

Immortality 1301

Chapter 1301: Little Wood

Their opponent was a Second Grade Primary Rank monster.

Its skin was crimson, engulfed in flames, adorned with long fangs, sharp black claws, and fiery eyes tinged with reddish-brown. Its movements left trails of fire behind — this was a Fire Demon Wolf, a fire-series monster beast.

The strength of the Fire Demon Wolf wasn't particularly weak or overpowering. Among Second Grade Primary Rank monster beasts, it was fairly average.

In Mo Hua's eyes, it was no big deal.

But for these novice Tai'a sect hunters, dealing with it was extremely challenging.

There were five of them, including "Little Wood" Ouyang Mu, and each of them wielded a yellow-red Spirit Sword, engaging in close combat with the Fire Demon Wolf.

The Tai'a Sect excelled in sword-casting techniques, and the quality of their Spirit Swords was remarkably high.

Complementing their sword-casting craft, the swordsmanship they practiced closely resembled body cultivation techniques.

With robust physical bodies and razor-sharp Spirit Swords, paired with the strength of body cultivation and the Sword Qi of swordsmanship, they demonstrated considerable combat power in true battles.

Although they lacked the ability to use superior Taoist skills or Sword Control techniques like spiritual cultivators or sword cultivators who relied on power accumulation,

Their martial-arts-like swordsmanship was swift in execution, with flexible moves and fluid transitions between offensive and defensive maneuvers.

In close combat, they had a significant advantage and couldn't be underestimated.

Senior Brother Ouyang Fengfeng practiced this type of swordsmanship.

Previously, during bounty missions, they relied entirely on Senior Brother Fengfeng's ability to hold the offensive and defensive fronts on his own and confront Sin Cultivators head-on.

This gave Senior Sister Murong and the other spiritual cultivators the opportunity to cast spells with ease.

However, these Tai'a sect "junior disciples" were nowhere near comparable to Senior Brother Fengfeng.

Not only were their cultivation levels, swordsmanship, and combat experience inferior, but even the quality of their Spirit Swords lagged behind considerably.

Especially "Little Wood," who was clumsy to the point of appearing completely clueless during a fight.

When he shouldn't have acted, he rushed forward with a stab, revealing a fatal flaw in his own defenses, which the monster exploited.

When he should've made a move, he hesitated, failing to strike, thereby squandering crucial opportunities.

The other Tai'a sect disciples were barely passable.

But even that was just "mediocre" at best.

They relied on their foundational cultivation and youthful vigor, daring to fight and kill recklessly.

Their timing and coordination amidst the advancing and retreating, the attacking and defending, were crudely handled.

They were far inferior compared to Situ's team.

And not even as sharp as Hao Xuan's skillset.

At this level, it was clear they couldn't possibly kill the Fire Demon Wolf.

Sure enough, after a short exchange, the Fire Demon Wolf feigned a flaw, luring two Tai'a sect disciples to attack.

Then it unleashed its demonic power, flames surging from its body. Taking advantage of the pair's eagerness for merit, their lack of restraint, and inability to shift tactics, it charged forward with explosive speed, transforming into a streak of fire, disappearing into the distance.

The principle of not chasing a desperate enemy was at least something these Tai'a sect disciples understood.

Moreover, this was happening inside Refining Demon Mountain.

And their spiritual power was nearly depleted as well.

The group sat cross-legged where they were, replenishing their spiritual power as they vented their frustrations:

"It escaped again!"

"We've tried so many times, and it always manages to evade us."

Someone turned to blame Ouyang Mu, "Wood, you keep making mistakes, too many errors. If not for you, we'd have killed this Wolf Demon already."

Another chimed in, "Did you even pay attention to what we told you?"

"If you keep being so useless, how are we supposed to bring you along into the mountains next time?"

Ouyang Mu kept his head down, feeling ashamed, and said nothing.

One disciple grew enraged, "At least try to speak up!"

"If it weren't for your brother..."

"Enough!" A slightly taller disciple interrupted, "Talking about it now serves no purpose."

The angry disciple swallowed his words, though his frustration was evident.

"If this keeps up, we won't capture a single monster, nor earn any Merit Points. It's simply a waste of time..."

Though he didn't explicitly name names, everyone knew whom he was referring to.

The atmosphere grew tense.

Mo Hua shook his head slightly.

Granted, Little Wood indeed lacked experience, his swordsmanship was rough, and his repeated mistakes dragged the team down.

Yet their team's overall strength was limited, and their monster-hunting lacked any solid strategy. Even without Little Wood, replacing him with someone of equal strength wouldn't have enabled them to kill the Fire Demon Wolf either.

In a failed hunting attempt, placing part of the blame on the weakest link was inevitable.

But entirely blaming Little Wood was rather unreasonable.

People often conveniently shift their own faults onto others, thus failing to recognize their own shortcomings.

That said, this was the Tai'a sect's internal affair, and Mo Hua saw no reason to intervene.

Afterward, the five Tai'a sect disciples searched around the mountains for a while, but the Fire Demon Wolf was nowhere to be found, and the twilight began to settle. Left with no choice, the group decided to return.

On the way back, the other four disciples cast looks at Little Wood filled with varying degrees of resentment.

Ouyang Mu merely kept his head down, quiet and subdued.

Mo Hua watched them descend the mountain without interfering.

By the next day, Mo Hua returned to the mountains to practice Sword Control as usual.

Around midday, after resting atop a tree for some time, he unsurprisingly spotted Ouyang Mu again.

Ouyang Mu's party was still five people, but this time, his companions were no longer the same ones from the day before.

It wasn't clear whether Ouyang Mu felt too guilty about hindering his previous teammates and voluntarily swapped groups.

Or if those four were fed up with him being a drag and decided not to include him anymore.

Mo Hua sighed softly.

Their target seemed to still be the Fire Demon Wolf.

But for novice monster-hunting teams, trying to hunt a Second Grade Primary Rank monster beast was a formidable challenge to begin with.

As expected, they failed again.

Although all five were inept, the entirety of the blame would inevitably fall on the weakest member.

Ouyang Mu endured another round of scolding.

But his wooden personality and inability to articulate himself left him helpless.

Chapter 1302: Little Wood

The other members quarreled among themselves, and before they even descended the mountain, the team had disbanded.

Mo Hua could see it clearly—among the five, Ouyang Mu was the weakest, but he was also the one most eager to hunt monster beasts.

The other four, instead of hunting beasts, seemed more interested in showing off, trying to outshine each other, with nearly no cooperation at all.

Now that the other four had left, only Ouyang Mu remained in place.

He gripped the sword in his hand tightly, his expression resolute, yet there was a hint of pain as he glanced around.

He seemed to want to keep hunting monster beasts, but he was also painfully aware of his own weakness, knowing he wasn't a match for them.

Yet simply descending the mountain like this left him feeling unsatisfied.

Ouyang Mu stood frozen on the spot, uncertain and hesitant, his demeanor already showing signs of bewilderment, unsure what to do...

Mo Hua sighed as he watched, then called out loudly from the tall branches of a nearby tree:

"Little Wood!"

The dazed Ouyang Mu was startled by the voice, lifting his head to look toward its source. On the nearby tree, he saw a young cultivator, who appeared not much older than himself, with bright red lips and white teeth, calmly walking down the vertical trunk step by step.

Ouyang Mu stared in a daze for a moment, then recognized him.

This was the same disciple of the Taixu Gate he had seen before at Refining Demon Mountain—the one who, despite being about the same age as him, could talk and laugh casually with senior disciples. His name seemed to be...

"Mo Hua."

"Brother Mo... Brother Mo, greetings!"

Ouyang Mu said nervously yet politely.

Mo Hua was slightly surprised and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"I..." Ouyang Mu stammered, "I'm monster hunting..."

He was rather embarrassed to say this.

Because his hunting skills were truly terrible.

Two entire days had passed, yet he hadn't managed to kill even a single monster beast.

Mo Hua asked again, "Your companions have all left. Why don't you return?"

