

Sect Master 51

Chapter 51: Inventory harvest

The method of refining Guardian Spirit Generals has long been lost within the current Taiyi Sect. Even if it hadn't been lost, the sect lacks the ability and resources to refine Guardian Spirit Generals. The remnants of the Guardian Spirit General's souls within the gem became Taiyi Sect's only hope. According to the records in the Sect Master's journal, the Guardian Spirit Generals during their peak possessed a Cultivation Base equivalent to the Gold Core stage.

Meng Zhang didn't expect these resurrected remnants to regain the combat power of the Gold Core stage. As long as they could possess the strength of the Foundation Building stage, it would already be a significant support for Taiyi Sect. What's more, these Guardian Spirit Generals had high Cultivation Base levels and rich experiences from countless battles, making their cultivation and combat experiences invaluable for Meng Zhang and Taiyi Sect's growth.

Although Meng Zhang knew that Jade Soul Fluid could repair Souls, he had no idea how to make the slumbering Guardian Spirit Generals in the gem absorb it. After thinking for a while, Meng Zhang took out the jade bottle containing Jade Soul Fluid and tried dripping it onto the gem.

The Jade Soul Fluid smoothly penetrated into the gem, but even after all the Jade Soul Fluid was used, the gem showed no change. Meng Zhang felt disappointed, as it seemed like the hard-earned Jade Soul Fluid had no effect.

Was the Jade Soul Fluid too low in grade, or were the quantities too small? Unable to figure it out, Meng Zhang temporarily put this matter aside. Upon returning to his quiet room, he carefully organized all his gains this time. The items useful for the sect were all stored in the sect's treasury, while those he could personally use were carried with him. The items temporarily unnecessary were stored separately, ready to be sold in the market.

Among these items, the most valuable were the large number of White Hidden Earth Crystals. However, these crystals were only semi-finished products, and their outer shells needed to be removed to obtain the finished product. Removing the outer shell from the White Hidden Earth Crystals required a lot of patience and meticulous work. The crystals had to be soaked in a special solution for three days and then slowly polished with true qi to gradually remove the outer shell and obtain the finished product. This work had nothing to do with Cultivation Base and could be done even by a Refining Qi stage cultivator, as long as they had enough patience.

However, Meng Zhang didn't have much time to waste on this task, even if the White Hidden Earth Crystals were valuable. He decided to turn the task of polishing the crystals into a mission and offer it to the disciples in the sect as an opportunity to earn merits. When all the White Hidden Earth Crystals were polished and sold, the spiritual stones earned could be used to supplement the sect's treasury. Meng Zhang had always left a portion of his gains for the sect as a subsidy.

Tian Zhen, being the General Affairs Elder, had the advantage of suppressing his curiosity and never asked about the origins of these items. He silently followed Meng Zhang's instructions and handled all these affairs.

Three days after the sandstorm subsided, Meng Zhang left Taiyi Sect again. The Zhao Family cultivator, who was becoming a little impatient, immediately became alert and kept a close eye on Meng Zhang. At first, they thought Meng Zhang was heading east, directly towards the abandoned

mine, and the Zhao Family disciples who thought Meng Zhang fell into their trap were pleased. However, their joy didn't last long.

Although Meng Zhang was heading east, his destination was not the abandoned mine. He passed by the wind chasing horse and the abandoned mine, continuing eastward. This time, Meng Zhang's goal was Firewell Market, located to the east of Taiyi Sect and over four thousand miles away. Firewell Market was owned by Earthfire Sect, but Flying Swan Sect, as the dominant force in the surrounding area, also had a foothold there.

Twin Success Valley was known as a sect with ten Foundation Building stage cultivators, allowing them to rule over their territory. Among the many affiliated forces of Flying Swan Sect, Twin Success Valley ranked among the top. Twin Success Valley had a domineering style, often causing trouble for its neighbors, but compared to Earthfire Sect, they lacked some momentum.

Earthfire Sect might have fewer Foundation Building stage cultivators, but their combat power exceeded that of Twin Success Valley. Twin Success Valley was domineering, but Earthfire Sect was even more wild. According to the rumors in Cultivation World, most disciples of Earthfire Sect were fearless madmen. Compared to the domineering Twin Success Valley, the fearless madmen were even harder to provoke.

In the past, when Meng Zhang rode the wind chasing horse to Singing Sand City, he could arrive within half a day. Now, going to the more distant Firewell Market would take several days back and forth. As they saw the figure of the wind chasing horse getting farther and farther to the east, confirming that Meng Zhang was not heading for the abandoned mine, the Zhao Family disciple riding the Red Feathered Eagle continued to follow Meng Zhang closely and report the situation back.

After receiving the report, Zhao Chen, a renowned Refining Qi stage expert of the Zhao Family, secretly arrived near Sweetwater Oasis. After waiting for some time, Fang Yong, who had received his message, found an excuse to go out and secretly meet with Zhao Chen. Being under Zhao Chen's control, Fang Yong was particularly humble and had a fawning smile on his face.

"Greetings, senior..."

"Enough with the nonsense. I ask you, did you tell that brat Meng Zhang all the information about the abandoned mine?" Zhao Chen cut off Fang Yong without hesitation.

"I did exactly as you instructed. Every word I said was according to your guidance," Fang Yong practically swore to the heavens.

Among the information Fang Yong provided to Meng Zhang, he mentioned the ferocity of the Ghosts in the abandoned mine and vaguely implied that there might be more to the mine than meets the eye. Cultivators, especially young ones, had a tradition of seeking opportunities outside. Many arrogant cultivators often believed themselves to be the main characters of the world, thinking that they would surely encounter Big Luck and gain benefits from various opportunities. However, the vast majority of such cultivators would end up dying without a burial place.

Chapter 52: Foundation Building is related

Opportunity, this word holds an irresistible allure for the bottom-tier cultivators in the Cultivation World.

Born in the lower echelons of the Cultivation World, with poor aptitude, no family backing, and unable to join prominent sects, they have to cultivate with mediocre techniques and scarce resources. How can they change their circumstances?

Two words: opportunity.

As long as they actively seek opportunities, all situations can be improved. Perhaps, they might chance upon a great opportunity and instantly soar to greatness like a dragon in the wind and clouds.

Of course, there may not be as many opportunities as one would hope in the Cultivation World, waiting for later generations to discover. Only heaven knows.

Regardless, many cultivators in the Cultivation World are enamored by the pursuit of opportunities, much like how ordinary people in Meng Zhang's past life pursued lotteries.

According to the plan of the high-level members of the Zhao Family, Meng Zhang, who was full of youthful vigor, should be easily swayed. Upon hearing the news about the abandoned mine, he should have taken it as his opportunity and immediately gone to investigate. However, unexpectedly, Meng Zhang seemed to be overly cautious or had deep reservations towards the Zhao Family, and he never went to explore the mine, foiling the Zhao Family's calculations.

Historically, the Zhao Family's cultivators have always patrolled the surrounding areas on Crimson Feather Eagles as a tradition. Recently, a Zhao Family cultivator on patrol accidentally discovered the traces of Ghost Path cultivators near the abandoned mine.

Ghost Path cultivators are ruthless and cruel, having committed many atrocities in the Cultivation World. The news of their appearance alarmed the high-level members of the Zhao Family. They were preparing to report the Ghost Path cultivators' presence to the Twin Success Valley for surveillance when a Zhao Family cultivator secretly monitoring the situation noticed that the Ghost Path cultivators were being hunted down by Flying Swan Sect cultivators.

