

Sect Master 61

Chapter 61: Allocating task

As for the more critical task of eradicating the sand monster nests, the four forces dispatched only secondary forces not because they didn't attach enough importance to it, but based on the actual situation.

Experienced cultivators skilled in searching for sand monster nests had already determined that the sand monster colony this time originated from three different nests. Sand monster nests were always well-hidden and challenging to pinpoint accurately.

Despite multiple efforts by these cultivators, they could only identify the general locations of the sand monster nests. Several areas that might potentially contain sand monster nests were marked on the map.

Thus, the four forces separately summoned vassal forces, hoping to quickly determine the exact locations of the sand monster nests through the strategy of a massive number of people searching together and then eradicate them.

Twin Success Valley summoned vassal forces to search one of those regions.

After briefing everyone on the general situation, Xiao Shenqiang formed a hand seal, and a massive sand table appeared in the sky. The sand table displayed the terrain and topography of an area spanning hundreds of li (over a hundred kilometers).

The sand table was detailed, clearly showing various intricate details.

"Pay close attention and memorize everything on this sand table. Remember it firmly in your minds," Xiao Shenqiang ordered solemnly.

Cultivators had far better memory than ordinary people, and many of them had the ability to recall things at a glance. Including Meng Zhang, the cultivators below focused and quickly memorized the details.

After a while, when Xiao Shenqiang felt everyone had memorized the information sufficiently, he began to assign tasks.

Each force was given an area to search based on the number and strength of the cultivators they sent. Since the sand monster nests were buried deep underground, the only way to find them was to use a cumbersome method, searching each suspicious area inch by inch.

"Anyone who first discovers a sand monster nest will have their force exempted from three years of offerings," Xiao Shenqiang set a reward.

A large portion of the income earned by all vassal forces under Twin Success Valley's command was annually dedicated as offerings to Twin Success Valley. Three years' worth of offerings exempted was a considerable amount of spirit stones, which held great appeal to every vassal force.

"Anyone who dares to retreat or hesitate during the search will be executed without mercy," Xiao Shenqiang continued, not only offering rewards but also enforcing consequences.

His round face lost all its smiles, and he appeared stern and resolute.

"If you don't search every grain of sand in the desert to find the sand monster nest, you will all pay double offerings to us this year."

As he spoke, Xiao Shenqiang's expression turned somewhat bitter and malicious.

Shan Ying, who had been silent with a dark expression on his face, suddenly interjected, "If anyone dares to deceive and overlook a sand monster nest in their assigned area, their entire family will be executed without mercy."

Despite the pitiful cries of the crowd below, Shan Ying waved his hand and dispersed them.

"Why are you still standing around? Move quickly! Today is the first day," Xiao Shenqiang urged as he glanced at the sky, which was about to darken. The solemn expression on everyone's face intensified.

No matter how lamentable they felt or harbored any hidden discontent, all of them had no thoughts or power to resist Twin Success Valley.

The crowd quickly dispersed, and the cultivators began to leave the main camp in groups.

Most of the forces in the main camp, except for a few like the Zhao Family, had various mounts. Among them were formidable demonic beast mounts, even stronger than the Wind Chasing Horses. Meng Zhang and his companions rode Wind Chasing Horses, quickly leaving the main camp far behind.

Taiyi Sect only had three cultivators, and their strength wasn't impressive. Twin Success Valley arranged a small search area for them, not out of kindness but to avoid complications.

The longer the sand monster nests existed, the greater the potential threat they posed. When Meng Zhang and his companions arrived at their destination, night had fallen, adding to the difficulty of searching for the sand monster nests.

Ignoring the darkness, they dismounted their Wind Chasing Horses and began the meticulous search.

The vast and flat desert offered no cover, and the sand monster nests would not be on the surface. The nests were buried deep underground, impossible to detect from the surface.

To search for the sand monster nests, cultivators generally used the Earth Escape Spell to delve underground and search. Even for Refining Qi Late stage cultivators, not all of them could use the Earth Escape Spell. For those unable to use it, they could use Earth Escape Spell talismans. And if they lacked even those, they had no choice but to dig the ground honestly. To complete the search within the time limit assigned by Twin Success Valley would be an incredibly difficult task.

All the cultivators from the vassal forces began to work tirelessly.

Although the Zhao Family cultivators were the first to arrive at the destination with the use of their flying boat, they couldn't search the underground from the boat. One by one, the Zhao Family cultivators jumped down and began using the Earth Escape Spell to burrow underground, carefully searching every inch of the area.

After all the cultivators from the vassal forces began their actions, many Twin Success Valley cultivators also left the main camp. Although the main forces of Twin Success Valley were sent to confront the sand monster colony, they had also arranged a significant number of disciples to search

for the sand monster nests. The disciples were tasked with searching the areas that were most likely to contain the sand monster nests. Compared to the mixed vassal forces, Twin Success Valley naturally trusted their own disciples more.

Shan Ying, a Foundation Building stage cultivator, remained in the main camp, ready to provide support in any direction upon receiving the news.

Meng Zhang examined the area assigned to Taiyi Sect and realized that searching this designated area within the allotted time would be an incredibly challenging task.

However, no matter how difficult it might be, the tasks assigned by Twin Success Valley had to be completed on time.

None of the three had the ability to use the Earth Escape Spell, but fortunately, Meng Zhang had prepared numerous Earth Escape talismans.

In Meng Zhang's view, if a sand monster nest existed underground, no matter how deep it was buried, it must have left a passage for the sand monsters to enter and exit. These passages would be close to the surface, making it easier for the sand monsters to move in and out.

Unfortunately, Meng Zhang's Deception Breaking Eye could see through illusions, but it couldn't penetrate deep underground. If the exits and entrances of the passages weren't close by, he wouldn't be able to see them if they were buried too deeply.

Chapter 62: Discovery

Meng Zhang came up with a method to conduct a more detailed search underground to avoid missing any potential clues. He and Tian Zhen selected a predetermined location and took turns using the Earthshaking Technique.

They controlled the range of the Earthshaking Technique and enhanced its depth. Meng Zhang's talent was extraordinary, and the spells he cast were powerful. Tian Zhen had previously cultivated the Earth Element's Yellow Sand Art but later switched to the superior Fifth Earth True Secrets, resulting in a robust Earth True Qi. Using the Earthshaking Technique with the Earth Element allowed him to fully unleash its power.

After using the Earthshaking Technique, Meng Zhang pressed his ear to the ground, carefully listening for any sounds from below. If there were any signs of collapsed passages, it wouldn't escape his detection.

Once the Earthshaking Technique depleted their True Qi, Meng Zhang and Tian Zhen took turns meditating to recover. Fortunately, Meng Zhang had made arrangements with Shi Weiming, the spokesperson for the Wild Alchemists, and obtained numerous pills for True Qi recovery. They had brought most of these pills with them on this expedition, and they were coming in handy now.

Every time they searched a certain distance, Meng Zhang would release Earth Escape talismans and enter the ground to conduct a meticulous search. Even though the surrounding ground was mostly soft sand, the depth they could reach with the Earth Escape Spell wasn't too profound. If the sand monster nests were indeed underground, they would likely be buried deeper. However, if they were searching for the passages leading to the sand monster nests, the depth they could reach was sufficient.