Ouyang Mu froze, only then realizing that the entire hunting process had been seen by Mo Hua.

Ouyang Mu's expression turned gloomy, but he still shook his head firmly and said:

"I won't leave. I'm going to kill the Flame Demon Wolf."

"Why?" Mo Hua appeared bewildered.

Ouyang Mu replied quietly, "I want the Flame Demon Wolf's spine bone..."

"Why do you need the spine bone?"

"For sword casting..."

Mo Hua froze for a moment, then his eyes lit up as he exclaimed:

"You can cast swords?!"

He had already heard from others that the Three Tai Xu Sects—Tai'a, Chongxu, and Taixu—had deep ties, and the Tai'a Sect was most famous for its Tai'a Sword Casting Skill!

Under Mo Hua's gaze, Ouyang Mu felt somewhat uneasy and woodenly nodded.

Mo Hua broke into a bright smile. "What did you just say you needed again?"

Ouyang Mu hesitated for a moment and repeated in a low voice:

"The Flame Demon Wolf's... spine bone."

Mo Hua nodded and whistled.

A moment later, a Taixu Gate disciple came rushing over from afar and stopped in front of Mo Hua:

"Junior Brother!"

Mo Hua instructed, "Kill a Flame Demon Wolf and pull out its spine bone for me."

"Got it!"

The disciple bolted off again.

Not long after, the mountains and forests in the distance erupted into chaos, with explosions of formations, shouts of cultivators, and the roars of monster beasts echoing through the air.

Finally, once all the commotion settled, the disciple returned, handing Mo Hua a spine bone. It was fresh, blood-stained, glowing in a fiery red hue, and surrounded by flickering flames.

Ouyang Mu stared at the spine bone, his mouth slowly falling open.

The spine bone of the Flame Demon Wolf!

For days, he had tried everything, pleading with countless people, enduring unimaginable hardships, painstakingly assembling a team, and battling monsters. Yet even after all the effort, he had failed to obtain this single spine bone.

And now, in just a brief moment—before he could even make sense of what had happened—a fresh, bloodied, flaming spine bone of the Flame Demon Wolf had been placed right in front of him.

Ouyang Mu's face was a picture of disbelief.

He slowly lifted his head, staring blankly at Mo Hua, his heart brimming with astonishment:

Just who exactly was this Brother Mo...

Chapter 1303: Follow Me

"This spine bone is for you."

Mo Hua said generously.

Ouyang Mu was momentarily overwhelmed by the favor and shook his head repeatedly, saying, "I can't take it..."

"Don't you want it?"

Mo Hua waved the spine bone in his hand.

Ouyang Mu's eyes were completely drawn to the spine bone, following its movements back and forth, reluctant to look away.

But he gritted his teeth and firmly declared:

"I want it, but I didn't earn it through monster hunting. I can't accept it."

Mo Hua said, "Senior Brother Feng looked after me before. Now I'm looking after you a bit. Just take it, it's fine."

Ouyang Mu still shook his head, "No merit, no reward."

Mo Hua was a little surprised, and his gaze carried a hint of appreciation.

This Little Wood, while a bit rigid, had a good heart, was principled, and didn't like taking advantage of others.

"Hmm," Mo Hua nodded. "If you don't want it, let's drop it."

Mo Hua pretended to put the spine bone of the Flame Demon Wolf away.

Seeing that the spine bone, which was so close to him, was about to vanish, Ouyang Mu froze for a moment and then grew a bit anxious.

He hesitated for a long while before hurriedly saying:

"Brother Mo, can I buy it with merit points?"

"Merit points?" Mo Hua pondered briefly and nodded, "That works. But this Flame Demon Wolf's spine bone, according to typical pricing, costs 800 merit points. Do you have that much?"

"Eight hundred?!"

Ouyang Mu was stunned, his face reddening soon after. "I... don't have that much..."

"How much do you have?"

"Just... three hundred..."

Ouyang Mu stammered nervously.

Although he was a direct lineage of the Ouyang Family, once within the sect, he had to follow the sect's rules and rely on himself for everything.

These merit points were accumulated bit by bit by helping others with blacksmithing and forging swords over time.

After spending some recently, he now only had 300 left.

"How about I sell it to you for 300?" Mo Hua suggested.

Ouyang Mu shook his head again and again, "No, I can't let Brother Mo take a loss. I..."

He hesitated for a moment and whispered, "Can I owe you first and pay you back later?"

Mo Hua rubbed his chin, silently pondering something, without responding.

Ouyang Mu thought Mo Hua didn't trust him and quickly vowed:

"I'll definitely pay you back!"

"How will you pay me back?" Mo Hua's eyes were meaningful as he asked with a guiding tone.

Ouyang Mu said, "I'll work hard to earn merit points..."

Mo Hua sighed, "It's not easy to earn merit points, is it?"

Ouyang Mu's face showed a hint of difficulty.

Indeed, earning merit points wasn't easy.

The good tasks were always highly contested.

If you couldn't compete for them, you could only complete lower-level tasks to slowly accumulate points.

At the same time, the sect demanded spending a lot of merit points on various things: cultivation techniques, Taoist skills, the Artifice Manual, pills, Spiritual Artifacts, and so on.

Saving merit points felt like gathering grains of sand, while spending them was like watching flowing water.

Most disciples found their earned merit points insufficient to meet their needs.

Generally speaking, once disciples reached the Foundation Building Middle Stage, they could enter the Refining Demon Mountain.

In the Refining Demon Mountain, as long as you learned quickly, became experienced, and successfully hunted monster beasts and harvested materials, earning merit points wouldn't be difficult.

However, if you learned slowly and repeatedly failed to hunt monsters, it would be adding insult to injury, making merit points increasingly hard to acquire.

Ouyang Mu had no confidence in monster hunting at all.

His 300 merit points had taken him a long time to save up...

If he bought this Flame Demon Wolf's spine bone, he'd owe 500 merit points.

To accumulate those 500 merit points through regular tasks would take who knows how long.

He had no assurance in monster hunting, and if something went wrong, he might not earn merit points and would be unable to repay the debt, making Brother Mo suffer a loss.

Ouyang Mu lowered his head, his expression flickering with hesitation and indecision.

Mo Hua saw this and smiled gently, speaking warmly, "If you can't repay the merit points, you can help me with something instead."

Ouyang Mu was taken aback, "I... what could I possibly help with?"

After thinking for a moment, Ouyang Mu slowly said, "If Brother Mo doesn't mind, I can do artifact refining... Sword casting is possible too..."

Mo Hua raised an eyebrow, finally hearing the words he was waiting for, and immediately nodded:

"Deal!"

Ouyang Mu felt slightly nervous, "But, my sword-casting skills are quite average..."

"It's fine," Mo Hua encouraged him, "No one starts out knowing everything. You can learn and practice slowly."

Coming from the Tai'a Sect with a proper sword-casting legacy, Ouyang Mu was surely better than himself, Master Gu, or the other Taixu Sect disciples.

Moreover, Mo Hua felt that although Little Wood was a bit stiff, he was sincere and had a good temperament.

A good temperament could compensate for lack of skill, as improvements would come with time.

But if someone lacked integrity, there was no point building ties with them.

Skill could be honed, but once a person's heart was tainted, it was nearly impossible to change.

Ouyang Mu was clearly encouraged and made a solemn promise, "Brother Mo, don't worry, I won't let you down!"

Mo Hua saw his serious expression and couldn't help but laugh, saying:

"Just do your best; no need to pressure yourself."

"Alright!"

Ouyang Mu nodded earnestly.

Mo Hua thought for a moment longer and said:

"You owe me 500 merit points. How about this? Forge me a Spirit Sword, and I'll count it as 100 merit points. I'll provide the materials."

Mo Hua's offer was a fair market price.

In the sect, commissions for ordinary Second Grade Spiritual Artifacts usually varied between 50 to 80 merit points due to the time required to forge them, with occasional fluctuations.

Spirit Swords cost a bit more.

One hundred merit points was considered reasonable.

Of course, these were just ordinary Spirit Swords.

