

Sect Master 651

Chapter 651: Mission

Long ago, Meng Zhang had the idea of going to rebuild the Taiyi Sect's mountain gate. However, due to unfavorable conditions, the plan has been delayed indefinitely.

Not to mention the possible obstacles from the nearby cultivation sects in the Grand Crossing Mountain Range, even just dealing with the demons occupying the Taiyi Sect's mountain gate is not an easy task that can be easily resolved.

Even after advancing to the Gold Corelate stage, according to the words of several Guardian Spirit Generals, it would still be extremely difficult for Meng Zhang to safely retreat if he were to be surrounded by a group of demons.

Over the years, the situation around Taiyi Sect has been tense, with one battle after another. Even if Meng Zhang wants to mobilize more Gold Core Daoist Masters from the sect to act together, it would be difficult to achieve.

Even now, though the situation in the Demon Wind Gobi seems stable, if Taiyi Sect were to suddenly withdraw too many Gold Core Daoist Masters, it would still bring about many problems.

After being reminded by the Extreme Sword Spirit General, Meng Zhang finally realized that joining the Jiuqu League's envoy to Grand Crossing Mountain Range is indeed a good opportunity.

Of course, due to the importance of this matter, although Meng Zhang is tempted, he didn't give an immediate response to the Extreme Sword Spirit General. He just said he wanted to think about it alone.

The Extreme Sword Spirit General didn't pressure him and, after saying what he wanted to say, took his leave.

After the Extreme Sword Spirit General left, Meng Zhang meditated in his quiet room, calming his mind and spirit. Then, he used the Grand Evolving Fortune technique to calculate the chances of success for his upcoming journey.

As the saying goes, it's difficult for a doctor to treat themselves. Many Diviners in the Cultivation World often find it challenging to calculate matters directly related to themselves. However, those who have mastered advanced techniques, like the Grand Evolving Fortune, have various ways to bypass this limitation.

The deeper Meng Zhang delves into his cultivation, the more satisfied he becomes with the Grand Evolving Fortune he obtained through a fortuitous encounter in his past. This seemingly inconspicuous technique proves to be more miraculous than he ever expected and has helped him avoid many crises.

Considering that this mission involves battling demons and traveling far to the Grand Crossing Mountain Range, Meng Zhang is a bit uneasy. So, he quiets his mind and uses the Grand Evolving Fortune to calculate the outcome.

The result of the calculation is vague and obscure, making it difficult to understand. From what Meng Zhang interprets, this journey will be full of dangers, but within these perils lies vitality and immense opportunities.

In theory, given Meng Zhang's current status and position, he shouldn't need to pursue so-called opportunities desperately. Continuing his cultivation steadily, even though it might be challenging and involve many detours, it's not impossible for him to break through to the Primordial Spirit stage.

However, Meng Zhang keenly perceives the changes in the Jiuqu League and the surrounding regions. He and Taiyi Sect will once again face significant opportunities and challenges.

This is a crucial juncture, and if Meng Zhang can lead Taiyi Sect successfully through it, then a promising future awaits.

In order to seize the chance to break through to the Primordial Spirit stage as soon as possible, Meng Zhang must be willing to take risks and embark on this journey.

Though the calculated result of the Grand Evolving Fortune is not particularly ideal, as long as it's not an absolute dead end, he can still proceed.

After completing the calculation, Meng Zhang summons the Extreme Sword Spirit General and tells him of his decision. He has resolved to seize this opportunity and personally go to the Grand Crossing Mountain Range.

As the Demon Wind Gobi cannot be left without people, Meng Zhang will be accompanied by the Extreme Sword Spirit General on this trip.

Additionally, he brings along the remaining sub-disc of the Mother-Child Transmission Disc. The main disc of the Mother-Child Transmission Disc is placed at Taiyi Sect's mountain gate, the Hundred Grass Slope. The other sub-disc has been kept at Red Rock Valley, maintaining close contact with the sect despite its distance from the mountain gate.

Next, Meng Zhang issued an order to Niu Dawei, who was stationed in Jiuqu City, instructing him to utilize Taiyi Sect's connections to include himself and Extreme Sword Spirit General in the envoy heading out this time.

Taiyi Sect, with Jin Li True Monarch looking after it, boasts numerous Gold Core Daoist Masters and formidable strength, along with its possession of the precious Demon Wind Gobi. After years of hard work, its influence has penetrated into many corners of the Jiuqu League, forming a vast network of connections.

Though it may not compare to the Primordial Spirit sects, Taiyi Sect holds a prominent position among the Gold Core sects.

Within the Jiuqu League, there are many forces eager to befriend Taiyi Sect. Even the influential figures in the alliance are willing to establish a favorable relationship with Taiyi Sect.

The request made by Meng Zhang is not difficult; the envoy already consists of many members, so adding two more people on short notice is not a problem.

Niu Dawei, appearing as an elder of Taiyi Sect stationed in Jiuqu City, managed to arrange the inclusion of Meng Zhang and Extreme Sword Spirit General in the envoy's personnel list.

The envoy dispatched by the Jiuqu League to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle is of high status and considerable size. To ensure the safe arrival of the envoy at its destination, they have arranged for several powerful protectors.

Among the envoy, there are as many as three Primordial Spirit True Monarchs.

True Monarch Azure Gem from Azure Origin Sect, True Monarch You Hongzhi from Four Seas Commercial Firm, and True Monarch Profound Wind, who is a loose cultivator.

As for the other Gold Core Daoist Masters, they are too numerous to count.

Azure Origin Sect, as the largest sect in the Jiuqu League, is one of the two actual dominators of the alliance. All important matters within the Jiuqu League must be approved by Azure Origin Sect before implementation.

For matters as significant as contacting the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle and jointly resisting the Dali Dynasty, the participation of Azure Origin Sect is naturally indispensable.

True Monarch Azure Gem, as an elder of Azure Origin Sect, is undoubtedly the leader of this mission.

Four Seas Commercial Firm, though ostensibly a trading business, is, in fact, one of the most powerful forces in the Jiuqu League, after Azure Origin Sect and Jade Sword Sect.

It conducts extensive business throughout the Jiuqu League and its surrounding regions, even extending deep into the Middle-Earth Continent.

Four Seas Commercial Firm also has numerous transactions with the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle. Their caravans regularly travel between the two regions, and they have established many branch establishments there.

True Monarch You Hongzhi used to be responsible for Four Seas Commercial Firm's businesses in the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle. He spent a long time there, becoming highly familiar with the situation and forming deep connections and relationships.

After becoming a Primordial Spirit True Monarch, he did not sever ties with the region; on the contrary, he made several trips to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle to maintain those connections.

True Monarch Profound Wind, as a loose cultivator, has always been independent within the Jiuqu League, maintaining a distance from the other high-ranking members of the alliance.

This approach means that many of the good opportunities within the alliance don't fall to him, but he also avoids taking on many unpleasant tasks.

However, this neutrality also brings him some benefits. Because he acts impartially and is known for his fairness, when the two major powers in the alliance distrust each other, they often turn to him.

As a neutral party, both major powers can reluctantly accept him.

Within the envoy, there are many Gold Core Daoist Masters, and aside from those with specific missions, such as Meng Zhang, each person has their own purposes.

Chapter 652: Respectful

The main members of the mission have long been selected. The reason for the delay in setting out is not only to wait for the gathering of the three Primordial Spirit True Monarchs but also due to some other minor matters.

During this time, there have been a few late cultivators like Meng Zhang who joined the mission for various reasons.

After Meng Zhang briefed the elders of Taiyi Sect about the affairs, he set out with Extreme Sword Spirit General, heading towards the headquarters of Jiuqu League, Jiuqu City.

At the time of their departure, Meng Zhang had just given orders to Niu Dawei through the sect's communication channel.