While Meng Zhang and Tian Zhen were busy searching for the sand monster nests, Fang Yong took on the role of guarding and staying alert. The task of searching for the sand monster nests was, in fact, very dangerous. If they didn't find the nests, it would be fine, but if they did encounter the sand monsters swarming out, being slow to escape could cost them their lives.

Fang Yong's vigilance was necessary to react quickly if the sand monsters appeared.

After working hard through the first half of the night, the tired trio took a brief rest. At daybreak, they resumed their work.

Searching for the sand monster nests underground in the vast desert was indeed an extremely strenuous, monotonous, and tedious task. Cultivators with little patience might become irritable and unwilling to continue after working hard without any results. Meng Zhang and Tian Zhen were both very patient individuals, though they were starting to feel a bit impatient inside, they maintained a calm exterior.

Coincidentally, the area they were searching was adjacent to the region assigned to the Forest Mountain School for searching. During the search, they had encountered each other a few times at the boundary between the two regions.

Xu Chengxian, the Sect Master of the Forest Mountain School, was naturally optimistic and easy-going.

"Sect Master Meng, as a Grand Sect Master, why are you personally participating in the search? It doesn't match your status as a Sect Master," Xu Chengxian teased.

"What Grand Sect Master? My Taiyi Sect has only two or three cats, far fewer than your Forest Mountain School, which has a large family and many people," Meng Zhang replied with a wry smile. "If I, as the Sect Master, don't participate, there won't be anyone left to do the job. It sounds nice to be a Sect Master, but doing it is not enjoyable at all."

During their breaks, Meng Zhang didn't mind chatting casually with Xu Chengxian to relax and take his mind off the work.

The Foundation Building stage experts of the Forest Mountain School had already been summoned by Twin Success Valley to participate in the direct confrontation with the sand monster colony. Xu Chengxian brought a group of Refining Qi stage cultivators here, feeling that they were just filling the numbers.

Xu Chengxian assigned the searching work to his disciples while he roamed around, chatting with neighbors assigned to the surrounding areas.

After chatting with Xu Chengxian for a while, Meng Zhang excused himself and returned to work.

Taiyi Sect only had two people doing the work, and if he slacked off, there would be no one left to do it. The area surrounding them for hundreds of miles could potentially contain sand monster nests. However, with over a hundred cultivators from various vassal forces of Twin Success Valley, it was as if sprinkling pepper in the river—no waves were stirred.

After five days of hard work, half of the allotted time had passed, but all the cultivators hadn't achieved any results. During these five days, they had all worked tirelessly, almost to the point of not resting day or night. When they were too tired, they would meditate while sitting on the ground, recovering their energy before immediately returning to work.

At this moment, Shan Ying and Xiao Shenqiang, who were overseeing the main camp, received news that Forest Spring Watch had discovered a sand monster nest and, with the help of cultivators from Liu Family and Green Bamboo Mountain, had successfully destroyed it.

Now, Shan Ying and Xiao Shenqiang were starting to get anxious. Twin Success Valley had many Foundation Building stage cultivators and had always been overbearing, considering themselves superior to the other three forces. Falling behind in eradicating the sand monster nests made them feel uneasy.

Shan Ying and Xiao Shenqiang couldn't stay put any longer. They led a group of Twin Success Valley disciples and headed to the target area. By supervising the search in person, they could motivate the vassal force cultivators to work harder, and their personal involvement could greatly speed up the search.

As expected, the search speed of everyone increased significantly. Even Xu Chengxian, who had been slacking, had to get involved personally.

As usual, on this day, after Meng Zhang and Tian Zhen used the Earthshaking Technique, they pressed their ears to the ground, carefully listening for any movements from below. Faint sounds of trembling passages entered their ears.

Meng Zhang made a hand gesture, signaling Tian Zhen. Tian Zhen activated his True Qi to release a more powerful Earthshaking Technique, causing stronger vibrations on the ground and making the trembling sounds from below more distinct.

To confirm, Meng Zhang used an Earth Escape talisman and went underground in the direction of the trembling sounds. He knew that if it was a passage used by the sand monsters, his actions would be extremely dangerous. However, he had no choice but to confirm.

In the vast desert, it wasn't just the sand monsters that dug tunnels underground. For example, the sandworms he had encountered before were creatures that habitually traveled underground.

If the sand monster nest was truly nearby, the likelihood of other demonic beasts in the vicinity was small. The ferocious and ruthless sand monsters wouldn't spare any other beasts they encountered. The area around the sand monster nest was a forbidden zone for life, a burial ground for living creatures.

On the other hand, if other demonic beasts were present underground, the likelihood of a sand monster nest nearby was minimal. In that case, Meng Zhang's work in this area could come to an end. No matter how carefully he searched, it would be impossible to find something that simply didn't exist.

Meng Zhang ventured underground to confirm whether he had Big Luck in finding the sand monster nest or whether he had encountered a demonic beast living underground. Whatever the result, there was no need to continue the search in this area.

Chapter 63: Returning

Meng Zhang's body flowed into the ground like fluid mud, effortlessly delving into the depths. After traveling a considerable distance underground, Meng Zhang found his target. It was an underground passage, entirely composed of compacted soil and stones, vastly different from the soft

sand structure surrounding it. Entering the passage through the sand layer, Meng Zhang's form became visible.

With just a glance, Meng Zhang knew that this passage must lead to the entrance and exit of the sand monster nest. The passage was unusually tall and broad. Even the so-called small sand monsters within the sand monster colony were taller than normal humans. The main force of the sand monster colony, the soldiers at the Refining Qi stage, were like giants, capable of contending with Refining Qi stage cultivators. Therefore, the underground passage had to be constructed tall and spacious to accommodate their passage.

As for the General grade sand monsters that could contend with Foundation Building stage cultivators, they were scarce in number, and most of them possessed abilities like Earth Escape, making the need for underground passages unnecessary for their free movement. The legendary Marshal grade sand monsters were seldom seen throughout the history of the Endless Sea of Sand. However, whenever one appeared, it would cause a widespread catastrophe, and even Gold Core sects like Flying Swan Sect might be in danger of being overthrown.

The deep passage seemed endless. Meng Zhang hesitated for a moment, wondering if he should continue forward to see if he could find the sand monsters. Just as he hesitated, the sound of wind echoed from the passage's other end, and a group of sand monsters floated in the air, using the wind to swiftly rush toward Meng Zhang's location. These were soldiers of the sand monsters at the Refining Qi stage, and given their numbers, if they surrounded him, it would be difficult for Meng Zhang to escape.

Perhaps he was extremely unlucky, or maybe the sand monster nest's vigilance was too strong, as they attacked just as Meng Zhang appeared in the passage. Without any hesitation, Meng Zhang immediately threw out a white bead. This white bead was something he had salvaged from a stall in Singing Sand City, a First Rank high-grade magic tool with most of its structure intact. He had refined it using the Blood Refining Martyr Art.

The white bead landed ahead of the approaching sand monsters and exploded with a loud bang. The explosion caused chaos among the sand monsters, and accompanying the blast was a bone-chilling cold. The passage was quickly covered in thick frost, completely sealing it off. The Blood Refining Martyr Art once again proved its worth, as even an all-out attack from an ordinary Refining Qi stage cultivator would not have the same effect.

