

Sect Master 81

Chapter 81: Mining

Deep EarthSpirit General arrived at this location, and without much explanation from Meng Zhang, he took action on his own initiative. He first looked around the surroundings, then his figure flickered, and he began to sprint wildly in all directions. After running a certain distance, Deep Earth would stop and look around, occasionally examining the ground as if his gaze could penetrate deep into the earth.

After running quite far, Deep Earth directly cast the Earth Escape Spell and dived into the underground. It was unclear what he was doing down there, but after a long time, he returned to the surface and came before Meng Zhang.

"Sect Master, the reserves of this scarlet copper mine are abundant. With Taiyi Sect's current manpower, even if everyone participated, it would take 20-30 years to completely extract the veins," Deep Earth reported.

"I didn't venture deep into the mine, just observed the periphery. Inside this scarlet copper vein, there should be associated ores," he continued, "The associated ores in the scarlet copper vein are usually Xuanton, Xuajin, and Flame Crystals. From the aura, the main associated ore here should be Xuajin, with a small amount of Flame Crystals."

After Deep Earth's exploration, he determined the approximate reserves and associated ores of the scarlet copper mine, which made Meng Zhang value it even more.

"Given the current situation of Taiyi Sect, it's not advisable to openly mine this scarlet copper mine," Meng Zhang said, expressing his concerns. Having been in Taiyi Sect for some time, Deep Earth had gained a good understanding of the sect's situation and its position among the neighboring forces. He was well aware of Meng Zhang's apprehensions.

"This scarlet copper vein is not buried deep, making it easy to mine," Deep Earth responded. "The situation on the Sweetwater Oasis side is on track, and it doesn't require my constant attention. I'll take a few extra storage bags each time and spend some time down there. After secretly mining the scarlet copper ore and selling it all, it should cover a significant portion of Taiyi Sect's expenses. As long as I'm careful with my comings and goings, the situation here shouldn't be exposed."

As the Guardian Spirit General of Taiyi Sect, Deep Earth was not only infinitely loyal to the sect but also actively considered the sect's interests. Since he had plenty of free time and volunteered for the task, Meng Zhang agreed to his proposal.

From then on, Deep EarthSpirit General was busily engaged in the mining work. Apart from establishing spirit fields at Sweetwater Oasis, most of his time was spent clandestinely mining the scarlet copper mine. Each time he went, in about half a month, he could fill seven or eight storage bags with scarlet copper ore.

Instead of selling the scarlet copper ore directly, Meng Zhang refined it with True Fire before selling the finished scarlet copper products. Unexpectedly, Tian Zhen's disciple, Tian Li, showed an interest in forging. As he cultivated the Fusion Gold Technique, he displayed considerable talent in this area.

Considering Taiyi Sect's current situation, it might not have the resources to cultivate a true tool refiner. However, it was feasible for internal disciples to learn the basics of forging and some entry-level techniques.

Before becoming a tool refiner, apprentices mainly focused on refining various materials. Meng Zhang purchased a First Rank refining furnace and a large quantity of Spirit Charcoal from Singing Sand City for Tian Li's use. After becoming proficient in refining scarlet copper ore, Tian Li was about to become a qualified apprentice tool refiner.

With the accumulation of scarlet copper within the sect, Meng Zhang would take it to the market for sale, exchanging it for Spirit Stones to support the sect's expenses. Additionally, the white hidden earth crystals brought back from the abandoned mine were being polished by some disciples and yielded many finished products. These white hidden earth crystals were even more popular than scarlet copper, and the Flying Swan Building was willing to purchase them at a high price without questioning their origin.

With these two sources of income, Taiyi Sect's financial situation improved significantly.

Time passed quickly, and Meng Zhang was now twenty years old, and it had been almost two years since he obtained the "Sun-Moon Wheel Turning Sutra." During these two years of arduous cultivation, Meng Zhang not only achieved a minor accomplishment in the "Sun-Moon Wheel Turning Sutra" but also broke through to the seventh level of Refining Qi. Except for Deep Earth Spirit General, Meng Zhang was the only Refining Qi stage cultivator in Taiyi Sect. With his talent, as long as he steadily cultivated, fusing the Solar True Qi and Lunar True Qi in his body to generate Sun and Moon True Qi, he would be able to enter the Foundation Building realm.

Apart from Meng Zhang, other members of Taiyi Sect had made significant progress in their Cultivation Base. With the improvement of the sect's financial situation in recent years, disciples could access relatively abundant cultivation resources.

Tian Zhen, who originally cultivated the Yellow Sand Technique, switched to the Fifth Earth True Secrets. Although the new technique was of a higher level and more powerful, it was also much more difficult to cultivate. Despite reaching the sixth level of Refining Qi, his cultivation speed had slowed down considerably. It seemed far from easy to break through to Foundation Building late stage, not to mention Foundation Building itself.

Daoist Clear Spirit's focus was entirely on Spirit Plants, completely neglecting his own Cultivation Base.

In the past two years, three new disciples had joined the sect, but their spiritual roots were very poor, limiting their future prospects. On the other hand, the progress of the original two disciples pleased Meng Zhang greatly.

Tian Zhen's disciple, Tian Li, reached the third level of Refining Qi and showed remarkable talent in forging. It seemed he would soon become a qualified apprentice tool refiner.

Wen Qiansun, who joined at the age of thirty-five, also reached the third level of Refining Qi, demonstrating the advantages of a middle-grade spiritual root.

By chance, Meng Zhang encountered Wen Qiansun reading a book on formations in the Hidden Scripture Pavilion. These books were compiled by Meng Zhang and contained precious knowledge he obtained from the Trial Ground.

After casually asking a few questions, Meng Zhang unexpectedly discovered that Wen Qiansun had some talent in formations. After thinking it over, Meng Zhang believed that even if Wen Qiansun couldn't reach Foundation Building due to age limitations in the future, if he became a Formation Master, it would still be very beneficial to Taiyi Sect.

Meng Zhang handed over a copy of "One Origin Formation Chart" to Wen Qiansun. Not only was it an excellent introductory material for formation cultivators, but it also contained a Refining Qi technique. After cultivating it, cultivators would have certain advantages in setting up and manipulating formations. While Taiyi Sect's disciples had relatively abundant cultivation resources, not everyone could obtain additional resources at will; each person's resources were limited. To acquire additional resources, disciples had to accept sect missions and earn merit.

Since the sect was small and had limited affairs, the main task assigned to disciples was taking care of spirit fields. After Meng Zhang brought back a batch of white hidden earth crystals, polishing them proved to be a profitable task until they were exhausted. Other simple tasks like guarding the mountain gate or patrolling the area between Taiyi Sect and Sweet

water Oasis had limited returns.

As Tian Li studied forging, Meng Zhang personally gave him a refining furnace. Now that Wen Qiansun was practicing formations, Meng Zhang provided him with a batch of Spirit Stones.

Chapter 82: Dharma Meeting

Meng Zhang also discovered an issue within the sect. Not only did the disciples lack guidance from higher-level cultivators in their practice, but even their studies of the hundred arts of cultivation relied solely on self-learning. Since Meng Zhang himself embarked on the path of cultivation, he primarily relied on self-study due to his exceptional aptitude and intelligence. However, this didn't mean he didn't need the guidance of seniors. Many crucial points could be grasped with just a casual remark from a senior, saving months of arduous cultivation.