Those engraved with Sword Arrays—the proper "Sword Weapons" of a true inheritance—were much more expensive. But they were beyond the abilities of most disciples to craft.

Ouyang Mu, still at the Foundation Building Middle Stage and currently studying at the sect, certainly wouldn't know such advanced sword-casting techniques.

And the Tai'a Sect wouldn't teach them Sword Arrays at this stage either.

Mo Hua had no need for those skills; he didn't require an inheritance-grade Spirit Sword.

All he needed was a regular Spirit Sword that Ouyang Mu could craft.

Chapter 1304: Hang Out with Me (2)

Ouyang Mu heard this and shook his head.

"Too low a price?" Mo Hua asked.

"No, no," Ouyang Mu hurriedly replied, "When I craft artifacts for others, it's usually forty merit points, and sword casting is just sixty. A hundred merit points is too much. My experience is shallow, and my skills are rough—I'm not worth that much."

Ouyang Mu glanced at Mo Hua and said somewhat embarrassedly:

"Brother Mo, I'll just charge you sixty as well. I'll craft eight... no, nine spiritual artifacts to pay off my debt."

Mo Hua was taken aback.

He'd haggled with plenty of people before, but encountering this reverse-negotiation was a first for him, leaving him momentarily disconcerted.

"Then it's settled—eight spirit swords!"

Mo Hua replied with a cheerful smile.

He stuffed the spine bone of the Flame Demon Wolf into Ouyang Mu's arms, making it impossible for him to refuse, and said:

"That's decided then. You hold onto this spine bone for now. Next month on the off-day, find me in the mountains, and I'll tell you which sword to forge."

After saying this, Mo Hua waved his hand and left.

Ouyang Mu remained in place, clutching the fresh wolf demon spine bone, still carrying the residual warmth of fire. His heart, too, was warmed by a blaze of gratitude.

This Brother Mo, truly, is a great good person!

Ouyang Mu gazed at Mo Hua's gradually retreating silhouette, his heart filled with gratitude.

...

Soon, a month passed.

On the off-day, Mo Hua again made his way to Refining Demon Mountain.

As promised, Ouyang Mu was waiting for him there.

Currently, he carried a debt of five hundred merit points, feeling the weight of pressure bearing heavily on his shoulders. He didn't want to disappoint Mo Hua's generosity in giving him the Flame Demon Wolf's spine, so he was eager to do something for him.

"Brother Mo, what sword do you want me to cast?"

Mo Hua handed over his pre-prepared sword-casting diagram to Ouyang Mu.

Ouyang Mu received it, took just one glance, and said:

"Brother Mo, this sword design is quite strange... it's not shaped like a regular spirit sword, is it?"

Mo Hua thought to himself, as expected of someone from Tai'a Sect—he saw through it in an instant.

"This sword is indeed a bit out of the ordinary," Mo Hua nodded and replied.

Ouyang Mu kept looking at it, muttering under his breath:

"Its exterior is similar, but its internal structure is different..."

"The materials seem a bit cheap—not very sturdy."

"There's space left for a formation inside, but this seems... not the typical reinforcement or sharpening formations used for regular spirit swords?"

Ouyang Mu gestured with his hand over the sword diagram, suddenly exclaiming in surprise:

"... It's a sword formation!"

"The sword formation isn't internally sealed; the sword's design is open source..."

...

Muttering to himself, Ouyang Mu's expression darkened, becoming despondent as he said: "Brother Mo, I can't craft this kind of spirit sword..."

"Why's that?"

Ouyang Mu explained: "This isn't a standard spirit sword—it doesn't use typical formations but sword formations."

"Sword formations aren't something I've learned yet. Only after joining the Inner Gate and signing a Death Oath will the sect teach them."

"Currently, the Elders and Instructors only teach the purely artifact-refining techniques outside of sword formations, like the Tai'a Sword Casting Skill."

"No problem," Mo Hua replied, "you don't need to worry about the sword formation—just focus on crafting the sword itself."

"Oh."

Ouyang Mu nodded.

He had no idea how Brother Mo intended to address the sword formation issue.

From his impression, the Taixu Sect didn't seem to have any special legacy regarding sword formations either.

Even if there were, it wouldn't be taught now anyway.

However, Ouyang Mu was polite enough not to pry further.

Purely casting the sword, without involving the sword formation—even if its design was a bit unconventional—wasn't difficult to accomplish.

Ouyang Mu studied the sword diagram Mo Hua had provided several more times.

Mo Hua keenly observed his reactions and suddenly asked, "Little Wood, what do you think of this sword diagram's design?"

Ouyang Mu froze, "What do you mean by what I think?"

"Well," Mo Hua thought for a moment and said, "how's the quality? Are there areas that need improvement...?"

Ouyang Mu was about to respond but hesitated and cautiously asked instead:

"Brother Mo, who designed this sword diagram?"

Mo Hua blinked and vaguely replied:

"I asked someone within the sect... a Foundation Establishment Middle Phase junior brother who's somewhat knowledgeable about artifact refining to design it..."

Ouyang Mu breathed a sigh of relief and began to critique:

"It's a complete mess."

Mo Hua felt a small pang in his heart.

He had carefully crafted this sword diagram after consulting numerous spirit sword blueprints and incorporating sword formations, "meticulously" designing it.

Only to have Little Wood condemn it as "a complete mess"...

Ouyang Mu didn't notice Mo Hua's expression and continued, "It should be the work of an amateur... not a total amateur, more like someone half-knowledgeable, half-competent..."

Mo Hua's eyelid twitched as he took a deep breath and said, "Then tell me, how should it be adjusted?"

Ouyang Mu, fully engrossed in the topic, immediately took out paper and pen and began drawing modifications for Mo Hua on the spot.

"First of all, the materials for the spirit sword aren't ideal."

"Spirit swords belong to the Golden Series, so using materials from gold-series monster beasts is generally correct. However, some of these materials have poor fusion compatibility and are bad at conducting spiritual power."

"Furthermore, with Five Elements Generation and Restraint, there is both 'Restraint' and 'Generation.'"

"For gold-series spirit swords, it's not always necessary to use entirely gold-series materials. Within the Five Elements, Earth generates Gold, so incorporating certain earth-series monster beast materials could have an eye-catching effect..."

"That's the issue with materials. Next is the design."

"The shape of this spirit sword clashes."

"For spirit swords meant for close combat and killing, the materials need to be rigid, the blade sharp, striving to cut through hair and slice iron as though mud..."

"If it's more focused on Sword Qi attacks, the sword body should be lighter, and the spiritual power conduction must be excellent..."

"This sword is heavy, yet the materials are subpar—not hard enough, and the spiritual power conductivity is also poor..."

"As for the sword formation segment, although it's open source, judging by the formation medium layer left inside, this sword formation and this spirit sword have zero compatibility."

"The sword is just a sword, and the sword formation is just a sword formation—they have nothing to do with each other."

"This simply won't work. Only when the sword weapon is compatible with the sword formation will the swordsmanship's full potential be unleashed..."

Chapter 1305: Stick with Me (3)

...

Normally quiet and reserved, Ouyang Mu suddenly became eloquent the moment the topic turned to sword-casting.

Moreover, what he spoke of were insights Mo Hua had completely overlooked before.

Truly, expertise in one field often feels as distant as a mountain in another.

Even though both are under the umbrella of artifact refining, sword-casting stands apart from other disciplines, with profound intricacies of its own.

Mo Hua looked at Ouyang Mu, admiration clear in his gaze.

This is what they call "professionalism"!

No wonder he's a direct disciple of the Ouyang family from the Tai'a Sect.

As Ouyang Mu continued talking, he suddenly grew bashful under Mo Hua's intense gaze. "I... I was just rambling. If I said anything wrong, please don't mind it, Brother Mo."

"No problem, no problem. You spoke very well."

Mo Hua nodded with a smile but thought inwardly, even if you said something wrong, I wouldn't be able to tell...

Mo Hua studied Ouyang Mu further and asked:

"Are you planning to become a sword-casting master in the future?"

