

## Doctor 951

### Chapter 951: The Foremost Powerhouse on the Combat Power Rankings

For a long time, Huang Miao had held the second place in the Inner Court Disciples' Martial Strength Ranking. The sudden rise of Fang Bai caught her unprepared.

Although Huang Miao had a good impression of Fang Bai and was happy to see his ascent, she felt a tinge of regret over being replaced on the Inner Court Disciples' Martial Strength Ranking.

Regret aside, Huang Miao harbored no jealousy in her heart.

After all, with Fang Bai's talents, he was bound to soar eventually. This modest Inner Court was too small to contain such a latent dragon.

At this moment, under a sturdy drooping willow tree by the lakeside not far away, a man around thirty stood silently there, his gaze piercing through the crowd and settling on Fang Bai.

The man had a burly figure, with thick brows and tiger-like eyes, exuding a compelling brilliance. He radiated an imposing and formidable aura as if he was a fierce tiger lying in repose, startlingly powerful once he made a move.

Dressed in the attire of an Inner Court disciple, it was clear he was one too, but unlike other Inner Court disciples, his hair and beard were unkempt and his clothes were very worn, showing that he was a man who cared little about his appearance.

In that man's gaze at Fang Bai, there was a hint of surprise and admiration, but more than that, a strong intent to battle.

The man cradled a long saber in his arms. Even though the blade was sheathed in a black beastskin scabbard, a chilling Killing Qi still leaked out.

Only a blade that has drunk deeply of blood could possess such Killing Qi.

Only a person who has walked through life and death could wield such a saber.

The man had actually been standing there for some time, having witnessed Hou Ziping's duel with Yang Wei and Fang Bai's bout with Yang Lin.

As he saw Hou Ziping and Fang Bai defeating Yang Wei and Yang Lin respectively, the man couldn't help but inwardly praise them.

"Junior Brother Hou's strength has indeed improved, but he is still not my match. But that Junior Brother Fang, who entered the Inner Sect not long ago, seemed to have held back in his duel with Junior Brother Yang. He might be a formidable opponent."

The man's eyes shimmered with a unique light as he murmured to himself, then looked down at the long saber in his hands, gently caressing the scabbard as if it was not a weapon filled with Killing Qi, but a dearly beloved lover.

"If Junior Brother Fang's next target isn't Junior Sister Huang, then it must be me. Well then, I shall await his challenge!"

The man raised his head to take another deep look at Fang Bai before turning and striding away.

As the man departed, Huang Miao suddenly felt an inkling and looked towards his retreating figure, a smile curling at her lips as she thought, "I knew it, Senior Brother Tu just can't resist a fight. Seeing a strong fighter like Fang Bai, I bet he's itching for a chance to battle him!"

Huang Miao failed to notice that at the moment Senior Brother Tu turned and left, Fang Bai also glanced, seemingly unintentionally, in that direction, the corners of his mouth lifting into a faint smile.

Whether it was the battle between Hou Ziping and Yang Wei, or Fang Bai against Yang Lin, the victors were determined almost immediately after the fights began, making the disciples of the Inner Court feel unsatisfied and deeply impressed with Hou Ziping and Fang Bai, the two Inner Court disciples.

When Fang Bai walked back to Hou Ziping's side, a number of Inner Court disciples eagerly gathered around them, warmly exchanging pleasantries. Their expressions carried a hint of ingratiating themselves.

In the case of Fang Bai, his effortless victory over Yang Lin, who was ranked third among the Inner Court disciples, led many who were present to believe that he now had the strength to compete for the top spot on the strength ranking. If not to curry favor now, then when?

Huang Miao approached Fang Bai with a smile and said, "Junior Brother Fang, I admit defeat in our bet. The ten thousand Essence Stones and one hundred Elixirs will soon be delivered to your residence. Additionally..."

At this point, Huang Miao sighed lightly, gave Fang Bai a deep look, and spoke in a lower voice, "Junior Brother Fang, I confess I'm not your match, so you needn't challenge me anymore. Your target should be Senior Brother Tu Hu!"

Among the several hundred disciples in the Inner Court, Fang Bai was almost familiar with all of them, especially the top ten powerhouses on the strength ranking—who he knew incredibly well.

Tu Hu, whom Huang Miao mentioned, was currently the strongest disciple topping the strength ranking of the Inner Court.

It was said that Tu Hu was originally an orphan picked up by a Steward of Bitao Martial Academy. As he grew older, he began to show extraordinary talent in Martial Dao.

Originally nameless, he earned the nickname "Little Tiger" due to his tiger-like appearance when he was young. After he single-handedly slaughtered a group of Unihorn Tigers during a trial, he renamed himself Tu Hu.

After entering the Inner Court, Tu Hu's progress was even more rapid. Through almost frenzied challenges, he swiftly climbed up the strength ranking of the Inner Court disciples, soaring higher and higher until he secured the first place five years ago. To this day, no disciple of the Inner Court has been able to shake his position.

But now, with the appearance of Fang Bai, it was clear that Tu Hu's status was being challenged.

Fang Bai smiled and shook his head, "To tell the truth, I'm not very interested in this strength ranking, nor will I actively challenge anyone. If Yang Lin hadn't challenged me, I wouldn't have bothered to duel with him."

The reality was that Fang Bai wasn't disinterested in challenging others; it's just that with his strength, challenging the Inner Court disciples who only had Heaven Level mid-stage Cultivation Level offered him no benefit for his Cultivation—it was akin to wasting time. Instead, he'd rather spend that time on other matters.

Huang Miao seemed not to have expected Fang Bai to say this and was briefly taken aback, then she chuckled bitterly, "Other Inner Court disciples are constantly initiating challenges, trying to secure higher positions on the strength ranking to take pride in it. Yet here you are, dismissive of the strength ranking altogether. Your mindset really resembles that of a superior being who looks down upon the Inner Court disciples with disdain."

Fang Bai said, "I have no other intentions, I simply prefer not to vie with others."

Huang Miao smiled cryptically and stated, "You may not like to vie with others, but there are many who do. Today's battle has certainly built your reputation within the Inner Court, and soon enough, you will have disciples challenging you. Moreover, Senior Brother Tu is a battle maniac; even if you don't seek him out, he will surely challenge you. Just wait and see!"

Fang Bai knew Huang Miao was stating the truth. He shook his head with a hint of helplessness, silently deciding that if any Inner Court disciples wished to challenge him in the future, he would push Hou Ziping forward as a shield. Only those who could defeat Hou Ziping first would then be qualified to fight him.

At the moment, Hou Ziping's strength was only slightly inferior to Huang Miao's. Moreover, with a bit more guidance from Fang Bai, it wouldn't be a problem for him to defeat Huang Miao and even Tu Hu, thus blocking all challenges from Inner Court disciples.

Chapter 952: Summoned by the Higher-Ups

That evening, upon returning to his residence, Fang Bai received ten thousand Essence Stones and over a hundred elixirs sent by Huang Miao.

Fang Bai was in urgent need of cultivation resources and therefore did not stand on ceremony, accepting them all.

Starting from the next day, just as Huang Miao had predicted, Hou Ziping and Fang Bai, having made a name for themselves with one battle, received numerous challenges from Inner Court disciples.

In response to the challenges directed at him, Fang Bai didn't outright refuse them, but declared, "If you want to challenge me, defeat Hou Ziping first." Consequently, those Inner Court disciples looking to challenge Fang Bai turned their challenge notices over to Hou Ziping.

This proved troublesome for Hou Ziping. As a disciple of Bitao Martial Academy, he had no choice but to accept challenges from his fellow sect members, unless he was willing to admit he was a "turtle shrinking its head in fear."

As a result, for a considerable period that followed, Hou Ziping faced several challenges almost daily, which greatly reduced his time for cultivation.

However, on the day his injuries healed, Hou Ziping had listened to Fang Bai expound upon numerous Martial Dao Arcanes. At the time, he hadn't fully understood or integrated them, but during the relentless succession of challenges, he validated each concept he had learned from Fang Bai, leading to numerous insights and a subsequent step forward in his power.

Hou Ziping was overjoyed by this realization, understanding that continuous battle was also a form of cultivation.

During this time, Fang Bai was free from harassment by the Inner Court disciples and could quietly focus on his own matters.

He wasn't in a rush to cultivate either, but instead spent his nights stealthily harvesting the Spiritual Medicine planted by the Bitao Martial Academy, then hiding away in his residence to refine elixirs, silently amassing cultivation resources.

After more than a month, Fang Bai's Space Ring already contained nearly ten thousand elixirs of various kinds.

To other disciples of the Bitao Martial Academy, this amount was astonishing, but for Fang Bai, it was far from enough.

Fang Bai was now like a giant beast that devoured cultivation resources. While other Martial Academy disciples needed only a few elixirs to aid their practice, Fang Bai required at least several hundred per session to have any effect.