Niu Dawei was highly efficient in handling matters, so by the time Meng Zhang and Extreme Sword Spirit General arrived in Jiuqu City, things had already been arranged.

Most of the time, Jin Li True Monarch stayed in Jiuqu City. It seems that she might be addicted to the game of power, as she invested much of her time and energy in various Jiuqu League affairs. Even her personal cultivation had been somewhat relaxed.

However, she had not forgotten her beloved direct disciple, Jin Qiao'er, and had called her to Jiuqu City several times.

In Jiuqu City, Jin Li True Monarch enjoyed top-notch treatment and prepared a very favorable cultivation environment for Jin Qiao'er.

But it seems Jin Qiao'er either couldn't get used to being there or missed Qiaoshou Sect. Every time she was in Jiuqu City, she couldn't stay for too long.

She shared all the difficulties and doubts she encountered in her cultivation with Jin Li True Monarch, then received guidance from her and insisted on returning to Demon Wind Gobi.

Jin Li True Monarch was extremely indulgent toward her only disciple, and she couldn't refuse her requests.

After Jin Li True Monarch arrived in Jiuqu City, there were many cultivators under her command.

Among them were many outstanding individuals who were very useful to Jin Li True Monarch.

However, in Jin Li True Monarch's heart, all these people combined couldn't match even a single finger of her disciple, Jin Qiao'er.

Due to Jin Li True Monarch's favoritism, Jin Qiao'er never had to worry about cultivation resources. She had more than enough resources and even had plenty of spare energy to take care of the younger generations in Qiaoshou Sect.

In the current Qiaoshou Sect, several outstanding disciples emerged, being nurtured as future leaders. With Jin Qiao'er's full assistance, these disciples had hopes of breaking through to the Gold Core stage.

Every time Meng Zhang visited Jiuqu City, no matter how busy or burdened he was, he would proactively pay a visit to Jin Li True Monarch.

The previous battle with the Sea Clan taught him a lesson, extinguishing any hint of arrogance and reaffirming his position.

As the protector of Taiyi Sect, besides offering abundant tributes, Meng Zhang also needed to show sufficient respect to Jin Li True Monarch.

This time, when Meng Zhang went to Grand Crossing Mountain Range, he naturally needed to inform Jin Li True Monarch in a timely manner.

Meng Zhang didn't encounter many obstacles and successfully met with Jin Li True Monarch.

Aside from the usual greetings, he discussed his journey to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle.

He didn't reveal his true purpose, using a half-truth as an explanation instead.

Meng Zhang's explanation was that the situation around Demon Wind Gobi had been stable in recent years, allowing him some rare free time.

Throughout, he has been very interested in the history of Taiyi Sect's ancestors. This time, when Jiuqu League dispatched a mission to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle, he decided to take this opportunity and follow along.

In the past, Taiyi Sect had established a mountain gate in the Grand Crossing Mountain Range, which lasted for hundreds of years. Meng Zhang's trip there was not only driven by nostalgia and to pay respects to his ancestors but also to see if he could connect with the old acquaintances from his sect's past and restore past networking relationships.

Jin Li True Monarch also had some knowledge of Taiyi Sect's history. It was once a formidable cultivation sect that shook the Middle-Earth Continent. However, due to a series of calamities, it declined to the edge of the Endless Sea of Sand, becoming a minor sect in the lower realms of the Cultivation World. Hearing this history, Jin Li True Monarch couldn't help but sigh and lament the unpredictability of fate and the ever-changing world.

Meng Zhang led Taiyi Sect's rise and could be considered a generation's prominent leader. He wanted to pay tribute to his ancestors and visit some of the old acquaintances, which was also somewhat of a homecoming.

Jin Li True Monarch didn't doubt Meng Zhang's words. Instead, she gave him some instructions. Having come from outside, Jin Li True Monarch was not a native cultivator of Jiuqu League and Demon Wind Gobi. She had spent some time in the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle and had some knowledge of its situation.

Based on her own experiences from back then, Jin Li True Monarch offered some advice to Meng Zhang. She warned him not to stir up trouble unnecessarily, but if the situation demanded it, he shouldn't back down blindly, as it might damage Jiuqu League's reputation.

After chatting for a while, Meng Zhang took his leave and returned to Taiyi Sect's residence in Jiuqu City, where Niu Dawei was waiting outside.

Over the years, Niu Dawei's injuries hadn't fully recovered, but his spirits were high, and his aura stable, indicating that he was in good shape. Spending so many years in Jiuqu City had broadened his horizons, and he had learned a lot. Though he didn't have many opportunities for direct confrontations, the experiences here still trained and benefited him greatly.

Beneath the seemingly peaceful surface, there were hidden dangers. It was difficult to distinguish between friends and foes among seemingly friendly outsiders. In seemingly insignificant matters, there might be treacherous traps lurking...

Taiyi Sect, as an emerging force, had deliberately avoided competing with established sects and disrupting their interests. However, its very existence disrupted certain delicate balances. Moreover, Taiyi Sect's rapid development within Jiuqu League, expanding its trade, might offend some established powers and interest groups.

Niu Dawei acted like a great general, treating people with neither arrogance nor humility. He was neither overly aggressive nor overly conservative in handling affairs. He possessed skillful methods, using both soft and hard approaches. He managed to maintain Taiyi Sect's interests while harmonizing various relationships, ensuring that Taiyi Sect didn't become a target of resentment.

Over the years, Niu Dawei had been stationed in Jiuqu City and fully utilized his position as an elder of Taiyi Sect in Jiuqu City, gaining many benefits for the sect and making numerous friends.

Meng Zhang indeed had plans to groom Niu Dawei as his successor. Besides cultivation base, he needed to have the ability to manage the sect and handle external forces.

After not seeing each other for many years and with Meng Zhang having just visited Jin Li True Monarch, it was a rare moment when Niu Dawei proactively approached him to report on the work he had done during these years.

Chapter 653: ...

The master and disciple had not seen each other for a long time. After a lengthy conversation, they chatted into the late night. Meng Zhang was very satisfied with Niu Dawei's performance and encouraged him greatly. Additionally, before leaving the sect, Meng Zhang made some arrangements.

At present, Fang Hanyu, who was in seclusion at the sect, would come to Jiuqu City after exiting seclusion to replace Niu Dawei's position and assume the role of elder in charge of the Taiyi Sect stationed at Jiuqu League. Niu Dawei, on the other hand, would return to Taiyi Sect and take up the role of the Sect Master's senior disciple and acting Sect Master, responsible for overseeing all internal affairs of the sect.

After Niu Dawei returned to Taiyi Sect, he would also have to complete an important task arranged by Meng Zhang. In the current Cultivation World, many sects are hesitant to accept new disciples, unless they are exceptionally talented and outstanding in various aspects.

The way the entire sect cultivates disciples is somewhat similar to the university system Meng Zhang experienced in his previous life. Disciples choose their own cultivation path, actively participate in learning the required knowledge, and voluntarily seek guidance from senior members of the sect.

As the leader of the sect, Meng Zhang is actually quite happy to see this situation. In the sect, the relationship between master and disciple is a strong bond. With numerous disciples and disciples' disciples, it's easy for them to form interest groups and factions, which is not conducive to the management of the sect and may even lead to the sect's division under certain extreme circumstances. However, Meng Zhang didn't think too much about it before, and he didn't interfere with the high-level cultivators' decisions in this regard, allowing them to make their own choices.

During the previous battle with the Sea Clan, Taiyi Sect suffered losses among its disciples. While the number of new disciples increased in recent years, the quality was not as good as before. One reason for this decline in quality is that the threshold for accepting disciples was lowered, leading to a decline in the overall quality of disciples. Another reason is that Meng Zhang felt that Taiyi Sect's disciple cultivation system needed some improvement.