Almost simultaneously with throwing the bead, Meng Zhang activated an Earth Escape talisman, causing his entire body to leave the passage and rush towards the surface. He knew that with just this method, he wouldn't be able to stall the sand monsters for long. Just as Meng Zhang left the passage, he heard the sound of ice breaking, and a large number of sand monsters surged out, heading straight for him.

Among the Refining Qi stage sand monsters, only a few possessed abilities similar to the Earth Escape Spell. Fortunately, none of the pursuing sand monsters had such an ability. Relying solely on digging through sand and stone, it would be difficult for them to catch up to Meng Zhang.

Meng Zhang risked his life, finally escaping to the surface just before the sand monsters could catch up. As soon as he emerged, Meng Zhang shouted, "Release the signal immediately!"

Tian Zhen quickly responded. Before leaving the main camp, disciples from Twin Success Valley had distributed signal talismans to all the vassal forces. Once they encountered a large group of

sand monsters, they would activate the signal talisman, and nearby fellow cultivators would rush to support them. As soon as Tian Zhen released the signal talisman, it emitted a piercing whistle and flew rapidly into the air, releasing dense black smoke.

The black smoke floated high into the sky, and with the sharp whistling sound, the commotion spread far enough to alarm nearby cultivators. After Tian Zhen released the signal talisman, Meng Zhang also released a communication talisman, which disappeared into the horizon, carrying their location information and heading directly back to the main camp.

It would take some time for the Foundation Building stage cultivators in the main camp to receive the communication and rush to their location. During this time, it was the most dangerous period for Meng Zhang and the others.

The nearest reinforcement was from Forest Mountain School. After being alerted by the signal talisman in the sky, the Sect Master, Xu Chengxian, led all his disciples to rush over at the fastest speed. Although Xu Chengxian was a crafty old man, he wouldn't delay when it came to critical matters.

Before Xu Chengxian and his disciples arrived, the ground began to shake violently, and many parts of the ground suddenly sank, revealing deep pits. A large number of sand monsters rushed out from these pits, surging towards Meng Zhang and the others.

The Confusion Bell magic tool was of little use against soulless sand monsters. With Fire Seal held high in his right hand, Meng Zhang spewed scorching flames from it, which turned into fiery serpents upon touching the ground. These fiery serpents twisted their bodies and pounced on the approaching sand monsters.

Meng Zhang exerted all his strength, maximizing the power of Fire Seal, allowing him to manifest nine fiery serpents to aid in the attack.

As Meng Zhang acted, Tian Zhen did not rush to attack; instead, he held a massive shield in front of Meng Zhang. When Tian Zhen pressed the shield against the ground, the ground rippled like water, and a powerful shockwave spread forward.

Fang Yong had the lowest cultivation base and was the most timid. Facing the incoming sand monsters, he was panicking and ended up hiding behind Meng Zhang, lacking the courage to fight. If not for the last bit of reason left in him, he might have fled the scene. Seeing Tian Zhen's actions, Meng Zhang couldn't help but scold Fang Yong angrily in his heart for his incompetence.

Meng Zhang had just engaged the sand monsters when reinforcements from Forest Mountain School arrived. Faced with the frenzied rush of sand monsters, without the need for orders, talismans were activated one after another, and numerous spells, such as Fireball Art, Golden Blade Art, and Earth Dragon Art, filled the air, rushing towards the sand monsters.

Then, several flying swords shot out, wreaking havoc among the sand monster horde.

Seeing the cultivators from Forest Mountain School, Meng Zhang finally breathed a sigh of relief. At least their lives were now secure.

As more and more sand monsters poured out from the ground, not only were there a large number of small sand monsters but also several Refining Qi stage soldiers among them. Forest Mountain

School and Taiyi Sect combined their forces to form a strong defensive line, firmly holding back the sand monsters' onslaught.

When both sects started to feel somewhat overwhelmed, even more reinforcements arrived from all directions after receiving the distress signal.

Various cultivators who were searching for the sand monster nest in the surrounding areas rushed over as fast as they could.

Chapter 64: Rushing

The cultivators from the Zhao Family's area were quite far away, but relying on the speed of their flying boats, they quickly arrived here to reinforce the situation. Upon seeing Meng Zhang and the others below, Zhao Yanbei, the Patriarch of the Zhao Family, cursed silently in his heart. He had come all this way to help the old nemesis, Taiyi Sect, defend against the sand monsters. It seemed that the credit for discovering the sand monster nest had fallen into the hands of these lucky Taiyi Sect fellows.

Zhao Yanbei felt resentful but knew he couldn't abandon everything and leave in front of everyone. Even the most magnanimous sects in the Cultivation World would have strict military laws when facing the common enemy of the sand monsters. Moreover, Twin Success Valley, known for its domineering style, would not tolerate any cowardly behavior. If Zhao Yanbei dared to escape the battlefield in front of everyone today, there was a good chance that Twin Success Valley would annihilate the Zhao Family tomorrow.

Reluctantly suppressing his anger, Zhao Yanbei led the Zhao Family cultivators and reluctantly joined the battle. With more reinforcements arriving, the human cultivators gradually gained the upper hand, pushing the sand monster horde back underground.

At this time, three figures flew from a distance and, within a few breaths, arrived above the battlefield. These three individuals were undoubtedly high-level cultivators at the Foundation Building stage, capable of flying in the air using the power of Qi.

The leader among them, an old man, coldly snorted and swung the verdant bamboo stick he held towards the front. Instantly, countless staff shadows appeared in the sky above the battlefield, striking down upon the sand monster horde. Whether they were small sand monsters or soldier-level ones, once they were hit by the staff shadows, their bodies were instantly crushed to pieces.

The middle-aged man following the old man silently pushed both hands downwards, releasing a bone-chilling coldness that spread in all directions. The sand monsters emerging from the underground were immediately covered in thick frost. Their movements slowed, and then their bodies burst open like blocks of ice.

Among the three, the last one to fly over was an elegant and knowledgeable Daoist. By the time he arrived, the battle below had already ended. After the two Foundation Building stage experts took action, not only were all the sand monsters on the ground eliminated, but no new ones emerged from below.

"It seems that you two are indeed formidable. The battle ended as soon as you made a move. This old Daoist didn't even have a chance to get involved," the Daoist said, displaying his courtesy.

"You Daoists always talk as sweet as honey. You guys are so good at using flowery words to please people," the old man who wielded the bamboo stick said, jokingly.

"What's going on here? Why are so many sand monsters emerging from underground?" The middle-aged man did not participate in the conversation between the two, asking about the situation below.

The Foundation Building stage cultivators from Twin Success Valley's main camp had not yet arrived, but three unfamiliar Foundation Building stage cultivators arrived first.

Meng Zhang speculated about the identities of these three Foundation Building stage cultivators. As the one who had discovered the sand monster nest first, he should respond to them.

As the middle-aged man's words fell, Meng Zhang took the initiative to step forward and respectfully saluted the three. "I have met the three seniors. I am Meng Zhang from Taiyi Sect."

Before Meng Zhang could continue speaking, two more figures flew over from a distance.

These two figures were extremely fast and appeared above the battlefield in the blink of an eye. They were none other than the Twin Success Valley's Foundation Building stage elders, Shan Ying and Xiao Shenqiang.