The abandoned mine seemed to be the hideout of the Ghost Path cultivators. In order to protect their hideout from being discovered, the Ghost Path cultivators deliberately led the pursuing Flying Swan Sect cultivators away. After confirming that the abandoned mine was indeed the Ghost Path cultivators' hideout, the high-level members of the Zhao Family were filled with greed.

Any Ghost Path cultivator who can roam freely in the Cultivation World must have a Foundation Building cultivation base at the very least. Moreover, the reputation of Ghost Path cultivators in the Cultivation World is even worse than the most ferocious bandits.

A Foundation Building-stage Ghost Path cultivator's lair should contain substantial wealth. The Zhao Family, which has been passed down for many years, has occasionally had Foundation Building-stage cultivators among its members. Over a decade ago, during the catastrophe caused by the sand monster, the Zhao Family lost its only Foundation Building-stage cultivator.

To maintain the family's prestige and protect their interests from being seized, the Zhao Family must cultivate another Foundation Building-stage cultivator as soon as possible.

Speaking of Foundation Building, it's inevitable to mention the Foundation Building Pill, a type of auxiliary pill used in Foundation Building.

After many years of practice in the Cultivation World, the Foundation Building Pill is among the most cost-effective, with minimal side effects and aftereffects. There are several different recipes for the Foundation Building Pill, and after countless years of research by predecessors and numerous practical tests, their effects are relatively similar.

When a Refining Qi completion-stage cultivator attempts to break through to the Foundation Building realm, they can only take one Foundation Building Pill at a time.

Within the territory of the Flying Swan Sect, only they have the ability and resources to refine Foundation Building Pills. One Foundation Building Pill is priced at ten thousand low-grade spirit stones, but in reality, they are often in short supply and cannot be bought even with spirit stones in hand.

Most of the Foundation Building Pills refined by the Flying Swan Sect are used to supply their disciples, and only a small portion is distributed to closely-related vassal forces as a way to strengthen relationships.

Spirit stones are the common currency in the Cultivation World, but strategic resources like Foundation Building Pills cannot be obtained solely with spirit stones.

Of course, not having Foundation Building Pills does not necessarily mean one cannot achieve Foundation Building. For cultivators with excellent spiritual roots like Meng Zhang, there is still a high chance of success in Foundation Building even without using Foundation Building Pills.

For cultivators with mediocre spiritual roots attempting Foundation Building without external aids, they would have to face the risk of near-death. Although there is a small chance of success in forcefully attempting Foundation Building without assistance, it requires great courage and luck.

Some sects and families possess secret methods that allow Foundation Building without using Foundation Building Pills, but these methods often come with various restrictions or hidden dangers.

Additionally, there are heavenly materials coveted by even Gold Core Daoist Masters that have the ability to assist in Foundation Building. However, whether any cultivators can afford to be so extravagant and use these heavenly materials for Foundation Building is unknown.

The reason Twin Success Valley is renowned for having ten Foundation Buildings is because they refine a special pill. Its original name is lost to time, and people call it the Lesser Foundation Building Pill.

The Lesser Foundation Building Pill's effects are at most 30% of a genuine Foundation Building Pill. However, countless Refining Qi completion cultivators are crazy about it.

Just like the Foundation Building Pill, the Lesser Foundation Building Pill is not easy to refine, and most of them are used internally within Twin Success Valley. A small portion of the Lesser Foundation Building Pills are sold outside, priced at six thousand low-grade spirit stones, but they are often bid up to seven to eight thousand low-grade spirit stones per pill. And frequently, the goods are already reserved before they are even put up for sale.

Ten years ago, after the Zhao Family's Foundation Building-stage cultivator died, they managed to purchase a Lesser Foundation Building Pill from Twin Success Valley for the friendship price of seven thousand low-grade spirit stones.

After Zhao Yanbei, the Zhao Family's patriarch, consumed the Lesser Foundation Building Pill, he failed to achieve Foundation Building, wasting the pill.

The best age for Foundation Building is before sixty years old. While it's not impossible to achieve Foundation Building after sixty, the chances of success become very slim.

Generally, sects or families do not allocate Foundation Building resources to cultivators above sixty years old.

Zhao Yanbei, the patriarch of the Zhao Family, is already fifty-two years old, and he has limited time to attempt Foundation Building.

In order to obtain Foundation Building Pills or Lesser Foundation Building Pills, the Zhao Family is frantically tapping into its internal potential and demanding resources from outsiders.

Although the neighboring Taiyi Sect is somewhat weaker, they still possess some strength. If the Zhao Family could swallow them whole, it would surely yield significant gains.

The Zhao Family has numerous cultivators, and some of them are Refining Qi late stage cultivators. If they truly wanted to break through Taiyi Sect's mountain gate and annihilate them, it would not be difficult.

However, the Cultivation World operates under rules; it is not a realm where one can act recklessly solely based on strength.

Both Taiyi Sect and the Zhao Family are vassal forces of Twin Success Valley. If the Zhao Family heedlessly exterminated Taiyi Sect today, it might be exterminated by Twin Success Valley tomorrow.

Similarly, while Twin Success Valley is subservient to the Flying Swan Sect, the Flying Swan Sect cannot recklessly annihilate Twin Success Valley without reason.

If there were no rules, the Cultivation World would have long fallen into chaos.

As long as one does not possess the strength to dominate the Cultivation World, they must adhere to certain rules and play within the game's boundaries.

Chapter 53: Reason

Since they couldn't openly attack and annihilate Taiyi Sect, the Zhao Family had been secretly scheming. For example, they sheltered traitors from Taiyi Sect like Fang Meng, intending to use their identities to interfere in Taiyi Sect's internal affairs. Later on, Zhao Family cultivators discovered the hideout of a Foundation Building-stage Ghost cultivator, which was the abandoned mine mentioned before. Compared to Taiyi Sect, this hideout was like a big piece of fat meat.

Of course, within this fat meat, there were also great risks. The Taiyi Sect traitors, including Fang Meng, were forced by the Zhao Family to enter the mine as cannon fodder. Most of them died at the hands of the Ghosts in the mine, while Fang Meng managed to escape skillfully and disappeared without a trace. The only one saved by the Zhao Family cultivators was Fang Yong.

Inside the abandoned mine were numerous Ghosts that posed a bit of a challenge even to the Zhao Family's Refining Qi late-stage elders. Meng Zhang's practice of Lesser Yang Qi Art had a special restraining effect on Ghosts and evil spirits. This level of information had long been disclosed to the Zhao Family by Fang Meng.

Moreover, Zhao Family patriarch Zhao Yanbei considered that although Taiyi Sect was a long-declined small sect, it still had a long-standing legacy. There might be some formidable techniques hidden in the hands of Taiyi Sect's Sect Master, Meng Zhang.

So, after extensive discussions among the Zhao Family high-level members, they settled on the plan. They secretly placed restrictions in Fang Yong's body and sent him back to Taiyi Sect.

On one hand, Fang Yong could act as the Zhao Family's informant, providing them with the latest information from Taiyi Sect. On the other hand, through Fang Yong, they could reveal some information about the abandoned mine to lure Meng Zhang into exploring it.

The hideout of the Ghost Path cultivator certainly held sinister techniques. With Meng Zhang, who cultivated Lesser Yang True Qi, leading the way, Zhao Family cultivators could reduce casualties and save a lot of effort.

However, Meng Zhang didn't follow the plan and refused to fall into the trap. After such a long time, he not only never went to the abandoned mine but also showed no interest in doing so.