In the past, regardless of age or background, all new disciples who entered Taiyi Sect were sent to the sect's academy for several to ten years of study. In the academy, they would learn fundamental techniques and the basic knowledge required for cultivation. Some younger disciples or those who were illiterate had to start from learning characters.

These disciples were nominally classified as outer disciples but could only be considered apprentices in reality. After completing their studies in the academy and obtaining some basic abilities, they could barely step into the threshold of the Cultivation World. At this point, they needed to rely on themselves, completing various sect tasks to obtain the sect's good deeds and exchange for various cultivation resources and techniques.

This training process is followed by most sects in the Cultivation World, including Taiyi Sect during its prime and the major sects in Jiuqu League's Primordial Spirit period, with few differences. What Meng Zhang wants to improve is to make the high-level cultivators in the sect devote more time and effort to cultivating the younger generation.

According to Meng Zhang's plan, in the future, any cultivator at the mid-Foundation Building stage or above in their Cultivation Base must, under normal circumstances, accept disciples from the sect. Foundation Building stage cultivators can take Refining Qi stage disciples as their apprentices, and Gold Core stage cultivators can accept Foundation Building stage disciples as their apprentices, and so on.

Whether they are outer disciples or Inner-Sect Disciples, bowing to a master cannot change their identity and status. However, they can receive care and more guidance from their masters.

Of course, the high-level cultivators taking on disciples is not only a mandatory requirement of the sect but also a way for them to obtain merits for the sect. The more outstanding disciples they cultivate, the greater benefits they can receive.

Meng Zhang assigned this task to Niu Dawei, both as a test for him and to allow him to interact with all the high-level cultivators in the sect, especially those Gold Core Daoist Masters.

The day of the mission's departure was set for ten days later, leaving Meng Zhang with plenty of time. During his stay in Jiuqu City, besides communicating and guiding Niu Dawei's cultivation, he strolled around, personally getting to know the place.

Before departing, Meng Zhang visited Jin LiTrue Monarch again. Jin LiTrue Monarch was busy with her affairs, so their conversation didn't last long. However, before parting, she bestowed two pseudo Fourth Rank talismans upon Meng Zhang for self-defense.

Jin LiTrue Monarch wasn't a Fourth Rank Talisman Master, and her talisman-making skills were ordinary. Even with a Primordial Spirit cultivation base, she couldn't draw true Fourth Rank talismans. She had expended a lot of effort and precious materials to create a few pseudo Fourth Rank talismans. While they might not have much effect in battles among Primordial Spirit True Monarchs, in the hands of Gold Core cultivators, they could be quite useful. They could threaten Gold Core stage cultivators and even offer some resistance against enemies at the Primordial Spirit level.

Originally, Jin LiTrue Monarch had made some of these talismans to be used for Jin Qiao'er's self-defense. But since she had a few left and Meng Zhang was about to go on a journey, she casually gave him two as a precaution.

Meng Zhang already had a genuine Fourth Rank talisman in his possession, but he hadn't been able to refine and use it. However, after experiencing life and death in a battle with a powerful True Dragon clan member, Ying Gaofei, he decided to strengthen his arsenal. He expended his blood and damaged his cultivation base to blood-refine the Fourth Rank talisman, so now he could probably unleash most of its power if he had to.

Receiving the pseudo Fourth Rank talismans from Jin LiTrue Monarch, he naturally expressed his gratitude and continuously thanked her. Objects refined by a Primordial Spirit True Monarch couldn't be purchased with spiritual stones, even with all the wealth in the world.

Jin LiTrue Monarch's generosity made Meng Zhang feel her goodwill. He could see that Jin LiTrue Monarch's obsession with power had delayed her cultivation. He had initially wanted to remind her, but he thought that with his current cultivation base and experience, he had no qualification to give advice to Jin LiTrue Monarch. If he accidentally offended her, it would be regrettable.

With this in mind, Meng Zhang held back his words.

After leaving Jin LiTrue Monarch's place, Meng Zhang felt somewhat conflicted. Over the years, due to the incident with the Sea Clan's major battle, the higher-ups of Taiyi Sect had some reservations about Jin LiTrue Monarch, finding her less reliable. In truth, Jin LiTrue Monarch wasn't a bad person; she just had a bad temper and tended to wear her emotions on her sleeve. In the cutthroat and deceitful Cultivation World, she could be considered a rare straightforward person.

She had sheltered Taiyi Sect for many years, making her contributions invaluable to the sect. However, Taiyi Sect couldn't always rely on others, nor could they place the fate and future of the sect solely on her shoulders. In the future, there would undoubtedly be new disagreements between them, and they might grow apart.

Shortly after returning from Jin LiTrue Monarch's place, the day for the mission's departure arrived.

Chapter 654: Meeting on the way

On the day of departure, two gigantic Cloud Boats were already hovering over Jiuqu City. These Fourth Rank Cloud Boats were extremely rare within the Jiuqu League and appeared to be like two small mountains from a distance.

Inside the Cloud Boats, apart from their spacious interiors, there were also miniature worlds created by Primordial Spirit True Monarchs using Divine Abilities. Building each Fourth Rank Cloud Boat

was no easy task; it required significant manpower, resources, and a considerable amount of time. Even a formidable force like the Jiuqu League possessed only a few Fourth Rank Cloud Boats.

The Fourth Rank Cloud Boats were not just massive in size, but they also boasted formidable combat and defensive capabilities, making them highly versatile with various functions. One of these Cloud Boats belonged to the Jiuqu League and was rarely used unless a major event occurred. The other Cloud Boat belonged to the Four Seas Commercial Firm and served as their tool for conducting business across the world.

The delegation dispatched to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle was not restricted to a specific group of members, leading to many cultivators trying to find their way into it. Some, like Meng Zhang, had specific purposes and needed to travel to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle. Others were cultivators who sought adventure and took this opportunity to travel far and wide. There were even those who engaged in trade between the Jiuqu League and the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle.

As a result, the delegation's ranks were a mixture of diverse individuals, making the group quite large. The cultivators in the delegation fell into two categories: one consisted of official members affiliated with the Jiuqu League, holding positions or conducting official duties related to the mission. The other category consisted of those who paid spirit stones to the Four Seas Commercial Firm to board the Cloud Boat and travel to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle.

Through some connections, Niu Dawei arranged Meng Zhang and Extreme Sword Spirit General into the first category, giving them the status of Jiuqu League members on official business to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle. As such, they were mostly accommodated on the Cloud Boat belonging to the Jiuqu League, where True Monarch Azure Gem and True Monarch Profound Wind presided.

The majority of the second category of cultivators boarded the Cloud Boat belonging to the Four Seas Commercial Firm, where You Hongzhi, the True Monarch of the Four Seas Commercial Firm, held authority.

Two days before departure, many flying boats approached the two Cloud Boats, bringing not only personnel but also a substantial amount of cargo. Mobilizing a Fourth Rank Cloud Boat was an expensive endeavor, especially when traveling such a vast distance between the Jiuqu League and the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle, which consumed a massive amount of spirit stones.

As the Four Seas Commercial Firm was primarily profit-driven, they not only sold a large number of passenger cabins on the Cloud Boat but also carried many goods to be sold at the Grand Crossing

Cultivation Circle. The Jiuqu League, despite its size and power, had suffered significant losses due to the warfare in the Yuantu Great Prairie in recent years, and its resources were somewhat strained. This time, they carried numerous goods, hoping to earn profits to make up for the shortages.

Even Azure Origin Sect, a prestigious orthodox sect known for its adherence to Daoist principles, couldn't afford to consider dignity when faced with practical interests. Although Azure Origin Sect didn't directly intervene, a significant portion of the cargo aboard the Cloud Boat belonged to major sects like Azure Origin Sect, besides the portion belonging to the Jiuqu League.