Seeing the three individuals in the air, Shan Ying's expression turned unpleasant. "Why are you three here?"

Meng Zhang, as a junior, knew better than to interrupt the conversation between the Foundation Building stage elders. He stood silently like a block of wood, not uttering a word.

"You guys from Twin Success Valley are so useless that you still haven't found the sand monster nest. I got impatient waiting and came to help you," the old man with the bamboo stick said carelessly.

Xiao Shenqiang's smile disappeared from his face. "Old Bamboo Stick, Twin Success Valley knows how to handle its affairs. It's none of your business, Green Bamboo Mountain."

In the western region of the Flying Swan Sect, Twin Success Valley had the largest number of Foundation Building stage cultivators and the most formidable strength. As the dominant force in the region, Twin Success Valley regarded itself as the local overlord.

Among the forces of the same level in this region, Liu Family, known for their cunning and scheming nature, preferred not to directly confront Twin Success Valley. Forest Spring Watch, as a Daoist sect, maintained a peaceful and composed style and would not easily provoke Twin Success Valley either.

However, Green Bamboo Mountain had always been at odds with Twin Success Valley. Although Green Bamboo Mountain had already established itself as a separate sect, it maintained a close relationship with Flying Swan Sect. In this region, Green Bamboo Mountain considered itself the representative of Flying Swan Sect and believed it was responsible for managing the area on Flying Swan Sect's behalf.

With a habit of meddling in everything that happened in the region, Green Bamboo Mountain and Twin Success Valley clashed endlessly, refusing to yield to each other. Twin Success Valley especially looked down on Green Bamboo Mountain and even felt superior to Flying Swan Sect, a

Gold Core sect. But these presumptuous fellows from Green Bamboo Mountain wanted to assert their dominance over Twin Success Valley, which the latter would not tolerate.

The relationship between the two sides had been hostile for many years, and conflicts had occurred multiple times. If it were not for Flying Swan Sect being above them, the two sides might have started an all-out war.

Seeing that the conversation between Xiao Shenqiang and Old Man Bamboo Stick was becoming less amicable, the Daoist quickly tried to smooth things over.

"Seniors, the important thing right now is the situation at hand. Let's put everything else aside for now and discuss it later. Currently, the sand monsters are running rampant, and it's not the time for internal strife."

Given the current situation, Xiao Shenqiang and Old Man Bamboo Stick were not really trying to provoke each other. They were just habitually engaging in a verbal spat. Now that someone was offering a way to defuse the situation, they naturally took the opportunity to climb down from the high horse.

The Daoist looked down at Meng Zhang below. "Kid, you were about to say something. Continue."

"Reporting to the seniors, I discovered a passage leading to the sand monster nest below," Meng Zhang replied cautiously.

Seeing the previous battlefield, all five Foundation Building stage cultivators had some speculations about the sand monster nest. Hearing Meng Zhang say it himself was the final confirmation they needed.

"No wonder, no wonder..." The Daoist muttered to himself.

He saw Xiao Shenqiang and Shan Ying looking puzzled, so he quickly explained for them.

Chapter 65: General grade

Originally, Old Man Bamboo Stick and the other two Foundation Building stage cultivators were engaged in a fierce battle with a large army of sand monsters, along with their subordinates, hundreds of miles away.

Suddenly, the sand monster army, which was actively fighting against the human cultivators, began to retreat voluntarily. Sand monsters are creatures without independent intelligence; they act solely on instinct. Whenever they encounter human cultivators, they fight to the death and never retreat or flee. Even if only one sand monster remains, it will fight to the end against the human cultivators without wavering.

However, there is one exception that can make the sand monsters retreat - when their nest encounters a problem, they will call upon all the nearby sand monsters. Any sand monster within the summoning range of the nest will abandon everything and rush to it at the fastest speed.

Observing the retreat of the sand monsters, the three experienced Foundation Building cultivators immediately deduced the reason. They ordered their subordinates to entangle the retreating sand monster army while they pursued them to find the location of the sand monster nest.

After a while, the three Foundation Building stage cultivators still couldn't find the sand monster nest and accidentally stumbled upon the ongoing battle of Meng Zhang and his companions. Listening to the narration of the old Taoist and combining it with Meng Zhang's report, they were certain that the sand monster nest was nearby.

"Very good, very good. You were the first to discover the clue about the sand monster nest. You shall be rewarded once we exterminate the nest," Xiao Shenqiang praised Meng Zhang. He then turned to the other three Foundation Building stage cultivators and said, "This area falls under the responsibility of our Twin Success Valley. Since we have found the sand monster nest, it should be our responsibility to exterminate it."

Xiao Shenqiang seemed determined to rely solely on Twin Success Valley's strength to eradicate the sand monster nest and didn't plan to utilize the help of the other three cultivators.

The friendly-looking old man's face turned sour, and Old Man Bamboo Stick sneered, "Benefits should be shared. You Twin Success Valley wants to hog it all for yourself, but you should ask us first."

The silent middle-aged man's face darkened, and he said in a low voice, "Since we have already tracked it to this point, unless you can defeat the three of us, we will not back down."

Meng Zhang, watching the tense confrontation between the five Foundation Building stage cultivators, recalled some rumors circulating in the Endless Sea of Sand. Sand monsters were enemies of humanity, but killing them yielded no spoils. Battling sand monsters was purely a losing proposition. However, within the sand monster nests, there were valuable treasures. If they exterminated the sand monster nest, they might obtain these treasures.

Though Meng Zhang had killed sand monsters before, he had never verified this rumor. However, seeing the five Foundation Building stage cultivators ready to fight for it, the authenticity of the rumor seemed probable.

As for what kind of treasure lay within the sand monster nest, nobody knew. Taiyi Sect in the past was too weak and had no ability to eliminate a sand monster nest. Despite Meng Zhang gaining extensive knowledge from the Trial Ground, there was no information about this aspect. It made sense since that knowledge was a legacy left behind by the peak Taiyi Sect, which wouldn't have concerned itself with remote places like the Endless Sea of Sand.

The five Foundation Building stage cultivators divided into two groups and continued arguing.

Meanwhile, a sudden piercing whistling sound emanated from afar, and strong winds started to blow. The five cultivators stopped their dispute and turned their attention to a distant black line rapidly approaching them, composed of sand and wind.

"General grade sand monster?" Xiao Shenqiang looked serious.

"Yes, that General grade sand monster is at least at the mid-level of Foundation Building stage. Even if the three of us team up, we can't defeat it," the old Taoist expressed some concern in his tone.

The atmosphere grew tense as the wall of sand and wind, a General grade sand monster, closed in on the five Foundation Building stage cultivators. Meng Zhang activated his Deception Breaking Eye to observe the creature.

The General grade sand monster was entirely composed of sand and wind, towering over everything with a constantly changing human-like shape, resembling a giant made of sand and wind.

It seemed that there was no communication or need for communication between humans and sand monsters. When they encountered each other, the only consideration was how to completely eliminate the other party. The wall of sand and wind displayed a massive face that distorted and contorted. Countless yellow sand particles rained down like a torrent, heading straight for the five human cultivators.