Unfortunately, in the past Taiyi Sect, there were no high-level cultivators capable of guiding Meng Zhang. But after obtaining the Sect Master's records, which contained the experiences of past Sect Masters in their cultivation, Meng Zhang greatly benefited from it. While he had acquired a lot of knowledge from the Trial Ground, it was only a superficial understanding without delving deep into any particular art.

Regarding the hundred arts of cultivation, he had broad knowledge and exposure but hadn't thoroughly studied any of them. Immediately, he thought of Deep EarthSpirit General. Although his memories were severely lost, his experience and knowledge in cultivation remained intact. Apart from being proficient in Geomancer-related skills, Deep EarthSpirit General also had considerable attainments in other cultivation arts.

Thus, Meng Zhang and Deep EarthSpirit General decided to regularly hold dharma meetings within the sect, where they would answer questions and impart various cultivation experiences to the disciples. Additionally, they would occasionally provide personal guidance to certain disciples. Even Daoist Clear Spirit agreed to Meng Zhang's request and started offering regular classes on Spirit Plant Technique within the sect.

In less than two years, Sweetwater Oasis not only formed a First Rank middle-grade spirit vein but also cultivated a seven-and-a-half-acre spirit field. Normally, after the formation of a spirit vein, it would take 2-3 years to develop a new spirit field. However, Deep Earth Spirit General's abilities shortened this time frame significantly. Once the spirit field had incubated for a while, various Spirit Plants could be grown.

On this day, just after Meng Zhang finished instructing Wen Qiansun, Li Xuan approached him. Li Xuan was a cultivator from the Li family who had joined Taiyi Sect within the last two years. Although he shared the surname Li, he had no blood relation to the main Li family. The Li surname was quite common, even within Sweetwater Oasis, where many bore the name Li.

Li Xuan was the son-in-law of the Li family and not a core member. His cultivation aptitude was ordinary, and his Cultivation Base had only reached the fifth level of Refining Qi at the age of fifty. Before joining Taiyi Sect, he had managed a shop in Singing Sand City. The Li family, along with many other sects and forces, suffered heavy losses during the sand monster incident two years ago. The attack resulted in the destruction of the Li family's Second Rank spirit vein and ultimately led to the extinction of their sect.

Li Xuan's strong sense of duty and loyalty to his family made him abandon everything in his shop and rush back to the Ancestral Ground of the Li family when he heard about the attack. After the sand monsters overran the Ancestral Ground, many Li family members, both cultivators and ordinary people, managed to survive by blending in with others. Li Xuan couldn't bear to see these familiar faces reduced to refugees or sold as servants, so he took them under his wing.

However, the Ancestral Ground's Second Rank spirit vein had been destroyed, and the oasis had become unsuitable for the survival of ordinary people. Unable to support the hundreds of survivors, Li Xuan sought help from Taiyi Sect. After explaining his situation to Sect Master Meng Zhang, they agreed to shelter the refugees in Sweetwater Oasis.

With Li Xuan's broad network and knowledge of various factions and forces, Meng Zhang soon realized the value of this new guest. Li Xuan had been well-connected during his time in Singing Sand City, interacting with various sects and loose cultivators. His insight and understanding of the internal affairs of neighboring cultivation powers were extensive.

Though Li Xuan lacked the potential for Foundation Building and wasn't focused on cultivation, his knowledge and experience in various matters made him an invaluable strategist. Meng Zhang saw him as a military advisor and treated him with respect.

Li Xuan presented Meng Zhang with an invitation from Forest Mountain School's Sect Master Xu Chengxian, inviting Taiyi Sect to attend a Foundation Building dharma meeting to celebrate Lin Shenpo's successful Foundation Building three months ago. Lin Shenpo had become a Foundation Building cultivator, and the dharma meeting aimed to invite guests from various nearby forces.

As one of the sects in the area, Taiyi Sect naturally received an invitation to the event.

Chapter 83: Forest Spring Watch

The last time Meng Zhang was summoned by Twin Success Valley, he had a chance encounter with Forest Mountain School's Sect Master Xu Chengxian. Though it was their first meeting, they had a pleasant conversation. Later, when Meng Zhang discovered the nest of sand monsters, Forest

Mountain School was the first to come to their aid. Now, Forest Mountain School has specially sent an invitation, and Meng Zhang naturally wants to go in person. He is also very interested in the dharma meeting held by the Foundation Building stage cultivators. As a guest, he must prepare a generous gift.

Meng Zhang entrusted this matter to Li Xuan. With Li Xuan's rich experience, he could definitely prepare a gift suitable for Meng Zhang's identity. After giving the task to Li Xuan, Meng Zhang continued his cultivation. There was still a month before the dharma meeting, so there was no need to rush.

In his previous experiences, Meng Zhang had used Earth Escape Spells several times. In the desert, the Earth Escape Spell was a very practical spell. Now that his Cultivation Base had reached the Refining Qi stage, he was qualified to delve into escape techniques. Instead of immediately practicing the secret methods recorded in the "Sun-Moon Wheel Turning Sutra," Meng Zhang chose to first cultivate the Earth Escape Spell.

Although he did not possess an affinity for the Earth element nor had he practiced any Earth attribute techniques, Meng Zhang had never thought about reaching the highest realm in the Earth Escape Spell. As long as the spell was effective enough, it sufficed.

Li Xuan took on the task of preparing the gift and put in a lot of effort. He purchased several items, among which the most precious were a set of spiritual shell chess pieces from Forest Spring Watch. These pieces were crafted from the shells of spiritual shells unique to Forest Spring Watch and were exquisitely polished. They felt smooth and emitted a faint spiritual aura, as if moistened by water vapor.

Being neighbors to Twin Success Valley, Forest Spring Watch could stand up to their dominance, indicating that they had their own reserves and strength. In the location of their mountain gate, besides the dense forest and tall mountains, a clear spring flowed down, forming a stream in the mountains.

For cultivators in the Cultivation World, when refining tools, they often required a crucial step of quenching. The method and materials used for quenching were a secret of each tool refiner. The water from the spring at the top of Forest Spring Watch's mountain was a unique water used for quenching.

Large sects like Earthfire Sect had long been ordering the clear spring water from Forest Spring Watch. In the stream formed by the clear spring, a special kind of spirit fish called Grass Spring Spirit Fish lived. The flesh of the fish was delicious, and its meat contained gentle spiritual energy, which had a nourishing effect on the meridians. When cooked carefully by the skilled chefs of Forest Spring Watch, the fish not only had a unique flavor but also maximized its nourishing effects.

These Grass Spring Spirit Fish could only survive in the spring water of Forest Spring Watch and were challenging to raise elsewhere.

At the source of the clear spring at Forest Spring Watch, there were also many special spiritual shells. The pearls produced by these spiritual shells had various uses. Especially the pearls formed by spiritual shells aged over a hundred years had wonderful effects in assisting Foundation Building.

Though these pearls' effects were far from comparable to Foundation Building Pills or Twin Success Valley's Lesser Foundation Building Pills, any spiritual item that could assist in Foundation Building would cause a commotion in the Cultivation World.