Various cultivators had received prior notice and passed through simple inspections to board the Cloud Boat. On the day of departure, after a brief farewell, the two Cloud Boats set off on their journey to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle.

The Cloud Boats appeared like colossal beasts as they hovered over Jiuqu City, casting a massive shadow that covered a large part of the city. As they slowly moved westward, many cultivators in the city felt a sense of relief, as if a considerable burden had been lifted.

Initially, the Cloud Boats started at a slow pace, as if gradually shifting their positions. It was only after flying a considerable distance that they began to accelerate. Once they reached a certain speed, they maintained a steady pace without further changes.

Given the immense size of the Cloud Boats, they constantly consumed a large number of spirit stones. Hence, they typically traveled at an economical and constant speed, only accelerating when necessary.

Thanks to Niu Dawei's prior arrangements, Meng Zhang and Extreme Sword Spirit General found themselves fairly well accommodated on the Cloud Boat. Although the interior of the Cloud Boat was vast, it was loaded with a large number of goods and passengers, making individual space far from abundant. Distinguished figures like Primordial Spirit True Monarchs required even more substantial, separate spaces.

Meng Zhang and Extreme Sword Spirit General were assigned two separate cabins situated close to each other, providing a decent environment. After the Cloud Boat started, they both left their cabins and stepped outside.

Outside the cabins was a wide corridor, where many passengers were moving about. Since this was Jiuqu League's territory, there was generally little danger, and everyone's mood was relatively relaxed. Many passengers didn't want to stay confined in their cabins and came out to get some fresh air.

Meng Zhang and Extreme Sword Spirit General strolled through the corridor, taking several rounds before reaching the deck. The defensive great formation set up on the flying boat filtered out the strong winds, leaving only a gentle breeze that invigorated the spirits.

On the deck, many cultivators were walking around, either admiring the scenery below or marveling at the sights in the high sky. Some sociable cultivators were engaging in conversations, networking, and expanding their connections.

As a Sect Master and a cultivator at the Gold Core stage, Meng Zhang held a relatively high position on the Cloud Boat. Aside from the three Primordial Spirit True Monarchs, there were few who could surpass him in status among the delegation.

This time, Meng Zhang deliberately kept a low profile and refrained from publicizing his identity. When Niu Dawei arranged for him and Extreme Sword Spirit General to join the delegation, he didn't mention that Meng Zhang was the Sect Master but simply presented them as junior members of the sect who wanted to explore the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle. If Meng Zhang revealed his true identity, he would likely be placed closer to the three Primordial Spirit True Monarchs.

With a significant responsibility on this journey, Meng Zhang didn't want to draw attention to himself and preferred to keep a distance from the Primordial Spirit True Monarchs.

Meng Zhang and Extreme Sword Spirit General's position on the Cloud Boat was neither prominent nor insignificant. They resided on the same level as Foundation Building stage cultivators. Among these Foundation Building stage cultivators, no one recognized their identities, nor could they perceive their true Cultivation Base.

Meng Zhang casually looked around, and his gaze slightly narrowed. It was quite unexpected to encounter an old acquaintance at this time and place. To call this person an acquaintance might be imprecise; they had only crossed paths once and were far from being truly familiar with each other.

Chapter 655: Visit

A graceful and elegant woman, dressed in a green dress, is standing not far from Meng Zhang and Extreme Sword Spirit General, glancing around. Although her face is covered by a light veil, hiding her entire countenance and concealing her aura, Meng Zhang recognized her with just a glance.

This person is the Saintess of the Yellow Lotus Sect, who had a chance encounter with Meng Zhang in Jiuqu City in the past. Gu Yue Huaidie of the Gu Yue Family played matchmaker and introduced them, arranging their meeting. They became friends because they shared a common enemy, the True Monarch Mountain Peak.

At that time, they had a decent conversation and reached some preliminary agreements, finding areas for cooperation. However, they hadn't met again since then, leaving their contacts to their subordinates.

The Saintess's subordinates had some contact and cooperation with disciples of the Taiyi Sect, but over time, the communication between the two sides dwindled. This was because the Primordial Spirit True Monarch who presided over the Yellow Lotus Sect's Main Altar was getting older, with fewer remaining years of life, and rarely appeared in public. Meanwhile, the True Monarch Mountain Peak, as a Primordial Spirit True Monarch, was almost invincible within the Yellow Lotus Sect, with a growing influence and a large number of followers and supporters.

In recent years, many insightful individuals within the Yellow Lotus Sect felt the changes in the situation both within the Jiuqu League and its surrounding areas. They came to the consensus that the Yellow Lotus Sect had to end its divided state, unite, and face external challenges together.

This was the shared view of many insightful individuals within the Yellow Lotus Sect, including significant support from the Main Altar, considering True Monarch Mountain Peak's exceptional strength and reputation. Having him mediate and unify the divided Yellow Lotus Sect was the option that would cause the least loss and preserve the sect's strength—an ideal choice.

Under these circumstances, the Yellow Lotus Sect Saintess, who had been at odds with True Monarch Mountain Peak, found herself in increasingly difficult days. After all, it was obvious which side to choose between a Gold Core Daoist Master and a Primordial Spirit True Monarch.

While the Saintess held a high position, in the Cultivation World, strength ruled above all, and one had to rely on their capabilities to speak. What was more critical was True Monarch Mountain Peak's image as a benevolent leader. At least on the surface, he respected the elders of the sect and didn't possess a vengeful or intolerant character.

The Saintess's influence was gradually diminishing, and even within the Yellow Lotus Sect's Main Altar, she started to feel isolated. She found it difficult to protect herself, let alone confront True Monarch Mountain Peak.

Although Taiyi Sect viewed True Monarch Mountain Peak as a major adversary, they would never openly target him. Consequently, since the Yellow Lotus Sect Saintess couldn't be of much help and had little utility to Taiyi Sect, they naturally kept their distance to avoid being entangled in direct confrontation with True Monarch Mountain Peak.

The Yellow Lotus Sect Saintess had tried to send messages several times, wanting to meet with Meng Zhang, but he had always found excuses to decline. Little did Meng Zhang expect that he would encounter her here.

Meng Zhang couldn't pretend not to see her because when he noticed her, she had also spotted him almost at the same time. However, she didn't approach him to talk; instead, she acted as if she hadn't noticed anything and slowly walked in another direction, getting farther away from Meng Zhang.

On this level where Meng Zhang was, Foundation Building cultivators were predominant. Apart from Meng Zhang and Extreme Sword Spirit General, two Gold Core Daoist Masters hiding their Cultivation Bases, there was now a Yellow Lotus Sect Saintess.

But that wasn't all; there were two more Gold Core Daoist Masters hiding their Cultivation Bases following behind the Yellow Lotus Sect Saintess, secretly monitoring her. Interestingly, one of these Gold Core Daoist Masters was someone Meng Zhang knew—a senior of the Yellow Lotus Sect's East River Branch who had participated in the past attack on the Taiyi Sect's mountain gate alongside Daoist Master Smiling Lotus.

At present, their main focus was on the Yellow Lotus Sect Saintess, and they hadn't noticed Meng Zhang and Extreme Sword Spirit General.

With Deception Breaking Eye, Meng Zhang had a keen eye, and with just a quick glance, he roughly understood the situation at the moment. The Yellow Lotus Sect Saintess, for some unknown reason, had also infiltrated the delegation heading to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle, with a long tail following behind her. She had noticed the tail but didn't have a good way to deal with it.

Despite the Cloud Boat's spacious interior, it was still a confined space. It was not an easy task to shake off pursuit and remain hidden.