Chapter 66: Lair

Almost at the same time as the sand monsters launched their attack, the five Foundation Building stage cultivators also took the initiative to strike. The massive body of the sand monster, entirely composed of sand and wind, became the most conspicuous target in the sky. The five Foundation Building stage cultivators displayed their strongest offensive techniques against the formidable enemy. In the face of such a strong opponent, no one would hold back or keep any secrets. Hesitating at this critical moment would be seeking death.

Three flying swords relentlessly pierced the huge body of the sand monster, continuously stabbing it. Old Man Bamboo Stick conjured thousands of shadows of bamboo sticks, fiercely slamming the sand monster. Countless ice-cold ice cones descended from the sky, covering a large portion of the sand monster's massive body.

Although the sand monster had a much higher level of power compared to the five Foundation Building stage cultivators, it lacked the ability to wield magic tools and could only rely on instinct and innate talents to fight. The five cunning humans were experienced fighters, and their magic tools and spells posed a great threat to the sand monster. Both sides went all out in the battle, with no intention of holding back. In a short period, the sand monster's body, entirely composed of sand and wind, dimmed and was torn into pieces. With a few loud bangs, the sand monster's massive body dissipated completely, turning into scattered yellow sand on the ground.

After the battle with the General grade sand monster, the Refining Qi stage disciples of Twin Success Valley, who were distributed in the nearby area, hurriedly arrived at the scene. Not long after the battle, the five Foundation Building stage cultivators quickly returned to Meng Zhang and the others in the air.

Their faces looked unsightly, indicating that even though the battle was short, it had taken a toll on their strength. Xiao Shenqiang, in particular, who used to have a cheerful smile, now appeared somewhat pale, clearly injured to some extent.

At that moment, several flying boats approached from the distance. Upon closer inspection, they were the Refining Qi stage disciples of Green Bamboo Mountain and Liu Family, who had completed the task of hunting the sand monster army and arrived one after another.

Xiao Shenqiang and Shan Ying exchanged a glance, both showing a sense of helplessness. They understood that it was impossible to monopolize the benefits of the sand monster nest now. However, this was for the better as more reinforcements would increase the chance of thoroughly eradicating the sand monster nest.

Xiao Shenqiang turned to Meng Zhang and said, "Kid, point out the entrance to the sand monster nest."

Meng Zhang was prepared and led everyone to the top of the tunnel. He was about to use the Earth Escape Spell to burrow into the ground when Guang Hong Daoist stopped him.

Guang Hong Daoist formed hand seals and shouted, "Rise!" The ground was immediately lifted, revealing the entrance to the tunnel. The other four Foundation Building stage cultivators understood his intention.

In the intervals between Guang Hong Daoist's actions, the three Foundation Building stage cultivators also used the Earth Escape Spell to bypass the complicated tunnels and head straight towards the sand monster nest's core.

Meng Zhang thought to himself, "The Earth Escape Spell has become a standard spell for Foundation Building stage cultivators in the Endless Sea of Sand. It seems they must have a way to locate underground and directly determine the position of the sand monster nest."

After the five Foundation Building stage cultivators used the Earth Escape Spell and disappeared, some other cultivators who also practiced the spell followed their traces.

The remaining cultivators were left to face the swarming sand monster horde. Fortunately, the majority of the incoming sand monsters were small and at the soldier level, with no General grade sand monster among them. Otherwise, the numerous Refining Qi stage cultivators present would have suffered.

In the chaos, many Refining Qi stage cultivators were either proactive or forced to retreat and scattered into different tunnels. The underground passages were numerous, with countless entrances and exits, swallowing all the Refining Qi stage cultivators in an instant.

Meng Zhang, along with Tian Zhen and Fang Yong, took the initiative to enter a nearby tunnel. Meng Zhang used the Deception Breaking Eye to actively avoid the large group of sand monsters and entered a relatively safe passage. Having just escaped from the chaos and feeling quite scared, Fang Yong couldn't help but complain, "These Foundation Building stage seniors only care about rushing forward, leaving us behind for the sand monsters. They're clearly causing harm and have no sense of seniority."

Tian Zhen glared at Fang Yong, "Shut your mouth."

Meng Zhang also silently cursed, "What a fool, openly complaining about Foundation Building stage experts like this. If their disciples hear it, it will cause trouble."

Chapter 67: Meeting on the way

Meng Zhang responded to the call of Twin Success Valley and happened to achieve great merit this time. He had already completed his mission and wasn't very willing to enter the sand monster nest. Killing as many sand monsters as possible wouldn't yield any spoils of war; it would only be a waste of effort. If he was unlucky and got injured by the sand monsters, that would truly be unfortunate.

Meng Zhang's primary task now was to protect himself and Tian Zhen from harm, and eliminating sand monsters was secondary. He couldn't blame Meng Zhang for being cautious in this battle. Considering the situation of Taiyi Sect, they couldn't afford any more losses.

Using the Deception Breaking Eye, Meng Zhang could see through nearby obstacles. He led Tian Zhen and Fang Yong, avoiding the large groups of sand monsters and killing the smaller teams that they couldn't avoid. This way, they also contributed to the human cultivators of the Endless Sea of Sand.

The Zhao Family cultivators, led by their patriarch Zhao Yanbei, had remained together and were not dispersed. They also had no intention of eliminating sand monsters; their goal was to find the figures of Taiyi Sect cultivators.

In the chaotic battle, without any Foundation Building stage cultivators present, it was quite normal for two mid-Refining Qi stage cultivators to die. Unfortunately, Meng Zhang had already taken his people and avoided them, leaving them no chance. Later on, the Zhao Family cultivators were also forced to disperse in the tunnels.

Even though Meng Zhang avoided the Zhao Family cultivators, he still encountered trouble. Keeping the Deception Breaking Eye active for too long put a great burden on his eyes. So, Meng Zhang couldn't keep it continuously activated and had to turn it on and off from time to time.

As Meng Zhang led the two of them into a new tunnel, it was precisely when he turned off the Deception Breaking Eye that an anomaly occurred in the tunnel. A human cultivator's head suddenly emerged from the ground, and then the body gradually surfaced.

Clearly, this cultivator was using the Earth Escape Spell to travel through the ground and was trying to return to the surface by undoing the spell.

This cultivator saw Meng Zhang's group, also consisting of human cultivators, but didn't pay much attention and continued ascending. Just as the upper half of his body emerged, the anomaly happened.

A black shadow swam through the ground and suddenly caught hold of the lower half of the cultivator's body. The cultivator screamed miserably and struggled desperately, but the black shadow, though seemingly small, possessed astonishing strength and firmly entangled his lower body.

Meng Zhang was startled by the scene. It was evident that this black shadow was a special sand monster with a talent similar to the Earth Escape Spell. Apparently, traveling through the ground with the Earth Escape Spell was also a dangerous task.

Without hesitation, Meng Zhang turned around and ran towards another nearby tunnel, with Tian Zhen and Fang Yong closely following, not daring to slow down.

After running just a few steps, the Refining Qi stage cultivator behind them stopped struggling, and all sounds vanished.

As they turned a corner, they ran into a group of cultivators running frantically from the opposite direction. Behind this group of cultivators, there was a large number of sand monsters in hot pursuit.

Both groups were stunned when they met face to face. Meng Zhang reacted the fastest, taking out a First Rank superior-grade flying sword refined with the Blood Refining Martyr Art and threw it at the wall beside the tunnel's entrance.