The Lingquan Sect had brought considerable income to Forest Spring Watch through Singing Sand City's unique taverns and restaurants. With a stable financial source, Forest Spring Watch was able to maintain several Foundation Building stage cultivators in each generation. Although their number was still less than half of Twin Success Valley's, Forest Spring Watch possessed the ability to make Twin Success Valley wary.

Li Xuan, who was well-informed, had learned that the Elder Lin Shenpo of Forest Mountain School was deeply fascinated by the Dao of chess, so he meticulously chose this gift.

After Li Xuan prepared the gift, they waited for half a month until the time for Forest Mountain School's dharma meeting drew near. Meng Zhang brought Li Xuan and headed directly to Forest Mountain School.

Forest Mountain School was located more than six hundred miles north of Taiyi Sect. On normal occasions, Meng Zhang had rarely gone in this direction.

Meng Zhang and Li Xuan rode their Wind Chasing Horses and set off early in the morning. The journey was safe and uneventful.

In the afternoon, they finally arrived near Forest Mountain School. As they got closer to the school, the terrain began to change. They first encountered various desolate and rugged terrains, followed by continuous small hills covered in green. Occasional glimpses of green could be seen among the hills.

The closer they got to Forest Mountain School, the more pronounced the greenery became, and the vegetation became denser. After passing through a hilly area, a large green mountain came into view.

In the Endless Sea of Sand, encountering such a green mountain was a rare sight. Just gazing at it made one feel refreshed and at ease. This mountain was Forest Mountain School's Lin Mountain.

Seeing the forest covering the mountains, it was easy to understand the origin of its name.

At the foot of Lin Mountain were numerous oases of different sizes, where countless mortals lived. These mortals formed the important foundation of Forest Mountain School, and the quantity of mortals alone could roughly indicate the potential of Forest Mountain School.

On top of Lin Mountain flowed a Second Rank middle-grade spirit vein, while the oases below were home to several First Rank spirit veins. These First Rank spirit veins were guarded by Forest Mountain School's disciples and served as important outer bases for the school.

As soon as Meng Zhang and Li Xuan entered the outer area of Forest Mountain School and hadn't yet reached the foot of Lin Mountain, they encountered patrolling disciples. These disciples were responsible for welcoming guests. After inquiring about Meng Zhang and Li Xuan's identities, the disciples warmly led them forward and sent a message back using a transmission talisman.

Throughout the journey, they passed by several oases in the outer area of Forest Mountain School. The thriving lives of the mortals in the oases impressed Meng Zhang.

The disciples they encountered along the way were disciplined and well-trained. Even though their Cultivation Bases varied, they didn't appear disordered. As a sect with over three hundred years of heritage, Forest Mountain School's ability to govern and educate their disciples had its own unique qualities.

As a relatively wealthy vassal sect under Twin Success Valley, Forest Mountain School's disciples didn't display extravagance or decadence. Meng Zhang carefully observed the disciplined disciples and, from their magic tools, could tell that Forest Mountain School was financially robust.

Chapter 84: Human Relations

The fearsome aspect of a wealthy miser lies not in their riches, but rather when those riches can be transformed into combat strength, it becomes intriguing.

Upon reaching the foot of Linshan, dedicated disciples who welcome guests greeted Meng Zhang and his companion warmly. Led by the disciple, they ascended the mountain, passing through the majestic gates of Forest Mountain School, until they reached the halfway point, where Sect Master Xu Chengxian of Forest Mountain School awaited them.

"Sect Master Meng, welcome, welcome! Your visit to Linshan truly brings luster to our sect," said Sect Master Xu.

"Sect Master Xu, you're too kind. Since our last parting, I have not forgotten your magnificence. Today, seeing you again, Sect Master Xu surpasses his former self," replied Meng Zhang.

Compared to the formidable wealth of Forest Mountain School, Taiyi Sect was merely a small faction. Xu Chengxian surpassed Meng Zhang in both cultivation level and seniority. The fact that Xu Chengxian personally received Meng Zhang, a sect master of a small sect, showed his exceptional character.

After exchanging pleasantries for a brief moment, Xu Chengxian reluctantly concluded the conversation and summoned a trusted disciple to lead them to the guest residence. Forest Mountain School, with its vast wealth, had dedicated buildings for hosting guests, forming an elegant architectural complex.

Meng Zhang and his companion were arranged in a separate small courtyard. Between each courtyard were small groves, streams, and bridges. After resting in the courtyard for a while, Li Xuan led Meng Zhang out.

This Foundation Building dharma meeting held by Forest Mountain School invited almost all the surrounding cultivation forces, and the leaders of various major forces were present. It was a rare opportunity for exchange, a chance to get to know influential figures and establish connections with other forces.

Meng Zhang was not fond of such social activities. He was neither a hermit solely focused on cultivation nor a gregarious socializer. Nevertheless, as the Sect Master of Taiyi Sect, dealing with others was inevitable. At the very least, he couldn't afford to make unnecessary enemies.

Overly arrogant people were likely to be isolated, while those who refused to socialize could be ostracized. As a sect master, expanding one's social circle and making friends was important. Even

if they couldn't find allies, having more friends would help secure a more favorable external environment for Taiyi Sect.

Meng Zhang realized that he was no longer entirely in control of his life. Since becoming the Sect Master of Taiyi Sect, he was compelled to do many things he disliked. Li Xuan's advice made sense, so Meng Zhang humbly accepted it.

As they left the small courtyard, they entered a large garden with pavilions, terraces, small bridges, and flowing streams. Many groups of people were already present, engaging in social interactions during this rare gathering.

Li Xuan, having been a member of the Li family and the manager of a shop in Singing Sand City, had a wide circle of acquaintances. Now that he served a new master, he made full use of his advantages.

"Brother Ruan, it's been a while! This is Sect Master Meng of Taiyi Sect. He's my new employer," said Li Xuan, introducing Meng Zhang to a person from Golden Blade Sect.

"Sect Master, this Brother Ruan is a remarkable figure from Golden Blade Sect."

...

"Sect Master, this is Brother Chen, the foreign affairs elder of Flying Eagle Sect. Allow me to introduce you both."

...

"Sect Master, this is Brother Gu. Don't let his loose cultivator status fool you; he surpasses many cultivators from prominent families."

...

Li Xuan led Meng Zhang through the garden, engaging in conversations with all the relevant cultivators, making introductions on Meng Zhang's behalf.

After making the rounds, Meng Zhang's smile felt almost numb. Although he wasn't physically tired, he felt mentally exhausted and slightly irritated.

In the hierarchy of Twin Success Valley's affiliated forces, Forest Mountain School and the now-destroyed Li family belonged to the first tier, with many Foundation Building stage and Refining Qi stage cultivators. They were considered powerful and were given some respect by Twin Success Valley. The second tier included forces like Taiyi Sect's arch-nemesis, Zhao Family. These forces had several Refining Qi stage cultivators and, with some luck, could produce a Foundation Building stage cultivator. In the presence of a Foundation Building stage cultivator, they could even challenge the first-tier forces. However, without a Foundation Building stage cultivator, their power would decline drastically, and they might face various crises. The third tier consisted of forces that had never produced a Foundation Building stage cultivator, relying solely on Refining Qi stage cultivators to maintain their status.