This meant that the nearly ten thousand elixirs Fang Bai had secretly refined recently would only last him for one month, even if used sparingly, and together with the ten thousand Essence Stones and over a hundred elixirs he had won from Huang Miao, he could at most sustain for two months.

Moreover, the Spiritual Medicine planted within the Bitao Martial Academy was not inexhaustible. Fang Bai had already harvested several thousand plants, and all of relatively mature ages, which was bound to attract the Martial Academy's attention before long.

Therefore, how to acquire more cultivation resources remained Fang Bai's most pressing concern at the moment.

The True Martial Realm was vast and boasted abundant cultivation resources, but the majority of the discovered resources had been divided and occupied by powerful Sects and clans, such as the Bitao Martial Academy, a fourth-grade Sect, which also had a share.

As for the lesser Sects and clans and the Individual Cultivation Martial Artists with no affiliation, they had to find their own means to search for cultivation resources.

On that clear morning, Fang Bai was sitting cross-legged in meditation on a cultivation stone in the courtyard when a Steward from the Bitao Martial Academy came to his residence and said, "Inner Court disciple Fang Bai, come with me to Lingtian Hall. The headmaster wants to see you."

Fang Bai was somewhat surprised, unsure of what matter would require the headmaster's summons, but he still dressed in the Inner Court disciple's uniform and followed the Steward to Lingtian Hall at Lingtian Peak.

After entering Lingtian Hall,

the steward who had brought Fang Bai there took a seat on a stone chair on the west side of the great hall.

Fang Bai looked up and saw, right in front of the hall, seated on an elevated stone chair, a stout elder with half-white hair and a ruddy complexion.

Although the elder tried to conceal his martial artist aura,

he couldn't hide it from Fang Bai's divine sense.

"This elder must be at the Desolate Level Perfection,

and must be Ren Jingbo, headmaster of Bitao Martial Academy," he thought.

Fang Bai had been in the Bitao Martial Academy for more than a month,

during which he had seen many high-ranking members of the martial academy,

but he had never met Headmaster Ren Jingbo,

whom he was seeing now for the first time.

A Desolate Level Perfection martial artist

was an untouchable, exalted figure to the ordinary disciples of Bitao Martial Academy,

but to Fang Bai, whose cultivation level was equivalent to the initial stage of the Vast Level

and who could contend with the Vast Level Perfection in combat, it was nothing significant.

Therefore, when other disciples of Bitao Martial Academy faced the imperiously unangry Ren Jingbo,

they would feel like they were under the pressure of a great mountain, appearing either flustered,

cautious,

or exceptionally respectful. Even when they spoke, it was with a trembling voice.

When Fang Bai appeared in Lingtian Hall,

he first greeted Ren Jingbo respectfully without being either arrogant or humble,

then he stood there with the ease of a light breeze and floating clouds,

unfazed by Ren Jingbo's high vantage point or the assessments from the several other martial academy elders around him,

his expression and demeanor unchanged.

On both sides of Ren Jingbo, and slightly lower,

sat two elders, one fat and one thin; both of them Desolate Level high ranking

and vice-headmasters of the Bitao Martial Academy.

On the east and west sides of Lingtian Hall,

were seated Bitao Martial Academy's four elders and eight stewards,

whose cultivation levels were middle-stage Desolate Level,

and initial-stage Desolate Level respectively.

One headmaster, two vice-headmasters, four elders, and eight stewards —

these fifteen Desolate Level martial artists constituted the higher echelons of Bitao Martial Academy,

forming its most core power.

They had all gathered in Lingtian Hall today to meet Fang Bai,

the disciple with dual innate attributes.

Seeing Fang Bai's exceptional calmness and lack of any sign of nervousness,

Ren Jingbo and the others marvelled,

Although these individuals had not released their martial artist aura to pressure Fang Bai,

it was beyond their expectations to see a disciple, who had just entered the martial academy,

remain so composed in the presence of such mighty figures.

However, upon considering Fang Bai's heaven-defying talent,

they understood and thought to themselves that,

perhaps, this is what distinguishes a martial dao prodigy from the rest.

"Fang Bai, you've been in Bitao Martial Academy for over a month now,

how do you find it here?" Ren Jingbo watched Fang Bai for a while before asking with a smile.

Fang Bai replied, "It's alright."

Ren Jingbo nodded his head, saying,

"You have dual innate spirit bodies, a constitution that is not only unprecedented in the history of our Bitao Martial Academy,

but also rare as phoenix feathers and unicorn horns throughout the entire True Martial Realm.

Because of this, we, the high-ranking members of the martial academy, have great expectations for you.

We hope you can achieve great success on the path of Martial Dao and lead Bitao Martial Academy to rise in the True Martial Realm!"

As he spoke, his chest surged with excitement and his blood boiled.

He left his stone chair, walked up to Fang Bai,

patted him on the shoulder, and said earnestly,

"Since the establishment of our Bitao Martial Academy, we have never produced a martial dao prodigy,

hence we have always been a fourth-rank sect.

Although a fourth-rank sect is much stronger than those insignificant small sects and factions,

it is still far behind compared to the third, second, or even first-rank major sects. Ah..."

#### Chapter 953: The Expectations of the Martial Academy's Senior Leadership

Ren Jingbo, who was previously brimming with excitement, now had a gloomy expression on his face as he let out a long, helpless sigh.

He removed his hands from Fang Bai's shoulders, clasped them behind his back, and walked forward two steps, his gaze deep and distant as he looked out of the hall.

A moment later, he said in a heavy voice, "When I took over as the head of Bitao Martial Academy, I swore an oath to lead it to prosperity, to ascend to a third-rank Sect in the True Martial Realm. However..."

A bitter smile appeared at the corner of his mouth as he continued, "But my cultivation level reached perfection in the Desolate Level thirty years ago and has been stagnant since, despite consuming a vast amount of cultivation resources—it hasn't been effective..."

Suddenly, he turned and asked Fang Bai, "Do you know what conditions are needed to ascend to a third-rank Sect?"

Fang Bai thought for a moment and replied, "I've heard that a third-rank Sect must be presided over by a Vast Level expert."

"Correct, being presided over by a Vast Level Martial Artist is the criterion for becoming a third-rank Sect. But you might not know that third-rank Sects are also categorized into levels of status."

Ren Jingbo explained, "For example, a Sect presided over by an expert at the initial stage of the Vast Level is considered an inferior third-rank Sect; one with a mid-stage expert is a mid-rank third-rank Sect;

one with a high-rank expert is a superior third-rank Sect; and one with an expert who has reached perfection at the Vast Level is a top-tier third-rank Sect. Our fourth-rank Sect is similarly categorized."

Fang Bai smiled and said, "So, since you're at Desolate Level Perfection, wouldn't that make our Bitao Martial Academy a top-tier fourth-rank Sect?"

Ren Jingbo replied with a wry smile, "What's the use of being a top-tier fourth-rank Sect? It only allows us to flaunt our strength against other fourth-rank Sects or some insignificant small Sects. Once we face a third-rank Sect, we're nothing more than a fart, resigned to bow and scrape!"

What Ren Jingbo said made sense. In the domain of the Martial Dao, a hair's breadth difference can lead to an error of a thousand miles. Thus, a fourth-rank Sect possessed by a Desolate Level expert would indeed be completely crushed when facing a third-rank Sect with a Vast Level expert.

"The difference between a fourth-rank Sect and a third-rank Sect might only be one word, but it involves significant interests!"

Ren Jingbo went on to say, "According to the unwritten rules of the True Martial Realm, if our Bitao Martial Academy becomes a third-rank Sect, the territory we govern can be expanded by at least double. If we discover cultivation resources like an Essence Stone Vein within our territory, the share we can allocate will also increase exponentially. This is very important for the development of a Sect."

Fang Bai frowned and asked, "Shouldn't the cultivation resources discovered within our governed territory belong entirely to us? How come there's still talk of sharing a portion?"

He still remembered that in his previous life in the Cultivation World, if a Sect discovered cultivation resources, it would claim them as its own, not allowing others to intervene. Only when faced with a stronger Sect forcefully taking over would they, under duress, be forced to offer a part of the share to the opposing party.

Fang Bai's question drew a speechless chuckle from the higher-ups of Bitao Martial Academy in the Lingtian Hall.

"Fang Bai, you really don't understand this, do you?"

The only female Elder in the Lingtian Hall said with a smile, "Even if we become a third-rank Sect, we still have second-rank Sects above us. If we really discover cultivation resources, it's good if we can keep the secret. But once a second-rank Sect finds out, they will surely use their overwhelming strength to force us to hand over the cultivation resources. So..."

Another Elder took over, "Therefore, after discovering cultivation resources, it's better to proactively inform the second-rank Sect that looms over us rather than conceal it. That way, we can obtain a larger share. Otherwise, we'd face suppression from the second-rank Sect, and the consequences would be unthinkable!"

