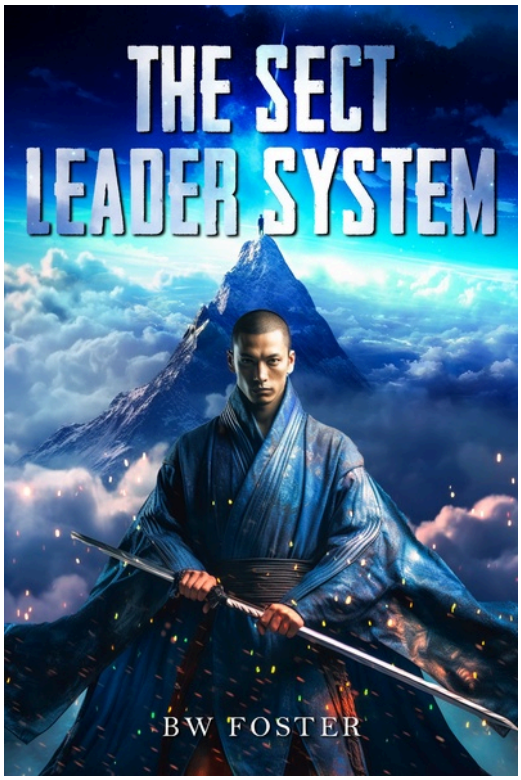
Marshal Carper’s Revision Recordings

Caveats:

- Spoilers ahead
- I’m just a dude
- My opinions are my own
- This is all meant to be constructive
- I am still accepting chapters to read but may not revise all of them (but will try my best)


THE SECT
LEADER SYSTEM
BW FOSTER

Chapter 97 – Don't Go Breaking My Heart

Benton met the twins the next morning at the gate. The three of them made a quick run clearing both sides of the road leading to where the Orange Vigor Spirit Wood grew and doing a sweep through and around it.

He killed many beasts, mostly rank twos, but didn't use any of his new techniques. They required practice before being put into use, and he preferred to do such experimenting out of sight of his sect members, even the twins. Exhibiting Mastery of a skill the first time he showed it off helped build the mystique of an ancient elder that he was shooting for.

It didn't take long before he could no longer sense any beasts within a half mile radius of the Wood, so he called the two siblings to a stop before heading back to the village. "I've got a whole list of things to handle this morning. You two are good to supplement Ye Zan's guards here today in protecting the harvesters, right? It is a good place for cultivating, and the two of you are getting close to a breakthrough."

Yang Xiu grimaced. "We know you had planned for us to help out there this morning, but we were hoping we could start spear and archery lessons today, instead, Master."

"Actually, Zi Delan's crew and the other kids from Vermillion Incomparable Rain Town are all getting really close to minor realm three. Wouldn't it be more efficient to do group lessons for everyone at the same time? If we wait four or five days and use the Qi Condensing Pills, in addition to getting both of you to minor realm nine, I should be able to get all of them to minor realm four. That way, we'd have a large group ready to learn weapon techniques from you at once."

The two shared a glance. As their realm rose, the hours of sleep they needed decreased, so they typically used nighttime for cultivation. They probably didn't like the idea of spending an entire day babysitting while not accomplishing any of their other tasks.

"How about this?" Benton said. "One of you cultivate here while the other hunts, and you switch out every few hours?"

"Yes, Master," the two chorused.

They both accompanied him back to the gate where they met Ye Zan and a half dozen of his guards along with the six harvesters. Benton explained the plan of having just the twins accompany them today, and no one objected.

Relieved on his own babysitting duties, Benton planned his morning. He had four stops to make, and unlike the previous night, he couldn't make himself do the one he most didn't want to do first. Instead, he went to see Wan Ai. When he got there, Zou Tian was helping her cut herbs.

"Greetings, disciples," Benton said. "How goes it?"

Wan Ai glanced at Zou Tian, clearly hoping he'd take on the duties of reporting to the sect leader, but she had no such luck as he deferred to her. The boy was a really good kid, clearing knowing Benton was trying to get her used to taking a leadership role and urging her to do just that.

"These—"

Zou Tian cleared his throat.

"This one has prepared three baths, Master," Wan Ai said.

"Three? That's extraordinary. Great job!"

The girl brightened slightly at the praise.

"Were there any issues?" Benton said.

"Nothing these ones couldn't handle," Wan Ai said. "Zou Tian found villagers who can heat the water and clean the tubs, and with his help, I was able to learn enough of the herb technique to both prepare the herbs and combine them with the energy of a spirit beast core. This one would never have been able to do any of that without Zou Tian's assistance."

The boy had kept trying to shush her during that whole explanation, but she actually talked right over him.