Looking at the timid Fang Yong, Zhao Chen felt a surge of anger. He couldn't tell if Meng Zhang was truly cautious and had no curiosity or if Fang Yong, the useless man, couldn't deceive Meng Zhang and was exposed.

Therefore, Zhao Chen repeatedly questioned Fang Yong about all the details of his contact with Meng Zhang. To prevent Fang Yong from lying, they inevitably used some means, making him suffer greatly.

Apart from honestly answering questions, Fang Yong kept crying and begging for mercy.

From Fang Yong's responses, they couldn't determine if Meng Zhang had seen through Fang Yong. The intention was to have Fang Yong infiltrate Taiyi Sect, but this useless man couldn't even enter Taiyi Sect's main gate and could only stay with ordinary people in Sweetwater Oasis. Zhao Chen truly wanted to slap this utterly useless guy to death.

Considering that sending Fang Yong back to infiltrate Taiyi Sect was a direct order from Zhao Yanbei, the patriarch of the Zhao Family, Zhao Chen suppressed his killing intent and directly kicked Fang Yong out.

Since Meng Zhang hadn't fallen into their trap all this time, it seemed unnecessary to continue waiting. Zhao Chen decided to advise the patriarch to explore the abandoned mine forcefully to avoid unexpected situations.

After that, internal debates arose among the high-level members of the Zhao Family. Was it worth taking such a risk to forcefully intrude into the Ghost Path cultivator's hideout for fictitious wealth? If the information leaked and led to Ghost Path cultivators coming to attack them, it could spell the doom of the Zhao Family.

Some Zhao Family elders strongly opposed provoking the Ghost Path cultivator and entering the abandoned mine.

As Zhao Chen was a trusted subordinate of the Zhao Family patriarch, Zhao Yanbei, he proposed an opinion. He suggested that the Ghost Path cultivator might have been killed by Flying Swan Sect cultivators during their pursuit. If their master didn't return, everything in the abandoned mine would become ownerless, and there would naturally be no risk. Of course, this optimistic idea was immediately opposed by some elders in the clan.

In the end, it was Zhao Yanbei, the patriarch of the Zhao Family, who made the final decision. He forcefully suppressed the opposing voices and decided to intrude into the abandoned mine, searching for the Ghost Path cultivator's hideout to obtain wealth.

Zhao Yanbei's reason for making this decision was simple—Zhao Family couldn't be without a Foundation Building-stage cultivator for too long. They must cultivate another Foundation Building-stage cultivator for the family as quickly as possible, which required a massive amount of resources.

Over the years, the Zhao Family had lost some benefits, either openly or secretly, and had been squeezed by some competitors. As long as it didn't involve open conflict, this kind of competition was in accordance with the rules of the Cultivation World and was tacitly accepted by various forces.

This kind of method was like cutting meat with a soft knife, making the Zhao Family extremely uncomfortable. If the situation continued to develop like this, the Zhao Family might end up like Taiyi Sect—losing all external gains and only being able to live off their own spirit field.

As long as a Foundation Building-stage cultivator appeared in the Zhao Family, all problems could be solved, and they could reclaim lost benefits.

After Zhao Yanbei made this decision as the patriarch, the entire Zhao Family began to mobilize. To be cautious, the Zhao Family collected many magic tools and talismans specifically designed to restrain Ghosts.

While the Zhao Family was preparing to intrude forcefully into the abandoned mine, Meng Zhang, who had already returned from the abandoned mine with a full load, arrived at Firewell Market as planned.

A journey of over four thousand li was not something the Wind Chasing Horse could cross in one go. They galloped all the way, stopping and camping several times along the road, taking several days to reach their destination. Even the Wind Chasing Horse was exhausted, and Meng Zhang felt a bit tired.

Firewell Market was just as its name suggested, established on a group of fire wells. The original location of Firewell Market not only had a Second Rank top-grade spirit vein but also many fire wells around it.

The so-called fire wells were naturally occurring cracks on the ground that continuously spewed intense flames from the underground.

Earthfire Sect, skilled in refining tools, was the first to discover this place. The flames gushing from the ground were the best for refining tools.

The tool refiners of Earthfire Sect used various means to control the flow of these underground flames and confined them within a series of fire wells.

During this process, Flying Swan Sect also put in a lot of effort and also stretched their hands in to grasp some benefits of Firewell Market.

Of course, Earthfire Sect cultivators were known for their madness, and some of them were fearless maniacs.

Even Flying Swan Sect didn't want to provoke madmen easily.

Although Earthfire Sect was nominally a subordinate of Flying Swan Sect, they had considerable autonomy.

Flying Swan Sect treated Earthfire Sect with relatively mild attitudes, and both sides cooperated happily and developed together at Firewell Market.

Chapter 54: Firewell Market

As Meng Zhang approached Firewell Market, he felt waves of scorching heat coming at him. Once he entered Firewell Market, the heat became unbearable, and he was drenched in sweat.

Cultivators at the Refining Qi stage could adjust their body temperature with true qi and were immune to extreme weather conditions. As a cultivator who practiced the Lesser Yang True Qi, which had an affinity with Yang attributes, Meng Zhang should have had stronger resistance to the heat. However, even he couldn't escape sweating profusely after entering Firewell Market.

The wind chasing horse he rode on was also soaked in sweat and was panting like a dog.

The security and defense at Firewell Market were stricter than Singing Sand City. All cultivators entering and leaving the market had to have their identities carefully checked, unlike Singing Sand City, where a simple registration sufficed.

Flying Swan Sect's rule over the area appeared loose but was actually quite stringent. All cultivation forces, be it clans or sects, whether directly affiliated with Flying Swan Sect or under the rule of its affiliates, were registered and documented. The leaders and influential figures of these forces, such as elders and masters, were recorded in detail, and any changes were updated promptly. Flying Swan Sect, with significant interests in Firewell Market, naturally shared this information with the market's guards.

Though Taiyi Sect might be a small and inconspicuous sect, its relevant information was also recorded in Firewell Market. Thanks to his status as the Taiyi Sect Master, Meng Zhang smoothly entered Firewell Market. Loose cultivators, on the other hand, would need someone to vouch for them to gain entry.

Endless Sea of Sand had extreme temperature differences between day and night. It was scorching hot like a furnace during the day and bone-chillingly cold at night. However, the climate at Firewell Market was drastically different from other places in Endless Sea of Sand.

When Meng Zhang arrived at Firewell Market, it was already nighttime, but the weather was still uncomfortably hot. Cultivators on the streets paid no mind to their appearances, with most of them bare-chested and wearing shorts. Even so, a few steps of walking would immediately drench them in sweat.

Meng Zhang keenly felt that the intense heat in Firewell Market primarily came from beneath the ground. Deep underground, it felt like there was a massive furnace burning, emitting nearly endless heat. People on the surface seemed like they were inside a giant steamer, receiving the roasting heat from the furnace.

The market was named Firewell because it had over a dozen natural fire springs. These fire springs had been transformed into dozens of fire chambers by Earthfire Sect and Flying Swan Sect. While most of these chambers were for their own use, quite a few were rented out to others in exchange for rent payments.

Firefire was a relatively cheap and effective fire source for refining tools. Constructing a fire chamber from scratch would be costly and require at least a cultivator at the Foundation Building late stage to do so. Thus, not many forces in the surrounding areas could afford their own fire chambers. Even many sects and families' tool refiners came to Firewell Market to rent fire chambers.

Relying on this unique advantage, Firewell Market had already established its reputation early on. After years of development, it surpassed Singing Sand City in prosperity.