With a loud explosion, the wall was blown open, revealing a huge gap. Behind the gap was another tunnel.

Before the shockwave of the explosion subsided, Meng Zhang and the others quickly rushed through, intending to enter the new tunnel as quickly as possible.

The group of cultivators running towards them from the opposite side also responded quickly and rushed towards the only escape route.

The gap was not big, but there were many people trying to escape. For a moment, the situation was chaotic and crowded. Sand monsters charged from both sides, and the screams of cultivators could be heard from behind.

Just as Meng Zhang and the two others entered the tunnel, they were dispersed by the cultivators rushing in from behind. There was no time to regroup. Tian Zhen shouted loudly from a distance and ran towards one end of the tunnel, while Meng Zhang was separated on the other side and quickly headed to the opposite end of the tunnel.

Surprisingly, Fang Yong, despite being somewhat useless, had decent survival skills. He had been following Meng Zhang closely and wasn't left behind.

After a desperate run with numerous twists and turns, the two of them finally got rid of the pursuers and entered a completely new tunnel.

Being separated from Tian Zhen made Meng Zhang feel quite annoyed. He couldn't return to where they got separated earlier and could only hope silently that his old buddy would be safe.

After wandering underground for a while, even Meng Zhang wasn't sure where they had ended up. Fortunately, these tunnels were designed for large sand monsters to move in and out, so they were exceptionally wide and tall. Meng Zhang didn't feel cramped while walking inside for a long time.

Meng Zhang had originally planned to use a messaging talisman to contact Tian Zhen. However, he realized that both he and Tian Zhen were moving constantly and not staying in one place. Even if he sent a messaging talisman, the other party might not receive it. The messaging talisman was a low-level talisman that could only be sent to a fixed area. As for the communication flying swords with some search capabilities, only Foundation Building stage cultivators could use them.

To avoid the large groups of sand monsters, Meng Zhang kept moving with Fang Yong inside the tunnel. After an unknown amount of time, they arrived at a crossroads where several different tunnels converged.

As they arrived at this crossroads, two other groups of cultivators were also approaching from the other two tunnels. One group of cultivators was unfamiliar to Meng Zhang. The other group, led by Zhao Family disciples, was very familiar—Zhao Renlong and Zhao Renhu, the two brothers.

Both brothers were elders of the Zhao Family, each possessing a mid-Refining Qi completion level of cultivation. Though they were approaching their seventies and had no hope of reaching Foundation Building stage, they had honed their cultivation base to become increasingly pure. Moreover, they spent a lot of time cultivating two powerful offensive techniques.

When they saw Meng Zhang, both of them had a pleased expression. It had been Zhao Family's long-standing wish to take advantage of the chaos underground to kill Meng Zhang. However, they hesitated slightly upon seeing another group of unknown cultivators nearby.

Killing Meng Zhang secretly in the underground without any witnesses would be no problem. However, now that there were onlookers, it would be dangerous. If they couldn't eliminate everyone, the consequences would be unimaginable.

While the Zhao Family cultivators hesitated, Meng Zhang didn't hesitate at all. He immediately threw out a huge shield.

This magic tool was also a stolen item bought from the black market in Firewell Market. After refining it with the Blood Refining Martyr Art, it was transformed into a disposable tool.

Meng Zhang's target wasn't the Zhao Family disciples but the space directly above the crossroads.

Chapter 68: Chasing

After a deafening roar that made everyone's ears buzz, the overhead stone wall collapsed, and countless rocks and soil poured down, completely blocking the path Fang Tong had just cleared for Meng Zhang.

A thick cloud of dust filled the entire passage, and before the shockwaves of the explosion had dissipated, Meng Zhang couldn't wait to observe the extent of the damage caused by the blast. He immediately turned around and sprinted back along the same tunnel. Fang Yong hesitated for a moment but quickly followed, closely chasing after Meng Zhang.

Meng Zhang's decisiveness surprised the members of the Zhao Family. The two elders of the Zhao Family exchanged glances, feeling somewhat caught off guard.

The unfamiliar cultivator nearby also became vigilant. They immediately assumed defensive postures, facing the Zhao Family members, and slowly retreated along the same passage.

"We saw nothing. Your grudges have nothing to do with us," one of the unfamiliar cultivators stated with a defensive tone, realizing the danger they were in.

Seeing the other side adopting such a guarded stance, the two elders of the Zhao Family knew that they had missed their chance for a surprise attack.

The group of unfamiliar cultivators gradually disappeared from view as they retreated. One of the Zhao Family cultivators behind them regretfully said, "What a pity, we actually let that Taiyi Sect kid escape."

"It's too early to say that now," Zhao Renlong said in a gloomy tone. The two elders of the Zhao Family worked together and quickly cleared the collapsed passage, leading several other Zhao Family cultivators to pursue Meng Zhang.

Meng Zhang led Fang Yong through numerous twists and turns in the tunnel, passing through several openings and changing several passages before finally stopping.

Meng Zhang looked at Fang Yong without saying a word, his face expressionless.

Feeling guilty, Fang Yong avoided Meng Zhang's gaze and turned his head elsewhere.

"All along the way, you left marks, right?" Meng Zhang's tone was very certain.

Fang Yong looked at Meng Zhang with a frightened look, clearly unaware that his secretive actions had been noticed.

Meng Zhang made a quick move, and Fang Yong, who couldn't react in time, was immediately restrained and unable to move.

When Fang Yong had been running behind Meng Zhang, he had been leaving true qi imprints all along the way to guide the other Zhao Family cultivators.

Meng Zhang, who had noticed all of this, felt the urge to kill, but he did not speak out or stop Fang Yong's actions.

It was only now, at this moment, that Meng Zhang finally made his move.

Regarding this foolish undercover agent, Meng Zhang couldn't be bothered to say much. Fang Yong had been discovered long ago, and his survival until now was only for this moment.

Up ahead in the passage, a large group of sand monsters, including some soldier-level ones, were rushing toward them. Behind them, the pursuing Zhao Family cultivators were likely close.

Meng Zhang had already used the Deception Breaking Eye to clearly see the terrain and the distribution of the sand monsters around him.

He first threw several talismans onto the ground behind him, then used the Earth Escape Spell to dive into the layer of earth and stone below.

Just as Meng Zhang's figure disappeared, the Zhao Family disciples tracking him arrived at the scene.

Seeing the approaching sand monsters, they tore Fang Yong, who was lying on the ground, into pieces. The two Zhao Family elders immediately took action and blocked the incoming sand monsters.

"Retreat quickly, don't linger in battle!" Zhao Renlong shouted in a loud voice.

Entangling with the sand monsters had no meaning, and the Zhao Family elders made the right decision.

As several Zhao Family disciples behind them were preparing to retreat, several loud noises suddenly erupted from the ground. A few fire pillars burst forth, causing them to fall into chaos immediately.

Delayed-trigger fire pillar talismans were simple tools commonly used by cultivators to set up traps.

This simple trap prevented the Zhao Family cultivators from escaping in time. The swarming sand monsters engulfed them, and the Zhao Family elders had no choice but to lead their people into a bitter battle.