Over a decade ago, Taiyi Sect belonged to the third tier. However, after the chaos caused by the sand monster incident more than ten years ago, Taiyi Sect lost all its Refining Qi stage elders and fell to the bottom of Twin Success Valley's affiliated forces. Now that Meng Zhang had reached the Refining Qi stage, Taiyi Sect was starting to recover its strength and barely qualified as a third-tier

force. Despite this, Taiyi Sect was still considered quite weak among the various forces gathered in the garden.

When encountering individuals from larger forces, some were polite and exchanged a few words, while others simply ignored them. Li Xuan smiled and greeted people everywhere, but they didn't form any significant connections.

In a quiet corner of the garden, Meng Zhang's face darkened. "Sect Master, there's no need for you to introduce them. I know them all," he said to Li Xuan.

He not only recognized them but was also quite familiar with them. These people were all Zhao Family's descendants, and the middle-aged man leading them was Zhao Dong, the one Meng Zhang had fought with before.

Seeing Zhao Dong, Meng Zhang noticed that Zhao Dong had reached the same cultivation level as him, the Refining Qi stage, with a cultivation base at the seventh level. However, there was a hint of arrogance in Zhao Dong's eyes, seemingly provoking Meng Zhang.

When Meng Zhang's cultivation base was inferior to Zhao Dong's, he could still suppress him with the Blood Refining Martyr Art. Now that their cultivation bases were equal, Meng Zhang didn't even bother to pay him any mind.

Chapter 85: Li Vestiges

If it weren't for being in the wrong place, Meng Zhang would have wanted to give Zhao Dong a good lesson to make him understand how to be a proper person. Ignoring Zhao Dong's provocative gaze, Meng Zhang and Li Xuan left the area and strolled through the garden.

An old man was walking around in the crowd, seemingly speaking to people around him, but they paid him no attention, even intentionally avoiding him. Just as the old man was rejected by someone, he was about to approach the next target when the members of the Zhao Family took the initiative to surround him.

"Old Brother Li, why are you so stubborn? The conditions offered by Zhao Family are not bad, but you don't know how to appreciate them. Now, you are just hitting walls everywhere, ending up in a sorry state," Zhao Dong mockingly taunted the old man.

"Old Brother Li, you really don't know how to show gratitude, making it hard for me as a brother," Li Xuan looked a bit embarrassed when he saw the appearance of the old man.

Meng Zhang seemed interested in this scene, and Li Xuan dutifully introduced him. It turned out that the old man was Li Shengqi, a remnant of the Li family that was destroyed in the past.

After the Li family was annihilated by sand monsters, there were still many of their members scattered outside who luckily escaped the disaster. If a capable figure could emerge to organize them, perhaps the Li family could have survived and retained their legacy. However, reality was not so kind. Selfish individuals took off with their belongings, and then the remaining members began to blame each other, leading to internal strife.

The remnants of the Li family realized the danger only too late and had to elect Li Shengqi as their leader, entrusting him to oversee their fate. Li Shengqi, who was once a steward of the Li family,

had a decent Cultivation Base and skills. However, it was all too late, and the fate of the Li family was already sealed.

The Zhao Family was the force that celebrated the most after the Li family's extermination. Over a decade ago, after the Zhao Family lost its only Foundation Building stage cultivator, they suffered losses due to the oppression from the Li family. They lost their commercial routes, shops in Singing Sand City, and more. Now that the Li family had fallen on hard times, the Zhao Family naturally wanted to capitalize on it and reclaim everything they had lost.

"Brother Zhao, our Li family is already in such dire straits, must the Zhao Family go all out to exterminate us? I implore you, please spare us," Li Shengqi pleaded with a bitter face.

Zhao Dong was not moved at all, and he even intensified the pressure on Li Shengqi. He knew that Li Shengqi still had two shops in Singing Sand City and some of the Li family's wealth. The Zhao Family wouldn't let go until they thoroughly squeezed him dry.

Meng Zhang disapproved of the Zhao Family's actions. "Twin Success Valley should step in and stop Zhao Family from being so excessive."

"They won't interfere. The internal affairs of the Li family's cultivators are not within Twin Success Valley's scope," someone replied.

"For many years, the Li family and the Zhao Family have played out this drama before. They were victorious in the past and now are suffering in misery."

"Sect Master, don't think that Zhao Family is so triumphant today. Who knows, someday they might end up like the Li family."

As a former member of the Li family, Li Xuan had a deep emotional connection with them. Hearing these words, he couldn't help but feel indignant and became somewhat impassioned.

"Keep your voice down; this is not the place to discuss such matters," Meng Zhang reminded him quietly.

Li Xuan quickly regained his composure, realizing he shouldn't criticize Twin Success Valley openly.

"Master, don't be fooled by Li Shengqi's pitiful act. I've had dealings with him before, and he's a cunning old fox."

"He risked his life to come to Forest Mountain School; he must have some ulterior motive."

"Indeed, probably seeking protection to counter Zhao Family's power."

Meng Zhang smiled, thinking he had grasped Li Shengqi's intentions. However, he soon realized it might not be that simple. Li Shengqi must have had a much larger plan if he was willing to risk his life leaving Singing Sand City.

Meng Zhang took a few steps forward, seemingly casual, passing by Zhao Dong's group with a curious glance. His behavior didn't seem out of place, as the confrontation between Zhao Dong and Li Shengqi had already attracted attention, and some curious onlookers were gathering around.

Using his Divine Ability, Mind Reading, Meng Zhang focused on Li Shengqi. However, to his surprise, he couldn't read any thoughts from the man, despite his Cultivation Base being lower. Meng Zhang was taken aback by this development.

Chapter 86: Read the Heart

Meng Zhang certainly didn't believe that Mind Reading was unsolvable. There were many secret techniques in the world that could conceal one's inner thoughts and prevent them from being read by Divine Abilities capable of reading minds.

He was just taken aback that even the cultivators from the Li family possessed such methods. After all, these kinds of secret techniques were not something easily accessible to everyone in the Cultivation World.

Meng Zhang couldn't help but stop in his tracks, activating his Deception Breaking Eye to carefully observe Li Shengqi.

"I see," after a moment, Meng Zhang discovered the reason behind it.

There were faint hints of purplish-blue on Li Shengqi's face, barely noticeable unless one had sharp eyes. Above his head, a purplish-blue aura was faintly visible and spreading downwards.

"He's really asking for trouble," Meng Zhang shook his head.

Li Shengqi hadn't mastered any secret technique; he had unknowingly taken a Heart-Locking Pill. After consuming this pill, all of his thoughts were deeply hidden. Unless he voluntarily revealed them, not only would mind-reading spells be ineffective against him, but even a cultivator at the Foundation Building stage wouldn't be able to forcibly extract his secrets.

Of course, the Heart-Locking Pill's extraordinary effectiveness came with significant side effects. The cultivator who took it would suffer severe damage to their vitality, hindering future progress in their Cultivation Base. If they allowed the pill's effects to spread unchecked within their body, they might even become an imbecile.

From Meng Zhang's observations, Li Shengqi had taken the Heart-Locking Pill some time ago. Now, even if he wanted to expel its effects, it was already too late.

"What kind of secret does Li Shengqi want to protect that led him to take the Heart-Locking Pill?" Meng Zhang was deeply curious.

Since he couldn't obtain the desired results from Li Shengqi, Meng Zhang turned his attention to reading Zhao Dong's thoughts. Like Meng Zhang, Zhao Dong had a Cultivation Base at the seventh level of Refining Qi. However, Meng Zhang couldn't access his deeply buried thoughts and could only read some surface-level ideas.