Meng Zhang found an inn, settled the wind chasing horse, and rested for a while. When the night grew deeper, he set out to wander the streets.

Firewell Market was much livelier than Singing Sand City, with most shops still open in the evening. Meng Zhang went to several different shops and sold a pile of miscellaneous items he carried, obtaining less than four hundred low-grade spirit stones.

Every time he went out, he had to carry seven or eight storage bags, which was quite inconvenient. It was like being an "Elder with Nine Bags" and looked extremely unsightly. Meng Zhang wanted to buy a larger capacity storage equipment, but after inquiring about the prices, he gave up. It was better to bear with the ugliness and not waste spirit stones.

Earthfire Sect was renowned for its craftsmanship in refining tools, and because of renting out fire chambers, Firewell Market attracted tool refiners from all over. Therefore, the market offered a vast array of magic tools, not only in quantity but also quality. Even some rare magic tools could be found there.

Using his discerning eye, Meng Zhang purchased several reasonably priced magic tools to bring back to his sect's treasury and reward his disciples. Additionally, he replenished some commonly used talismans, especially the Earth Escape Talismans, buying quite a few of them. After his experience in the abandoned mine, Meng Zhang realized the benefits of using talismans and now had the means to buy more for future needs.

As he walked the streets, even though it was late at night, Firewell Market was still as bright as daylight. Flames would soar into the sky from buildings beside the street, illuminating the sky with a bright and fiery red. Sounds of clanging and striking echoed throughout the streets, occasionally accompanied by booming and explosions. However, the people on the streets were already accustomed to these sounds and paid them little attention.

With so many tool refiners gathered in Firewell Market, such commotions were considered quite normal.

Meng Zhang decided to visit Firewell Market's black market. Thanks to his Deception Breaking Eye and extraordinary insight, he had successfully made some good deals in Singing Sand City. However, the limited number of stalls in the black market there made it difficult for him to find fruitful deals after a few visits. He hoped that Firewell Market's black market would be livelier and more fruitful.

Filled with anticipation, Meng Zhang began searching for the location of Firewell Market's black market. In this never-sleeping city, finding a secluded and shady corner to serve as a black market proved to be quite a challenging task.

Unlike the black market in Singing Sand City, which was on the surface, Firewell Market's black market was located underground. To the north of Firewell Market, where there were no natural fire springs or fire chambers, some unknown power had dug an immense underground space, turning it into an underground plaza and other structures.

As was his habit, Meng Zhang headed directly for a dark corner. After searching for a while, he couldn't find the location of the black market. Finally, he spent a few spirit stones to hire a local guide, who led him to the entrance on the surface, from where they descended into the underground plaza.

The underground was dug very deep, and a long corridor extended deep underground. Several dimly lit torches were stuck on both sides of the corridor, emitting a faint yellow glow.

Following the dimly lit corridor for a considerable distance, Meng Zhang finally entered an extraordinarily vast underground plaza. At this time, the plaza was already full of stalls. Under the faint light from above, the items on the stalls appeared hazy and elusive.

Chapter 55: Black market

Although the lighting inside the black market was poor, there were still many customers. Besides numerous stalls, the square also had wide passageways for pedestrians. However, at this moment, the surging crowd had squeezed these passages tightly, making it nearly impossible for people to pass through.

Witnessing the bustling scene with people moving shoulder to shoulder, Meng Zhang's eyes lit up. Indeed, Firewell Market's black market was much livelier than Singing Sand City's.

Meng Zhang left the corridor and stepped into the square, carefully inspecting the various items on the stalls as he walked with the crowd. Underground in scorching Firewell Market, the temperature was even higher than on the surface, and the dense crowd made the enclosed space even more uncomfortable.

When Meng Zhang had just entered Firewell Market, he had tried using spells to cool down his body and adjust his body temperature with true qi. However, despite trying various methods, the effect was not significant, and he still felt extremely hot.

Meng Zhang's keen senses made him realize that it wasn't just a matter of temperature. There seemed to be a vast underground fire emitting continuous heat, containing a peculiar force that made people feel dry and hot. Fortunately, after careful discernment, he concluded that this force

only caused discomfort and didn't carry any hidden harm. As a cultivator, his endurance was much stronger than that of an ordinary person, and enduring a bit of heat was not a big deal.

Filled with anticipation for the stalls in the black market, Meng Zhang even felt the heat had reduced somewhat. After spending considerable time and sweating profusely, he wandered around the black market but didn't find anything valuable. The items on the stalls were few, and those that were valuable were priced exorbitantly. It was clear that the vendors were well aware of the worth of their merchandise, and those valuable items weren't worth buying at such high prices.

Meng Zhang's hopes of making good deals in the black market were dashed. He realized that while his Deception Breaking Eye and the knowledge he gained from the Trial Ground were advantageous for making discoveries in Singing Sand City, in the vast Cultivation World, he was likely not the only one who practiced eye techniques. Many experienced and knowledgeable cultivators existed, making it more challenging to find hidden treasures.

Meng Zhang mentally scolded himself for wasting so much time. If he had known there would be no valuable discoveries in the black market, he would have relaxed in the inn instead.

Deciding to leave since the black market offered nothing of interest, Meng Zhang headed towards the edge of the square, intending to enter the corridor he came through. However, at that moment, a middle-aged man blocked his path.

"Are you Taiyi Sect's Meng Zhang, Sect Master Meng?" Although phrased as a question, the tone was certain.

"Who are you? What do you want?" Meng Zhang looked wary of the stranger. In an unfamiliar place, being approached by an unknown cultivator naturally called for caution.

"It seems that Sect Master Meng didn't find anything of value in the black market."

"Well, the so-called black market is just fooling ordinary cultivators. There's nothing good inside. Big customers like Sect Master Meng naturally wouldn't be interested in those deceiving goods."

The middle-aged man didn't directly answer Meng Zhang's question but took out a black token.

"If Sect Master Meng wants to buy something valuable or special, you can take a look in there."

The middle-aged man pointed to an inconspicuous small house beside the underground square and handed over the black token to Meng Zhang.

After using his Deception Breaking Eye to verify that the token had no traps, Meng Zhang carefully accepted it. The man then left on his own.

In this process, Meng Zhang attempted to use Mind Reading to read the man's thoughts but failed. However, he clearly sensed that the man had no ill intentions towards him. It appeared that Mind Reading wasn't an infallible ability.

Meng Zhang knew that there were several secret methods in the Cultivation World that could conceal one's thoughts and prevent others from using mind-reading techniques on them. Being able to determine that the man held no ill will already showed the remarkable nature of Mind Reading as a Divine Ability.

Recalling some rumors, Meng Zhang realized that in some large markets, there existed hidden and organized black markets. The forces behind these black markets were formidable, and even the local leaders of the markets had to give them respect.

The items available in these black markets far exceeded those found in regular shops and covered almost everything. Of course, some illegal items from the Cultivation World were among them.

Although Meng Zhang had never dealt with the black market personally, there were records in the Taiyi Sect Master's journal of past Taiyi Sect Masters conducting transactions in the black market.

Combining these records, Meng Zhang understood that after entering Firewell Market, despite selling various items at different shops, his actions had likely been noticed by someone. Four hundred low-grade spirit stones might not seem like much, but it still displayed his purchasing power.

For the powerful force behind the black market, determining his identity and background should have been a simple task. With mediocre strength, hailing from a weak sect, yet possessing a considerable amount of spirit stones, he was the type of customer Shang Families all loved.

