

The bamboo was extremely heavy, and he was carrying ten stalks. Couple that with the fact that he was climbing a mountain, and soon Bai Xiaochun was huffing and puffing. The more he thought about it, the more he felt that he was in a really unfair situation.

"I began to practice immortal cultivation because I want to live forever. Why the heck would I go around fighting and killing, huh? "This bamboo could obviously grow a bit taller, but right now I need those merit points...." The more he thought about the situation, the more annoyed he got at the unfairness of it all. Sighing, he hefted his spiritwinter bamboo as he hiked up the mountain path. Currently, quite a large group of Outer Sect disciples was gathered outside of Fragrant Cloud Peak's Missions Office, hands filled with various medicinal plants which they would exchange for merit points. A Fragrant Cloud Peak Elder was present to inspect the items being handed in. The amount of merit points given as a reward depended on the quality of the items handed in. Just outside of the building itself was a wide, flat boulder, upon which a ruddy-faced, white-haired old man sat cross-legged. A seemingly endless line of disciples stretched out in front of him, and everyone in line had spirit plants clutched in hand. When the old man gave his appraisal, a young assistant off to the side would record the information and dole out the merit points. "Not bad. This watermist orchid already has four petals. Mid-grade item. "This woodvein ginseng is a bit too dark, and the earth-type power is too strong. It's completely out of balance. Sorry, it doesn't meet the requirements." Circling about overhead was a flock of elegant five-colored phoenixes, each one more than three meters long. Occasionally, they would make melodious calls that rang out in the area. They were spirit pets belonging to the elder who sat there, and whenever the appointed day came to hand in plants and vegetation, the birds would come along with him. They were, of course, the subject of much envy on the part of the Outer Sect disciples. The elder's cultivation base was in the Foundation Establishment stage, and was clearly beyond ordinary. Although his overall skill with spirit medicines didn't match up to Li Qinghou's, he was still very famous in the sect. Furthermore, his obsession with the Dao of medicines had reached a frightening level that even Li Qinghou couldn't equal. Many people even said that if a third master apothecary ever appeared in the Eastwood Continent, then it would definitely be this very Elder Zhou. There was one particular young man in the line who wasn't very handsome, but stood tall and straight. When he reached Elder Zhou, he clasped hands and bowed respectfully. "Greetings, Elder Zhou, it's me, Chen Zi'ang." When the other Outer Sect disciples in the area heard the young man's name, they all looked over curiously. "Oh, so he's Elder Brother Chen Zi'ang. I heard that he's quite gifted when it comes to growing spirit plants." "I heard that too. Ever since Chen Zi'ang joined the sect, he's never grown a spirit plant that got less than a high-grade rating. He's really incredible!" As the discussions continued in low tones, Chen Zi'ang stood there with a tranquil, indifferent expression on his face. However, deep in his eyes burned a proud and lofty air. Elder Zhou could see how pleased Chen Zi'ang was. He had long since been keeping an eye on him, considering how gifted he was when it came to growing spirit plants. "Zi'ang, what type of plant did you grow this time?" Elder Zhou asked warmly. "Elder Zhou, I'm happy to report that I grew spiritwinter bamboo!" With that, Chen Zi'ang waved his hand, causing ten stalks of spiritwinter bamboo to appear. Each one was as thick as an arm, and over two meters long. They were emerald green, and even flickered with a faint green glow. "I first soaked the seeds in a spirit spring, then ground some spirit stones into gravel to act as soil. Next, I fed the plants with my own spiritual energy at least every six hours. Every three days, I would carefully tend to their leaves, and I even used the Ninegreens Profound Magic I mastered, as well as other medicinal plants, to grow them to this