Upon hearing this, Ouyang Mu's expression grew complex. After a long pause, he sighed deeply. "My father won't allow it..."

Mo Hua was taken aback and asked in surprise:

"Why wouldn't your father allow it?"

Ouyang Mu said, "My father believes that the Tai'a Sect's lack of renown in the past was due to prioritizing 'sword-casting mastery' too much."

"Those who shine are the sword users, not the sword casters."

"The Tai'a Sect's recent rise to prominence is because the elders decided to use sword-casting mastery as a foundation to vigorously promote the sect's Tai'a Sword Skill and gradually develop it further."

"Now, within the sect, any disciple with potential must study swordsmanship."

"Only those who can't develop in swordsmanship are sent to study sword-casting."

"Being part of the Ouyang family's direct lineage, with so many eyes on me, I am expected to follow my brother's example: study swordsmanship and serve as a model for the sect disciples."

"If I were to focus on sword-casting, my father wouldn't be pleased..."

Speaking to this point, Ouyang Mu looked visibly dejected. "It's just..pared to my brother, I fall so far behind. Whether it's spiritual roots, cultivation level, insight, charisma, sect prestige, or interpersonal skills, I'm vastly inferior to my big brother..."

The more Ouyang Mu spoke, the quieter his voice became.

Mo Hua sighed deeply.

Having an overly exceptional brother, the pressure on Little Wood was easy to imagine.

Their names matched their personalities. Senior Brother Feng was like a towering, steady, and warm maple tree.

While Ouyang Mu was thin, timid, like a "little wooden stick" that hadn't yet grown.

The difference between the two brothers was stark.

"But do you want to become a sword-casting master?" Mo Hua asked.

Ouyang Mu nodded. "I'm not good at anything else. Usually, I don't speak well, I'm mediocre at sword cultivation, clumsy at monster hunting, but I only feel a little happy when I'm sword-casting."

Mo Hua encouraged him, "Then don't worry about it. Study what you want to study."

Ouyang Mu was visibly conflicted. "But my father..."

Mo Hua asked, "Now that you're studying swordsmanship, is your father happy?"

Ouyang Mu shook his head. "My father thinks my swordsmanship is terrible; he's not happy."

"There you go," Mo Hua said, "If studying sword-casting doesn't make your father happy and studying swordsmanship doesn't make him happy either, then happiness isn't the issue. So what's the difference?"

"Since that's the case, why not study something that makes you happy?"

Ouyang Mu froze.

As his mind spun around, he suddenly realized Brother Mo's words...

Made quite a lot of sense.

Whether he studied sword-casting or swordsmanship, his father would be unhappy.

The result was the same either way.

So what was he so conflicted about?

Although he understood this logic, deep inside, he still felt some unease and hesitation.

Mo Hua didn't expect him to figure everything out immediately. Instead, he comforted him:

"Don't overthink it. Start by forging the Spirit Swords you still owe me."

Though Little Wood was supposed to study swordsmanship first, he still needed to earn Merit Points.

His swordsmanship skills were not sufficient to support him in earning Merit Points.

He was left with no choice but to rely on sword-casting to earn them.

As long as Mo Hua guided him step by step down the "right path" of sword-casting, all would eventually fall into place.

Mo Hua thought silently to himself:

"What's so great about studying swordsmanship..."

"In Qianxue State, disciples who study swordsmanship are everywhere; they don't lack Little Wood."

"Besides, Little Wood doesn't have much talent for Sword Dao, nor is he predisposed to the killing temperament it requires. Forcing him to study swordsmanship is just holding him back..."

"Such a good sword-casting seedling, and the Tai'a Sect doesn't even recognize his value..."

Mo Hua shook his head.

Ouyang Mu recovered, nodded, and said, "Alright."

Regardless, he needed to first forge the eight Spirit Swords owed to Brother Mo.

"By the way," Mo Hua said, pointing to the sword-casting diagram in Ouyang Mu's hand, "Modify this diagram the way you just described for me. It's for that junior brother in Taixu Gate whose artifact refining skill is mediocre."

Still lacking confidence, Ouyang Mu hesitated. "Is this okay? Modifying someone else's sword diagram—wouldn't that be inappropriate?"

Mo Hua nodded firmly, "It's perfectly appropriate. Just go ahead and revise it."

Under Mo Hua's strong insistence, Ouyang Mu focused intently and meticulously revised the Spirit Sword's formation diagram.

When Mo Hua examined the result, he was utterly blown away.

Had he not compared them, he might have never realized how atrocious his previous diagrams were.

Quietly, Mo Hua crumpled up his own earlier diagrams and stuffed them into his Storage Bag.

"Use your design!"

Mo Hua said to Ouyang Mu.

"Alright, Brother Mo!"

Although Ouyang Mu didn't understand why, such recognition from the seemingly formidable Brother Mo greatly boosted his confidence.

Upon returning to the Tai'a Sect, he temporarily set other matters aside and dedicated himself wholeheartedly to forging swords for Mo Hua.

Eight days later, on the day of the break period.

In the forested mountains of Refining Demon Mountain.

Ouyang Mu handed a golden Spirit Sword to Mo Hua with both hands.

Since it was his first time crafting this type of Spirit Sword, he wasn't sure about its actual effectiveness. He only refined one first for Mo Hua's inspection.

Mo Hua received the Spirit Sword, feeling a slight tremor in his heart.

The sword was lightweight, its luster subdued, its internal structure precise, its shape sharp, and its refining craftsmanship remarkably refined.

Even before engraving a Sword Array, traces of Sword Qi could already be felt emanating.

Compared to the flying swords he had used previously, this sword was leagues apart.

Ecstatic, Mo Hua decided to test the sword.

With practiced ease, Mo Hua swiftly engraved the Gold-Cutting Sword Formation onto the Spirit Sword. His speed was so fast and the patterns so unique that Ouyang Mu couldn't even discern what Mo Hua had drawn.

After completing the Sword Array, Mo Hua moved to an open area, gazed at the sky, and released his Divine Sense to search for a target.

Soon enough, a ferocious eagle soared across the clear sky.

Mo Hua sat cross-legged, placing the golden Spirit Sword before him.

He held his breath, concentrated, activated the Sever Gold Sword Control Technique, and controlled the sword with his Divine Thought while targeting with his Divine Sense.

The golden Spirit Sword suddenly flared brilliantly.

A burst of golden light flashed momentarily.

Then, a streak of gold shot skyward, heading straight for the savage eagle demon beast.

In a split second, the dazzling golden light erupted.

The sharper Sword Qi spread instantaneously, blossoming like golden lotuses, enveloping the eagle demon completely and shredding its wings and flesh into fragments.

The eagle demon was utterly annihilated by the Broken Gold Sword Qi.

It died instantly, not even making it to the ground!

Such powerful Sword Control!

Mo Hua looked stunned as he turned to the equally astonished Ouyang Mu. He patted his shoulder and declared boldly:

"From now on, stick with me!"

Chapter 1306: Sword Stream

"This... wouldn't be appropriate..."

Ouyang Mu hesitated, somewhat stunned.

"What's inappropriate?" Mo Hua said, "From now on, in Refining Demon Mountain, I'll have your back."

"But, I'm a disciple of Tai'a Sect..." Ouyang Mu whispered, casting a glance at Mo Hua's Taoist Robe, "Senior Brother, you're from Taixu Gate."

Mo Hua replied matter-of-factly:

"You've already called me Senior Brother—what difference does it make whether it's Tai'a Sect or Taixu Gate?"

"Broaden your horizons; don't get stuck on sect rivalries."

"Besides, Tai'a, Taixu, and Chongxu Sect have historical ties, and their ancestors were connected."

"If you trace it back over a thousand years, we're practically family. Why make a fuss about it?"

Ouyang Mu slowly nodded, feeling that Mo Hua's words made sense.

"But I only know artifact refining and sword casting. I'm afraid I won't be able to help you much, Senior Brother Mo."

"Sword casting is already enough!" Mo Hua replied.