Fortunately, the reputation of the black market had been good, and he hadn't heard of any past cases of robbery or violence by the organizers. The transactions in the black market were still relatively fair, and they aimed to make customers willingly spend their spirit stones.

At this moment, the middle-aged man was conversing with another cultivator. It seemed that the man was responsible for attracting customers. Running a black market, of course, meant wanting many customers and prosperous business.

Meng Zhang pondered for a moment and decided that the black market had a decent reputation, and there shouldn't be any danger in going to take a look.

He entered the small house indicated by the middle-aged man. Inside the pitch-black room, a person dressed entirely in black guarded the door. Seeing Meng Zhang entering, the person extended their hand.

"Token."

Meng Zhang handed over the black token. The person checked it and then handed him a mask and a cloak.

The person lightly tapped the wall, revealing a dark hole through which a deep passage led.

"Go inside and follow it to the end."

Meng Zhang accepted the mask and cloak without asking any further questions and walked straight into the passage. Although the passage was pitch-black, cultivators generally had some night vision ability or technique. Meng Zhang's Deception Breaking Eye could directly penetrate the darkness.

Chapter 56:

Meng Zhang continued to move forward in the dark passage, unaffected, while checking the two items in his hand. The mask could conceal his appearance, and the cloak could hide his figure. Both items had no traps but contained some restrictions serving two purposes.

Firstly, when worn, they obscured his entire body, making it difficult for others to see his appearance and figure, essentially solidifying a small obscuring spell. Secondly, they provided some blocking effect against Divine Consciousness for cultivators in the Foundation Building stage.

In the Cultivation World, cultivators in the Foundation Building stage could possess Divine Consciousness, a special ability for exploration distinct from the commonly used five senses.

The function of these two items was to protect the privacy of the black market traders and prevent their identities from being exposed. Meng Zhang admired this practice of the black market.

The passage twisted and turned, and it was quite long, descending deep into the ground with no knowledge of its final destination. Meng Zhang walked at a steady pace until he reached the exit.

Meng Zhang first put on the mask and the cloak before stepping out of the passage. A dazzling bright light greeted his eyes, and the surroundings were vast, almost like a wide well with a broad opening at the top.

The bottom of the well had multiple entrances and exits, and the one he had taken to enter was just one of them. In front was a high platform with a large table. At the back and on both sides, the space was divided into several layers, each containing numerous small compartments like tiny cells.

Meng Zhang had just stepped out of the passage when maidservants came forward to guide him. They ascended the steps and led him into an empty cell.

After explaining the precautions for the transaction, the maidservants closed the room's door, leaving Meng Zhang alone inside the dark cell. The small space had only a chair placed within it.

Sitting on the chair, Meng Zhang absentmindedly opened the window in front of him. The glaring light immediately poured in, and through the small window, he could clearly see the high platform in front.

Beside the chair was a slender black token, resembling a brush, with the number 185 written on it.

Meng Zhang sat on the chair, carefully observing his surroundings. At the bottom entrance, new cultivators continuously arrived, being led to different small rooms.

Some imposing individuals, obviously in the Foundation Building stage, were taken to private compartments on the top floor.

Meng Zhang didn't have to wait too long before the trading session began. All the cultivators who came to trade had entered their respective rooms.

At this moment, a plump, white-haired old man stepped onto the high platform. Without any nonsense, he clapped his hands, and countless streams of light immediately flew into the various rooms.

Meng Zhang saw one of these streams pass through his window and enter the room, transforming into a scroll floating in front of him.

As the maidservant had instructed, Meng Zhang raised the black token in his hand and lightly tapped the scroll.

The long scroll immediately unfurled, revealing a light screen with neatly arranged columns of text. These texts were the catalog of goods for sale in the black market.

Meng Zhang gently waved the token in his hand, causing the catalog to scroll down, displaying more items.

The black market indeed lived up to its name, as the first items listed were various male and female Furnace Cauldrons.

In the area controlled by Flying Swan Sect, trading with mortals was a taboo, let alone dealing with other cultivators. Cultivating cultivators into Furnace Cauldrons for sale was strictly forbidden.

Once discovered, such acts would be severely punished. Meng Zhang lightly touched the text on the catalog with his token, causing the light screen to fluctuate and immediately display corresponding images of the cauldrons.

The images of the cauldrons were remarkably clear, almost lifelike, with even the slightest expressions on their faces recorded, making the images vivid and not like lifeless objects.

Below the images, rows of text flashed, providing detailed information on the age, physical characteristics, cultivation techniques, and more for each cauldron.

For cultivators practicing unorthodox techniques, these Furnace Cauldrons were precious treasures. However, Meng Zhang felt a surge of disgust.

While unorthodox, some cultivators from righteous sects secretly practiced it. Though Taiyi Sect was a declining sect, it still upheld strict moral standards and prohibited its disciples from engaging in sinful unorthodox practices.

"These are just pitiful people," Meng Zhang sighed as he looked at the images of the cauldrons.

While he had purchased mortals before, he treated them as his subjects to replenish the population of Sweetwater Oasis. However, he loathed the act of viewing cultivators as commodities to be harvested and harmed.

Unfortunately, as a mid-stage Refining Qi cultivator, he had enough trouble on his plate and couldn't change the current situation. All he could do was protect himself while he was poor and remain virtuous.

Skipping the section about the cauldrons, he continued to browse the catalog.

The black market offered a wide range of items, including magic tools, pills, and talismans, covering almost everything. However, all the items sold in the black market were more or less shady in origin.

Meng Zhang found the section for magic tools, and there were many Ghost Path magic tools available. For instance, magic tools like the Hundred Souls Banner required the extraction of the souls of a hundred mortals during the refining process, fusing them into the magic tool. Such cruel methods were strictly prohibited by many sects in the Cultivation World.

There was also the Soul Attraction Banner, which forcefully extracted the souls of cultivators and enslaved them on the banner. Enslaving the soul of a cultivator was another heinous act.

Most of the Ghost Path magic tools were insidious and related to ghosts. Because of their powerful and peculiar abilities, some cultivators in the Cultivation World secretly kept a few for unexpected needs.

After briefly scanning the section on magic tools, Meng Zhang found that selling Ghost Path magic tools was considered the most taboo.

Despite being a black market, there were certain limits, and they didn't openly sell magic tools of the demonic path. Of course, while it was a public place, if they dared to openly sell demonic path magic tools, it might attract powerful individuals to eradicate the demonic path.

As for whether the black market would sell demonic path magic tools secretly, that remained unknown.

Among the numerous magic tools on sale, there were naturally normal magic tools, occupying most of the space in the magic tool catalog. However, these normal magic tools had some problems in terms of their origins.

Chapter 57: Cold poisonous Yin thunder

The catalog listed a wide variety of items, with detailed descriptions. Among them, many items even caught Meng Zhang's interest.

Although most of the items sold in the black market had questionable origins, the black market was honest about it and clearly stated their sources in the catalog. Despite knowing the origins might be dubious, some treasures were still sought after by many.

Meng Zhang was eyeing something specific: three Cold Poison Yin Thunders refined by the Liu Family. The Liu Family was on par with forces like Twin Success Valley and Forest Spring Watch, boasting several Foundation Building cultivators in their ranks.

It was said that within the secret ground of the Liu Family, there was a Cold Cave that had existed for countless years, emanating a chilling aura at regular intervals. Cultivators with Liu Family bloodline, practicing their secret techniques, could forge their Foundation with this chilling aura, negating the need for Foundation Building Pills. Although this method had some hidden risks, it ensured a steady supply of Foundation Building cultivators in the Liu Family, granting them a prominent position among Flying Swan Sect's vassal forces.