Good for both of them. The pairing had worked out a lot better than he had expected. Which was a very good thing. Both him and the sect needed those baths to be ready.

"Well, great job. I'll let Ye Zan know the first three of his guards can begin tonight."

The girl cupped her hands. "Gratitude, Master."

"Are you ready to have helpers sent over?" Benton said.

"This one has barely gotten the basics down, Master. This one wouldn't know how adding more people would help at this point."

On one hand, she made a good argument. Developing a procedure and scaling it up were both difficult tasks. Trying to do the two at once would be a nightmare. On the other hand, Benton knew she would try to avoid having to deal with more people, and having others who knew how to perform the tasks was crucial.

"Let's see," Benton said. "We've assigned four new sect members from the village to help you. They all have experience with herbs but only received their cultivation methods yesterday. It looks like you have all the menial tasks being performed by villagers Zou Tian hired, so they probably wouldn't be much help for now. Besides, it would be great if we could give them several weeks to cultivate before teaching them a technique."

"Yes, Master. This one agrees."

"You're also getting one of the former Vermillion Incomparable Rain Town orphans, but he hasn't quite hit the third minor realm yet. In two or three days with

the assistance of a Qi Condensing Pill, he'll be at minor realm four and ready and raring to go to help you. I'll send him over then."

"Understood, Master."

"The final helper is one of the original eight from the village orphanage. I'll be giving her and the others their pills today, so she'll be ready to learn techniques starting tomorrow. Please be ready to help her learn."

"Yes, Master."

"Great," Benton said. "How are you looking for tomorrow as far as number of baths?"

The girl swelled with pride. "This one expects to have another five ready by then."

"Fantastic! You really are a treasure. There is one issue we should discuss, however."

"Yes, Master?"

"You are at the very peak of fifth minor realm about to break into the sixth. Do you want to do that now or wait? I'm planning on giving you a pill once you reach that milestone that will propel you to the seventh realm in a day."

She could then get to the eighth realm on her own, and he'd take her to the ninth with another pill. Honestly, that wasn't the best way to do things as it was better to spread out the pill-taking more. That was why his practice was to give a pill to his disciples at the third minor realm instead of waiting until later when advancing took more time.

He was trying to balance speed versus foundation, though, so the big question really was how much would the rapid advancement hurt her base? His judgment both from Su's memories and Pill Basics was that it was suboptimal but not enough to impact her potential.

Of course, he'd sit down with her and discuss the positives and negatives before he gave her either pill. Ultimately, it was her decision.

"Body Cultivation is too important for this one to take the time to advance right now, Master."

"Your cultivation is important, too."

"Maybe after this one's two helpers are competent enough, Master?"

Benton frowned. That solution really would be best for the sect, but he hated for her to sacrifice her own advancement. Then again, they were only talking about a week.

"It's your call," Benton said.

After leaving the makeshift alchemy lab, he visited Xun Wu, who was still sleeping as a part of his recovery from taking the Spirit Root Refinement Pill. Benton, allowed into the room by his wife in order to check up on him, scanned him.

Name: Xun Wu
Affiliation: Rising Tide Sect
Age: 41
Cultivation: None
Techniques: None
Spiritual Roots: A-
Qi Aspect: Fiery coal in the middle of the forge

Success! Not that he ever really doubted it, but it was still cool that his sect now had its third A rank member.

"He should be just fine," Benton said to the blacksmith's wife.

Xun Wu would obviously need a cultivation method and, as a top tier disciple, merited one specific to his qi aspect. Benton quickly whipped one up and presented both the jade slip and a rank one spirit beast core to her.

Benton's next stop didn't go quite as well. Peng Hanying was still at the guards' house, having only taken the second of five pills. The poor kid had sweat literally dripping down his face, burning with fever and whimpering from pain. If Benton didn't fully trust the System's quality enough to believe completely that the kid would come through just fine, he would have called a stop to the whole thing.

He did ask the kid if he wanted to stop and got a hard no in reply. Benton respected the kid's resolve too much to pull rank on him.

Leaving him and his father with encouraging words, Benton headed off to his last and least favorite stop of the morning—the orphanage.

"Master, you came!" Mistress Zhong said upon opening the door. "I had expected you last night."

"Apologies, Mistress Zhong, the villagers were ready for induction into the sect sooner than expected, and I didn't want to come by too late and disturb the kids." Benton paused. "I'm assuming you haven't told her."

"No. I thought the news should come from you, Master."

"You're right. Good call." He paused, remembering another task, and pulled eight Qi Condensing Pills from his ring. "Before I forget, give these to the original set of kids."

"Yes, Master."

He sighed. "Well, best get to it, then."

Feeling like a kicked dog, Benton traipsed into the room being used for the convalescing Jin LiJuan. She was awake and immediately eyed him.