Knowing that there were sand monsters in the nest with abilities similar to the Earth Escape Spell, Meng Zhang didn't dare to stay underground for too long. Leaving the previous tunnel, he entered a new passage and willingly gave up his Earth Escape state.

Meng Zhang was fortunate that right after leaving the Earth Escape state, a shadow came chasing after him underground.

Meng Zhang's Deception Breaking Eye immediately spotted the target, and he didn't hesitate to use the earthshaking technique on the ground.

The simplest and most effective way to interrupt the Earth Escape Spell was to use the earthshaking technique against the ground.

Unless the opponent had a high level of mastery in the Earth Escape Spell, it would be difficult to evade the interference of the earthshaking technique.

The ground undulated like waves, and the soil beneath started to vibrate, temporarily trapping the sand monster that had been traveling underground.

Meng Zhang didn't dare to stay here any longer and immediately used the Divine Movement Art to escape far away.

Meng Zhang darted through the passage, trying his best to avoid the sand monsters and ill-intentioned cultivators.

In the chaotic underground passage, there were not only battles between sand monsters and human cultivators but also internal conflicts among human cultivators. Some audacious individuals launched sneak attacks, killing others to seize treasures and settle their grievances. The number of cultivators taking advantage of the situation to strike had increased.

Meng Zhang cursed in his heart. Those five Foundation Building cultivators from Taiyi Sect were too focused on seizing the treasures from the sand monster nest, completely disregarding the Refining Qi cultivators under their command, resulting in such chaos.

Who knew how many human cultivators would be injured or killed after this melee.

In Meng Zhang's heart, he could only hope that his senior, Tian Zhen, would survive amidst the chaos.

Unintentionally, Meng Zhang turned into a relatively narrow passage.

"Senior Xiao," a familiar figure appeared in his sight, causing Meng Zhang to call out involuntarily.

It was Xiao Shenqiang, the Foundation Building elder from Twin Success Valley, sitting there cross-legged, right in front of him.

"So, it's little Meng," Xiao Shenqiang smiled kindly.

As the elder responsible for external affairs in Twin Success Valley, he remembered the main figures of their subordinate vassal forces. Moreover, Meng Zhang was the one who had first discovered the sand monster nest.

"Senior Xiao, why are you here alone? Where is Senior Dan?" Meng Zhang asked with apparent concern.

Xiao Shenqiang's face turned ashen, and a large hole appeared in his chest, with half of his body soaked in blood, making it clear that he was seriously injured.

"I can't hold on much longer, there are a few things I need to explain. Could you come closer and pass a few words to the Valley Master for me?" Xiao Shenqiang's tone was gentle but showed signs of fatigue.

He took out a storage bag tied to his waist with his right hand.

"Meng, if you help me with this favor, the contents of this bag will be your reward," Xiao Shenqiang said, and the storage bag contained all of his possessions, including a Lesser Foundation Building Pill.

Before he could finish speaking, Xiao Shenqiang started to cough violently, as if he was about to cough up his lungs

.

Blood kept spraying out of his mouth, and he could no longer hold the storage bag properly, dropping it to the ground.

The storage bag rolled a few times on the ground and happened to stop in front of Meng Zhang. All he had to do was step forward and bend down to easily pick up the storage bag.

Chapter 69: Spirit Tool

Meng Zhang not only did not step forward to pick up that storage bag, but instead, he faced Xiao Shenqiang and slowly backed away. Ever since he met Xiao Shenqiang, Meng Zhang had activated his Mind Reading Divine Ability, trying to read Xiao Shenqiang's thoughts. The result was not unexpected; he couldn't glean any useful information and didn't know if Xiao Shenqiang harbored ill intentions towards him. There was an insurmountable gap between the early Foundation Building and mid Refining Qi stages. The difference in their Cultivation Base made Meng Zhang's Mind Reading Divine Ability futile.

Realizing something was amiss, Meng Zhang relied not on his innate Divine Ability but on his life experiences and an unbiased mind. In the world of cultivation, he never hesitated to assume the worst of others.

He came across a severely injured senior cultivator during his journey—a dying expert who entrusted all his wealth to Meng Zhang, leaving behind only a daughter unaccounted for. Such a scenario was all too familiar. To his surprise, Meng Zhang encountered this stroke of luck.

In the deceitful world of cultivation, Meng Zhang knew he couldn't harbor any illusions. Instead of immediately picking up the storage bag that conveniently fell in front of him, he decided to leave the place. Under these circumstances, he shouldn't hold any wishful thinking. Even if he misjudged the situation, it was better to retreat and observe from a distance. There might not be any gains, and even if there were, there might not be a chance to touch them.

Watching Meng Zhang retreat, Xiao Shenqiang's amiable smile vanished, and his face turned grim. "I initially thought you'd come to me willingly, saving me some effort and sparing your body from damage," he said, pointing a finger at Meng Zhang. A green true qi shot from his hand, attempting to seize Meng Zhang's body.

While retreating, Meng Zhang had already prepared for the worst. Xiao Shenqiang's words revealed his intent—to take over Meng Zhang's body.

At the same time, Xiao Shenqiang had already taken out his ultimate trump card from the storage bag. A fist-sized, pure white sphere was thrown by Meng Zhang. The sphere and Xiao Shenqiang's true qi collided directly in the air. After a soft sound, the green true qi seemed to freeze in the air, and its chilling aura continued to extend towards Xiao Shenqiang's body.

"Frigid Yin Thunder, what connection do you have with Liu Family?" Xiao Shenqiang roared angrily as he was affected by the freezing poison.

Meng Zhang didn't answer. Since he had already taken action, there was no room for hesitation. Another Frigid Yin Thunder was thrown directly at Xiao Shenqiang.

Already heavily injured, Xiao Shenqiang's previous attack was interrupted by Meng Zhang's Frigid Yin Thunder. The icy poison spread along the true qi he released, rendering him immobile and unable to react.

Before Xiao Shenqiang's body, the Frigid Yin Thunder seemed to encounter an invisible barrier and exploded, causing a frosty, invisible wall to appear. The wall quickly cracked and shattered. The bone-piercing chill left Xiao Shenqiang almost devoid of sensation, and his protective magic tool was broken, leaving him defenseless.

Meng Zhang threw the last Frigid Yin Thunder.

It exploded on Xiao Shenqiang, turning his body into an ice sculpture. These three Frigid Yin Thunders, capable of harming Foundation Building stage cultivators, put an end to Xiao Shenqiang's life and saved Meng Zhang.

Meng Zhang felt a hidden sense of relief. He was glad he had been cautious and, back in the black market, had decisively purchased this stolen item. Generally, early Foundation Building cultivators couldn't possess the ability to take over others' bodies, and even mid Foundation Building cultivators had a low success rate. At least late Foundation Building cultivators had a certain chance of success.

It was indeed unfortunate for Xiao Shenqiang. As a senior elder of Twin Success Valley, he ended up in this situation because of a trace of greed. Recklessly venturing into a sand monster's lair, he was ambushed halfway by a General-grade sand monster with Earth Escaping Talent. He was not only separated from his companions but also severely injured and unable to move. Helpless and awaiting death, he finally encountered Meng Zhang.