Another Elder, with a look of sorrow and indignation, sighed, "When under the eaves, one must bow their head. In the True Martial Realm, no Sect wants to live under the shadow of another, but what can we do when our own strength is lacking?"

This sentiment caused a wave of empathy among the other high-ranking members of Bitao Martial Academy in the Lingtian Hall.

Over the years, a few small Essence Stone Veins and a number of precious Spiritual Medicines had been discovered within the territory governed by Bitao Martial Academy. Most of them, however, were seized by a third-rank Sect that dominated over Bitao Martial Academy, leaving them with only a small portion.

Although everyone at Bitao Martial Academy, from top to bottom, felt dissatisfied and aggrieved, a third-rank Sect with a Vast Level Expert was not something they could afford to provoke, so they had to swallow their anger and pride.

For many years, the higher-ups at Bitao Martial Academy had harbored a deep desire to cultivate their own Vast Level Expert.

If their dream came true, Bitao Martial Academy could ascend to a third-rank Sect, sit on an equal footing with the Sect that had been oppressing them, no longer share cultivation resources with them, or act according to their whims.

However, cultivating a Vast Level Expert was not so easy. The fact that no Vast Level Expert had emerged from Bitao Martial Academy over thousands of years spoke volumes about the difficulty of such a feat.

But now, Bitao Martial Academy had simultaneously produced three Disciples with Innate Spiritual Roots, an unprecedented event in the history of the Academy that had the high-ranking officials, led by Ren Jingbo, extremely excited.

Especially Fang Bai, a Disciple with a Dual Attribute Innate Spiritual Root, was entrusted with their greatest expectations.

"Fang Bai, you are the first Disciple in thousands of years at Bitao Martial Academy to possess Dual Attribute Innate Spiritual Roots, and it's not an exaggeration to call you the number one talent. You're only twenty years old, yet you've already reached Heaven Level mid-rank as a Martial Artist. There's no extravagance in hoping that you will reach the Vast Level by my age. So you must strive in your cultivation, and we will offer you our utmost support!"

"Indeed, Fang Bai, the responsibility for the rise of Bitao Martial Academy in the future rests on your shoulders!"

"Don't let us down!"

"If you encounter any problems in your cultivation, you can talk to us."

"We will spare nothing in our advice and will hold back no secrets from you!"

...

The two deputy heads, four Elders, and eight Stewards on the scene all spoke up one after the other.

Fang Bai waited for them to finish, then responded with a smile, "The love and support you, the heads, Elders, and Stewards have shown this Disciple, I am deeply grateful. I indeed have a matter that requires the support of the higher-ups."

"Whatever the matter, just tell us!"

Ren Jingbo said, gesturing grandly.

Fang Bai replied, "My physique is quite special, so I consume more cultivation resources than other Disciples during cultivation. Therefore... could I be allocated more cultivation resources each month?"

Ren Jingbo thought for a moment and nodded, "That shouldn't be a problem. How about we give you an extra two thousand Essence Stones and twenty Elixirs every month?"

Fang Bai said, "That's still a little less! I hope to receive ten thousand Essence Stones and a hundred Elixirs each month."

Chapter 954: Unrequited Love

As Fang Bai's voice fell, Ren Jingbo and the other leaders of Bitao Martial Academy exchanged uneasy glances, all showing signs of difficulty.

Ren Jingbo, recalling how he had just put on a generous front, as if he would agree to any request Fang Bai made, now felt deeply ashamed as his request came up and he found it very hard to fulfill, blushing with embarrassment.

"Fang Bai, you are now an Inner Court disciple, receiving five thousand Essence Stones and fifty elixirs a month, which is already on par with the treatment of a Core Disciple. If we give you more cultivation resources, I'm afraid the other disciples will have objections!"

Ren Jingbo twisted his beard continuously, laughing dryly as he spoke.

Fang Bai sighed, "There's a saying, 'The path of the Martial Dao is like rowing up the stream, not to advance is to fall back.' Without sufficient cultivation resources to aid me, my cultivation progress will slow down or even come to a halt. This is not what all the honored deans, elders, and stewards present wish to see, right?"

"This..."

Ren Jingbo and the high-level officials of Bitao Martial Academy exchanged looks once again.

Fang Bai was Bitao Martial Academy's greatest hope for rising to prominence, and naturally, none of the leadership wanted his cultivation to suffer due to a lack of resources.

However, Ren Jingbo's point was also valid; the cultivation resources Fang Bai currently received each month were already equivalent to those of a Core Disciple. If more were allocated to him, it would inevitably lead to complaints and dissatisfaction among other disciples.

For a moment, Ren Jingbo and the other leaders of Bitao Martial Academy were all frowning deeply, at a loss for what to do.

"How about this, Fang Bai, in a few days, will be the annual practice trial in the mountains for our disciples at Bitao Martial Academy. If you achieve outstanding results in the trial and gain the approval of the other disciples, we will be able to justifiably increase your share of the cultivation resources. What do you think?"

The vice dean sitting to the left of Ren Jingbo said with a beaming smile.

The thousands of disciples from Bitao Martial Academy would participate in the one-month mountain practice trial that took place every year during the transition from spring to summer. The main objective was to hunt Spirit Beasts and gather Spiritual Medicine; in the end, the one with the most gains received certain rewards from the Academy's leadership.

Each trial was a time when the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy competed against each other, with everyone eager to perform well and attract the attention of the higher-ups.

Fang Bai knew about the annual mountain trials for the disciples and understood how seriously each one took it, with many hoping to use the opportunity to test their Martial Arts and gain some cultivation resources.

Some disciples at Bitao Martial Academy also hoped they might encounter some fortuitous opportunities in the mountains to boost their abilities dramatically.

Such an opportunity had previously happened to the Inner Court disciple, Tu Hu.

It was said that Tu Hu was not very talented initially but had stumbled upon the remnants of a Desolate Level Martial Artist during a trial, where he obtained some Martial Arts Techniques and resources for cultivation. As a result, his strength increased significantly, placing him at the top of the Inner Court's combat rankings.

Tu Hu's experience had become a legend within Bitao Martial Academy, with many disciples dreaming of one day encountering a great opportunity like he did.

Therefore, the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy always participated enthusiastically in the mountain trials, each striving to be the first upon entering the mountains.

The suggestion of the vice dean to Fang Bai was to have him "win others over with his martial prowess"; as long as Fang Bai performed well enough in the trial, then allocating him additional cultivation resources later would seem reasonable and fair.

"Alright, it's settled then! Honored deans, elders, stewards, watch my performance in the trial!"

Fang Bai agreed readily with a nod.

Ren Jingbo and the others were relieved to see that Fang Bai had no complaints, their faces revealing a look of pleasure.

The more they observed Fang Bai, the more satisfied Ren Jingbo and his peers became. They were especially impressed that Fang Bai could maintain a demeanor that was neither servile nor overbearing, and appeared as calm as a gentle breeze or soft cloud when facing the high-ranking figures of the Martial Academy. This was not something an ordinary disciple could achieve.

"Fang Bai, should you encounter any questions in your martial arts techniques or cultivation methods, feel free to consult with us at any time,"

Ren Jingbo specifically instructed before Fang Bai left the Lingtian Hall.

If any other disciple of the Martial Academy could receive such words from Ren Jingbo, they would surely dance with excitement and be so stirred as to weep.

After all, individuals like Ren Jingbo were Desolate Level experts. Receiving their guidance was a rare opportunity that would undoubtedly be beneficial beyond measure.

Yet Fang Bai remained unmoved by honor or disgrace, smilingly expressing his gratitude to Ren Jingbo and the other Martial Academy high ranks before leisurely departing from Lingtian Hall.

"Have you noticed that the kid seems somewhat indifferent to our goodwill?"

Watching Fang Bai's departing figure, Ren Jingbo spoke with a glum expression, "Although our strength is far inferior to those Vast Level experts from third-grade sects, I feel we are more than capable of advising that young man... Heh, I really don't understand what is going on in that kid's mind!"

"Perhaps the martial arts techniques and Martial Dao arcana we taught him before have already been thoroughly understood by him? If that is the case, our guidance would be of no significance to him,"

an elder commented with a smile, twirling his beard.

Another elder, nodding in agreement, said, "That lad possesses a Dual Attribute Innate Spiritual Root, and has extraordinary talent. Perhaps he not only understands what we teach but can also expand upon it. So... there might not be anything he needs our guidance for."

"In that case, it seems I was being overly sentimental,"

Ren Jingbo laughed heartily and added, "Alright then, I will wait and see how that young man fares in this mountain training adventure. I hope he does not disappoint me!"

After leaving Lingtian Hall, Fang Bai went straight to Hou Ziping's residence. He intended to gather as much information as possible about the upcoming training adventure from Hou Ziping, to formulate strategies in advance.