What he lacked was someone to cast swords for him.

Whether it was monster hunting or fighting, Mo Hua was never short on people.

Within the sect, when it came to combat, Cheng Mo, Situ Jian, Yang Qianjun, and Hao Xuan were always at his beck and call.

In Refining Demon Mountain, the surrounding hillsides were practically filled with his "Junior Brothers." A casual whistle would summon a team.

Moreover, Mo Hua was fully capable on his own.

His repertoire of techniques was already quite extensive.

For treachery, he had Concealment Technique; for defense and retreat, he relied on Water Passing Step.

For attack, he commanded Formations, Forbidden Techniques, and Sword Control.

Outside the Qian Learning State Boundary, he could even "summon" Gu Changhuai, Uncle Gu of Golden Core Realm, and leverage the secret commands of the Gu Family to mobilize their cultivators.

He had plenty of hands for fighting.

But specialized and professional Tao cultivation talents were scarce.

At present, what he especially lacked were sword-casting masters with orthodox backgrounds, inheritance, and natural talent.

Seeing Ouyang Mu still hesitating, a glint flashed in Mo Hua's eyes, and he added:

"If you're unwilling, we can forget about it. I wouldn't want to force you."

After all, Ouyang Mu was a disciple of Tai'a Sect and a direct lineage of the Ouyang Family. Asking him to follow someone from Taixu Gate would naturally make him uncomfortable.

This was only human nature.

"Senior Brother Mo, I'm sorry..."

Ouyang Mu felt a little guilty.

Senior Brother Mo had been so kind to him, yet he rejected his offer.

"It's alright," Mo Hua smiled, "If you don't want to work with me, that's fine. Let's keep it strictly professional—in the future, help me cast swords, and I'll compensate you with Merit Points."

Ouyang Mu froze, showing some concern in his expression.

Mo Hua roughly understood and asked, "Are you worried your father won't let you cast swords?"

Ouyang Mu nodded.

"But you still need to earn Merit Points, don't you?"

"I do..."

"Does your father give you Merit Points?" Mo Hua continued.

Ouyang Mu shook his head, "No, Tai'a Sect has strict rules, and our Ouyang Family is also stringent. Within the sect, everything must be earned by oneself. We can't rely on our status to bully others, nor exploit identity for personal gain. Even Merit Points must be accumulated step by step."

"Then aside from sword casting, do you have any other way to earn Merit Points?"

After racking his brain in deep thought, Ouyang Mu finally had to admit that, apart from sword casting, he had no other means of earning Merit Points.

"There you have it..." Mo Hua said, "If your father won't give you Merit Points and you must earn them yourself, then you can only rely on sword casting to do so."

"Besides, whether it's learning sword casting or honing swordsmanship, those are concerns for the future. Right now, the priority is earning Merit Points and focusing on cultivation."

"Without the present, there is no future."

"So for now, just focus on sword casting—don't worry about anything else."

Ouyang Mu couldn't help but nod in agreement.

Taking advantage of the moment, Mo Hua added some "pressure" with a serious tone:

"Furthermore, think carefully—throughout the entire Qian Learning State Boundary, sword-casting masters aren't exactly rare; you're not the only one."

"Sword-casting masters need a steady supply of monster beast materials to practice their craft."

"Opportunities to receive stable material supply, employment for sword casting, and compensation with Merit Points are exceedingly rare."

"If you miss this chance, you might never encounter another like it in the future..."

Hearing this, Ouyang Mu immediately became nervous.

Sect missions were always fiercely contested.

He had difficulty competing with others in the first place, and extra opportunities for sword casting outside sect teachings were exceedingly rare.

If he wanted to refine on his own, the cost of materials alone would require a significant amount of Merit Points.

Ouyang Mu still remembered the efforts he went through to acquire the Flame Demon Wolf's spine bone for sword casting.

Ultimately, relying solely on himself, he failed to obtain it.

It was Senior Brother Mo who had someone slay the Flame Demon Wolf, extract the spine bone, and gift it to him.

If he refused now, he truly feared he'd lose such lucrative "sword casting" opportunities in the future.

Ouyang Mu promptly nodded multiple times and said:

"Senior Brother Mo, if you don't mind my crude skills, you can always come to me for sword casting—I'll do my utmost!"

"Good!"

Mo Hua nodded, satisfied.

After thinking for a moment, he said, "I'll provide you with materials. For now, forge six or seven of those golden Spirit Swords I showed you, and then I'll consider crafting other types."

"Alright, Senior Brother Mo."

Ouyang Mu agreed.

Afterward, Mo Hua located an Eagle Demon that had been felled mid-air by Sword Qi and plummeted to the ground. He skinned and collected materials before handing them to Ouyang Mu, instructing him to exchange for Merit Points at the mountain gate and save them for personal use.

The poor boy had just over three hundred Merit Points to his name.

Without some assistance, he likely couldn't even afford the entrance fee to Refining Demon Mountain...

Ouyang Mu was both overwhelmed and deeply moved but couldn't refuse, given his financial struggles. He silently resolved:

To repay Senior Brother Mo's kindness, he must devote himself fully to sword casting.

Leaving Refining Demon Mountain, the two walked back to the sect side by side.

Because Tai'a Mountain and Taixu Mountain were adjacent, their paths to the sect coincided.

Chapter 1307: Sword Stream (2)

As they walked, Mo Hua suddenly thought of a question and asked:

"Little Wood, how old are you?"

Ouyang Mu thought for a moment and replied, "I was born in the third month of the year 20,012 of the Taoist Calendar."

Mo Hua was somewhat surprised.

Little Wood was actually the same age as him, and even older by a few months.

Calculating it, Mo Hua realized he was actually younger.

But Little Wood seemed to have gotten used to calling him "Senior Brother," so there was no need to mention such minor details.

Anyway, in Taixu Gate, there were plenty of disciples older than him who still called him "Junior Brother."

The two chatted casually as they walked. Once they arrived at the mountain gate, they each returned to their respective sects.

Mo Hua returned to Taixu Gate, while Ouyang Mu headed back to Tai'a Sect.

The Tai'a Mountain exuded a robust and ancient air, solemn and grand, unlike the ethereal charm and serene beauty of Taixu Gate. In its peaks and pathways, bricks and tiles, there was a discernible craftsmanship.

Lowering his head, Ouyang Mu silently returned to the Disciple's Residence.

He didn't greet anyone along the way.

And naturally, no one greeted him either.

In Tai'a Sect, he was mostly alone.

He had already grown accustomed to it.

Once back at the Disciple's Residence, Ouyang Mu shut the door, staying alone in his room. He took out the sword diagram Mo Hua had given him and studied it repeatedly.

At the same time, he thought and annotated, pondering how he could forge the Spirit Sword better according to Brother Mo's guidance.

As he thought, an image suddenly surfaced in his mind—the scene earlier that day of Mo Hua controlling his sword, a golden light streaking through the heavens, slaying the Monster Beasts.

Brother Mo's sword control technique was truly powerful!

So powerful!

At a loss for words, he couldn't think of any other descriptive term. Again and again, he could only marvel at these two words: "So powerful."

Although Brother Mo seemed slightly lacking in natural talent, his sword control technique was stronger than any he had seen among disciples of the same generation.

Ouyang Mu felt an inexplicable surge of excitement.

This formidable sword control technique used a Spirit Sword forged by him!

Brother Mo had even praised him!

Ouyang Mu couldn't help but wonder, if he could create an even better Spirit Sword, with higher quality, wouldn't this sword control technique become even more formidable?

A more powerful sword control technique... what would it look like?

Ouyang Mu thought about it with great anticipation.

...

After that, Ouyang Mu became even more motivated in sword forging.

With his naturally diligent and responsible personality, in addition to his passion for sword crafting, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to refining Spirit Swords.

By the next break period, he had forged three more Spirit Swords.

"Because I also need time for cultivation and classes, I could only craft in my spare time, so I only managed three," Ouyang Mu explained to Mo Hua.

"It's alright, it's already very good," Mo Hua encouraged him.