Zhao Dong had surrounded Li Shengqi and was threatening him, but it was all just an act. Their original goal was not to make Li Shengqi yield, nor was it about taking over Li Family's shops and wealth in Singing Sand City.

Reading up to this point, Meng Zhang couldn't glean more information. He glanced at the Zhao Family disciples that Zhao Dong had brought along; they were all at the middle stage of Refining Qi. After employing Mind Reading, Meng Zhang successfully obtained some of their thoughts. However, as these disciples were of lower status, they didn't have access to the family's high-level secrets, so the information was limited.

Nevertheless, it wasn't entirely fruitless; he managed to learn about some internal struggles and personnel relations within the Zhao Family. It deepened Meng Zhang's understanding of the Zhao Family, and there might be some useful aspects he could exploit.

After continuously reading the thoughts of so many people, Meng Zhang felt exhausted, mainly on a mental level. Delving into their minds and extracting their thoughts was akin to jumping into a cesspool naked. He had to be cautious not to be contaminated by the filth while searching for useful things in the mess.

Spending an extended period inside someone else's mind would undoubtedly contaminate his own consciousness and even cloud his Dao heart. Mind Reading, as a divine ability, seemed useful, but it couldn't be used recklessly. There was a delicate balance in how to use it, and Meng Zhang needed to master that.

Probably because they were attracting too much attention, Zhao Dong and his group looked around and decided to let Li Shengqi go. This was the territory of Forest Mountain School, and all guests were invited to attend the Foundation Building Dharma Meeting. Zhao Family's people didn't dare to cause trouble here, as it could provoke the Foundation Building cultivators of the school.

After breaking free from Zhao Family's grasp, Li Shengqi hurriedly fled the scene, as if he were escaping for his life, leaving the garden behind without any further commotion. As the crowd lost interest in the situation, their attention shifted elsewhere.

In the following days, Meng Zhang and Li Xuan stayed at the Forest Mountain School's premises for two more days. During this time, new guests arrived one after another.

Being one of the major forces affiliated with Twin Success Valley, Forest Mountain School's strength and influence had risen significantly with the appearance of a second Foundation Building stage cultivator in the sect.

Many subordinate forces under Twin Success Valley came to attend the event, giving Forest Mountain School ample face.

During those two days, Meng Zhang spent most of his time meditating indoors. Occasionally, he went outside for a walk, and the friendly disciples of Forest Mountain School warmly guided him around Linshan, allowing him to enjoy the scenery.

Li Xuan took this opportunity to socialize and gather information.

On the third day, it was the official day for the Foundation Building Dharma Meeting.

Early in the morning, the guests from various sects and families, who had already prepared for this event, were led by Forest Mountain School's disciples to the venue for the dharma meeting.

The location was a flat piece of land with a spacious square at its center, where a high platform was erected. This was where the higher-ranked cultivators of Forest Mountain School held the dharma meeting to impart teachings to the sect's disciples.

The surrounding area was filled with many cushions, with each section assigned to different forces.

As there were only Meng Zhang and Li Xuan from Taiyi Sect, their assigned area was not large. Quite coincidentally, it was not far from where Zhao Family cultivators were seated.

Looking at the Zhao Family cultivators taking their seats, a middle-aged man who stood out caught Li Xuan's attention. He whispered to Meng Zhang, introducing him.

"The man leading them is Zhao Jiudou, the current head of the Zhao Family. I heard he's just in his forties and already has a Refining Qi completion Cultivation Base. If he hadn't failed to acquire a Foundation Building Pill, he might have already reached the Foundation Building stage."

Meng Zhang had some knowledge about their neighbor, the Zhao Family.

Zhao Jiudou was known as a genius cultivator from the Zhao Family since he was young. In his thirties, he had already reached the Refining Qi late stage, entering the high-level ranks of the Zhao Family.

He was the youngest elder of the Zhao Family and also the most powerful cultivator among them.

Back when Zhao Yanbei, the former head of the Zhao Family, was still around, he had been wary of Zhao Jiudou and had intentionally suppressed him.

Over two years ago, Twin Success Valley blamed Zhao Family for the death of Foundation Building stage elder Xiao Shenqiang and sent Zhao Yanbei and other participating cultivators, including Zhao Jiudou, to Singing Sand Mountain to perform hard labor.

In Zhao Yanbei's absence, Zhao Jiudou rose to prominence. He quickly seized power within the Zhao Family and became the chief elder, responsible for managing all the family affairs.

Chapter 87: Striking

After Zhao Jiudou took charge of the Zhao Family, he made significant moves. The ancestral ground of the long-standing enemy, the Li Family, was breached by sand monsters, resulting in the destruction of the Li Family. Seizing the opportunity, the Zhao Family emerged and coerced the remaining cultivators of the Li Family, extracting substantial benefits from them. All the possessions taken by the Li Family from the Zhao Family in the past were recovered one by one.

The disappearance of those remaining Li Family cultivators was attributed to Zhao Jiudou's clandestine actions. His ruthlessness made many people wary. Presently, Zhao Jiudou's reputation within the Zhao Family had reached its peak, even surpassing the family head, Zhao Yanbei. Even if Zhao Yanbei returned to the Zhao Family at this time, it was uncertain whether he could do anything to Zhao Jiudou. Apart from forces with Foundation Building cultivators, the surrounding cultivator factions were reluctant to provoke him easily.

As a long-standing enemy of the Zhao Family, the Taiyi Sect, if not for Zhao Family's current focus on extracting benefits from the Li Family, Zhao Jiudou's momentum would have already clashed with the Taiyi Sect.

Meng Zhang glanced at Zhao Jiudou, feeling cautious but not overly concerned. Zhao Yanbei, the family head of the Zhao Family, and many Refining Qi stage Zhao Family cultivators were still serving hard labor in the Singing Sand Mountain. Regardless of Zhao Jiudou's completion of Refining Qi stage, the Taiyi Sect also had a Spirit General, Deep Earth, at the Refining Qi stage. Deep Earth's power at its peak was comparable to that of a Gold Core stage cultivator. Even if its current strength hadn't fully recovered, it was not something Zhao Jiudou could handle. Deep Earth,

being the most crucial trump card, was something Meng Zhang did not want to use easily, which allowed the Zhao Family cultivators to be arrogant.

After Meng Zhang and the others sat on the cushions for a while, guests from various factions began to enter the square and take their seats.

It was only when the beautiful celestial music started playing that the noisy square began to quiet down. Several figures flew over from not far away, accompanied by the melodious music, and slowly landed on the high platform.

As these figures appeared, the once boisterous square became so silent that one could hear a pin drop. Everyone's respectful gazes were directed towards the high platform, whether genuine or pretentious, showing their respect and fear for the Foundation Building cultivators.

Among the Foundation Building cultivators standing in the middle was an old man with white hair. "I am Xu Yishan from the Forest Mountain School. I believe there is no need for introductions, as all of you should already know me."

"Next to me are Brother Ruan from Golden Blade Sect, Daoist Guang Hong from Forest Spring Watch, and Aunt Jin from Qiaoshou Sect. They are all renowned figures, and I don't need to introduce them further."