Three days later, the annual mountain training event of the Bitao Martial Academy commenced.

In the early morning, when the sky was just beginning to brighten, the martial academy's mountain gate square was already teeming with people.

Thousands of disciples from the academy had gathered: menial servants, external courtyard disciples, inner court disciples, as well as core disciples and direct disciples. It was an unprecedented grand occasion.

Since the mountain training events occurred each year, the academy's disciples were well-versed in the routine.

Following the procedure, after a lengthy speech from one of the vice-presidents of the Martial Academy, the disciples dispersed to find suitable sect members to form teams, and then reported their team members' names to an academy steward for record-keeping.

The academy imposed a rule that the number of people in each team must not exceed ten. Otherwise, even if the team gained significant achievements during the mountain training, the academy would not recognize them.

Indeed, if a team had too many members, its overall strength would increase correspondingly, and its ability to deal with risks and challenges would be significantly enhanced. Thus, the purpose of the academy's disciples training in the mountains would be lost.

Chapter 955: Can I Join You?

Disciples of Bitao Martial Academy included menial servants, External Courtyard disciples, Inner Court disciples, Core Disciples, and Direct Disciples.

Among them, menial servants, External Courtyard disciples, and Inner Court disciples accounted for the vast majority, while there were only ten each for Core Disciples and Direct Disciples.

Despite their small numbers, Core Disciples and Direct Disciples's strength were both formidable, possessing High Rank and Heaven Level Perfection in their cultivation realms, respectively, making them the best among thousands of disciples in Bitao Martial Academy.

Especially the ten Direct Disciples, who were usually personally mentored by the four Elders of the Martial Academy, enjoyed a treatment and status far above other disciples.

If a Direct Disciple's cultivation realm were to advance one more step, they would become Desolate Level experts, and at that point, they would be able to join the ranks of the higher-ups in the Martial Academy and become a figure looked up to by the other disciples.

Thousands of Martial Academy disciples were bustling about on the plaza, looking for friends to form teams, with some in groups of three to five, others consisting of six to seven, and still others making up a team of ten.

Behind Bitao Martial Academy, the massive mountain range stretched endlessly with numerous Spirit Beasts and countless dangers, turning any trial adventure in the mountains into a true odyssey.

Therefore, in order to protect themselves while hunting more Spirit Beasts and gathering more Spiritual Medicine, the Martial Academy disciples chose to venture into the mountains together.

Of course, there were disciples with aloof personalities or those who trusted in their own strength who preferred to undertake trials in the mountains alone. Although this carried certain risks, the benefit was that they did not need to share the cultivation resources they acquired with others.

For example, some Core Disciples and Direct Disciples liked to practice alone in the mountains; teaming up with menial servants, External Courtyard or Inner Court disciples was considered burdensome by them.

In fact, with Fang Bai's cultivation level, he naturally could have ventured into the mountains alone as well, but considering the personal safety of the Liu siblings, he decided to team up and travel with them.

"Junior Brother Fang, may I join you?"

Hou Ziping squeezed out from the noisy crowd and approached Fang Bai, Liu Liehu, and Liu Qingqing to ask.

Recently, Hou Ziping's strength had greatly increased, making him one of the top contenders in the Inner Court Disciple Combat Strength Rankings. His popularity had become exceptionally good as a result. Many Martial Academy disciples actively sought him out to team up for the mountain trials, only to be rejected by him.

While other Martial Academy disciples wanted to team up with Hou Ziping, he himself was keen to form a team with Fang Bai. Seeing Fang Bai standing with Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu, Hou Ziping had a thought and approached to seek Fang Bai's opinion.

Seeing the hopeful expression on Hou Ziping's face and knowing that the two had a good relationship, Fang Bai smiled and nodded, "It would be a pleasure to have Senior Brother Hou join us."

He then introduced Hou Ziping to Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu.

"Hello Senior Brother Hou! We will be in your care!"

Upon hearing Hou Ziping was Fang Bai's senior brother, Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu respectfully saluted with clasped fists and a bow.

"Greetings, junior sister and junior brother!"

Hou Ziping hastily returned the salute.

Although Liu Qingqing was an External Courtyard disciple and Liu Liehu a menial servant, their close relationship with Fang Bai made it impossible for Hou Ziping to act superior in their presence.

Furthermore, Liu Qingqing possessed an Innate Spiritual Root, and Liu Liehu's talent was also somewhat better than his. With Fang Bai's guidance, their future achievements were destined to surpass his own. There might come a time when he would need to ask for their help.

Therefore, although Hou Ziping's current strength was stronger than that of the Liu siblings, and he held the status of a senior brother, he treated the Liu siblings as equals.

Just then, a sweet scent drifted by, and a graceful figure appeared before the four of them—it was Huang Miao, ranked second among the Inner Court disciples in combat strength.

"The four of you, is your team still short of members? How about counting me in?"

Huang Miao looked at Fang Bai with a smiling face, knowing that among the four people present, it was Fang Bai who made the decisions. As long as Fang Bai nodded, she could join them.

Fang Bai smiled and said, "Is Senior Sister Huang serious or just joking? The four of us are not that strong; if Senior Sister Huang joins us, aren't you afraid we'll hold you back?"

As he said this, he pointed towards a team that had already been formed in the distance and said to Huang Miao, "Why doesn't Senior Sister Huang consider joining a team led by Core Disciples or Direct Disciples instead? With them, you would be more secure when entering the mountain, and perhaps you would reap even greater rewards!"

The team Fang Bai pointed to consisted of ten disciples from Bitao Martial Academy, and their team leader was a Direct Disciple.

Core Disciples and Direct Disciples were powerful and were often the object of admiration and fawning by many menial servant disciples, External Courtyard disciples, and Inner Court disciples. Therefore, many disciples preferred to team up and venture into the mountains with them.

Huang Miao glanced at the team Fang Bai had pointed to, and with a dismissive twist of her lips, she said, "Those Core and Direct Disciples are so arrogant and conceited, thinking they're the best in the world; they're just irritating to look at!"

After a pause, she continued, "Moreover, to join their team, one has to lower their pride, beg in various ways, and most of the cultivation resources obtained in the mountain have to be given up to them. That's too unfair. Anyway, I don't want to team up with them."

As she said this, her phoenix eyes glanced at Fang Bai, and she chuckled, "On the other hand, I'm quite interested in forming a team with Junior Brother Fang and the others. It's just, I'm not sure if Junior Brother Fang and the others would agree to have me join."

Fang Bai replied, "If Senior Sister Huang wishes to join, we naturally welcome you."

Hou Ziping was very excited about Huang Miao joining and said, "Senior Sister Huang has ventured into the mountains multiple times and is very familiar with the conditions inside. With Senior Sister Huang here, our haul this time will definitely be substantial!"

Fang Bai said, "In that case, let our group of five form a team. As for the selection of the team leader, how about we have Senior Sister Huang take on the role?"

Hou Ziping said, "I agree."

Although Hou Ziping thought that Fang Bai was possibly stronger than Huang Miao and was the strongest among the five of them, Fang Bai, after all, was new to Bitao Martial Academy and had not been there for long, unlike Huang Miao, who was familiar with the mountain. Thus, it was the most appropriate choice for Huang Miao to lead them into the mountain.

Since Fang Bai and Hou Ziping both agreed to Huang Miao taking the role of team leader for their five-person team, Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu naturally would not disagree.

Huang Miao was straightforward and did not dillydally in refusal; she nodded and said, "Since everyone recommends me as team leader, I'll take up the responsibility! Let's go and register!"

"Wait a moment, I have something to say."

Fang Bai looked at Huang Miao, Hou Ziping, Liu Qingqing, and Liu Liehu, speaking earnestly, "For this mountain expedition, regardless of how much cultivation resources our team obtains, or who contributes more, the cultivation resources will be divided equally among us. What do you think?"

Chapter 956: Choice

Hou Ziping and Huang Miao had not yet expressed their opinions when Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu, the two sisters, hastily waved their hands and shook their heads.

Liu Qingqing said, "No, Brother Fang, that wouldn't be fair to you. Liehu and I are too weak; after entering the mountain, we won't be of much help, so you three should take a larger share of the cultivation resources."

Liu Liehu also said, "Yes, Brother Fang, my sister is right. I think we should distribute the cultivation resources based on how much each of us contributes after we enter the mountain. That would be the fairest way!"

Upon hearing Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu both calling Fang Bai 'Brother', Huang Miao knew their relationship was deep. A glint flashed in her phoenix eyes, and she said to Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu with a smile, "Since Junior Brother Fang said so, let's listen to him! I have no objections!"

Fang Bai was extraordinarily talented and had a promising future in the Martial Dao. Huang Miao took the initiative to join Fang Bai's team for the mountain expedition mainly to build a good rapport with him; the amount of cultivation resources she could gain was of secondary importance to her.