Over this period, Mo Hua had come to realize that Little Wood actually had excellent talent in sword crafting.

But he lacked confidence.

Furthermore, due to the lack of crafting materials and the burden of his father urging him to abandon sword casting for swordsmanship, he was weighed down with worries and couldn't let go fully.

"Feel free to keep learning sword casting. If you need materials, just let me know. Also, if you have any new ideas or approaches for crafting, you can share them with me..."

Mo Hua decided to nurture Little Wood a bit, guiding him down a unique path in artifact refining.

His own situation was unconventional.

Whether it was customized spiritual tools or sword casting, they diverged from general standards of artifact refining.

If Little Wood could be counted upon, Mo Hua wouldn't have to worry about artifact refining in the future and could focus solely on formations.

He could focus on studying formations and designing Formation Diagrams.

Little Wood could focus on researching refining diagrams.

The innovations resulting from their collaboration could then be mass-produced with the help of Master Gu at the Gushan Refining Workshop.

Each would excel in their respective strengths while achieving perfect division and synergy.

Mo Hua looked at Ouyang Mu with anticipation.

Ouyang Mu didn't fully understand, but he suddenly felt a heavy weight on his shoulders...

"Alright, Brother Mo."

After that, Little Wood began progressing rapidly.

Mo Hua started letting him handle more responsibilities.

Not just Spirit Swords; even customized spiritual tools were entrusted to Little Wood. Mo Hua would explain his thoughts and the corresponding formation concepts, then let Little Wood design the refining diagram.

Little Wood would meticulously create his designs, consult with Mo Hua, solve formation-related issues, and finalize the refinement array map.

Mo Hua presented this refinement array map to Master Gu, who praised it highly.

"This refinement array map is brilliantly conceived and highly practical. Given my level, I can hardly find any flaws..."

After a moment of reflection, Master Gu asked, "This... wasn't devised solely by the young master, was it?"

He knew very well the extent of Mo Hua's abilities.

In formations, Mo Hua was profoundly skilled.

But in artifact refining, although he had many fascinating ideas and often surprised others, his poor foundation frequently led to basic errors.

Mo Hua nodded and replied, "I sought assistance from a disciple born into a sword-casting family."

Master Gu was momentarily startled, then remarked with admiration, "No wonder. This disciple of yours has a solid foundation and deep family heritage."

Mo Hua nodded in agreement and said:

"Indeed."

...

Soon after, Spirit Artifacts designed by Ouyang Mu were mass-produced under Master Gu's supervision.

Once refined, Mo Hua tried them out and found them satisfactory.

Entering the Refining Demon Mountain again, Mo Hua brought Ouyang Mu to the Taixu Gate's mountain peak to meet with his group of "Junior Brothers."

Mo Hua introduced him to everyone:

"This disciple's surname is Ouyang, given name Mu. He is a Tai'a Sect disciple, an exceptional talent in sword-casting. Please take good care of him during our time in the Refining Demon Mountain."

Tai'a Sect disciple?

The group of Taixu Sect disciples looked at him curiously.

A Tai'a Sect disciple—why was he tagging along with the Junior Brother?

But whatever the Junior Brother did usually had his reasons.

Chapter 1308: Sword Stream (3)

Junior Brother asked everyone to take care of him, so just do so.

What's more, the Tai'a Sect and the Taixu Sect already share a connection. Friendly exchanges between disciples are not a bad thing, and they don't reject it either.

The Taixu Sect disciples cupped their hands and said:

"Greetings, Brother Ouyang."

Between sects, the hierarchy of seniority among disciples is first determined by their cohort year.

Those in a higher cohort are Senior Brother or Senior Sister; those in a lower cohort are Junior Brother or Junior Sister.

If they're from the same cohort, it's usually determined by age.

The older one takes the title of Senior Brother or Senior Sister; otherwise, the dynamic is up to context.

Ouyang Mu, being thin and young-looking, naturally came to be called "Junior Brother."

Ouyang Mu's dark, expressionless face flared red all of a sudden, and he stammered:

"H-hello... everyone."

He had never been stared at by so many people at once before.

Nor had he ever been addressed as "Junior Brother" by so many at the same time; for a moment, he felt completely flustered.

Mo Hua then said, "In the future, if your spiritual artifacts get damaged and need repairs, you can find Junior Brother Ouyang."

"Understood!"

The Taixu Sect disciples answered in unison.

Their spiritual artifacts were typically either inherited or custom-made, purchased from the Gu Family Store in Taixu City under the recommendation of Junior Brother.

But when these artifacts broke, repairing them was a hassle.

Especially spiritual swords, their repairs were costly and intricate.

Having a professional Sword-Casting Master to handle repairs would be ideal.

Letting Little Wood make an appearance was essentially an initiation of sorts; Mo Hua's intentions had been partially achieved. With a wave of his hand, he said:

"It's getting late; let's go hunt some monsters."

"Yes, Junior Brother."

Some disciples dispersed.

Others, who had matters to discuss with Mo Hua, approached him in small groups and asked:

"Junior Brother, about the Monster Hunting Formation you taught yesterday, I'm still not very proficient with it. Isn't it activated using Divine Sense?"

"Is my Divine Sense too weak? I can't seem to control it..."

"Junior Brother, can you free up some time to tell me how to kill a Black Bear Demon...?"

"I want to forge a pair of Meteor Hammers, using bear claws as the hammerheads."

"Junior Brother, is there a Taoist Robe that can counter Earth-series demonic power, or any custom-made artifact for armor-breaking? I asked the Gu Family Store, but they had no answers..."

"Junior Brother, later we plan to kill a Burmese Python. Its blood is quite rare. Should we save some for you...?"

...

Mo Hua patiently answered each query.

Having received satisfactory replies, the disciples went their separate ways.

On the side, Ouyang Mu watched, inwardly astonished.

Only now did he realize that Brother Mo's status within the Taixu Sect was far higher than he had imagined.

Even his elder brother, with remarkable talent, exceptional temperament, and prominent prestige among his cohort within the Tai'a Sect, couldn't match such influence...

Ouyang Mu glanced at Mo Hua, whose gaze remained clear and unpretentious, his demeanor relaxed, like a simple and innocent youth. For a moment, Ouyang was slightly lost in thought.

"What's the matter?" Mo Hua asked.

Ouyang Mu smiled faintly, "Oh, nothing..."

...

In the days that followed, Ouyang Mu became even more diligent and conscientious.

The spirit sword in Mo Hua's hands underwent several optimizations under Ouyang Mu's suggestions.

With each optimization, its power grew.

However, over time, the quality of the spirit sword reached its limit.

The power of Mo Hua's Sword Control also hit a bottleneck.

"Brother Mo, utilizing materials from a Primary Rank, First Grade monster to stabilize the sword array under specific conditions can only enhance this much power for now," Ouyang Mu said.

"If you want to improve further, you'll need materials from at least a Middle Stage, Second Grade monster."

"But these materials are difficult to smelt, and with my current cultivation level, I'm not capable of utilizing them properly..."

"Alternatively, there's the sword array itself..."

From their interactions, Ouyang Mu had come to understand the principle behind Mo Hua's Sword Control. He found it both clever and a little "unfair."

Yet, he couldn't deny that this method of Sword Control, especially in the hands of the unpredictable Brother Mo, was terrifying in its potency.

Ouyang Mu remarked, "The power of this Sword Control fundamentally hinges on the strength of the sword array. The stronger the sword array, the more powerful the Sword Control."

"By the way, Brother Mo," Ouyang Mu asked suddenly, "Is your family's sword array limited to the Gold-series Sword Array?"

"Family's sword array?" Mo Hua was momentarily confused.

Ouyang Mu replied, "Didn't you say so yourself?"

"Oh, right..."

Mo Hua had almost forgotten.

He had told Little Wood that the "Gold-Cutting Sword Formation" on his sword was a family-inherited Gold-series Sword Array.

Little Wood, being kind-hearted, had believed him without question.

"Yes, that's correct; it's inherited from my family."