In recent years, Taiyi Sect had largely restrained their covert actions against True Monarch Mountain Peak and his forces. True Monarch Mountain Peak was busy unifying the Yellow Lotus Sect and had no time to deal with Taiyi Sect's minor actions. Similarly, Taiyi Sect was focused on assimilating the newly acquired territories and recovering from the losses sustained during major battles; they didn't want to stir up more trouble.

Especially after the Taiyi Sect's higher-ups found Jin Li True Monarch to be unreliable, they were even less willing to provoke other Primordial Spirit True Monarchs.

Although True Monarch Mountain Peak was indeed Taiyi Sect's archenemy, they believed in taking revenge slowly and had enough time to wait. Unlike Meng Zhang, who was much younger, they had no reason to be impatient.

Encountering the Yellow Lotus Sect Saintess in such a place, Meng Zhang could only curse his bad luck in his heart, knowing that it meant new troubles were coming.

As he urgently headed to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle to investigate the fallen Taiyi Sect mountain gate, he truly didn't want to get involved in anything at this time. But, as it goes, world events are unpredictable.

With his mood considerably dampened, Meng Zhang had no interest in sightseeing. After casually strolling around the outer deck to get an idea of the situation, he returned to his cabin.

Once back in his cabin, Meng Zhang meditated with his eyes closed and didn't venture outside again.

Not long after nightfall, a knocking sound came from outside Meng Zhang's cabin. Before he could react, the Yellow Lotus Sect Saintess appeared silently before him.

On this level, the main guests were Foundation Building cultivators, and each independent cabin was equipped with restrictions to block external observation. If someone intruded, it would alert the occupants promptly. However, these restrictions were mainly effective against Foundation Building cultivators and below, almost ineffective against Gold Core Daoist Masters.

"I have come uninvited, being a rude guest. I hope Sect Master Meng won't take offense," said the Yellow Lotus Sect Saintess, standing before Meng Zhang, bowing lightly.

Meng Zhang sighed; trouble really couldn't be avoided. When someone comes and stands in front of you, how can you pretend not to be offended? It seemed impossible.

Chapter 656: Transaction

"For so long, Sect Master Meng may not know the name of this humble woman."

"I am surnamed Xu, given name Mengying."

In the Cultivation World, except for a few pseudo-Daoist sects, cultivators are not bound by many conventions. There is no strict rule against the disclosure of personal names or relationships between men and women.

Xu Mengying maintained a humble posture in front of Meng Zhang, appearing like a delicate woman.

The more she acted this way, the more vigilant Meng Zhang became.

"Coming to your doorstep without warning is indeed a bit impolite. However, Sect Master Meng, as the leader of a sect, doesn't need to be so guarded."

"Sect Master Meng should know that I have no ill intentions. We are still friends, facing common enemies."

Seeing that Meng Zhang wasn't buying into the delicate female act, Xu Mengying dropped the pretense and became more straightforward.

"Miss Xu, we don't have a deep connection. The past agreements are just that—things of the past."

"Do you think, given your current situation, that you have any value to Taiyi Sect?"

Straight to the point, Meng Zhang had no intention of beating around the bush.

"Since Miss Xu has noticed the tail behind her, she should be well aware of the troubles she carries. Coming here at this time, it's suspicious."

"The current Taiyi Sect, the current me, have no interest in the internal affairs of your Yellow Lotus Sect. Your conflicts and infighting have nothing to do with Taiyi Sect, nor with me."

Meng Zhang's attitude was clear—he didn't want to get involved in Xu Mengying's troubles.

Xu Mengying chuckled lightly. Even through a veil, Meng Zhang could feel her astonishing charm, like blooming flowers, enchanting and beautiful.

Of course, Meng Zhang didn't think she would be foolish enough to use seduction or enchantment techniques on him. He was not so shallow as to be swayed by such tactics.

After a charming smile, Xu Mengying's tone turned firm.

"Sect Master Meng, I understand your desire to avoid trouble. But do you know, there are some troubles you can't escape just by wanting to?"

"Yue Feng is busy unifying the Yellow Lotus Sect, integrating all its forces. Indeed, he may not currently bother Taiyi Sect."

"But with his vengeful heart, he will never forget Taiyi Sect as an enemy."

"If he truly unifies the Yellow Lotus Sect, gaining even more formidable power, Taiyi Sect will face an unprecedented powerful adversary."

Facing Xu Mengying's seemingly earnest persuasion, Meng Zhang lazily replied.

"We'll talk about future matters in the future. I only focus on the present. Besides, no one can predict what will happen in the future."

Seeing that Meng Zhang was unmoved by her words, Xu Mengying finally brought out the substantial offer.

"Sect Master Meng has already cultivated to the Gold Correlate stage, right? With your aptitude, reaching the Primordial Spirit stage is a matter of time. Soon, this humble woman will have to address you as True Monarch Meng."

"Too kind, too kind, Miss. I don't deserve such praise. My cultivation base is still far from the Primordial Spirit stage," Meng Zhang casually responded.

"With Sect Master Meng's current cultivation base, I wonder if you need the Nine Heavens Refined Essence?" Xu Mengying asked seemingly casually.

Meng Zhang raised an eyebrow; this woman seemed to have a keen sense of others' urgent needs.

Meng Zhang needed to absorb and refine a sufficient amount of Nine Heavens Refined Essence to perfect his cultivation at the Gold Corelate stage and lay a solid foundation for advancing to the Primordial Spirit stage.

In the Cultivation World, efficient methods of extracting Nine Heavens Refined Essence are closely guarded secrets of major sects. Without the guidance of the Extreme Sword Spirit General, Meng Zhang would still be in the dark.

Storing Nine Heavens Refined Essence for a short period is not difficult, but long-term storage poses many challenges. Gold Corelate cultivators need a substantial amount, and the essence is difficult to preserve and transport.

Even with a significant expenditure of spirit stones, it is challenging to purchase Nine Heavens Refined Essence. If some are occasionally available, they are quickly snatched up.

Taiyi Sect, with its current influence, has established a trade network covering almost the entire Jiuqu League. Many years ago, Meng Zhang ordered Taiyi Sect branches to collect information and channels for selling Nine Heavens Refined Essence.

However, despite Taiyi Sect's efforts, they have been unable to purchase any Nine Heavens Refined Essence.

Meng Zhang considered that obtaining a large amount of Nine Heavens Refined Essence might require the intervention of a Primordial Spirit True Monarch. Yet, convincing one to act was no easy task, and even with significant costs, there was no guarantee of success.

Moreover, many Primordial Spirit True Monarchs were not inclined to see unrelated cultivators gain opportunities to advance to the Primordial Spirit stage.

Despite Taiyi Sect's close ties with Jin Li True Monarch, after initially helping Meng Zhang, Jin Li True Monarch was unwilling to provide further assistance.

Nine Heavens Refined Essence was not only useful for Gold Corelate cultivators but also for Primordial Spirit True Monarchs. Even with Meng Zhang's connections, Jin Li True Monarch was reluctant to trade a large quantity of Nine Heavens Refined Essence.

Now that Xu Mengying had mentioned Nine Heavens Refined Essence, it likely meant she could acquire a considerable amount. Meng Zhang indeed needed it, but he refrained from speaking first to avoid appearing too eager.

Xu Mengying, sensing Meng Zhang's interest, continued speaking without waiting for his response.

"My Yellow Lotus Sect, a Primordial Spirit powerhouse with a heritage of over a thousand years, almost produces a Primordial Spirit True Monarch in every generation. Sometimes, we even have more than one."

"These senior True Monarchs can effortlessly contribute and help accumulate a substantial amount of Nine Heavens Refined Essence for the sect. With Yellow Lotus Sect's profound foundation, we have ample means to store Nine Heavens Refined Essence for an extended period."