Hou Ziping also expressed his stance, "I have no objections either!"

Liu Qingqing's lips twitched slightly, as if she wanted to say more, but Fang Bai waved his hand to stop her, saying, "Alright, that's settled then!"

Huang Miao said, "Let's go, let's register together!"

The five approached the central stand in the square, where team captain Huang Miao reported the names and identities of her team members to a steward responsible for recording the details of each team.

After recording the names and identities of Huang Miao and the other four, the steward looked up at Fang Bai, who was standing behind Huang Miao, and earnestly advised, "Fang Bai, the mountains are perilous, and anything can happen. You must be extremely careful! In case of emergency, if you cannot

handle it yourselves, use our sect's unique signal flare to call nearby disciples for support. Remember, remember!"

Fang Bai, who had met this steward a few days ago at Lingtian Hall and saw his concern, replied with a smile, "Steward Wang's words are firmly in my heart. Thank you for your concern, Steward Wang!"

Steward Wang stroked his beard and nodded, then added, "This mountain expedition is also a test for you. I hope you will perform well. Go on, prepare yourself, and you'll be able to enter the mountain soon."

Fang Bai once again expressed his gratitude and then returned to the square with Huang Miao and the others, waiting for the departure time to arrive.

Around ten o'clock in the morning, thousands of Bitao Martial Academy disciples finished forming teams and, led by their captains, dashed towards the mountains behind the Martial Academy.

Though numbering in the thousands, the disciples appeared extremely small when dispersed into the vast expanse of the Bitao Mountain Range, like droplets entering a great river.

Like many areas, the edge of the mountain region lacked Spirit Beasts and Spiritual Medicine, so the thousands of Bitao Martial Academy disciples didn't linger on the outskirts but moved further into the mountains.

Especially the teams led by core or direct disciples aimed deep into the heart of the mountains.

The mountain range that stretched for thousands of miles was called the Bitao Mountain Range because of the Bitao Martial Academy, and viewed from above, the range of peaks indeed resembled waves in a vast sea.

The inner depths of the Bitao Mountain Range were abundant in Essence Energy, making it a paradise for ferocious Spirit Beasts and a suitable place for wild Spiritual Medicine to grow. It attracted many martial artists, including Bitao Martial Academy disciples, from within a hundred thousand miles radius.

This area was frequented not only by Bitao Martial Academy disciples but also by nearby loose cultivators who risked venturing deep into the mountains in search of cultivation resources.

In the depths of Bitao Mountain Range, it was common for Spirit Beasts and human Martial Artists to engage in conflicts. Martial Artists who entered the mountains to search for Cultivation Resources would occasionally encounter the skulls and bones left behind after fierce battles between human Martial Artists or deep mountain Spirit Beasts.

However, these skeletal remains could not deter the resolve of human Martial Artists to seek Cultivation Resources. Each year, in addition to the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy, tens of thousands of Martial Artists from all directions would visit the Bitao Mountain Range.

Martial Artists like Huang Miao, who had repeatedly entered and exited the Bitao Mountain Range without facing grave danger, had gained a wealth of experience. They knew which paths to take to avoid encountering too many and too ferocious Spirit Beasts, thus increasing their chances of harvesting more Spiritual Medicine.

Since Spirit Beasts were large and inconvenient to carry, the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy seldom spent time and effort hunting Spirit Beasts during their mountain training. Instead, they chose to harvest as much Spiritual Medicine as possible.

However, those Spiritual Medicines with longer medicinal ages were usually guarded by fierce Spirit Beasts, making conflicts with Spirit Beasts unavoidable when attempting to harvest these medicines.

Therefore, the majority of Martial Artists who entered the mountains would primarily collect common Spiritual Medicines with shorter medicinal ages, although occasionally some would also bring out the bodies of smaller Spirit Beasts.

After Huang Miao led Fang Bai and four others into the mountains, they did not hurry forward but temporarily rested in a secluded, uninhabited valley and started chatting softly.

"If we want to achieve good results in this Martial Academy training, we have two options. I'll state them now, and we can decide together," Huang Miao said, sweeping her gaze over Fang Bai, Hou Ziping, Liu Qingqing, and Liu Liehu.

"The first option is to proceed directly to the deeper parts of the mountain like the teams led by Core Disciples and Direct Disciples, where there's a chance to discover rare Spiritual Medicines with longer medicinal ages," she continued.

"But we are only five people. Our overall strength is not as good as those teams led by Core Disciples and Direct Disciples. Going deep into the mountain is too risky. If we're unlucky and encounter a powerful Spirit Beast, we'd be in bad luck," Hou Ziping sighed.

Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu, having had training experiences in the huge mountains outside Liuhu Village before their time at Bitao Martial Academy, knew the dangers of the mountain's interior and deeply agreed with Hou Ziping's words.

The deeper parts of the mountain offered greater opportunities to discover Cultivation Resources, but the unpredictable dangers were far greater. If one were to encounter a life-threatening crisis, it would not be worth it.

"Senior Sister Huang, what's the second option?" Liu Liehu couldn't help but ask.

Huang Miao replied, "The second option is for us to give up on entering the deep parts of the mountain and instead hunt some lower-ranked small Spirit Beasts and harvest some Spiritual Medicines with shorter medicinal ages on the periphery. This way is safer, and as long as the number of small Spirit Beasts we hunt and the Spiritual Medicines we collect is substantial, we can still achieve good results and gain the recognition of the higher-ups in the Martial Academy."

After finishing, her gaze fell on Fang Bai's face, and she asked, "Junior Brother Fang, which option do you think is better?"

Without any hesitation, Fang Bai responded, "No venture, no gain! I choose the first option."

"I knew Junior Brother Fang would choose the first option!"

Laughing, Huang Miao said to Fang Bai, "Although our interactions haven't been many, I can tell that you appear humble on the surface, but inside, you possess an indomitable pride. There are situations where

you might choose silence, but there are things you refuse to be second-best at. Am I right, Junior Brother Fang?"

Chapter 957: Can't Bear to Leave

"She who knows me, is Senior Sister Huang."

Fang Bai laughed heartily and said, "Fearless and proactive, that is the true nature of a martial artist. Hence, even if the heart of the mountains is fraught with peril, I must go! The greater the danger, the greater the opportunity!"

Huang Miao said, "I agree with you, I'll go with you!"

"We're going too!"

Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu, the siblings, were like young calves unafraid of tigers; wherever Fang Bai went, they naturally followed, not caring about the dangers involved.

Although Hou Ziping harbored fear for the depths of the mountains, the company of Fang Bai and Huang Miao reassured him, and he nodded in agreement to go as well.

Guided by Huang Miao, the group of five took a shortcut into the mountain and made their way towards the heart of the Bitao Mountain Range.

"There are a few Red Fire Chickens in the small valley to the left."

"There is a nest of Snow Jade Rabbits in the cave on the right."

"There's a school of Blue Ice Fish in the pool under that waterfall."

"Under that ancient pine on the opposite slope, there are several Crystal Heart Lotuses that are two hundred years old."

...

Along the way, Fang Bai would occasionally point out the locations of some lower-tier spirit beasts and lesser spiritual medicines, then Huang Miao, Hou Ziping, and the Liu siblings would excitedly go over to hunt those spirit beasts and harvest the medicines.

As for these lower-grade spirit beasts and spiritual medicines, Fang Bai wasn't very interested. On the contrary, Huang Miao, Hou Ziping, and the Liu siblings were brimming with enthusiasm. Before even entering the depths of the mountainous region, the spirit beasts on their backs and the elixirs they were holding weighed more than three hundred pounds combined.

Fortunately, they were all Heaven Level Martial Artists, so even a thousand pounds wouldn't tire them out, otherwise the spirit beasts and medicines might have overwhelmed them.

"Bringing these spirit beasts and medicines back to Bitao Martial Academy, we can exchange them for a good number of Essence Stones and elixirs at the Elixir Hall."

Hou Ziping said gleefully.

Huang Miao was also smiling brightly, nodding and saying, "We haven't even reached the heart of the deep mountains, and we've already reaped quite a lot. I'm really looking forward to the upcoming challenges!"

"Without Brother Fang, we wouldn't have gained so much! Brother Fang is truly impressive!"

Liu Liehu looked at Fang Bai with an expression full of admiration.

Back then, outside of Liuhu Village in the vast mountains of Dashan, Fang Bai had helped the martial artists of Liuhu Village to harvest a large number of spirit beasts and medicines, exchanging them for many Essence Stones and elixirs, thereby solving the problem of scarce cultivation resources for the martial artists of the village.

This time, entering the mountains for their trial, most of the spirit beasts and medicines they had acquired along the way were discovered by Fang Bai; otherwise, they might have missed them.

"Junior Brother Fang, I've decided, from now on when going on mountain expeditions, I'm teaming up with you. With that, the gains are sure to be good."