However, the process of absorbing the chilling aura from the Cold Cave also left behind a substantial amount of cold poison. Liu Family Foundation Building cultivators would refine this poison into the highly venomous Cold Poison Yin Thunders, capable of threatening Foundation Building cultivators.

The catalog explicitly stated that these three Cold Poison Yin Thunders were forcibly taken from the hands of Liu Family cultivators, hinting at their problematic origin. Although Liu Family occasionally sold a small number of Cold Poison Yin Thunders, most were reserved for use by their Foundation Building cultivators or given as protection to promising junior disciples. The origins of these three Cold Poison Yin Thunders were undoubtedly related to acts of robbery and murder.

Despite the risks, Meng Zhang decided to buy these three Cold Poison Yin Thunders if possible. As a Refining Qi Sixth Layer cultivator, he was slightly stronger than an average Refining Qi Mid-stage cultivator, but his strength had its limits. His most powerful means were Blood Refining Martyr Art, which allowed him to unleash the power of a Refining Qi Ninth Layer cultivator with a blood-refined magic tool.

Taiyi Sect was currently coveted by the Zhao Family, which had plenty of Refining Qi Ninth Layer cultivators. Blood Refining Martyr Art would not be as effective against them. The Cold Poison Yin Thunders could pose a threat to Foundation Building cultivators and, if purchased, could serve as a hidden trump card to save his life in critical situations.

After quickly browsing through the catalog and assessing his options, Meng Zhang had a clear plan.

The auction soon began with the plump old man on the high platform announcing the first item for bidding. The atmosphere quickly heated up with enthusiastic bidding.

As the auction progressed, some items sparked fierce competition. However, the identities of the bidders were kept anonymous, and the powerful Foundation Building expert on the high platform prevented any unruly behavior.

Finally, it was Meng Zhang's turn to bid. After some fierce competition, he successfully acquired the three Cold Poison Yin Thunders for five hundred low-grade spirit stones.

Normally, even a First Rank top-grade magic tool would cost no more than a hundred low-grade spirit stones in the outside market. However, the Cold Poison Yin Thunders, despite their tremendous power, were disposable items, used up after one attack.

But for Meng Zhang, this price was worthwhile. First Rank top-grade magic tools posed no threat to Foundation Building cultivators, while the three Cold Poison Yin Thunders, bought through legitimate means, would undoubtedly be more expensive, and there was no guarantee of getting hold of them even with sufficient funds.

Afterward, Meng Zhang spent another hundred low-grade spirit stones to buy three First Rank top-grade magic tools. Like the Cold Poison Yin Thunders, these magic tools were also stolen goods, intended for use with the Blood Refining Martyr Art.

While the Blood Refining Martyr Art could be used with slightly damaged magic tools, the effect would be better with intact ones. With cheap goods available in the black market, Meng Zhang decided to buy a few. He estimated that, after blood refinement, these three magic tools would explode with massive killing power, each equivalent to a full-strength strike from a Refining Qi Ninth Layer cultivator.

Since the appearance of magic tools changed slightly after blood refinement, and they were disposable items, they would turn into fragments upon detonation. As long as he was careful and avoided being caught by the victims, the risk was relatively low.

Having carefully considered the matter, Meng Zhang was confident in purchasing these stolen goods.

The auction continued for a long time, but Meng Zhang didn't find any other items he wanted or couldn't conveniently buy for various reasons. So, he chose to remain silent.

After the auction ended, a group of maidservants entered each room to complete the transactions with the customers. Those who bought large items were led away by the maidservants to other locations for further transactions.

Meng Zhang paid the spirit stones, received the items he purchased, and thoroughly checked their authenticity before concluding the transactions.

During the transactions, curiosity got the better of Meng Zhang, and he attempted to read the thoughts of the maidservant before him with his Mind Reading Divine Ability. However, to his surprise, his Divine Ability failed again. Despite the maidservant having a lower Cultivation Base than him, he could not read anything from her mind. If not for her clearly being alive, Meng Zhang might have mistaken her for an unconscious puppet.

After the transactions were completed, the maidservant handed Meng Zhang a jade token and explained its usage in detail.

It was a token and also a simple magic tool. With this jade token, Meng Zhang could contact the black market and participate in transactions whenever he visited a place connected to the black market.

After carefully examining the jade token and confirming its authenticity, Meng Zhang stored it in his storage bag.

With the transactions completed, Meng Zhang quickly left the room, randomly selecting a passage to make his way out. The structure of this place was quite extraordinary, not only showcasing exquisite architectural craftsmanship but also incorporating intricate formations, involving mazes and spatial shifts. Trying to force one's way in could easily lead to being trapped or lost.

Chapter 58: Flying sword Soft Around The Finger

Meng Zhang had no gains in the Ghost Market but managed to purchase desired items in the Black Market. Returning to the inn, he spent the night without any noteworthy events.

Early the next day, Meng Zhang started strolling through the Firewell Market. The market attracted various forces, including skilled tool refiners from Earthfire Sect and talented weapon craftsmen among the loose cultivators. The majority of shops in the market sold a wide variety of magic tools, with many also dealing in refining materials.

Firewell Market served not only as a prominent magic tool production base in the Flying Swan Sect's territory but also as a top material distribution center for refining. Even a large influx of refining materials wouldn't create a significant commotion in this market.

Meng Zhang devised a plan, envisioning bringing the secretly mined scarlet copper ore here for sale in the future.

The Firewell Market offered a diverse selection of magic tools, not only in variety but also in quality. Several excellent flying swords caught Meng Zhang's eye. Despite several previous fruitless attempts in Singing Sand City due to either high prices or unsatisfactory quality, he now found several promising choices.

After careful consideration and selection, Meng Zhang purchased a First Rank top-grade flying sword called "Soft Around The Finger." This flying sword was less than half a foot long and an inch wide, with no hilt, appearing as a thin, silver piece of steel.

Cultivation World commonly used two types of flying swords. One type resembled a normal long sword, allowing it to be used like a conventional weapon for both close combat and flying attacks. The other type, like "Soft Around The Finger," had no hilt and could only be used for flying attacks.

As for legendary sword pills, Meng Zhang had never seen them in person. They were nowhere to be found among the numerous shops in Firewell Market. Sword pills were said to have strict requirements for refining, involving special spirit materials and Sword Cultivator secret techniques. However, the Sword Cultivation path was not popular in the Endless Sea of Sand, and there were no powerful Sword Cultivator sects. As a result, sword pills remained elusive.

The flying sword "Soft Around The Finger" was refined using the primary material of Hundred Refining Soft Steel, making it both flexible and strong. To fully unleash its power, the user needed to have a profound understanding of flying sword techniques.

Meng Zhang spent a considerable sum of one hundred and fifty low-grade spirit stones to purchase this coveted flying sword, exceeding the usual price of a First Rank top-grade magic tool.

Although Meng Zhang had the innate talent to control two First Rank top-grade magic tools, the horror of controlling a third one was an arduous task with his Refining Qi Mid-stage cultivation base.

Like every cultivator, Meng Zhang also had a dream of mastering a flying sword. Flying swords were the most prevalent and widely used magic tools in the Cultivation World.

Though he couldn't currently soar through the skies like Fei Tian, manipulating a flying sword and making it dance through the air was still an enticing prospect.

After spending the entire day in the market and purchasing a heap of items, most of which were gifts for fellow sect members, Meng Zhang decided not to return empty-handed after such a rare journey.