"In fact, the Nine Heavens Refined Essence currently stored by my Yellow Lotus Sect is sufficient for the use of two or three Gold Corelate cultivators, with plenty to spare."

At this point, Meng Zhang understood that Xu Mengying intended to trade Nine Heavens Refined Essence with him.

"Enough talk. Tell me what I need to do for you to provide the Nine Heavens Refined Essence."

"I must emphasize, if it involves extreme danger and requires me to risk my life, I must respectfully decline."

Chapter 657: Route

Meng Zhang's intention was clear—he indeed needed the Nine Heavens Refined Essence. Sufficient Nine Heavens Refined Essence would shorten his cultivation time and help him complete the Gold Core stage of cultivation.

In order to take some risks and help Xu Mengying with a small favor, that wouldn't be a problem. However, if the risks were too great, Xu Mengying would have to seek other alternatives.

Even if Xu Mengying didn't provide Meng Zhang with the Nine Heavens Refined Essence, the worst that could happen would be that Meng Zhang would have to spend more time in the future collecting it from the Nine Heavens.

Xu Mengying understood Meng Zhang's intention and was confident that she could move him and obtain his assistance.

"Sect Master Meng probably doesn't know that Daoist Master Smiling Lotus and Daoist Master Mountain Garden have already boarded this Cloud Boat, heading together to the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle," Xu Mengying said, mentioning the two names to Meng Zhang.

Meng Zhang was familiar with both names. Daoist Master Smiling Lotus was the Elder of the Yellow Lotus Sect East River Branch and the actual decision-maker. He led the cultivator army in a life-and-death battle against Taiyi Sect in the past, making him an old enemy of Meng Zhang.

Though Meng Zhang hadn't seen Daoist Master Mountain Garden in person, he had heard of his reputation. Daoist Master Mountain Garden was an Elder of the Yellow Lotus Sect Mountain Branch and a trusted disciple of True Monarch Mountain Peak.

Both of them were cultivators at the Gold Core stage with profound cultivation bases and formidable strength. Even if Meng Zhang were to confront them now, he couldn't be certain of defeating them.

Taiyi Sect had always been vigilant and collected intelligence on neighboring forces, especially those they had conflicts with in the past. Xu Mengying continued, "They were ordered by their master, Yue Feng, to follow and track me with a group of cultivators until we boarded this Cloud Boat."

Though Xu Mengying's tone was calm, Meng Zhang could sense the hidden resentment in her words.

"This time, I have important matters to attend to in the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle, and I absolutely cannot let them interfere," Xu Mengying explained. "They outnumber me, and I can't contend with them on my own or shake them off."

"I'm not asking too much of Sect Master Meng; I just hope you can help me evade their pursuit."

Listening to Xu Mengying's request, Meng Zhang fell into contemplation. The group led by Daoist Master Smiling Lotus was numerous and powerful, and even if Meng Zhang confronted them, he couldn't be sure of victory. However, if it didn't escalate to a full-blown battle and he merely helped Xu Mengying shake off her pursuers, there might be a way.

Meng Zhang didn't want to provoke True Monarch Mountain Peak, but if there were profitable opportunities, he was somewhat interested in causing trouble for this group.

Seeing Meng Zhang lost in thought, Xu Mengying continued, "After the matter is settled, I can make the decision to provide a batch of Nine Heavens Refined Essence, enough for Sect Master Meng to complete the Gold Core stage of cultivation."

"On the Cloud Boat, three Primordial Spirit True Monarchs are in charge, and they wouldn't dare take action against me, only tracking my movements."

"Just now, I used a secret technique to temporarily shake them off. As long as I don't leave the Cloud Boat, they will quickly find me again."

"Sect Master Meng, I cannot stay here for long. I hope you will carefully consider and make a decision as soon as possible."

"Now I must leave; you can take your time to think it over. I hope that the next time we meet, regardless of your decision, you can give me a reply."

After Xu Mengying finished speaking, she bowed to Meng Zhang and left without hesitation. After her departure, Meng Zhang pondered for a while, then left his cabin and knocked on the door of the adjacent cabin.

Extreme Sword Spirit General opened the door and invited Meng Zhang inside. Meng Zhang didn't conceal anything and told Extreme Sword Spirit General about the visit from Xu Mengying, the Saintess of the Yellow Lotus Sect.

According to Extreme Sword Spirit General, Meng Zhang's journey was of great importance, and he shouldn't get involved in unnecessary conflicts. However, obtaining enough Nine Heavens Refined Essence would accelerate Meng Zhang's cultivation speed, and in Extreme Sword Spirit General's view, the sooner Meng Zhang reached the Primordial Spirit stage, the greater the benefits would be.

After a moment of silence, Extreme Sword Spirit General offered his opinion. If it only required a bit of effort to entangle Daoist Master Smiling Lotus and his group, that wouldn't be a problem. However, engaging in a large-scale battle with them would likely affect Meng Zhang's current mission, making it not worth the risks. The balance between these considerations should be made by Meng Zhang himself as the Sect Master.

Having left Extreme Sword Spirit General, Meng Zhang returned to his own cabin and weighed the pros and cons repeatedly before finally making a decision. For many years, he had been limited by the shortage of Nine Heavens Refined Essence, which hindered his cultivation progress. He needed to complete the Gold Core stage as soon as possible, and even if it meant taking some risks, he was willing to accept them. As long as he could successfully break through to the Primordial Spirit stage, the threat from True Monarch Mountain Peak would no longer be a concern.

In the following days, Xu Mengying didn't immediately pay another visit, as if giving Meng Zhang enough time to contemplate.

The two Fourth Rank Cloud Boats continued to advance according to the planned route, heading straight towards the direction of the Grand Crossing Mountain Range. There was a very distant distance between the Jiuqu League and the Grand Crossing Mountain Range, and in between lay no large human cultivator forces. Instead, deserts, barren mountains, rivers, and swamps alternated, and the spiritual energy in the area was very thin.

The Grand Crossing Mountain Range was situated in the northwest direction of the Jiuqu League, close to the upper reaches of the Jiuqu River. The meandering Jiuqu River originated in the west and flowed from west to east, passing through an exceptionally vast land.

The Jiuqu League, named after the Jiuqu River, occupied the essence of the land on both sides of the river. However, its actual control area was limited to the middle and lower reaches of the river. The upper reaches of the Jiuqu River were occupied by a large and formidable aquatic race.

During the early days of the Jiuqu League's establishment, the aquatic race from the upper reaches had descended downstream and launched numerous attacks on the Jiuqu League. The ancestors of the Jiuqu League paid a heavy price to defeat the aquatic race and protect their newly established human clan force. However, due to various constraints, the Jiuqu League couldn't completely wipe out the aquatic race upstream.

After being heavily defeated by the Jiuqu League, the aquatic race didn't dare to organize large armies to attack again. Instead, they fell into a long-lasting struggle with nearby terrestrial demonic tribes and became unable to invade the Jiuqu League.

Nowadays, the control areas of the Jiuqu League and the aquatic race were close to each other, leading to occasional small-scale conflicts and battles, but there hadn't been large-scale warfare for many years.

In the vicinity of the upper reaches of the Jiuqu River, there was a continuous forest known as the Black Jade Forest, inhabited by powerful demonic beast clans. Strictly speaking, the so-called aquatic race also belonged to the demonic beast category, but they never regarded themselves as such. They considered themselves higher beings and looked down upon other demonic beasts. The aquatic race harbored deep hostility towards the demonic beast clans in the Black Jade Forest, considering them as enemies.

For many years, conflicts and large-scale battles frequently occurred between the aquatic race and the demonic beast clans in the Black Jade Forest.

