

Everyone was in a wonderful mood, and were extremely pleased with Bai Xiaochun. Not only was he very charming, he seemed to have lots of crafty ideas. Big Fatty Zhang decided that a reward was in order, and pressed a grain of spirit rice into Bai Xiaochun's hand.

Bai Xiaochun laughed happily as he staggered back to his room. Before he could climb in bed, all of the spiritual energy he had absorbed by eating the various precious materials suddenly burst out inside of him. His head spun, and he flopped face-first down onto the ground, where he immediately began snoring. He slept wonderfully for the entire night. The following morning at dawn, when he opened his eyes, they shone brightly. He looked down to find that he was fatter than the day before. Furthermore, his skin was covered in a sticky layer of filth. When he hurried out to wash up, Big Fatty Zhang and the others were preparing breakfast for the sect disciples. When they saw Bai Xiaochun's bedraggled appearance, they started laughing. "Ninth Junior Brother, all that filth comes from the impurities in your body. Once you get rid of it, it will be much easier for you to practice cultivation. Take a few days off, we won't need your help anyway. In a few days you can start working again." "Don't forget about that grain of spirit rice! Eat it up quickly before it goes bad." "Sure thing," Bai Xiaochun replied. Feeling quite energetic, he returned to his room and grabbed the turtle-shaped wok off of the stove. After filling it with water from the washroom, he returned and put it back on the stove. Then he pulled out the grain of spirit rice to examine it. It was about the size of his thumb, crystalline in appearance, and fragrantly aromatic. "If immortals eat this stuff, then it must be incredible." Sighing, he threw a few pieces of wood into the stove, then lit the fire. He was immediately hit by a blast of heat, which caused him to back up, blinking anxiously. Then he looked down at the fire and clicked his tongue. "That's no ordinary fire. It lights faster and also burns a lot hotter than the fire in the village." Taking another look at the burning logs in the fire, he realized that they were not ordinary pieces of wood. About this time, the fire began to burn even hotter than before, and Bai Xiaochun watched in amazement as one of the designs etched into the back of the turtle shell wok began to light up, starting at what appeared to be the tail of the turtle shell and ending where the head would be. Soon, the entire design was shining brightly. Bai Xiaochun stared in amazement, then slapped his thigh. "I knew it! This is some sort of treasure! It's definitely way better than Eldest Brother's wok!" More certain than ever that this wok was something extraordinary, Bai Xiaochun quickly tossed the grain of spirit rice into the water. Then he sat off to the side with the Violet Qi Cauldron Control Art bamboo scroll. Emulating the movements and breathing techniques depicted in the first picture, he began to cultivate. He had only just begun when, suddenly, his eyes went wide; the posture which had been so difficult to maintain just the day before, was now much easier to assume. In fact, he actually felt very comfortable, without the slightest sensation of awkwardness. In addition, the breathing technique no longer left him feeling as if he were suffocating. Instead, he felt a very pleasant sensation. Furthermore, he was absolutely certain that before today he could only maintain the posture for about three or four breaths of time, but this time, after seven or eight breaths, he didn't feel the least bit of pain or discomfort. Suppressing his excitement, Bai Xiaochun calmly continued until thirty breaths of time had passed. Just when he was finally starting to feel weak and uncomfortable, a strand of qi suddenly appeared inside of him. It was very cold, and swirled around rapidly; before it could make a full circle through his body, it vanished. However, Bai Xiaochun was so excited he leapt to his feet. "Qi! Hahaha! Finally some qi appeared!" Bursting with excitement, he began to pace back and forth in his room. He quickly came to the conclusion that it must have something to do with all the precious materials he had consumed the previous night. Suddenly he wished he had eaten