Due to some past experiences, Xiao Shenqiang, despite being only at the early stage of Foundation Building, dared to make a last-ditch attempt at taking over Meng Zhang. Unexpectedly, Meng Zhang was so cautious and had methods capable of harming Foundation Building stage cultivators.

Knowing he had caused trouble for himself, Meng Zhang used his Deception Breaking Eye to carefully examine the surroundings, including underground and above. Fortunately, there were no onlookers, so he should be able to keep this secret. He didn't touch Xiao Shenqiang's body and instead picked up the storage bag from the ground.

As expected, Xiao Shenqiang's wealth was significant. It contained an expensive Ten-Direction Storage Bag. Meng Zhang didn't plan to take anything from it but intended to use the items inside to divert attention. The storage bag wasn't sealed with any restrictions and could easily be opened.

Inside were two Second Rank magic tools, more than ten bottles of pills, numerous talismans, and various odds and ends. An item caught Meng Zhang's attention—a transparent and weightless light gauze.

This was a spirit tool. How could that old man Xiao Shenqiang possess a spirit tool?

As the name implied, a spirit tool could only be controlled by one's soul, making it a special magic tool. When a Cultivator controlled a spirit tool with their soul, it could display various miraculous effects. Ordinary cultivators had no means of obtaining a spirit tool, nor did they have the need to use one, especially in a barren place like the Endless Sea of Sand where spirit tools were extremely rare.

The materials for forging spirit tools were exceptionally scarce, and only a few Ghost Cultivators possessed the means to create them. If Meng Zhang hadn't acquired much knowledge from the Trial Grounds, he probably wouldn't recognize this spirit tool.

Initially, he had no intention of keeping any items from the storage bag for caution's sake, but upon seeing this spirit tool, he felt tempted. Not out of greed but because this spirit tool could be of great use to him.

After careful consideration, Meng Zhang decided it was best to leave the area first. From Xiao Shenqiang's storage bag, he took out a Fireball Talisman and threw it towards Xiao Shenqiang's corpse. A loud explosion rang out, and Meng Zhang's figure disappeared into the distance.

Chapter 70: Alarming

The passage where Xiao Shenqiang was located collapsed amidst the sound of an explosion, reducing his frozen body to several pieces, which were then completely buried. Meng Zhang had prepared beforehand and positioned himself in a passage where cultivators would pass through or secretly approached other cultivators. He divided the items from Xiao Shenqiang's storage bag into many portions and scattered them on the ground. In the end, even the storage bag itself was discarded, with the spirit tool being the only item Meng Zhang chose to keep.

Meng Zhang thought it through repeatedly and was unwilling to give up this spirit tool. He carefully analyzed the situation and believed he could conceal the spirit tool from the people of Twin Success Valley. Next, Meng Zhang searched the underground for a long time and finally found a relatively quiet and safe place. There, he hid in a corner, set up several flame columns outside, and then sat cross-legged on the ground, risking a Divine Soul Departure from the body under such circumstances.

As Meng Zhang's Soul left his physical body, it didn't stray far but picked up the spirit tool and began to refine it. The spirit tool was as light as a feather, yet it took great effort for Meng Zhang's Soul to barely hold it in his hand. While Meng Zhang was busy refining the spirit tool, chaos and conflicts had erupted in the various passages outside due to the scattered belongings of Xiao Shenqiang.

The possessions of a Foundation Building stage cultivator were irresistibly attractive to numerous Refining Qi stage cultivators. Riches have a way of enticing people, and hardly anyone can resist the temptation of a sudden windfall. Some self-proclaimed lucky cultivators found the treasures, confirmed they were not traps, and secretly kept them. There was even a Second Rank magic tool that was nearly discovered simultaneously by several groups of cultivators, resulting in a fierce battle and leaving a pile of corpses behind, with the victorious one taking the magic tool and leaving.

During the chaos when Xiao Shenqiang was killed by Meng Zhang's Ice Poison Yin Thunder, the soul lamp in the ancestral hall of Twin Success Valley went out. The Endless Sea of Sand was already resource-scarce, and the area where Twin Success Valley was located was even more desolate. The sect couldn't afford to have a soul lamp for every disciple; they were only set up for important figures within the sect, such as elders and true disciples. The ancestral hall was guarded day and night, and when Xiao Shenqiang's soul lamp extinguished, it immediately alarmed the disciples on duty.

Soon, Twin Success Valley's Sect Master, Xiao Haisheng, and several elders were alerted. Even in a sect boasting ten Foundation Building stage experts, the Foundation Building elders were still essential pillars of the sect. With Xiao Shenqiang's death, they couldn't let it go uninvestigated and had to find out the truth. Xiao Haisheng, a late-stage Foundation Building expert, immediately led numerous disciples on a rarely used Second Rank flying vessel and departed from Twin Success Valley.

The journey to eradicate the sand monster nest that Shan Ying and Xiao Shenqiang were dispatched for had already been known due to sect orders, so it was not a secret. The Second Rank flying vessel could carry over a hundred cultivators and was much faster than a First Rank vessel.

In less than half a day, they arrived over the sand monster nest. Xiao Haisheng left a Foundation Building elder to guard the place, preventing anyone from leaving. He personally led a group of elite Refining Qi stage disciples into the nest.

As expected of a late-stage Foundation Building expert, Xiao Haisheng's actions were decisive and powerful. It didn't take long for him to quell the chaos within the sand monster nest. With his unparalleled cultivation base and years of accumulated prestige, Xiao Haisheng gathered all the cultivators inside the nest and essentially annihilated all the sand monsters, destroying the core of the nest completely.

With the nest's core destroyed, it meant the nest lost the ability to reproduce sand monsters. Even if a few wandering sand monsters remained outside, they were no longer a threat.

After dealing with the sand monster nest, Xiao Haisheng gathered all the cultivators inside the nest to the surface. Before Xiao Haisheng arrived at the nest, Meng Zhang had completely refined the spirit tool with his out-of-body soul.

The main material of the spirit tool was the rare outer skin of a ghostly beast found in the Netherworld. Though not a powerful creature, this ghostly beast possessed exceptional stealth abilities. Ghosts didn't reveal themselves voluntarily and were invisible to ordinary people. Cultivators could see ordinary ghosts by infusing their eyes with true qi, but those skilled in stealth were challenging for cultivators to detect unless they had special Divine Abilities for vision.

When the outer skin of the ghostly beast was refined into a magic tool by a Ghost Path cultivator, it not only easily deceived ordinary cultivators but also made it difficult for ghosts themselves to detect it.

Meng Zhang named this ethereal spirit tool the "Concealment Gauze Cloth."

Among the soul techniques Meng Zhang mastered was a Collect Thing Spell, which could hide this kind of special item that existed somewhere between tangible and intangible. After casting the Collect Thing Spell, the spirit tool Concealment Gauze Cloth would be concealed deep within his

soul. Unless someone forcibly tore open Meng Zhang's Soul, it would be difficult to discover the existence of the spirit tool.

After successfully concealing the spirit tool, not long after Meng Zhang's Divine Soul returned to his body, Twin Success Valley's Sect Master, Xiao Haisheng, entered the sand monster nest. Soon after, Meng Zhang, along with other cultivators, was driven to the surface.

The ground was packed with cultivators from various factions. Under Xiao Haisheng's forceful command, all the cultivators present assembled and stood according to their respective faction affiliations.