level!" "Very good," said Elder Zhou, stroking his beard. The praise in his eyes was clear. "These stalks of bamboo are over two meters long, and pulse with green energy. They exceed the high-grade mark, and can be classified as extreme high-grade. I encourage you to keep working hard. If you can grow the bamboo to over three meters, then they will be classified as superior-grade." When the surrounding Outer Sect disciple heard the words extreme high-grade, even more discussions broke out, and numerous envious gazes were cast in the direction of the spiritwinter bamboo. A smile broke out on Chen Zi'ang's face, and the lofty gleam in his eyes intensified. He clasped hands and bowed, and was just about to walk over to the assistant to collect his merit points, when a cold snort suddenly rang out. "Elder Zhou, Disciple Zhao Yiduo also grew some spiritwinter bamboo!" A long-faced young man with narrow eyes suddenly appeared. As he approached, he cast a glance of disdain in Chen Zi'ang's direction. [1. Zhao Yiduo's name in Chinese is 赵一多 zhào yī duō. Zhao is a common surname. Yi means "one" and duo means "more"] His sudden appearance on the scene instantly caused excitement among the surrounding Outer Sect disciples, who all looked over at him. "It's Elder Brother Zhao Yiduo! Elder Brother Zhao's skill with spirit plants and vegetation is supposedly neck and neck with Chen Zi'ang's!" "Well now we get to see them face off. They've been rivals for some time now, and both of them want to be known as the number one botanist among all the disciples." Chen Zi'ang's expression immediately darkened. He looked coldly at Zhao Yiduo, who glared back at him. The hostility in their eyes instantly intensified. "Zhao Yiduo, go ahead and take out your spiritwinter bamboo," Elder Zhou said encouragingly. Apparently, even he was interested in finding out what was going to happen. He was well aware of the competition between the two young disciples, and was in fact happy to see it. It was only by means of healthy competition that great advancement could be made. Zhao Yiduo clasped hands and bowed to Elder Zhou, then slapped his bag of holding to produce ten stalks of spiritwinter bamboo, each and every one of which was over three meters long and thicker than a person's leg. They were bright emerald green and even seemed somewhat crystalline. From the spiritual energy they emanated, it was clear that they were beyond normal, and also far above Chen Zi'ang's in terms of quality. The mere sight of the bamboo sent the crowd into an uproar. Most people had heard that spiritwinter bamboo could grow longer than three meters, but had never seen it before. Spiritwinter bamboo three meters long! I wonder how long it took to grow?" "That spiritwinter bamboo has reached the point where it's emanating spiritual energy. Elder Brother Zhao's ability with plants definitely puts him as the number one Outer Sect disciple on Fragrant Cloud Peak!" Seeing how excited the crowd was, Zhao Yiduo smiled provokingly at Chen Zi'ang. Chen Zi'ang's face immediately darkened. As for Elder Zhou, his eyes gleamed with praise as he looked at the bamboo and then nodded. "Excellent, excellent. Quite a few disciples have handed in spiritwinter bamboo today, but yours is definitely the best in terms of quality. It isn't high-grade, it's definitely superior-grade. Very, very good job, Zhao Yiduo. Keep up the good work!" Zhao Yiduo once again bowed to Elder Zhou, then looked over challengingly at Chen Zi'ang. "Junior Brother Chen, it seems you need to put some more work into your studies." Chen Zi'ang's expression grew even darker, and he snorted coldly. "Isn't it a bit early to gloat, Elder Brother Zhao? After all, it doesn't count when you have someone helping you. Next time, I'll definitely grow the spiritwinter bamboo to five meters tall!" Hearing this, Zhao Yiduo laughed heartily. "Junior Brother Chen, if you talk yourself up too much, you're bound to crash and burn. spiritwinter bamboo is extremely hard to grow because of the incredible amount of spiritual energy it requires. For Qi Condensation disciples like us, growing it to three meters is the absolute limit of the limit. And you think you're going to grow it to five meters? Only Foundation Establishment Elders could do something like that. That's not even to mention six meters. In all the years I've been in the sect, I've never even seen six-meter-tall Spiritwin--" Before Zhao Yiduo could even finish speaking, booming thuds could be heard from the path leading up to the Missions Office, as if some enormous creature were approaching. Instantly, the Outer Sect disciples turned in shock, whereupon gasps began to ring out. The standoff between Zhao Yiduo and Chen Zi'ang was also interrupted, and both of them frowned and looked over toward the path. Soon, what became visible were the tops of several stalks of enormous bamboo, thicker than a person. They were a bright emerald green, and if you looked closely, you would even see some violet specks flickering on their surface. They also emanated a splendid, multicolored glow. Even more shocking was the powerful spiritual energy emanating off of the bamboo, which instantly led to cries of shock. "Wh-what is that stuff!?" "It looks like some kind of tree! But at the same time, it also

looks like bamboo!" Chen Zi'ang and Zhao Yiduo were frowning, and couldn't even identify what it was they were looking at. However, they could tell that it was something incredible. Off to the side, Elder Zhou's eyes were wide as he stared at the bamboo, and he even began to pant slightly. Everyone stared as more and more of the bamboo became visible. When the bamboo was completely revealed, shockingly, each stalk was fifteen meters tall, and it was being carried by a petite young man, who was currently panting as he trudged up the path, the bamboo slung over his shoulder. He almost looked like an ant carrying a steamed mantou.... Every step that he took resulted in a booming thud, and as he walked along, the Outer Sect disciples made way for him, shocked by how strong he appeared to be. The young man was, of course, Bai Xiaochun, who had been grumbling to himself the entire way about the brutality of the competition and the horror of 10,000 Snakes Valley. Although he wanted to cry, no tears would come, and as he trudged along, he didn't even notice the crowd of people looking at him. When he reached Elder Zhou, he tossed the bamboo down onto the ground, which resulted in a huge boom. Then he sat down on top of the bamboo, huffing and puffing a bit as he wiped the sweat from his brow. "I couldn't fit this bamboo in my bag of holding. Man, I'm totally worn out. Oh, hello Elder, I'm here to hand in this mission." All of a sudden, Bai Xiaochun got an odd feeling, and looked around to find everyone in the crowd staring at his bamboo. Gasps could even be heard. "Bamboo.... That stuff is actually bamboo?" "It's so big! I've never seen bamboo that big before. Come on, they must be trees, right?!" Chen Zi'ang and Zhao Yiduo couldn't conceal their astonishment as they realized what they were looking at. However, they almost couldn't make themselves believe it was true, and knelt down to inspect the bamboo more closely. Zhao Yiduo began to tremble, and had to resist the urge to try and break open one of the bamboo stalks to examine it from the inside. Before he could, Elder Zhou tromped over and then waved his sleeve, sending Chen Zi'ang and Zhao Yiduo tumbling off to the side. Then Elder Zhou stood there, staring at the bamboo with wide eyes. After a long moment, he took a deep breath and said, "Th-this... this really is spiritwinter bamboo!!" The surrounding Outer Sect disciples gaped in shock for a moment, and then burst into an uproar. "Spiritwinter bamboo!! I can't believe those big trees... are actually spiritwinter bamboo!!" "How is that even possible? How could spiritwinter bamboo get so thick? Heavens, they're actually fifteen meters long!" "Fifteen meters and as thick as a person. Th-that's... bamboo?" The sounds of the uproar grew even louder as people began to compare Bai Xiaochun's bamboo with that of Chen Zi'ang and Zhao Yiduo.