Mo Hua emphasized again, then shook his head and said, "Our family only passed down this one array; for now, we don't have any others."

Whether his family would "pass down" more in the future depended on what other sects or families might offer to him.

Ouyang Mu felt a bit regretful and said, "If there were other sword arrays, we could try experimenting with multi-attribute, multi-form spirit swords."

Mo Hua sighed lightly.

Indeed...

Suddenly, his eyes gleamed as he asked, "What if we didn't use a sword array?"

"Not use a sword array?"

"What about other formations, like Killing Formations?" Mo Hua suggested.

Ouyang Mu shook his head, "That won't work. Not all formations can be casually embedded into swords."

"Sword arrays are special. Although I'm not deeply knowledgeable about formations, from a Sword-Casting standpoint, sword arrays have the highest compatibility with sword weapons."

"Sword weapons can also maximize the power of sword arrays."

"Other formations have lower adaptability to spirit swords, and the power they can unleash through Sword Control is minimal."

"If you really want to use them, the formation would have to be converted into a sword array first..."

Mo Hua froze for a moment upon hearing this, then exclaimed in astonishment:

"Converted into a sword array? Formations can also be converted into sword arrays?!"

Ouyang Mu, caught off guard by Mo Hua's question, suddenly felt uncertain and hesitant.

Knowing that Mo Hua was an esteemed Formation Master, Ouyang became even more cautious in his response:

"I'm not actually sure..."

Ouyang Mu whispered, "This was something I overheard while chatting with my father and the Chief Elder of our sect. Whether it's true or not, or if there were any errors, I don't really know."

"It's also possible that I misheard..."

Mo Hua's eyes narrowed slightly as he sank into deep thought.

Little Wood wasn't the type to lie.

That statement... might hold some truth.

When he had crafted sword arrays before, Mo Hua hadn't considered this possibility, but now it struck him:

The sword patterns in the Gold-Cutting Sword Formation of Sever Gold Sect resembled certain variant Gold-series formation patterns.

Sword patterns were variant formation patterns.

Sword arrays were variant formations!

This made perfect sense...

Previously, Mo Hua had been puzzled about why Elder Master Xun's categorization of formations, spanning from Yin-Yang and Eryi to Three Talents, Four Symbols, Seven Stars, and Eight Trigrams, didn't include sword arrays.

Sword arrays were a unique category of formations, but clearly, they didn't fall under any of the traditional classifications from Eryi to Eight Trigrams.

If sword arrays were "variant" formations, it would all add up.

These variant formations would not conflict with the broader categories of formations but rather intertwine with them.

Theoretically, any formation from Eryi to Eight Trigrams could be converted into a sword array through specific formation pattern variations.

The Earth Fire Formation could be converted into the Earth Fire Sword Array.

The Di Sha Formation could be converted into the Di Sha Sword Array.

...

However, while this sounded simple in theory, researching it in practice would undoubtedly be an immense challenge, fraught with difficulties.

Otherwise, sword arrays wouldn't remain as the core secret inheritance of sword-dao families.

Based on Mo Hua's formation expertise, standard pattern transformations to convert formation patterns into "sword patterns" would surely involve the most profound and complex principles of formations.

"What kind of formation principles would it involve?"

Mo Hua racked his brain, searching for an answer, and suddenly thought of a term:

Formation Flows!

"Sword Dao Formation Flows?"

Formation Flows dealt with the origins of formations, approaching their very essence.

To comprehend the origin of the Great Dao and master a certain "Sword Dao Formation Flow" might allow one to convert elemental formations into "sword arrays" through formation pattern transformations.

Mo Hua's heart trembled.

If this hypothesis proved correct, then...

Mo Hua's thoughts churned rapidly as he continued his deductions:

If he applied the principles of the Reversed Spirit Formation or Spiritual Power Fusion into a formation, and then, through Sword Dao Formation Flows, conducted formation pattern transformations to convert them into sword arrays...

Wouldn't that result in...

The Spiritual Power Dissolution Sword Array and the Spiritual Power Convergence Sword Array?!

Chapter 1309: The Youth

Divine Sense Sword Control—using divine sense as the force, a spirit sword as the medium, a sword array as the formation, and the laws of spiritual power reversal and spiritual power fusion to unleash devastating killing power...

Just thinking about it made Mo Hua shudder in awe.

But what a pity...

Until now, he had not formally studied the Formation Flow.

As for sword arrays, he had only learned the "Gold-Cutting Sword Formation." Let alone simplifying complexity, uniting the multitude into one, or delving into the Sword Dao Origin of the "Sword Dao Formation Flow."

That goal was still too far away.

Nonetheless, thanks to this, Mo Hua gradually formed a direction and a framework in his mind.

Combining Divine Sense Sword Control with the deadly power of formations.

Henceforth, study more formations and comprehend the laws of all things;

Practice sword control more to deepen his understanding of Sword Dao.

One day in the future, he would undoubtedly attain insight into the Great Dao, merge with sword arrays, and create a Sword Dao "ultimate weapon"—one that uses "Divine Sense Sword Control" as the spell point, the sword as the form, and the array as the core, bearing the power of Dao Laws!

Mo Hua was filled with anticipation.

He patted Ouyang Mu on the shoulder, filled with expectations, saying:

"You must seriously study sword casting!"

In the future, all matters of sword casting would depend on Little Wood.

Ouyang Mu was a bit confused, but being acknowledged by Mo Hua still made him somewhat happy.

Afterward, he diligently continued to delve into sword casting.

The quality of spirit swords had reached its current limit.

The power of sword control had also hit a bottleneck.

Ouyang Mu could only think from other perspectives about how to improve, starting with cost reduction.

Mo Hua's "unorthodox" sword control technique would "sacrifice" a spirit sword every time it was executed.

Spirit swords had become consumables.

Using them over an extended period would incur enormous expenses.

Ouyang Mu thought that since he couldn't enhance their power anymore, he might as well reduce costs to save Brother Mo some merit points.

Merit points were hard to earn, after all.

This he deeply understood.

Though he had earned a considerable amount of merit points by crafting swords for Brother Mo and, in turn, benefiting from the spoils, the habit of being "frugal and resourceful" was ingrained deep in his bones.

After discussing with Mo Hua, Ouyang Mu began to experiment with ways to "cut corners" without reducing the swords' effectiveness, using some "cheaper" materials to forge spirit swords.

Typically, because spirit swords were meant for long-term use, balancing power and durability, the crafting process was intricate, and refining materials were expensive. The quality of materials directly impacted the product, leaving no room for cutting corners.

But with Mo Hua's sword control technique, a sword array would detonate with a blast, and a spirit sword would break after a single use.

So the traditional ideals of making spirit swords "sturdy and durable," "structurally stable," and "aesthetic and elegant"... could all be ignored entirely.

In fact, the sword weapon itself could even adopt an explosive structure.

Forget sturdiness and durability; instead, prioritize flammability, volatility, and explosiveness.

This was something Mo Hua had said casually.

It was the first time Ouyang Mu realized that even sword weapons could have such bizarre "refining methods."

Artifact refining didn't always have to "follow the textbook" and rigidly adhere to conventions.

"Norms for objects are set by people, but objects are dead, and people are alive. One must adapt lifeless 'objects' to suit living people..."

So Mo Hua said.

Ouyang Mu felt as though he'd just received a revelation and exclaimed with admiration:

"Brother Mo, you know so much!"

Though Brother Mo's refining skills were average at best, his words were truly insightful!

"Objects are dead, people are alive; prioritize the person, break free from formality..."

Ouyang Mu nodded earnestly.

And so, this child who had been somewhat wooden, staid, earnest, and as honest as a "block of wood" began to be "led astray" in the art of refining by Mo Hua...

From then on, Ouyang Mu began experimenting with more artifact refining ideas.

He conducted his refining based on cultivators' needs and real-world utility, resorting to "any means necessary" to achieve his goals.

Mo Hua found himself much less burdened as a result.