In the evening, Meng Zhang, with a lingering desire, visited the Ghost Market in Firewell Market again. However, this time, he returned empty-handed without any gains.

After resting for a night, early the next day, Meng Zhang left Firewell Market and began his journey back. Once again, the Zhao Family disciple, who had been following him on a Crimson Feathered Falcon, faithfully traced his steps from the sky.

After several days on the road, under the disappointed gaze of the Zhao Family disciple, Meng Zhang rode the Wind Chasing Horse and bypassed the abandoned mine directly to return to Taiyi Sect.

Upon returning to the sect, Meng Zhang began distributing the gifts he had purchased for his sect members. He gifted a shield of earth attribute called "Fifth Earth True Shield," a First Rank middle-grade magic tool, to General Affairs Elder Tian Zhen. This shield, combined with Tian Zhen's Fifth Earth True Secrets cultivation technique, could provide formidable defense.

To Daoist Clear Spirit and the Wang family father and son, Meng Zhang gave magic tools related to spirit plants, such as "Cloud-Dispelling Rain Flag," "Spirit Tilling Hoe," and "Reaping Scythe."

For the younger disciples of the sect, Meng Zhang gifted miscellaneous items like talismans.

After the gift-giving, Meng Zhang began to refine the recently purchased flying sword, "Soft Around The Finger." It took considerable effort and time to fully refine the flying sword.

The flying sword now curved into a ring-like shape, fitting snugly around his left wrist.

Back in the Zhao Family, there was an internal debate on whether to explore the abandoned mine. However, the plan was postponed after receiving orders from Twin Success Valley. They issued a summons for all vassal forces to send experts, led by their respective leaders or sect masters, to a designated location for a joint operation against the recently emerged sand monster colonies.

Zhao Family's Patriarch, Zhao Yanbei, had to lead their experts to join the operation, leaving the abandoned mine exploration plan temporarily suspended.

As a vassal force of Twin Success Valley, Taiyi Sect also received the summons. Apart from Sect Master Meng Zhang personally leading the expedition, Taiyi Sect was required to send at least two more cultivators to accompany them.

Taiyi Sect was already short on manpower, especially since they had only three Refining Qi Mid-stage cultivators capable of fighting. Considering the tragic fate of their previous sect master, Daoist Profound Spirit, who died during a sand monster attack while on a similar mission, Meng Zhang knew he couldn't afford any mishaps.

Both Daoist Clear Spirit and Tian Zhen volunteered to join the expedition and accompany Meng Zhang. However, Meng Zhang made a decision to let Tian Zhen accompany him while leaving Daoist Clear Spirit behind to guard Taiyi Sect.

For the required third cultivator, Meng Zhang chose Fang Yong, who had been staying at Sweetwater Oasis. Meng Zhang framed it as an opportunity for Fang Yong to redeem himself. If he performed well during this mission, he could clear his past mistakes and return to Taiyi Sect.

Fang Yong was reluctant to go, fully aware of the perilous nature of the expedition. Nevertheless, he had no reasonable grounds to refuse and was forced to accompany Meng Zhang on the journey.

Chapter 59: Recruiting

Meng Zhang's true purpose for bringing Fang Yong along was not as he claimed verbally.

This time, Twin Success Valley's summon was of great intensity, mobilizing all vassal forces, including the Zhao Family. By taking Fang Yong undercover, if the opportunity presented itself on the chaotic battlefield, it would not be impossible to secretly strike at the Zhao Family. It was likely that the Zhao Family held similar intentions towards Taiyi Sect as well.

Twin Success Valley's summons left no time for delay, forcing all vassal forces to act immediately and rush to the designated location for assembly. The gathering point was an oasis located 800 li (around 400 kilometers) to the south.

This oasis served as an outpost of Twin Success Valley, situated on a First Rank spirit vein and guarded by Twin Success Valley's cultivators year-round. Not only were numerous spirit fields cultivated within the oasis, but there were also many mortal inhabitants.

Meng Zhang and his group, aided by their Wind Chasing Horses and with a relatively short distance to travel, arrived early compared to the other vassal forces.

In one corner of the oasis's northern area, Twin Success Valley had set up a large camp. The camp was divided into several sections, with Twin Success Valley's cultivators stationed at the center while the other sections were allocated to their vassal forces.

The different vassal forces were assigned different areas based on their numbers.

Taiyi Sect, with the fewest members, was received indifferently by the Twin Success Valley disciples who accommodated them hastily before leaving.

Taiyi Sect's camp was located in the northwest corner of the main camp, consisting of only three separate tents. Although they weren't given much importance, Meng Zhang didn't mind. With Taiyi Sect's current strength, it would be more trouble than it's worth if they attracted too much attention.

The main purpose of Twin Success Valley issuing the summons to Taiyi Sect was not because they genuinely needed three cultivators who were far from reaching the Refining Qi Late stage. The main intention was to display Twin Success Valley's authority, treating all vassal forces equally, so they would always remember that Twin Success Valley was the true master and held the power of life and death over them.

Not long after Taiyi Sect arrived at the main camp, Forest Mountain School also arrived. Forest Mountain School was also a small sect, though stronger than Taiyi Sect after a series of changes. However, it was still not outstanding among Twin Success Valley's vassal forces.

The Sect Master of Forest Mountain School, Xu Chengxian, though quite aged, took the initiative to greet Meng Zhang, a junior disciple.

He neither underestimated Meng Zhang's youth nor looked down on Taiyi Sect.

"Sect Master Meng, you've arrived quite early," Xu Chengxian said with a slight surprise.

Meng Zhang quickly went forward to greet the Daoist Master as Forest Mountain School's camp was not far from Taiyi Sect's, making their arrival not a rare event.

Both sects were vassal forces of Twin Success Valley and were relatively close neighbors with some knowledge about each other.

After exchanging pleasantries with the Daoist Master, Meng Zhang made a casual comment about the Li Family still not arriving, given their closest proximity to the gathering location. Xu Chengxian seemed surprised by Meng Zhang's question and asked if he was unaware of the situation.

Meng Zhang replied with some confusion, genuinely not knowing what Xu Chengxian was referring to.

Xu Chengxian hesitated for a moment, then looked around as if sharing a secret before explaining in a hushed voice.

The sand monster colony this time was enormous and extraordinarily powerful, causing significant disasters in a very short time. Both Twin Success Valley and its vassal forces suffered heavily.

Several of Twin Success Valley's vassal forces were wiped out, including the Li Family.

The Li Family had numerous cultivators, and there was even a Foundation Building stage cultivator in their family. Among Twin Success Valley's vassal forces, they ranked among the top in terms of strength.

The Li Family was situated on a Second Rank spirit vein, and their mountain gate was protected by a Second Rank defensive formation. However, the sand monster colony still managed to break through their defenses, leading to their annihilation.

The calamity caused by the sand monster colony was extensive, not only destroying two direct-claimed spiritual grounds of Twin Success Valley but also causing damages to nearby forces at the same level as Twin Success Valley, such as Forest Spring Watch, Liu Family, and Green Bamboo Mountain.

Furthermore, the sand monster colony continued to grow, and its attacks spread to the surrounding areas.

It was said that even the Flying Swan Sect had been alarmed, and if Twin Success Valley and other vassal forces couldn't eliminate the menacing sand monster colony, the Flying Swan Sect would intervene personally.

Meng Zhang was astonished by Xu Chengxian's words. Since he became the Sect Master of Taiyi Sect, they had been secluded and had hardly any interaction with the outside world, making their information severely limited.