Huang Miao's gaze towards Fang Bai was also filled with a special radiance, increasingly finding Fang Bai to be extraordinary, thinking that teaming up with him this time was indeed a very correct and wise decision.

Seeing Huang Miao, Hou Ziping, and the two Liu siblings carrying spirit beasts and holding spiritual medicines, their faces excited like they'd found treasure, Fang Bai said with a wry smile, "These spirit beasts and medicines are of low grade and not very valuable; holding onto them is a burden. If it were up to me, I'd say we should just discard them!"

Upon hearing this, Huang Miao, Hou Ziping, and the two Liu siblings all shook their heads vigorously.

Huang Miao said, "Junior Brother Fang, these Spirit Beasts and Spiritual Medicines are what we have worked so hard to hunt and gather, how can we abandon them? Although their value is not great, they can still be exchanged for a good number of Essence Stones and Elixirs."

Hou Ziping also said, "In fact, the Spirit Beasts and Spiritual Medicines we have obtained so far, even if we returned directly to the Martial Academy, could already rank us among the top. If everyone does not wish to continue taking risks and moving forward, we can go back now!"

As Hou Ziping said this, he had already begun to harbor thoughts of retreating in his heart.

Hou Ziping had ventured into the mountains for training before, but he had never reaped as much as he did this time. Glancing at the Spirit Beasts slung over his back and the Spiritual Medicines in his hand, he felt quite content. Thinking of the dangers in the deeper parts of the mountains and the risk of losing his life, he became somewhat uneasy.

Liu Liehu said, "Brother Fang, when we used to enter the mountains in search of Cultivation Resources in Liuhu Village, what we got were these low-grade Spirit Beasts and Spiritual Medicines! Senior Sister

Huang made a valid point just now. These Cultivation Resources were obtained through our hard work. If we discard them, it would be such a waste!"

Compared to Huang Miao, Hou Ziping, and Liu Liehu, Liu Qingqing did not speak. She felt that Fang Bai wouldn't have said those words earlier without a reason; there must be some rationale behind it.

However, she also found it hard to part with the Spirit Beasts and Spiritual Medicines they had already obtained.

Fang Bai was aware of the "content with little gains" mindset among the four of them, and he said with a smile, "I ask you, can the value of these low-grade Spirit Beasts and Spiritual Medicines you have now match that of a mid-grade Spirit Beast? Can they equal the value of a mid-grade Spiritual Medicine?"

Huang Miao and the other three looked at each other and shook their heads.

The value of a single mid-grade Spirit Beast or mid-grade Spiritual Medicine could match that of hundreds of low-grade Spirit Beasts and Spiritual Medicines.

However, mid-grade Spirit Beasts are extremely ferocious and difficult for ordinary Martial Artists to hunt; and beside mid-grade Spiritual Medicines, there are usually very powerful Spirit Beasts guarding them, making it tough to harvest.

Therefore, hunting mid-grade Spirit Beasts or harvesting mid-grade Spiritual Medicines became the ultimate goal for the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy venturing into the mountains.

It can be said that if a team of Bitao Martial Academy disciples managed to successfully hunt down a mid-grade Spirit Beast or harvest a mid-grade Spiritual Medicine and bring it back to the Martial Academy, they would stand a great chance of securing the first place in the team rankings.

Although Huang Miao and Hou Ziping also hoped to hunt a mid-grade Spirit Beast and harvest a mid-grade Spiritual Medicine, to become the envy of all the disciples in Bitao Martial Academy, they were very aware of their own limitations and knew it was almost an impossible goal, so they didn't even entertain the thought.

Fang Bai said, "If you know the value of mid-grade Spirit Beasts and mid-grade Spiritual Medicines, then what do you want with these low-grade Spirit Beasts and Spiritual Medicines in your hands?"

Once we reach the depths of the mountains, hunting a few mid-grade Spirit Beasts and harvesting a few mid-grade Spiritual Medicines to take back will yield a substantial number of Essence Stones and Elixirs. Why not go for it?"

Fang Bai's words were very persuasive, but Huang Miao and Liu Liehu, who were well aware of the risks of the mountain's heartland, remained unmoved. On the other hand, Liu Liehu and his sister Liu Qingqing, gazing at the low-grade Spirit Beasts and Spiritual Medicines in their hands, began to feel conflicted.

"Brother Fang, I will listen to you!"

A moment later, Liu Liehu discarded the Spirit Beasts he had been carrying on his back and the Spiritual Medicines he had been holding in his hands, and with his head held high and his chest out, he spoke loudly.

"I am as well."

Liu Qingqing followed suit in expressing her stance.

"Junior Brother Fang, even Core Disciples or Direct Disciples have difficulty hunting mid-grade Spirit Beasts... do you... do you have confidence?"

Huang Miao knitted her delicate brows and asked with a sigh.

With a hint of nervousness, Hou Ziping looked at Fang Bai.

Although Hou Ziping hadn't been in contact with Fang Bai for long, he knew that Fang Bai was not someone who spoke idly or boasted. If Fang Bai nodded, then he could confidently follow Fang Bai into the depths of the mountains.

Chapter 958: Convinced!

Bitao Mountain Range, deep inside the mountain belly, teemed with thousands of Spirit Beasts, many of which were over 500 years old—a considerable threat to any who dare to trespass.

But at the same time, the area was also home to many extremely rare forms of Spiritual Medicine, and it's said that disciples from the Bitao Martial Academy once picked medium-grade Spiritual Medicine over 500 years old deep within the mountains.

Furthermore, due to the secluded environment and abundant Essence Energy, this deep mountain area has historically attracted many powerful individuals to reside and cultivate there.

Some unfortunate experts might have encountered problems during their cultivation and perished, leaving behind their Cultivation Resources as coveted treasures.

Medium-grade Spiritual Medicine over 500 years old, Spirit Beasts of the same age, and the legacy of powerful cultivators made these resources highly desirable to any Martial Artist.

Therefore, when Bitao Martial Academy disciples ventured into the mountains for their training, some teams, confident in their strength, would take the risk and delve into the depths in hopes of good fortune.

To enter these deep mountainous areas, the numerous and powerful Spirit Beasts proved the greatest obstacle.

Though some Spirit Beasts could be docile, most were volatile and ferocious, seeing human Martial Artists as a feast, ready to unleash a mad onslaught upon any intrusion into their territory.

Particularly, middle-grade Spirit Beasts, rare as they were, had an attack power far surpassing a Heaven Level Martial Artist. Thus, it was nearly impossible for a single Heaven Level Martial Artist to venture alone into the mountains and hunt one down.

Even within Bitao Martial Academy, the strongest Direct Disciples only reached the realm of Heaven Level Perfection.

Each time Bitao Martial Academy disciples embarked to the mountains, very few dared to go alone into its depths. Not even the proudest Core and Direct Disciples would do it without teaming up with other disciples, relying on the strength of a team to brave the risks of the deep mountain belly.

Since the founding of the Bitao Martial Academy, generation after generation of disciples ventured into the mountains. Only a few lucky teams ever managed to hunt middle-grade Spirit Beasts or harvest middle-grade Spiritual Medicine.

And for those less fortunate teams, sometimes disciples became prey to the very middle-grade Spirit Beasts they sought, leading to casualties.

Such incidents weren't rare in the Martial Academy's history of several thousand years.

Precisely because of the dangers, with life itself on the line, Bitao Martial Academy's Core Disciples and Direct Disciples, who were usually haughty, chose to team up with other disciples for their mountain training missions.

Under normal circumstances, when disciples from Bitao Martial Academy went on their mountain excursions, the majority of teams wouldn't venture into the deep mountains; only a few teams with overall strong capabilities would take the risk.

Before entering the Bitao Mountain Range, apart from Fang Bai, the other four members of his five-person team hadn't considered venturing into the deep mountains. Therefore, when Fang Bai proposed hunting middle-grade Spirit Beasts and collecting medium-grade Spiritual Medicine there, the other four, including Huang Miao, were rather surprised.

Although after a moment's hesitation they all agreed to follow Fang Bai into the mountain depths, Huang Miao couldn't help but ask if Fang Bai was confident, since it was a matter of their lives, and caution was paramount.

Fang Bai laughed carefreely and mysteriously said, "I've previously learned a method by chance that can tame Spirit Beasts. Dealing with mere middle-grade Spirit Beasts is going to be too easy."

Upon his declaration, Huang Miao and the others stared at him with eyes wide open, clearly astonished.

Huang Miao said, "I've heard that in our True Martial Realm, there are Beast Tamers, skilled in the Beast Taming Technique, capable of domesticating some fierce Spirit Beasts into mounts for Martial Artists. Junior Brother Fang, do you truly know this skill?"

Fang Bai counter-asked, "Does Senior Sister Huang not trust me?"