more. "No wonder Elder Brother Zhang would rather starve to death in the Ovens than go climb the ladder in the Outer Sect. Not even the Outer Sect disciples would have opportunities like this." Sitting down anxiously, he once again began to practice cultivation. This time, he was able to maintain the posture and breathing for a full sixty breaths of time. At that point, a flow of qi appeared in him, almost a trickle, that rapidly circulated through his body. Having experienced this once before, he was ready, and began to guide the qi through a specific path, as indicated by the first picture in the bamboo scroll. Soon, the qi was flowing through him in just the way he wanted. He maintained the posture and movements indicated in the first illustration, and as he did, he could sense streams of coldness emerging from various parts of his body, almost like drops of water, which merged into the qi flow, causing it to grow larger and larger. In the end, it was like a tiny stream, flowing in a continuous cycle. A tremor ran through him, and it was as if a layer of fog had suddenly been stripped away from his mind. A rumbling sound echoed out from his body. He suddenly felt lighter and more agile than before. At the same time, globules of filth were expelled from the pores all over his body. Unlike last time, the stream of qi inside of him didn't vanish, but instead, remained there, circulating through his body. Bai Xiaochun opened his eyes, and they shone even more brightly than before. His mind even seemed to move a bit quicker and his body felt lighter and faster. "A permanent qi vessel," he thought excitedly. "That's the sign that I've successfully cultivated the first level of the Violet Qi Cauldron Control Art! It also means that I've reached that, what's it called...? The first level of Qi Condensation!" Bai Xiaochun was overjoyed, and immediately ran to the washroom. When Big Fatty Zhang and the others saw him, they exchanged knowing glances. Although they were a bit surprised that Bai Xiaochun had reached the first level so quickly, they all knew why it had happened. After returning to his room, Bai Xiaochun took a deep breath, and then began to study the bamboo scroll more thoroughly. "After cultivating the first level of the Violet Qi Cauldron Control Art, I should be able to control physical objects. Wow, this is basically an immortal magical technique. I should be able to shoot things through the air." Eyes shining, he followed the instructions prescribed in the scroll, moving both hands together in a special way to perform an incantation. Then, he waved his finger at the nearby desk. Instantly, the stream inside of him surged like a bucking bronco, racing toward his right index finger and then out through the tip of his finger. It turned into something like an invisible thread, which then attached itself to the nearby desk. However, almost as soon as it reached the desk, the connection grew unstable, and the thread disintegrated. Bai Xiaochun's face went pale. After a moment of recuperation, he reviewed what he had just done, then decided to give up on moving the desk. Instead, he pulled out the wooden sword from his bag and placed it on top of the desk. He wasn't sure what type of wood the sword was made from, but despite being much lighter than the desk, it still seemed unusually heavy. He waved his finger toward it, and the wooden sword twitched, then slowly floated an inch up into the air before falling back down onto the desk. Bai Xiaochun was anything but discouraged. After a few more excited attempts, he was able to get the sword to rise higher and higher. Soon it was ten inches, then twenty, then thirty.... By the time dusk fell, he could get the wooden sword to fly in a straight line. Although it wasn't very fast, and he couldn't quite make it turn, it wouldn't fall down as easily as it had when he first started practicing. "Henceforth, I, Bai Xiaochun, am an immortal!" He rose proudly to his feet, held his left hand behind his back, and then waved his right hand, causing the wooden sword to fly unsteadily back and forth in his room. Eventually, his qi began to grow unstable, so he put the wooden sword away and continued to practice cultivation. Later, he caught wind of a fragrant aroma coming from the wok, causing him to raise his head and take a deep sniff. Suddenly feeling ravenous, he realized that he had been busy cultivating all day, and had completely forgotten about the spirit rice boiling in the wok. He immediately walked over and lifted the lid to look inside. The moment he did, the strong, fragrant aroma of spirit rice wafted out. Furthermore, at some point during the process, a brilliant, glowing silver design had appeared on the surface of the rice! The design was clearly visible, and when Bai Xiaochun looked at it closely, he suddenly felt lost within the light. After a while, though, the design began to fade. He narrowed his eyes, and after some more thought, picked up the grain of spirit rice and held it in his hand for a closer look. "That design looks really familiar...." His eyes flickered with a thoughtful gleam. He ducked his head to look under the stove, and saw that the fire had long since burned out. The pieces of wood were nothing more than ash now, and the design on the wok had once again faded into obscurity. However, he could still tell that the silver design on the grain of rice was the same design as

the one on the back of the wok. He decided not to continue to investigate the design, and to be safe, chose not to eat the rice for the time being. Instead, he put it into his bag, sat there for a moment in contemplation, then left his hut to help Big Fatty Zhang and the others. Before long, half a month had passed. Bai Xiaochun's cultivation progress had once again slowed down. However, after some discreet inquiries, he learned that silver designs never appeared on spirit rice when it was cooked. His curiosity had definitely been piqued. The more he learned about it, the more it seemed that there was something special about this particular grain of rice, not to mention his wok, which seemed even stranger. A few days later, Third Fatty Hei left the Ovens to go purchase supplies, giving Bai Xiaochun the perfect opportunity to sneak into the Four Seas Room, a place where servants could get general information about cultivation. On his way back to his hut, he did his best to conceal the excitement which filled his heart. After closing the door behind him, he immediately took out the grain of spirit rice and studied the silver design. Gradually, an expression of disbelief appeared on his face. "When immortals practice cultivation, there are three skills they can't do without. The first is medicine concocting, the second is equipment forging, and the third is spirit enhancement!" Bai Xiaochun thought back to the images he had dug up when searching through the ancient records in the Four Seas Room. One of them had closely resembled the silver design that was now visible on the grain of rice. "Spirit enhancement!" After a moment, he took a long, deep breath. Spirit enhancement was a special technique in which the energy of heaven and earth was forced into physical objects. It was a type of magic that essentially replaced the natural functions of nature, a technique which could be used on medicinal pills, incense, or magical items. Unfortunately, it was forbidden by heaven and earth, ensuring that the rate of success was limited. A success would lead to the item being vastly more powerful. A failure would result in the spiritual energy of the item becoming completely useless. The most shocking thing about spirit enhancement was that it could be performed over and over again. Every success increased the effects of the spirit enhancement by tenfold, leading to heaven-shaking, earth-toppling transformations. Of course, the more precious the item was to begin with, the more terrifying the results of success would be. Unsurprisingly, the chances of success decreased with each enhancement. In fact, after a certain point, even some spirit enhancement grandmasters wouldn't dare to go any further. After all, the ramifications of a failure in that case would be difficult to accept. "The ancient records said that the Spirit Stream Sect's guardian treasure is an item that was somehow enhanced ten times by spirit enhancement. The Heavenhorn Sword!" Bai Xiaochun's throat felt dry. Eyes shining with disbelief and confusion, he swallowed and looked over at the turtle-shaped wok. There were ten faint decorative lines on the back of it, and when he looked at them, his heart began to beat so hard it felt like it was about to burst out of his chest. As of this moment, he was sure that the design which had appeared on the spirit rice was a mark of spirit enhancement. Furthermore, the source of that design was none other than his wok! After a moment of hesitation, he gritted his teeth. If he didn't get to the bottom of this mystery, he wouldn't be able to sleep. He knew for a fact that this wok was something extraordinary, and therefore, he couldn't let anyone in on his secret. He waited until it was late in the night, then very quietly tip-toed over to the wok. After taking a deep breath and trying not to think about what would happen if he failed, he pulled out his wooden sword and threw it inside, the same way he had thrown the grain of rice in.