Speaking until here, Xu Yishan politely arched his hand towards the crowd below and then waved to the person beside him. "This time, I want to introduce to you our disciple, Lin Shenpo."

"Thanks to the blessings of our ancestors, Lin Shenpo has successfully reached the Foundation Building stage and has become one of us."

"This dharma meeting is not only to celebrate Lin Shenpo's success in Foundation Building but also to share some cultivation experiences with everyone."

As Xu Yishan spoke, a middle-aged man with a cold gaze and expression walked forward and stood in front of him. He respectfully saluted the crowd below before stepping back behind Xu Yishan. Throughout the whole process, there was no expression on his face, even on such a joyous occasion as his own Foundation Building dharma meeting.

"Lin Shenpo has always been like this. Everyone should not take offense. He usually focuses on cultivating and seldom interacts with outsiders," Xu Yishan explained casually.

"Enough with the chitchat; let's not waste any more time. Since you all came to participate in this dharma meeting, I believe you must be looking forward to Lin Shenpo's teachings," Xu Yishan continued. As Xu Yishan was speaking, two figures flew over from a distance. "Brother Xu, we were delayed on the way, and we're sorry for arriving late," their voices rang out before the two figures arrived above the scene.

Upon seeing the two people, the faces of several Foundation Building cultivators on the high platform changed slightly. Even Lin Shenpo, who usually maintained his composure, raised an eyebrow.

"We are truly sorry for being late, Brother Xu. Today is a joyous day for your Forest Mountain School, and yet, we come as uninvited guests," one of them said.

"The two of you are guests that we at Forest Mountain School are honored to have. There's no need for other pleasantries," Xu Yishan said warmly.

"That's right, with two experts from Twin Success Valley present, Forest Mountain School shines even brighter," added another Foundation Building cultivator on the high platform.

"Brother Xu, we rarely have the opportunity to visit, so we must take advantage of today and spend some quality time together," they said.

The two Foundation Building cultivators were known to most people present, Dan Yihu, the new foreign affairs elder of Twin Success Valley, and Shan Ying, the enforcement elder of Twin Success Valley.

"Daoist Guang Hong from Forest Spring Watch is also here; what a rare guest," Dan Yihu said with a playful smile as he looked towards Guang Hong Daoist.

"Lin Shenpo is related to my family's Lin Clan and is considered our kinsman. Naturally, I have to join the celebration of his Foundation Building dharma meeting," Guang Hong Daoist calmly replied, not backing down.

"Ah, I almost forgot, Daoist Guang Hong is also a descendant of the Lin Clan."

"As the saying goes, spilled water cannot be retrieved. Since Lin Shenpo's ancestors have already left the Lin Clan, your ties to the Lin Clan are not significant, so there's no need to linger on it," Dan Yihu said, and Guang Hong Daoist lowered his gaze, choosing not to argue.

"But, considering the old ties, it's also understandable for Daoist Guang Hong to attend," Dan Yihu added.

"Coming here as guests, Twin Success Valley's presence is an honor for Forest Mountain School. We dare not be negligent," Xu Yishan replied with a smile.

The people sitting on the square maintained silence while several Foundation Building cultivators conversed. Some perceptive individuals sensed the underlying tension in the conversation, which aligned with the information Li Xuan had shared with Meng Zhang earlier. Consequently, Meng Zhang had a rough idea of the situation.

Chapter 88: Viewpoints

Forest Spring Watch is a cultivation force on the same level as Twin Success Valley, both being vassals of the Flying Swan Sect.

However, Forest Spring Watch's territory is much smaller than Twin Success Valley's, and its affiliated forces are not as numerous, mostly being mediocre. Within Forest Spring Watch, there are several outstanding families, and these families have a deep integration with Forest Spring Watch, making them completely inseparable.

The Lin family is one such family. Most of the remarkable cultivators in the family are disciples of Forest Spring Watch. In each generation of Foundation Building cultivators in Forest Spring Watch, one can generally see members of the Lin family.

Lin Shenpo's grandfather was a cultivator from the Lin family in Forest Spring Watch. Due to a falling-out with his family, he left and joined Forest Mountain School. Originally, he was just an

ordinary and unremarkable cultivator in the Lin family. However, after joining Forest Mountain School, he began to rise. Not only did he climb up to a high position within Forest Mountain School, but he also left behind a large number of descendants.

In Lin Shenpo's generation, he successfully achieved Foundation Building, making him one of the true masters of Forest Mountain School.

As an affiliated force of Twin Success Valley, Forest Mountain School's close relationship with Forest Spring Watch is something that Twin Success Valley does not want to see. Now that Forest Mountain School has two Foundation Building cultivators, it is considered unique among the vassals of Twin Success Valley.

The higher-ups of Twin Success Valley are undoubtedly somewhat worried that Forest Mountain School, feeling an increase in power and having ties with Forest Spring Watch, may develop some inappropriate thoughts.

Of course, Forest Mountain School has not done anything yet, and even if Twin Success Valley is domineering, they cannot act rashly based solely on their concerns about the situation.

Therefore, this led to the appearance of Dan Yihu and Shan Ying.

Having existed for over three hundred years, Forest Mountain School only has two Foundation Building cultivators. On the other hand, Twin Success Valley, which boasts of having ten Foundation Building cultivators, can easily dispatch two Foundation Building cultivators.

Even Forest Spring Watch doesn't possess such strength.

All of these thoughts were just Meng Zhang's speculations, but he believed they were close to the truth.

On the elevated platform, with the arrival of Dan Yihu and Shan Ying, the Foundation Building cultivators of Golden Blade Sect and Qiaoshou Sect seemed visibly constrained.

After some superficial pleasantries, they slowly got back to the main topic.

The two Foundation Building cultivators from Twin Success Valley came to Forest Mountain School to engage them in a friendly competition and not to embarrass them.

"We have chatted here for quite some time, and the younger ones below might have grown impatient," Dan Yihu said with a big laugh. "Perhaps some daring souls are already cursing us old folks in their hearts."

"Let's have Lin Shenpo start the lecture now," he continued.

After speaking, Dan Yihu and Shan Ying took their seats on either side of the platform on casual cushions.

With Dan Yihu opening the way, the other Foundation Building cultivators also sat on the cushions, leaving Lin Shenpo standing alone in the middle of the platform.

Lin Shenpo didn't waste any time and sat cross-legged before directly starting the lecture.

For the Refining Qi cultivators below, having a Foundation Building cultivator giving a public lecture was a rare opportunity. Many of them might never encounter such an opportunity in their entire lives.

Naturally, Lin Shenpo's lecture didn't focus on his own insights and experiences of Foundation Building, as that knowledge was not something easily shared. Even among the Forest Mountain School disciples, only a few core members would be qualified to learn such things.

But to speak vaguely, using a lot of obscure and impractical information, would not be a good scene either. Forest Mountain School had sent out invitations, and everyone had come with great gifts to pay their respects. It would be quite petty not to share something useful.

Lin Shenpo wasn't a professional Sword Cultivator, but he had been passionate about swordsmanship from a young age. Though there was no dedicated Sword Cultivator sect in the Endless Sea of Sand, he had never lost his love for sword techniques. He had even almost delayed his Foundation Building due to his focus on sword skills.

For the first time since reaching Foundation Building, Lin Shenpo chose to give a public lecture, and he focused on the art of controlling swords.