Basically, all he had to do was state what kind of spirit artifact he needed, what effect he wanted, and what formations he planned to use. Little Wood would mull it over and, by the next day, have a refining diagram ready for Mo Hua.

Moreover, as the Tai'a Sect and Taixu Sect were geographically close, communication was convenient.

...

And so, month after month passed by.

With Mo Hua taking the lead, the Taixu Sect's "monster-hunting" team grew stronger and stronger.

The "strategies" for monster hunting became increasingly comprehensive.

The hunting processes grew ever clearer, the complementary spirit artifacts became more refined, and the hunting system matured rapidly.

The number of hunted monster beasts kept growing, and the variety of harvested materials became increasingly diverse.

Anyone who followed Mo Hua and roamed Demon Hunting Mountain as part of the Taixu Sect had a substantial influx of merit points.

With such abundant monster beast materials, Ouyang Mu's refining skills also improved rapidly.

At the same time, because he often accompanied Mo Hua and frequently repaired spirit artifacts for the Taixu Sect disciples, Ouyang Mu became well-acquainted with many of them.

In the Tai'a Sect, Ouyang Mu was rather withdrawn.

Due to his special background as a direct lineage of the Ouyang family, he was supposed to shine in the sect like his elder brother.

Yet compared to his brother, he was unexceptional, wooden, and socially awkward.

The disciples of the Tai'a Sect regarded him with odd expressions.

Jealousy, disdain, alienation, sympathy—they all mixed together.

Ouyang Mu felt very uncomfortable.

But when he was with Mo Hua and the Taixu Sect disciples, Ouyang Mu felt much more at ease.

He could freely refine artifacts and cast swords.

Everyone called him "Little Wood." Nobody cared whether his surname was "Ouyang," nor did anyone compare him to his extraordinary elder brother.

Everyone simply saw him as a fellow junior disciple, a reliable artifact refiner. He didn't need to worry about how others viewed him anymore.

Though Ouyang Mu still had a somewhat unassuming personality, his expression became noticeably brighter, and his thin face often carried an honest smile.

Chapter 1310: Youth (2)

Sometimes, he couldn't quite figure it out.

He was a disciple of the Tai'a Sect, yet his relationships with his fellow disciples weren't great. Somehow, inexplicably, he ended up mingling effortlessly with the Taixu Sect disciples...

...

Another month passed, and there were little more than two months left until the New Year.

The fourth year of Mo Hua at the Taixu Sect was also approaching its end, amid the bustling daily grind.

It was a day off as well, and Mo Hua, as usual, went up the mountain. Along the way, a group of Taixu Sect disciples greeted him warmly.

"Junior Brother, hello!"

Mo Hua smiled brightly and waved back, acknowledging each of them.

Walking through the mountain paths like this, he reached a quiet spot, chose a large stone, sat down cross-legged, and placed a spirit sword before him.

This was a plain and even somewhat "cheap-looking" spirit sword.

At the same time, it was the latest "explosive-type" spirit sword forged by Little Wood according to Mo Hua's specifications.

Since a sword used for sword control would inevitably break, why not let it completely shatter?

The moment the sword array detonated, the spirit sword would also "explode."

This approach had two benefits.

First, when the spirit sword exploded, the fragmented sword shards would scatter along with the sword qi, bursting outward like a rain of pear blossom darts, thus enhancing the power of sword control to some extent.

Second, it allowed for "destroying the evidence."

After the sword control, the spirit sword would directly shatter into "obliteration," leaving no intact sword weapon behind. This made it harder for others to deduce the details of this swordsmanship technique.

Furthermore, this type of spirit sword was inexpensive to produce.

Little Wood had researched this for a long time and made numerous attempts before finally crafting this explosive-type spirit sword.

Mo Hua was about to test the sword once again.

"A Primary Rank Second Grade flying monster beast is no good—it's too weak..."

Mo Hua thought silently.

Flying monster beasts already had weaker blood qi compared to land beasts. Their flesh defenses were also inferior; only their ability to soar through the skies at great speed made them challenging opponents.

But all those advantages were effectively countered by Mo Hua's "sword control."

After Little Wood improved the spirit sword previously, Mo Hua was already capable of killing one eagle demon with a single "sword control."

Now, the iterative upgrades on this spirit sword had strengthened it further, and Mo Hua wanted to try it out on a stronger monster beast.

"A Middle-level Second Grade Demon Wooden Eagle."

This was the target Mo Hua deliberately chose.

Among Middle-level Second Grade monster beasts, the Demon Wooden Eagle was relatively weak, but it was undoubtedly much stronger than the Primary Rank Second Grade ones.

Mo Hua calmed himself, unleashed his divine sense, and stayed seated, "waiting by the tree stump for a rabbit."

He watched for any chance that a monster beast might fly overhead, allowing him to strike with one clean sword blow.

But after waiting for half a day, all that flew by were Primary Rank bird demons.

Mo Hua sighed lightly.

Encountering a Middle-level Second Grade monster beast in the outer mountains did require a bit of luck.

Of course, it was mainly because the Taixu Sect had been hunting around these mountain peaks with relentless aggression.

Although the Refining Demon Mountain had an abundance of monster beasts, the disciples here would never be able to slay them all. Nevertheless, the smarter monster beasts knew to migrate where the terrain seemed perilous and the cultivators appeared dangerous.

As Primary Rank Second Grade monster beasts decreased, Middle-level ones naturally became even rarer.

Mo Hua felt helpless.

"Shall I try another location?"

Outside the Taixu Sect mountain peaks, he might find something.

Since it was all part of the outer mountains, and he had already scouted them in advance, there shouldn't be much danger.

Mo Hua packed up his sword, stood up, looked out into the distance, and then headed straight in a direction where he felt the chance of encountering monster beasts was higher.

Upon leaving the Taixu Sect mountain peaks, the surrounding landscape indeed appeared a bit unfamiliar.

After walking for a while, he encountered disciples from other sects.

Some wore their sect's Taoist robes, while others didn't.

Those dressed in Taoist robes did so because they had many fellow disciples nearby and were looking out for each other.

Those without Taoist robes traveled in small groups of three to five, opting to act discreetly and avoid exposing their affiliations.

Mo Hua thought for a moment, then silently took off his Taixu Sect Taoist robe and replaced it with a simple gray outfit.

Being alone, it was better to remain low-profile.

After walking for a while longer, Mo Hua finally spotted traces of a Middle-level Second Grade Demon Wooden Eagle.

He unleashed his divine sense and tracked the traces all the way to a mountain forest, where he found the eagle demon circling above. Its gaze was fierce, and it let out sharp screeching cries at intervals.

The eagle demon's massive form exuded an intimidating aura.

Its blood qi and demonic power were both superior to those of ordinary Primary Rank Second Grade monster beasts.

Mo Hua glanced behind him and first chose a retreat route for himself.

If the sword strike missed its mark or failed to heavily wound the eagle demon, he had to decisively flee immediately.

Otherwise, being targeted by this eagle demon could be troublesome.

Mo Hua confirmed the escape route, ensuring everything was foolproof, then sat down, retrieved his spirit sword, and began locking on with his divine sense, controlling the sword via his divine thought.

With a flicker of divine thought, the spirit sword resonated.

A brilliant golden light flared up, cutting through the sky and tracing a sharp golden line. Accompanied by the faint sound of sword resonance, it struck the circling Demon Wooden Eagle with lightning speed.

At the moment the spirit sword hit, golden sword qi erupted.

The sword qi generated by the sword array spun like a miniature tornado, tearing into the eagle demon's divine body.

Meanwhile, the spirit sword itself was also destroyed by the sword qi, breaking into countless fragments.

The shattered sword splintered into fragments, mixing with the sword qi and bursting forth like golden fireworks in the daylight.

The fragmented sword and sword qi struck together.

Even for a Middle-level Second Grade Demon Wooden Eagle, it was difficult to resist the sudden onslaught.

Its feathers were shredded by the sword qi, while the fragments of the shattered spirit sword sliced through its flesh.

This explosive-type sword control technique could be considered, in a unique sense, a fusion of sword qi and sword weapon.