Such vital information, if not for Xu Chengxian informing him, he would still be entirely unaware.

Meng Zhang felt a shiver down his spine but also a sense of relief. Thankfully, the sand monster colony had not targeted Taiyi Sect. Otherwise, even if they risked their lives, they wouldn't have been able to change the fate of the sect's destruction.

"I am truly ignorant, and if not for your guidance, I wouldn't have known the extent of the terror posed by this sand monster colony," Meng Zhang sincerely thanked Xu Chengxian.

Xu Chengxian waved it off with a dismissive gesture. "It's a small matter, not worth mentioning. This information has already spread. If I didn't tell you, you would have known sooner or later."

Meng Zhang silently reminded himself to pay more attention to external news in the future and not focus solely on closed-door cultivation.

Chapter 60: Building up

As time passed, more and more cultivators arrived at the main camp. While Meng Zhang and Xu Chengxian were engrossed in their conversation, cultivators from the Zhao Family also arrived.

Zhao Yanbei, the patriarch of the Zhao Family, stood in front of their flying boat, looking at the various cultivators on the ground with a sense of indescribable satisfaction. The damn Li Family had finally met their end. Although sand monsters were the enemies of the Cultivation World, sometimes they could do good things too. Over a decade ago, during the calamity caused by sand monsters, the Zhao Family lost their only Foundation Building stage cultivator, and since then, they had been on a downward spiral.

The Li Family, which had always been in competition with the Zhao Family, took advantage of their weakness at that time to launch an attack. Facing the Li Family with a Foundation Building stage cultivator in their ranks, the Zhao Family inevitably lacked confidence and suffered losses in their conflicts. They not only lost two shops in Singing Sand City but also two crucial trade routes.

With their interests greatly damaged, the Zhao Family had been determined to cultivate another Foundation Building stage cultivator, and the relentless pressure from the Li Family was a significant factor.

Now that the Li Family had been exterminated by the sand monsters, the pressure on the Zhao Family was significantly reduced. Zhao Yanbei had originally planned to explore abandoned mines, but upon receiving the news of the Li Family's destruction, his mood immediately turned from gloomy to bright.

Following Twin Success Valley's orders, the Zhao Family was supposed to send a total of fifteen cultivators, including their patriarch, to respond to the summon. Zhao Yanbei actively complied and didn't send any weak cultivators to make up the numbers. Instead, they dispatched the elites of their family. The team not only included several Refining Qi Late stage cultivators but also three Refining Qi Completion stage cultivators. Even their flying boat, which was usually preserved due to the cost of using spirit stones, was sent on this occasion.

Zhao Yanbei intended to please Twin Success Valley and hoped to purchase a Lesser Foundation Building Pill from them again.

Normally, a First Rank flying boat could only carry ten cultivators. However, beside the Zhao Family's flying boat were five Red Feather Eagles ridden by cultivators.

The Zhao Family's flying boat directly entered the main camp, and Zhao Yanbei looked down, inadvertently catching sight of the three members of Taiyi Sect. A disdainful smile crept across his lips.

The cultivators sent by the Zhao Family this time were all at least in the Refining Qi Mid stage, while the most powerful cultivator in Taiyi Sect was only in the Refining Qi Mid stage of Cultivation Base. In order to make up the numbers, they had even brought along some trash at the Refining Qi Initial stage.

Xu Chengxian, the Sect Master of Forest Mountain School, whose circle of acquaintances was broad, saw more and more cultivators arriving, including some good friends. He apologized to Meng Zhang and went to greet those friends.

Among the cultivators of various forces, many were acquainted with each other, and there were even some old friends who hadn't seen each other in a long time. They greeted each other and began conversing.

Twin Success Valley held great authority among its vassal forces. Before the final deadline arrived, all the vassal forces that could make it had already gathered in the main camp. Some keen cultivators had noticed that among the arriving cultivators, many familiar faces were missing, and the number of cultivators was significantly reduced.

Of course, this wasn't because any vassal forces dared to defy Twin Success Valley's summon. The forces that hadn't arrived either suffered heavy damage from the sand monster colony and couldn't participate or had been entirely wiped out by the sand monsters.

Upon realizing this, the cultivators looked displeased. The sand monster colony this time was unexpectedly powerful and had caused the destruction of several forces. Even Zhao Yanbei, who had been in a good mood earlier, now wore a serious expression.

The sand monster colony was too formidable, and these vassal forces that responded to the summon faced enormous pressure. It was possible that they might be entirely wiped out.

While everyone was discussing with uncertainty, a flying boat arrived above the main camp. Two cultivators disembarked from the flying boat and floated in mid-air above the crowd.

Some sharp-eyed cultivators had already recognized the two individuals—Shan Ying and Xiao Shenqiang, Foundation Building stage elders of Twin Success Valley. Shan Ying was an old man with a stern expression, seemingly not one to smile easily. On the other hand, Xiao Shenqiang wore a beaming smile, giving people a friendly and amiable feeling.

"Everyone, please calm down and listen to what I have to say," said Xiao Shenqiang, though he wore a smile, his voice wasn't soft, and it resonated in everyone's ears.

The cultivators who had responded to Twin Success Valley's summon gathered on their own without the need for any commands and surrounded Xiao Shenqiang.

Xiao Shenqiang glanced at the situation below and was very satisfied with the cultivators' understanding of the situation.

At this time, the original cultivators of Twin Success Valley in the main camp had already finished counting and were well aware of the number of attendees. After hearing the reports from their fellow sect members below, Xiao Shenqiang's smile grew even broader.

"It seems everyone is giving face to our Twin Success Valley. The deadline is not here yet, but those who should come have already arrived."

"Next, let me give everyone a brief introduction to the current situation and assign tasks," Xiao Shenqiang slowly explained, and everyone gained a new understanding of the current situation.

The outbreak of the sand monster chaos had occurred less than half a month ago, but its devastation was extensive, affecting many forces.

Large groups of sand monsters had formed an array and swept across an area of several thousand li (over a thousand kilometers). Twin Success Valley suffered the most, and surrounding forces like Forest Spring Watch, Liu Family, and Green Bamboo Mountain also suffered significant losses.

Upon receiving the news, the Flying Swan Sect also issued strict orders for the four forces to exterminate the sand monster threat within a limited time, not giving the sand monster colony a chance to grow stronger.

Based on the Cultivation World's experience in countering sand monsters over the years, the most crucial step was to eliminate the sand monster nests as soon as possible. As long as the nests remained, new sand monsters would continue to emerge, and their strength would increase over time.

The four forces had convened and dispatched their elite disciples to form battle formations, confronting the sand monster army head-on. Simultaneously, they called on all vassal forces to search for the sand monster nests and eliminate them as soon as possible.

These four forces didn't involve Refining Qi stage cultivators from the vassal forces in the direct confrontation; it was mainly for coordination purposes. Cultivators from the same sect or family, who had been together for many years and well-trained, would form a solid formation with seamless cooperation.

Introducing numerous unfamiliar cultivators might not only affect coordination but also disrupt their own formation during the large-scale confrontation in the Cultivation World, which would be crucial for the final outcome.

The Foundation Building stage cultivators participating in the battle were generally not part of the formations; instead, they fought one-on-one with the strong sand monster opponents.

In several direct confrontations, the human cultivators had a resounding victory, gaining an absolute advantage. The four forces had set up four major formations, each winning on their respective battlefields, and they had eliminated many sand monsters. They were currently continuing to search for the remaining sand monster groups to annihilate them.