Flying swords were the most popular magic tools in the Cultivation World. Whether it was a Refining Qi cultivator, a Foundation Building cultivator, or even a Gold Core Daoist Master, they all carried flying swords and were adept at sword techniques.

Almost all cultivators dreamed of flying freely in the sky, controlling their swords to traverse the world. However, the ability to fly on swords and control them required at least a Foundation Building Cultivation Base.

The flying swords most Refining Qi cultivators possessed were just common magic tools with little difference from other magic tools. Only a very few with exceptional talents could cultivate specialized sword techniques. Although they couldn't fly on swords, they could still use swords as powerful weapons in combat.

Those who were more focused on the path of swordsmanship were known as Sword Cultivators. With a sword in hand, they could shatter a thousand magic tools and myriad spells.

Lin Shenpo couldn't be considered a true Sword Cultivator, so he wouldn't reveal the true extent of Sword Cultivator's techniques. The unique sword techniques he had cultivated for many years would not be easily disclosed.

Thus, Lin Shenpo's lecture primarily covered the attention points when controlling a sword during combat, based on his years of battle experience. Occasionally, he would cite specific examples to illustrate how to respond in certain situations.

Though Lin Shenpo was a quiet and reserved cultivator, lacking smiles, when speaking about his beloved swordsmanship, his soul seemed to soar.

Furthermore, his teachings were full of practical knowledge, making them valuable to the cultivators present. As long as they weren't too dull, they would gain some insights after earnestly comprehending his words.

Meng Zhang, too, listened intently and nodded repeatedly, feeling that he had gained something from it.

A long time ago, Meng Zhang had shown extraordinary talent in swordsmanship. Even in the declining Taiyi Sect, where no sword techniques were passed down, he had managed to develop

several assassination sword skills, which earned praise from Daoist Profound Spirit, the former sect master.

In the inheritances he obtained from the Trial Ground, there were several sword techniques. With the treasure he acquired, Meng Zhang spent considerable effort in practicing these sword techniques.

Learning a high-level sword technique meant that even an ordinary flying sword could exhibit tremendous power, let alone Meng Zhang's Soft Around The Finger, which was considered a small treasure among First Rank flying swords.

Meng Zhang's greatest regret was that he hadn't found a suitable sparring partner to showcase his sword skills. He had considered testing his swordsmanship against Deep Earth Spirit General a few times, but the general was always busy, and Meng Zhang didn't want to disturb him.

As for the other members of Taiyi Sect, to put it bluntly, none of them were even qualified to let Meng Zhang use his flying sword, let alone spar with him.

Chapter 89: Tries the Sword

As Lin Shenpo spoke with excitement, he pointed with one hand, and a flying sword soared into the air, hovering above his head. Then, with a casual wave, twelve chess pieces flew into the air, forming a formation that surrounded the flying sword from all directions.

The flying sword entered the formation, engaging in a fierce battle with the surrounding chess pieces, resembling a fight against a formidable enemy. The twelve chess pieces also whirled and danced, engaging in a contest with the flying sword.

It was said that besides his obsession with swordsmanship, Lin Shenpo also enjoyed playing chess. Many believed it was merely a pastime, but now it seemed that the chess pieces in his hands were also powerful magic tools.

The Refining Qi stage cultivators sitting below were fascinated, completely engrossed in the spectacle.

Even Dan Yihu, the Elder of External Affairs from Twin Success Valley, who was sitting on the high platform, exclaimed, "I've heard about Lin Shenpo's reputation as a master of both chess and swordsmanship, and today, I see it's well-deserved."

"Where, where, Elder Dan overpraises," Xu Yishan, who accompanied Lin Shenpo, humbly replied.

Shan Ying, who had been wearing a cold expression all along, sneered when he heard their conversation. The ever-proud Shan Ying looked down upon such theatrical performances.

Lin Shenpo continued his demonstration and explanation before finally concluding his teachings. "All that I've spoken so far is merely empty words. I wonder if any of you have learned anything from it? If you think you've learned something, feel free to come up and demonstrate."

Hearing this, many cultivators below showed eager expressions, itching to have a try.

In the area where the Zhao Family cultivators sat, one of them immediately jumped up onto the platform. "I am Zhao Dong. After listening to the senior's teachings, I feel as if I've been enlightened. I, a humble junior, am willing to demonstrate."

Lin Shenpo glanced at the first person who went up, Zhao Dong. "A single demonstration is not interesting. Do you want me to find you an opponent?"

"I would be honored, but there's no need for the senior to choose my opponent. I've already selected one," Zhao Dong said as he looked towards Meng Zhang below the high platform.

"Sect Master Meng, as the leader of Taiyi Sect, your name has long been admired. Today is a rare opportunity. I wonder if Sect Master Meng is willing to instruct me?" Zhao Dong's gaze was provocative.

Meng Zhang's face showed disdain. "A jumping clown, perfect for me to test my sword skills."

Without the slightest hesitation, Meng Zhang jumped onto the high platform. "Since I am in a good mood today, I'll give you some pointers."

Zhao Dong's face showed a flash of anger. He couldn't believe that an insignificant sect leader would dare to look down on him.

"Don't let your tongue slip, lest you eat your words later," Zhao Dong retorted.

Lin Shenpo didn't have time to listen to their verbal sparring and immediately declared, "You may begin."

Upon hearing the command, Zhao Dong drew his earth-yellow flying sword from its sheath and had it circle above his head before thrusting it toward Meng Zhang.

Meng Zhang raised his left hand, and the flying sword called "Soft Around The Finger" wrapped around his wrist was released and flew out. The once supple sword body immediately straightened, soaring into the sky.

Both of them were Refining Qi stage cultivators, lacking the divine consciousness of Foundation Building stage cultivators, so they couldn't control their flying swords like the latter.

Refining Qi stage cultivators often relied on their Qi to control the flying swords, utilizing true qi to manipulate the refined flying swords. The range of control was limited to their visual range, with the flying swords' attack range generally being only a few dozen yards.

The size of the high platform was enough for the two to display their skills.

Both were at the seventh level of Refining Qi, but in terms of cultivation techniques and swordsmanship, Meng Zhang was far superior to Zhao Dong.

Winning against his opponent was not a problem for Meng Zhang; in fact, he intended to win handsomely. In this public sword duel, Meng Zhang naturally didn't use his own practiced sword techniques. Instead, he casually displayed a few moves of his Flying Sword Assassination Art, which was enough to give Zhao Dong a good lesson.

Soft Around The Finger proactively met Zhao Dong's flying sword, and the two flying swords clashed in the air. Compared to the opponent's broad sword, Soft Around The Finger seemed tiny and petite.

However, every strike from Soft Around The Finger was precise, directly hitting several crucial points on the sword and hilt of Zhao Dong's flying sword.

Just like a person, a flying sword also had critical points and weaknesses. When refining a flying sword, the restrictions imprinted on it inevitably had weak spots, which became its weaknesses.

When Zhao Dong released his flying sword, it exuded a fierce momentum, but after clashing with Soft Around The Finger, the flying sword trembled violently, and its movements became distorted.

A series of crisp sounds echoed as Zhao Dong's flying sword kept retreating in the air, knocked far away by Soft Around The Finger.

Soft Around The Finger didn't pursue the flying sword further but directly attacked Zhao Dong.