Chapter 658: Agreement

In the journey from Jiuqu League to Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle, there are two areas that must be passed through: the vicinity of Jiuqu League upstream and the vicinity of Black Jade Forest. Even if one takes a big detour, it is difficult to completely avoid these two places. Both the aquatic creatures and the demonic beasts from Black Jade Forest consider the surrounding areas as their own territory and frequently arrange multiple patrol teams within a vast region. Whenever these patrol teams encounter outsiders, they engage in fierce battles, showing no mercy and pursuing relentlessly.

The biggest challenge for the merchant caravan traveling from Jiuqu League to Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle is to find a way to avoid the aquatic creatures and demonic beasts. Furthermore, during this long journey, many individuals who cannot find a place in the human cultivation world gather in this region due to its remoteness from human society. There are fugitives who have committed serious crimes, outlaws being pursued, Ghost Path cultivators, and even rogue cultivators from dark paths – almost everything is included.

If it were an ordinary cultivator team, they would face numerous hardships and life-threatening situations on this journey. The two Fourth Rank Cloud Boats, resembling two small mountains, flying high above the sky, are imposing enough to deter anyone from easily offending them. Only Fourth Rank experts have a chance of posing a threat to these Cloud Boats.

For many years, the Four Seas Commercial Firm has relied on these meticulously crafted Fourth Rank Cloud Boats to trade between Jiuqu League and Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle, earning substantial profits. Because the strength of this mission is formidable, there is no need to back down excessively, even if the head of the mission is unwilling to get involved in too much trouble. Therefore, the route taken by the two Cloud Boats is different from the usual merchant caravan routes. They do not deliberately avoid dangerous areas and often travel in a straight line, heading directly into potential dangers.

On this route, there were originally many bandits who plundered caravans, some of whom were even led by Gold Core Daoist Masters, making them quite powerful. When the Cloud Boats pass

by, there are still some foolish individuals who secretly follow from behind, lurking in the shadows. However, the three Primordial Spirit True Monarchs in command of the Cloud Boats emit an aura unique to Fourth Rank experts, causing these sneaky individuals to scatter like mice when they see a cat, hastily avoiding them.

If it weren't for the mission at hand, it is likely that some of the Primordial Spirit True Monarchs would not be able to resist taking action against these rodents.

As the Cloud Boats continue their journey, the road remains relatively peaceful, undisturbed by those ignorant troublemakers. However, the upcoming segment of the journey requires everyone to be on high alert.

Not far ahead lies the junction of Jiuqu River and Black Jade Forest. The territories of the aquatic creatures and demonic beasts intertwine, creating a complex entanglement. Meng Zhang had plenty of time to contemplate this situation during these past few days.

One night, Xu Mengying secretly visited again. After receiving Meng Zhang's somewhat reserved response, she visibly relaxed. Xu Mengying promised Meng Zhang that once they return to Jiuqu League, she will deliver the promised Nine Heavens Refined Essence as agreed. To assure Meng Zhang's trust, Xu Mengying even made a Heart Demon Oath.

For a cultivator of Xu Mengying's background, there might be ways to bypass the Heart Demon Oath, but breaking such an oath would still be troublesome, potentially resulting in serious consequences. Xu Mengying voluntarily made this Heart Demon Oath, which made Meng Zhang feel restless.

He also made a Heart Demon Oath, promising to do his best to help Xu Mengying escape her predicament as long as it doesn't endanger himself. With this agreement, they became temporary allies.

The two of them discussed and arranged some clandestine communication methods. As they drew closer to their destination, Daoist Master Smiling Lotus and his group kept a closer eye on Xu Mengying. If things continued this way, it would become increasingly difficult for Xu Mengying to meet with Meng Zhang again without raising suspicions.

To avoid alerting Daoist Master Smiling Lotus and the others, Xu Mengying planned to remain within their line of sight during the upcoming period. The initial action time they agreed upon was when the Cloud Boats arrived at Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle and everyone began to disembark.

After Xu Mengying left, Meng Zhang and the Extreme Sword Spirit General began preparing for their impending actions. Shortly after, the two Cloud Boats approached the upstream area of Jiuqu River. In this region, the widest part of the river spans over a thousand miles, and even the shortest part is several hundred miles long. The river is vast, with numerous tributaries, forming a dense network of waterways.

Standing high above and looking down, one could occasionally see teams of fish-headed human-bodied creatures patrolling back and forth on the surface of the river. Perhaps out of curiosity, many cultivators on the two Cloud Boats went up to various decks to observe the situation below. The Cloud Boats were protected by defensive formations, so they were not worried about any danger. Although the guards on the Cloud Boats reminded everyone to be cautious, few took it seriously.

Among the aquatic patrol teams below, there were also sharp-eyed individuals who had already noticed the presence of the Cloud Boats. However, facing a high-speed Cloud Boat flying from above, they felt helpless. Moreover, just by appearance, the Cloud Boat was not an easy opponent to deal with. Smarter beings wouldn't bother inviting trouble.

The two Cloud Boats continued to advance and were about to enter the territory of the Black Jade Forest. The Black Jade Forest was an immense and boundless forest, covering an area of tens of thousands of miles in all directions. The forest spread along both banks of the Jiuqu River, with many sections of the river enveloped by the forest.

The demonic beasts within the Black Jade Forest were exceptionally fierce and powerful, brimming with a unique wildness. The demonic beasts Meng Zhang encountered in the Demon Wind Gobi were nothing more than harmless domesticated pets compared to the ones in the Black Jade Forest. In the forest, there were several Fourth Rank demonic beasts, each worthy of being called a "Monster King." As for the Third Rank and lower demonic beasts, they were as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.

These ferocious and violent beings harbored extreme animosity toward other creatures. Even different factions of demonic beasts engaged in fierce battles. The aquatic creatures nearby suffered greatly from the torment of these beasts. The demonic beasts did not share any benevolence with the aquatic creatures and saw them as both enemies and food.

Facing the powerful demonic beasts of the Black Jade Forest, the aquatic creatures were occupied with containment, leaving them little time to focus on their human enemy, the Jiuqu League. Meng Zhang vaguely remembered hearing some rumors in the past that the aquatic creatures had changed their hostile attitude toward the Human Clan and secretly extended goodwill to the Human Clan cultivators. The reason behind this change was the overwhelming strength of the demonic beasts in

the Black Jade Forest, forcing the aquatic creatures to seek assistance from the Human Clan cultivators.

However, back then, the events were too distant from his own circumstances, and Meng Zhang did not invest much effort in verifying the truth of those rumors. For now, as the two Cloud Boats entered the territory of the aquatic creatures, they did not slow down, and the aquatic creatures did not interfere.

The Black Jade Forest was vast, making it difficult to completely avoid its territory while trying to reach the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle. Therefore, the Cloud Boats took a considerable detour to avoid the core area of the Black Jade Forest. Even with three Primordial Spirit True Monarchs on board, it was unlikely that anyone would want to forcefully clash with the Monster Kings.

Observing the scene below, Meng Zhang was thoroughly intrigued and captivated. Many cultivators on the Cloud Boat had similar reactions.

Suddenly, Meng Zhang's expression changed as he scanned his surroundings, looking for an escape route. Before he could fully react, a sudden croaking sound erupted, causing both massive Cloud Boats to tremble. The terrifying sound waves struck the Cloud Boats, triggering their defensive formations, which lit up with protective barriers. Despite the protection of the defense formations, the force of the sound waves still penetrated somewhat, catching many unprepared cultivators on the decks off guard.

Meng Zhang stabilized himself, resisting the force of the sound waves. Then, he heard a voice from the nearby Cloud Boat of the Four Seas Commercial Firm, True Monarch You Hongzhi, saying, "Be careful, everyone. It's the Fourth Rank demonic beast, the Sky-swallowing Toad."