With a smile, Huang Miao replied, "If it were someone else, I really wouldn't. But with Junior Brother Fang, I do!"

Her phoenix eyes twinkled with an unusual light, her expression brimming with excitement as she spoke to Fang Bai, "Since Junior Brother Fang can tame Spirit Beasts, Senior Sister Huang has a somewhat presumptuous request. I wonder if Junior Brother Fang could agree to it..."

Fang Bai asked with a smile, "Senior Sister Huang isn't thinking of having me tame a Spirit Beast for you to use as a mount, is she?"

Huang Miao giggled and replied, "Junior Brother Fang really understands me! So, what do you think, Junior Brother Fang, about your sister's request..."

"Alright, I agree!"

After saying this, Fang Bai glanced again at Hou Ziping and Ms. Liu, adding, "I'm planning to tame five Spirit Beasts so each of us can have one as a mount. I just wonder what the expression on the faces of the disciples at the Bitao Martial Academy will be when we return riding five Spirit Beasts."

Liu Liehu, excited at the thought of returning to Bitao Martial Academy riding a Spirit Beast and being the center of everyone's attention, rubbed his palms together and said eagerly, "Brother Fang, let's move forward quickly, I simply can't wait."

With Fang Bai's assurance, Huang Miao and the others were no longer resistant to venturing deep into the mountain range, feeling a faint sense of expectation instead.

However, Fang Bai's suggestion for them to discard the lower-ranked Spirit Beasts and lesser Spiritual Medicine they had previously hunted and gathered went unheeded, as they still carried them with them.

Seeing this, Fang Bai could only show a resigned wry smile and no longer tried to dissuade them.

They continued on their way, and during their journey, they encountered numerous Cultivation Teams. Upon seeing the Spirit Beasts and Spiritual Medicine that Huang Miao, Hou Ziping, and the others had obtained, they were greatly envious. After exchanging a few cordial words, they split up and went their separate ways, continuing their cultivational journey.

As they approached the depths of the mountainous area, they encountered far fewer Cultivation Teams, yet the overall strength was increasingly formidable, composed mainly of Core Disciples or Direct Disciples leading the teams.

"Isn't that Senior Brother Tu Hu? His team has actually gotten into a conflict with the team led by Senior Brother Zhou!"

Upon arriving in front of a ravine several zhang wide, Huang Miao noticed two confrontational teams on the other side of the ravine not far away. She looked more closely and quickly recognized the identities of the two sides.

Fang Bai looked up towards the other side of the ravine and frowned, asking, "I have met Senior Brother Tu, but who is this Senior Brother Zhou?"

Huang Miao explained, "Senior Brother Zhou Tong from our Bitao Martial Academy is one of the top ten Core Disciples, currently ranked eighth on the Core Disciples' battle strength list."

Seeing Huang Miao speak of this Zhou Tong with a face full of indignant dislike, Fang Bai couldn't help saying, "Senior Sister Huang seems to have some aversion to that Senior Brother Zhou Tong!"

Huang Miao snorted, "More than aversion, if I get the chance, I'd dearly love to kill him myself! It's just that I'm far from his equal in strength, so for now, I can only wish."

As she said this, she looked towards Tu Hu with some concern and murmured, "I wonder why Senior Brother Tu would get into a conflict with Senior Brother Zhou. Although Senior Brother Tu is strong, how could he be a match for Senior Brother Zhou? I'm afraid Senior Brother Tu is going to be at a disadvantage."

But Fang Bai disagreed, "Senior Sister Huang, you might be mistaken. Why do I think that Senior Brother Tu has a greater chance of winning?"

Chapter 959: Let Me Help You

"You're saying Senior Brother Tu has a better chance of winning? How... how is that possible?"

Huang Miao looked at Tu Hu and then at Zhou Tong, shaking her head, "Senior Brother Tu's strength is only slightly better than mine, while Senior Brother Zhou is ahead of him by a minor realm. The gap of a minor realm is enough to let Senior Brother Zhou defeat Senior Brother Tu with ease."

Fang Bai smiled and said, "Although Senior Brother Tu's cultivation level is slightly lower than Senior Brother Zhou's, I would bet that his combat power is actually stronger than Senior Brother Zhou's."

Although a martial artist's cultivation level generally indicates their strength, sometimes combat power can be affected by many factors, such as actual combat experience and martial arts techniques.

Take Fang Bai, for example, his cultivation level is only equivalent to the early stage of the Vast Level in this world, but his combat power can sweep through all martial artists within the Vast Level Realm. When he goes all out, he can even fight against a Cosmic Level Expert."

This is because the cultivation techniques practiced by Fang Bai are of an extremely high grade and because of his extensive battle experience from a previous life.

When Fang Bai first saw Tu Hu, he knew that this man was not as simple as he seemed. It appeared that Tu Hu had cultivated some special technique and possessed the ability to challenge someone beyond his level. Although not to the extent Fang Bai could challenge across a major realm, challenging a martial artist with a minor realm higher was still manageable for him.

What Fang Bai didn't understand was why Tu Hu, who could have become a core disciple and received more cultivation resources every month, would choose to stay in the Inner Court instead.

Could it be that he preferred to be a big fish in a small pond rather than a small fish in a big pond?

Although Fang Bai was somewhat interested in Tu Hu, he didn't pay special attention to him. After all, there wasn't much interaction between them, and their cultivation levels were not on the same scale.

Huang Miao, hearing Fang Bai say that Tu Hu had a chance of defeating Zhou Tong, was somewhat skeptical. However, when she observed Tu Hu's expression, she noticed that facing Zhou Tong, Tu Hu showed no signs of nervousness or panic. Instead, he radiated a strong will to fight as if eager for a battle with Zhou Tong.

"Crazy... Senior Brother Tu has gone crazy... Has he forgotten what happened two years ago?"

From across the several zhang wide ravine, Huang Miao looked at Tu Hu, who was brimming with a fighting spirit, and frowned, murmuring to herself.

Tu Hu was known in Bitao Martial Academy as a challenge fanatic, having been unbeaten in the Inner Court for years. Two years ago, after having grown arrogant, Tu Hu challenged the least ranked among the top ten core disciples, Shi Yan, and was severely injured and publicly humiliated by him, requiring a full half-year to recover.

After that incident, Tu Hu seemed to have become a bit more restrained, never again challenging a core disciple.

In Huang Miao's eyes, Tu Hu was an open and generous person. During previous mountain training sessions, many Bitao Martial Academy disciples had received his help, so he was well-liked.

A few years ago, during a mountain training session, Huang Miao was attacked by a group of spirit beasts, narrowly escaping death under their sharp teeth and claws. Fortunately, Tu Hu, who happened to be passing by, came to her aid and saved her from danger.

This incident filled Huang Miao with gratitude toward Tu Hu.

Now, seeing Tu Hu in conflict with the core disciple Zhou Tong, Huang Miao couldn't help but worry about him.

"Senior Brother Tu has saved my life; I can't just stand by and watch when he's in trouble."

Huang Miao spoke and leaped across the several zhang wide ravine, making her way to Tu Hu's side.

"Let's go over and take a look as well!"

Although Fang Bai did not want to get involved in the conflict between Tu Hu and Zhou Tong, Huang Miao was after all the captain of their team, so it was not good for them to just stand by and watch as she crossed over to the opposite side of the mountain stream.

Hou Ziping whispered, "Junior Brother Fang, Zhou Tong is a core disciple, we can't afford to provoke him! If Senior Sister Huang gets into a conflict with Zhou Tong because of Tu Hu, we..."

Fang Bai smiled and said, "Senior Sister Huang doesn't believe in me, and nor do you? Tu Hu is a highly skilled master who keeps a low profile. Zhou Tong is no match for him, so neither Senior Sister Huang nor us will be involved."

Seeing Fang Bai speak so confidently, Hou Ziping finally breathed a sigh of relief and said, "That's good... That's good..."

Following behind Huang Miao, they too crossed the mountain stream and stood beside her.

"Junior Sister Huang, what are you doing...?"

Seeing Huang Miao and her four companions appear beside him, Tu Hu frowned, but his gaze did not leave Zhou Tong across from him, remaining highly vigilant.

Huang Miao said solemnly, "Senior Brother Tu, I'm here to help you!"

"You... help me?"

Tu Hu's frown deepened, then he shook his head and said, "This matter between us is not something you can intervene in! Go away!"

Huang Miao said, "No, Senior Brother Tu, you have saved my life before, and now that you are in trouble, how can I just ignore it?"

Tu Hu said irritably, "With your strength, you're not helping me, but making it worse for me! Go away! And take these people with you who came over with you, all of you go!"

Although his words belittled Huang Miao's strength, she was not at all angry, but instead stubbornly shook her head and said, "Senior Brother Tu, I know you're purposely trying to send me away to keep me out of the conflict, but I, Huang Miao, am not an ungrateful person. I will repay your kindness, even at the cost of my life!"