Seeing Meng Zhang's flying sword coming for him, Zhao Dong became somewhat panicked. While activating his hand seals to try to recall his flying sword, he also activated a protective magic tool, summoning a small shield in front of him.

Soft Around The Finger deftly avoided Zhao Dong's protective magic tool and stabbed directly toward his head.

Seeing Zhao Dong unable to evade the flying sword, the Zhao Family disciples sitting below stood up nervously.

Even the usually composed Zhao Jiudou, an elder of the Zhao Family, couldn't help but tense up.

Though they knew Meng Zhang wouldn't dare to kill anyone in this situation, they worried that this young man might act impulsively in his youthful arrogance, causing severe harm to Zhao Dong, which would be a disaster.

While everyone watched anxiously, Zhao Dong's death scene didn't materialize. Meng Zhang wasn't a fool; how could he turn Forest Mountain School's joyful occasion into a bloody spectacle?

Soft Around The Finger gently brushed past Zhao Dong's head, cutting off his topknot. The flying sword emitted a soft force that shook Zhao Dong, causing his vision to darken, his mind to grow dizzy, and him to be unable to react for a long while.

Zhao Dong's flying sword and the shield lost control and fell onto the high platform.

Retracting Soft Around The Finger, Meng Zhang said to Zhao Dong,

"I wonder how much you've learned from my guidance."

Meng Zhang's attitude irritated some mature cultivators, but the younger generation found it quite enjoyable to see someone being given a lesson face to face.

Looking at Zhao Dong, who was swaying, Zhao Jiudou's face turned ironclad as he leaped onto the high platform.

With a casual toss, Zhao Jiudou threw Zhao Dong's body and the fallen magic tool towards the Zhao Family members below, then bowed to Lin Shenpo. "Elder Lin, Sect Master Meng's sword skills are exceptional. I am eager to learn from him as well."

Chapter 90: Fencing

Upon hearing Zhao Jiudou's words, Lin Shenpo frowned slightly. "You, at the completion of the Refining Qi stage, taking on someone at the seventh level of Refining Qi, it seems like bullying."

As Foundation Building cultivators, they could easily discern each other's cultivation level at a glance.

"I have no intention of bullying based on my cultivation level; I just want to experience Sect Master Meng's swordsmanship. Let's make it a limit of ten moves. Ten moves should be enough to appreciate Sect Master Meng's swordsmanship. I wonder if Sect Master Meng dares to accept the challenge?" Zhao Jiudou said, glancing at Meng Zhang.

In the Cultivation World, it was not uncommon to challenge opponents of higher cultivation levels, but it was not widespread either. Usually, it was disciples from prestigious sects who relied on superior techniques and secret arts to challenge those from smaller sects or unaffiliated loose cultivators without powerful backing. Such challenges often involved crossing minor cultivation realm barriers, and the higher the cultivation base of both parties, the more difficult the challenge.

If Meng Zhang had not broken through to the Refining Qi late stage and was still at the sixth level of Refining Qi, even with the inheritance from the peak Taiyi Sect, he might not be able to defeat Zhao Jiudou at the completion of Refining Qi.

If crossing realms were that simple, what meaning would the cultivation base realm have?

"Since Senior Zhao has the intention, I will fulfill your wish," Meng Zhang responded without backing down.

Meng Zhang's acceptance was not due to Zhao Jiudou's provocation alone. The difference in their realms was not insurmountable, and it was a public challenge on the high platform. Meng Zhang also wanted a strong opponent to test his swordsmanship. Besides, Zhao Dong was too weak; defeating him would not be fulfilling for Meng Zhang.

Lin Shenpo naturally wouldn't stop them when both sides were eager for a battle.

"Today, we should avoid any injuries. I hope you both will hold back," he said.

"Alright, we can begin," Meng Zhang said with a firm gaze at Zhao Jiudou.

Meng Zhang's agreement to the challenge was not just a response to Zhao Jiudou's provocation. The gap between their realms was not significant, and there was no unbridgeable chasm between them. Moreover, they were on the high platform, under the watchful eyes of everyone. Meng Zhang wanted a powerful opponent to test his swordsmanship. As for Zhao Dong, he was too weak to satisfy Meng Zhang's desire for a real challenge.

Seeing that both sides were ready for a duel, Lin Shenpo naturally wouldn't interfere.

Zhao Jiudou's cultivation base surpassed Meng Zhang's, and he had been practicing swordsmanship for many years, making him quite proficient. However, he had not received any systematic swordsmanship inheritance, merely relying on bits and pieces of self-taught techniques.

On the other hand, Meng Zhang's cultivation base might be weaker than his opponent's, but with the profound sword technique he mastered, he could stand undefeated.

Among the sword techniques Meng Zhang obtained in the Trial Ground, he focused on two of them. One was the Lifeless Killing Sword, a sinister and murderous technique used for assassination, which wasn't suitable for this occasion. The other was the Gentle Wind Willow Dance Sword

Technique, an open and upright technique, which appeared soft but contained hidden power. When combined with the Soft Around The Finger flying sword, it complemented each other perfectly.

The Soft Around The Finger flying sword, fully refined by Meng Zhang, was under his complete control. It moved like a flexible willow, effortlessly neutralizing the opponent's attacks.

The Foundation Building cultivators sitting on the high platform were initially uninterested in the battles between the Refining Qi cultivators. But as the two started their swordplay, their spirits lifted, and they couldn't help but take notice.

Shan Ying, who had previously met Meng Zhang, remembered him well. He praised, "Although this Taiyi Sect disciple's cultivation base is slightly lower, his swordsmanship is exquisite, with a profound understanding of using gentleness to overcome strength."

Several other Foundation Building cultivators beside him nodded in agreement, acknowledging Shan Ying's keen judgment.

Lin Shenpo, the closest one to the battle, ignored the idle chatter and felt some admiration. Zhao Jiudou's cultivation base exceeded Meng Zhang's, and he had more experience in swordplay, yet he lacked a systematic swordsmanship inheritance, just patching together various techniques.

In contrast, although Meng Zhang's cultivation base was inferior, he relied on a profound sword technique that enabled him to stand undefeated.

It was said that Taiyi Sect had experienced a glorious era before its decline. It seemed that some of Taiyi Sect's inheritance had not completely disappeared.

Both Meng Zhang and Zhao Jiudou were genuinely enjoying the battle and displayed many of their true abilities. The two sword lights danced in the sky, swift and unpredictable, entwining fiercely.

Having watched for a while, Lin Shenpo, who could already see through the depths of their sword techniques, grew impatient. A green sword light rose from behind him and directly swept toward the battling duo.

Caught in the green sword light, both Meng Zhang and Zhao Jiudou felt their flying swords losing control. Before they could react, their flying swords had returned to the ground in front of them.

"Alright, ten moves have already passed. Unless you're willing to fight to the death, it would be difficult to determine a winner in such a short time. Today's battle can be considered a draw," Lin Shenpo declared.

Having received the order, both of them naturally dared not defy. Picking up their flying swords, they left the high platform and returned to their seats.

Meng Zhang couldn't help but feel regretful. He had only cultivated the initial move of the sword technique, using gentleness to overcome strength, but had not yet comprehended the following moves of combining softness and firmness. Otherwise, he would have shown Zhao Jiudou an extraordinary display of swordsmanship.