Following that, a clear chant was heard from the Cloud Boat where Meng Zhang stood. It sounded like a chant, but it was actually True Monarch Azure Gem reciting the classic texts of the Dao alliance loudly. With True Monarch Azure Gem's recitation, the tremendous roar of the Sky-swallowing Toad was gradually blocked from affecting the Cloud Boat.

This display of power stunned many cultivators on the Cloud Boat. They couldn't believe that Fourth Rank demonic beasts would act against them in this place. A Fourth Rank demonic beast was considered a Monster King in its own right. Why would it come to this remote edge of the territory instead of remaining in its own lair?

A gigantic toad, the size of a small mountain, leaped from a distance and landed not far from the Cloud Boat. The toad opened its mouth wide, sucking in and then exhaling a powerful air column that fiercely struck the Cloud Boat of the Four Seas Commercial Firm.

The terrifying sound waves finally subsided, and the impact caused both Cloud Boats to sway again.

Chapter 660: Intentionally conflict

Cloud Boat of the Four Seas Commercial Firm has entered and left Tiger Mountain City multiple times, and many cultivators in the city are very familiar with it. Moreover, with the influence of the Four Seas Commercial Firm in Tiger Mountain City, there is no need for patrol teams to come and inspect.

Because the Jiuqu League envoy did not notify the Grand Crossing Cultivation Circle before their departure, the major cultivation forces here are unaware of the envoy's arrival, and they naturally won't send anyone to welcome them.

According to the plan made before the envoy's departure, they are supposed to stay in Tiger Mountain City for a period of time and use the Four Seas Commercial Firm's connections to establish contact with the city's higher-ups, gradually communicating with the surrounding cultivation forces.

Seeking allies and persuading them to stand on the same front is not an easy task; it requires careful consideration and must not be rushed to avoid negative consequences.

The Fourth Rank Cloud Boat is too large to land in the city. Instead, two Fourth Rank Cloud Boats flew to the eastern suburbs of Tiger Mountain City, one of the large flying boat take-off and landing areas frequently used for travel to and from the city.

The two Fourth Rank Cloud Boats slowly lowered their flight altitude and finally hovered at a height of about one hundred zhang above the ground.

Before the Cloud Boats had even come to a complete stop, small flying boats flew over from a distance.

A small portion of these flying boats belonged to the branches of the Four Seas Commercial Firm stationed in this area, responsible for receiving their own goods and passengers year-round.

Most of the flying boats were used for transportation, even though they appeared small and many seemed to be in poor condition, they were still fully capable of carrying passengers or cargo.

Tiger Mountain City covers a large area, and the controlled area outside the city is also extensive. Although this is the outskirts, there is still a considerable distance from the city. Even cultivators with flying abilities prefer to conserve their energy and spend some spirit stones to ride the flying boats.

After the two Cloud Boats stabilized, cultivators jumped off the decks one after another. Some flew towards the passenger-carrying flying boats, some took out flying magic tools, and others flew directly towards Tiger Mountain City in the distance.

Xu Mengying had been waiting on the deck for a while and now she, too, flew off the deck and headed towards one of the passenger-carrying flying boats.

Two Gold Core Daoist Masters closely followed her, keeping a distance of only two to three zhang.

Interestingly, one of the Gold Core Daoist Masters was Hong Siming, an elder from the East River Branch. He had met and fought against Meng Zhang before, which created some grudges between them.

After the truce between Taiyi Sect and Yellow Lotus Sect, the two sides hadn't encountered each other again, but the past grievances remained unresolved.

Meng Zhang and Extreme Sword Spirit General flew out from another direction, pretending to have just noticed Hong Siming.

Extreme Sword Spirit General exclaimed in surprise, "Sect Master, isn't that a person from Yellow Lotus Sect?"

Meng Zhang praised the acting skills in his mind and disdainfully glanced at Hong Siming.

Originally, the flight paths of the two groups of people didn't overlap, but Meng Zhang intentionally flew straight over at full speed, as if he intended to collide forcefully.

Hong Siming and his companion stopped, and he angrily questioned, "Meng Zhang, what are you trying to do?"

"Such audacity! How dare you call our Sect Master by name? A mere insignificant third-rate cultivator, do you think you can address our Sect Master so casually?"

Extreme Sword Spirit General shouted loudly, acting like a loyal and devoted dog. Hong Siming and his companion found it amusing; after all, both were Gold Core Daoist Masters, and none was inferior to the other. How could it be that they couldn't even be called by their names?

"Taiyi Sect? Never heard of it before. Perhaps they are just some insignificant bottom-tier faction," said Hong Siming's companion sarcastically.

His companion was a cultivator from the Mountain Branch, which had the True Monarch Mountain Peak—a true Primordial Spirit-level force. He couldn't stand Meng Zhang's arrogance in front of him.

Now, Meng Zhang didn't need to find any more excuses for provocation.

"Dare you!" Extreme Sword Spirit General angrily retorted, appearing ready to attack.

Though they were exchanging verbal jabs, Hong Siming had no intention of fighting Meng Zhang and his companion. While there had been animosity between them in the past, they had maintained a peaceful coexistence since the truce between their factions. Moreover, Taiyi Sect was not a weak sect, as it had the protection of a Primordial Spirit True Monarch.

True Monarch Mountain Peak was busy consolidating the influence of the Yellow Lotus Sect and probably wouldn't want to start a conflict with Jin Li True Monarch's group at this time.

However, Hong Siming couldn't control his companion's actions.

His companion from the Mountain Branch was arrogant and lacked respect for Hong Siming. Seeing the two Gold Core cultivators actively provoking them, he had no intention of backing down. He felt compelled to act.

With great anger, he lifted his right palm and struck fiercely at Extreme Sword Spirit General with a powerful palm force.

The intimidating Extreme Sword Spirit General suddenly lost his momentum and, instead of continuing the attack, struggled to defend against the opponent's strike. He seemed to be seriously injured.

This unexpected display of strength surprised both Hong Siming and his companion. They were Gold Core Daoist Masters; how could they be so ineffective?

"Darn you! You humiliated our sect earlier, and now you dare to launch a sneak attack on our elder. Are you really seeking to be our enemy?" Meng Zhang said furiously and took action directly.

He didn't use any spells or Divine Abilities, nor did he unleash any magic tools. With a simple move of his hands, he sent out powerful True Essence, forcefully striking Hong Siming and his companion.

Hong Siming's Cultivation Base was only in the mid Gold Core stage, while his companion was even weaker, at the early Gold Core stage. Faced with Meng Zhang, who was in the late Gold Core stage, their strengths were worlds apart.

Meng Zhang didn't even need to exert much effort; he easily suppressed them.

The pursuit of Yellow Lotus Sect's saintess, Xu Mengying, was a matter personally assigned by Yue Feng. Daoist Master Smiling Lotus and Daoist Master Mountain Garden, who were overseeing the task, didn't dare to be careless.

As a precaution against any unexpected tricks Xu Mengying might use to escape, they made many preparations in advance. There were two groups of people—one overt and one covert—tracking Xu Mengying to ensure no mistakes were made.

Hong Siming's group was the overt one, and now they were being suppressed by Meng Zhang, unable to fight back. In the covert group, there was some hesitation. It didn't seem appropriate to just watch their companion being taken down in front of them. Facing their companion's blame and their sect's disapproval afterward wouldn't be pleasant.

After a moment of hesitation, the two Gold Core Daoist Masters from the covert group rushed over, intending to help Hong Siming and his companion.

Seeing enemy reinforcements arriving, Meng Zhang was undeterred. He laughed heartily and confidently welcomed the challenge. With a sweeping motion of his hand, he pulled the two Gold Core Daoist Masters from the covert group into the fray as well.