"Master! Do you know yet? Can you heal me?"

He kneeled beside her pallet. "Kind of. I found pills that can partially restore your cultivation. At best, you will be the lowest of the low in talent, an F-, and really not even that high as there are sure to be complications with your meridians

and channels. Maybe even your dantian. You have to understand that what you did was very dangerous. You could have died."

"This lowly one knows, Master. I thought about what I did a lot while I've been in bed, and it was all my fault. You told me you would come back. Mistress Zhong said that you were journeying far and that you were probably delayed by things you couldn't control. But I was impatient. I was stupid!" Tears started streaming from her eyes.

His greatest weakness in two lives was a crying child. Well, one who was genuinely upset. Crocodile tears swayed him not at all.

Jin LiJuan was not faking it. The little thing was devastated.

The whole thing was made worse by the fact that she wouldn't be in all that pain had he come back to the village when he said he would. The situation wasn't his fault, per se, but he had to accept some of the blame.

"Even if it's not good cultivation, I can still cultivate, though, right?" she said when she'd recovered enough to speak. "You can fix me that much, right, Master?"

"The thing is, Li'er, that the cure if expensive. Very expensive. I can speed the cultivation of thirty of our fellow sect members for that much."

Her lip quivered, and she bit it. "I … see, Master. It makes no sense to spend so much on healing me when I have no way to repay the sect. This was all my fault. It's okay, Master. It's okay."

The girl was so clearly trying to re-assure herself that it broke Benton's heart.

"You can still help the sect, Li'er, in whatever capacity you want. My sect is your sect. It's your home. Its members are your brothers and sisters, okay? You will always have a place with us. You will be valued. Your life will be much better than you ever imagined."

She gamely tried to smile, but it was as if her lips just couldn't make the necessary movement. "I'll be fine, Master. Gratitude. It's okay. It's going to be okay."

Benton felt like she was literally grabbing his heart and tearing it to shreds.

The entire group agreed that not healing her was best for the sect. Spending so much for so little in return made no sense. They all had a good reason for making that decision.

But none of them had to stare that little girl in the eyes and tell her they wouldn't heal her.

Not couldn't. Wouldn't.

"Tell me why you ate the spirit beast meat," he said.

"Because I wanted to cultivate, Master."

"But why did you want to cultivate so badly?"

More tears welled in her eyes. "My parents, Master. The beasts got them. I wanted ... it's silly."

“It’s anything but silly Li’er. It’s heartbreaking.”

“I just … I wanted to get back at the beasts, Master. I wanted to be strong and fast and powerful so that I could kill the beasts and so that no more little girls would have to lose their mommy and daddy like I did.”

“That last part is really sweet. Protecting people is good. I like that. The first part of that, I didn’t. Vengeance feels like it should be good, but it isn’t. If I heal you, I want you to promise me that you won’t pursue some kind of war against the beasts. No vengeance. Your mom and dad wouldn’t have wanted you to live a life full of hate.”

Benton couldn’t even begin to imagine what the little girl’s life had been like. Living in a village where starvation was a real danger, having her parents die to an animal attack, being put in a crowded orphanage that didn’t even truly have enough resources to take care of her.

She had suffered enough.

Between the upcoming quest completions, making one Shop Point per new member, and eventually another two when they reached Foundation Establishment, he would find a way to afford it.

“Master?”

“I mean it, Li’er. Swear to me.”

“But … I don’t understand, Master.”

Benton looked in her little tear-filled eyes. “I have to hear it, Li’er. Swear.”

“I won’t kill the beasts, Master. I swear it. Only to protect, not because I’m mad.”

Good enough.

“Get as much rest as you can tonight and eat as much as you can stomach. You’re going to need your strength. Tomorrow, have Mistress Zhong take you to the guards’ house. The pills will be waiting for you there with instructions.”

“You can’t, Master. This lowly one isn’t worth it.”

“You are worth it, Li’er, and if I can’t do this for you, how could I consider myself worth anything? What even is an old man like me doing here?”

“Old man? Master is hardly older that Senior Brother Ru. You’re nothing like Mistress Zhong. She’s old.”

“Looks can be deceiving, Li’er, especially for cultivators. Now, you remember what you’re supposed to do tonight?”

“Eat and sleep a lot, Master.”

“Exactly. I have to go, now.”

Benton practically fled from the room and nearly ran into Mistress Zhong. The woman had tears in her eyes as well, probably from the crack about her being old. He made a mental note that she was sensitive about her age.

“You heard?” he said.

“Yes. I’ll take care of everything, Master.”

That was good, He had been afraid that she’d be angry at him for going against the council’s unanimous decision.

“Okay. Well. I’ve got … stuff to do.”