Tu Hu raised an eyebrow, about to say something else, but suddenly heard a cold snicker followed by a mocking voice asking, "Are you the one who is ranked second on the Inner Court disciples' strength list, Huang Miao?"

The person speaking was none other than the core disciple Zhou Tong, who was confronting Tu Hu.

Zhou Tong had fair skin, a straight nose, thin lips, and a lean frame. Dressed in pristine core disciple attire, he looked rather graceful and elegant.

Behind Zhou Tong stood nine disciples of Bitao Martial Academy; among these nine, aside from two from the External Courtyard, the rest were from the Inner Court. They were also among the top one hundred on the Inner Court disciples' strength list.

Behind Tu Hu, although there were also nine disciples from Bitao Martial Academy, the group included two menial servant disciples and three from the External Courtyard. Only four were Inner Court disciples, and their strength was merely on par with those behind Zhou Tong.

Though both teams had the same number of people, in the eyes of others, when considering overall strength, Tu Hu's side was clearly far inferior to Zhou Tong's. If the two sides clashed, it would certainly be Tu Hu's side that would be at a disadvantage.

Even the nine disciples from Bitao Martial Academy behind Tu Hu thought so, their faces filled with worry. They knew that if Tu Hu were defeated, they, as disciples teamed up with Tu Hu, would surely face humiliation from Zhou Tong's side.

So now, they could only pray that Tu Hu would create a miracle and turn the tables on Zhou Tong.

However, Zhou Tong was a distinguished core disciple. His cultivation level had reached the high rank of Heaven Level. How could he be easily defeated by Tu Hu, who was in the External Courtyard with only a mid-level Heaven Level cultivation?

Chapter 960: Only One Battle Left

"Senior Brother Zhou, hello! I am Huang Miao!"

Upon hearing Zhou Tong's inquiry, Huang Miao followed the etiquette, cupped her fists towards Zhou Tong, performed a bow, and then solemnly replied.

Towards a core disciple like Zhou Tong, Huang Miao had always held reverence, but now that Tu Hu and Zhou Tong had clashed, she, harboring a heart full of gratitude, decided to go all out and stand by Tu Hu's side.

Although she knew this could result in Zhou Tong's retaliation, possibly even endangering her life, Huang Miao remained undeterred.

Zhou Tong appeared to be just over thirty years of age, but in reality, he was over fifty, his apparent youthfulness a result of years of cultivation.

Zhou Tong was exceptionally talented and had encountered auspicious opportunities in his youth; around the age of thirty, he had already become a High Rank Martial Artist of the Heaven Level, ascending from a disciple of the Inner Court to a core disciple.

When Huang Miao joined the Bitao Martial Academy, Zhou Tong was already a core disciple. Among the thousands of disciples at the academy, core disciples were esteemed figures, each entitled to an individual cultivation cave, basically cut off from the menial servants, External Courtyard, and Inner Court disciples, with few opportunities for them to meet.

Although Huang Miao was a notable individual among the Inner Court disciples, to Zhou Tong she amounted to little. However, Zhou Tong considered himself a man of charm and paid extra attention to the female disciples of the Martial Academy who had good looks. While Huang Miao wasn't peerless in beauty, she still ranked near the top among the academy's female disciples, naturally becoming a target of Zhou Tong's interest.

In the Bitao Martial Academy of today, the publicly acknowledged most beautiful woman was Liu Qingqing, a disciple of the External Courtyard who had not been at the academy for long, while the former top beauty, Gao Shuxian, had been relegated to second place, with Huang Miao unquestionably third.

Zhou Tong had previously coveted Gao Shuxian and had expressed his love to her more than once, but Gao Shuxian was cunning. Using her looks and wits, she juggled numerous male disciples at the same time, even having intimate relations with some of the direct disciples.

Zhou Tong, although powerful, dared not provoke those direct disciples who were even stronger than him, and thus he had to give up on Gao Shuxian and turned his attention to Liu Qingqing and Huang Miao instead.

However, ever since Liu Qingqing entered the Bitao Martial Academy, she had garnered the favor of the only female Elder among the academy's four Great Elders, Situ Min, who often provided her with guidance. Furthermore, Liu Qingqing spent most of her time in secluded cultivation, seldom venturing out, giving Zhou Tong scarce opportunity to approach her. Therefore, he focused his attention on Huang Miao.

At this moment, seeing Huang Miao appear by Tu Hu's side and even joining forces with him against himself, Zhou Tong's heart was filled with both jealousy and anger, and his speech took on a sarcastic tone.

"Junior Sister Huang, since you know who I am, do you still dare to oppose me?"

Zhou Tong's gaze bore into Huang Miao, releasing a thread of suppressive might, as he spoke with a cold expression.

Huang Miao, merely a Martial Artist of the mid-level Heaven Rank, immediately felt an immense pressure upon encountering the suppressive might unleashed by Zhou Tong, a High Rank Martial Artist of the Heaven Level, and she couldn't help but take two steps back.

"One must repay kindness received. If I were to ignore this matter today, it would weigh on my conscience for the rest of my life."

Huang Miao took a deep breath, withstood Zhou Tong's pressure, steadied her stance, and responded earnestly.

Zhou Tong was a core disciple, and it was impossible for Huang Miao to have no fear of him. However, she owed a great debt to Tu Hu, a debt she could not ignore without feeling guilty.

A Martial Artist's cultivation not only involves practicing Martial Arts Techniques and strengthening the physical body but also cultivating the mind.

A mind with distracting thoughts greatly affects a Martial Artist's cultivation and, in severe cases, can even lead to Deviation.

Huang Miao's interference in the conflict between Tu Hu and Zhou Tong was not just to repay a debt from the past but also to ensure that her future path in the Martial Dao wouldn't be affected by her mindset.

Therefore, even when threatened by Zhou Tong, Huang Miao still chose to stand by Tu Hu's side.

Zhou Tong's face looked unpleasant as he spoke in a heavy tone, "Junior Sister Huang, it is not easy for a Martial Artist to cultivate. I advise you to leave now. Do not let a moment of impulsiveness ruin your future!"

What Zhou Tong implied was that Huang Miao should mind her own business and leave quickly. If she impulsively made an enemy out of Zhou Tong, there would be no good ending for her.

Huang Miao shook her head firmly and did not respond to Zhou Tong again.

Seeing Huang Miao's resolute attitude, Tu Hu did not continue to persuade her to leave, but he sighed and said, "Junior Sister Huang, why trouble yourself like this? Fine then, if you wish not to leave, then stay!"

Huang Miao released her own Martial Artist Aura to counter Zhou Tong's oppressive presence and said crisply, "Senior Brother Tu, no matter how strong the opponent, I will stand by your side and fight alongside you!"

"And us too, Senior Sister Huang!"

Liu Liehu said loudly, thumping his chest.

Huang Miao turned her head to glance at Fang Bai and the other three before shaking her head, "This matter doesn't concern you. I don't need your help."

She knew Hou Ziping, Liu Qingqing, and Liu Liehu were all obedient to Fang Bai, then she said to Fang Bai in a stern voice, "Senior Brother Fang, I might not continue on the journey of cultivation with you. As for the position of team leader, you take over. I hope you can lead Junior Brother Hou and the other two to achieve good results. You guys... go now!"

Fang Bai said, "Senior Sister Huang, we are one team. We should share the blessings as well as the adversities. By asking us to leave, are you trying to implicate us in dishonor?"

"That's right, Senior Sister Huang, our team came to the mountains for cultivation, and we have to face everything together. If we were to leave, the other disciples back at the Martial Academy would mock us!"

Liu Qingqing said earnestly.

Liu Liehu said, "I won't leave either! What's so great about being a Core Disciple? We have more people here, and it's not certain that we can't beat him!"

"Only through battle!"

Hou Ziping also said loudly.

Hou Ziping was originally a bit wary of Zhou Tong and did not want to get involved in this affair but noticed that Zhou Tong's gaze towards them was filled with Killing Qi, clearly hating everyone standing on Tu Hu's side.

Being hated by a Core Disciple was not a good thing. Hou Ziping knew that even if he could withdraw now, he might face Zhou Tong's retaliation later on. With that in mind, it would be better to join forces with Fang Bai and others for a forceful fight. If they could defeat Zhou Tong, or even inflict serious damage, Zhou Tong would then hesitate to trouble them again in the future.

In the True Martial Realm, only one's fists could establish a Martial Artist's authority and dignity, while retreating and yielding would only bring disgrace upon oneself.

Huang Miao's gaze swept over Fang Bai and the others, feeling a warm current in her heart, she nodded and said, "Very well, we shall fight side by side!"

Tu Hu looked at Fang Bai with a meaningful expression just as Fang Bai looked back at him.

Their gazes met in midair, each giving a silent smile.