

# THE QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY

## Chapter 3: The Array Master

Mo Hua woke up at the hour of the Rabbit and started his routine cultivation.

An hour later, after concluding his practice, he headed to the classroom to await instruction.

Instructors in the sect are collectively called "educators" and teach Outer Sect disciples various disciplines including cultivation, array formation, pill concoction, and artifact forging, while also supervising and guiding their practice.

Like other sects in the cultivation world, the Tongxian Sect also categorizes disciples into three types: direct disciples, Inner Sect, and Outer Sect.

The Outer Sect is open to the public for the purpose of teaching and cultivating new practitioners, funded by the disciples' entrance fees, which are essentially tuition. Outer Sect disciples learn the publicly available teachings of the sect, and upon graduation or departure, they retain a nominal relationship with the sect but are not materially bound to it.

The Inner Sect is the core of the sect, where disciples are deeply integrated and manage the sect's enterprises such as spirit mines, spirit lands, caves, and commercial operations.

Inner Sect disciples have access to teachings and spells not typically shared outside, bonded by a master-disciple relationship that ties them closely to the sect. Misdeeds by an Inner Sect disciple can implicate the sect, and those who betray their masters are often seen as committing a grave transgression, with severe consequences.

Direct disciples of the sect are the Inner Sect's elite, either blood-related to the sect leader or elders or having a deep master-disciple relationship. Direct disciples are the core of the sect, often ascending to crucial positions such as sect leader or elder.

The teachings of the direct disciples include the sect's most esoteric doctrines, and if a direct disciple betrays the sect, they are hunted down to death.

The Dao Law prohibits vigilante justice and indiscriminate killing. Pursuing a betraying direct disciple goes against these laws and will bring accountability from the Dao Court. However, such matters are typically managed by local Dao Court authorities. The Dao Court, being the most powerful, does not interfere directly in such affairs, especially concerning major sects with significant influence.

But none of this concerned Mo Hua much.

He was just an Outer Sect disciple of the Tongxian Sect, neither of the Inner Sect nor a direct disciple. Even if he wished to be targeted, he was not considered significant enough...

Mo Hua longed to join the Inner Sect, but without spirit stones or connections, it seemed unlikely in this lifetime, let alone becoming a direct disciple.

Settling into his seat, Mo Hua focused his mind until a stern-looking educator, around fifty years old and of the ninth level of Qi cultivation, entered the room.

Among the Tongxian Sect, this educator held a high position because he alone taught array formations and was rumored to possibly become a ranked Array Master within a few years.

All Qi-cultivation phase disciples learned their array formations from him, regardless of their background. He treated all equally; making no exceptions in reprimanding or disciplining those who erred.

Thus, the disciples both respected and feared him.

Annual tuition was due once a year, hence classes were held annually.

Today was the last day of the sect's annual training. After today, a month-long break would commence. The disciples' grades for various courses would also be released today.

The educator held a stack of report cards in his hand.

The disciples were anxious. Mo Hua was initially indifferent, but seeing his peers' nervousness made him anxious as well.

Soon, Mo Hua received his grades.

As usual, he excelled in array formations, earning the highest grade, an 'A'. In the Tongxian Sect, not many could achieve such a grade in arrays, and Mo Hua was among the few.

His cultivation was rated 'B'. It wasn't for lack of effort but because his innate talents were limited. With a mediocre Five Elements spiritual root, his progress was constrained.

For other subjects that could be mastered with time, like the History of Dao or Theories of Qi Cultivation, he also scored 'A's. However, for subjects requiring materials purchased with spirit stones, like pill concoction or talisman making, he scored 'B's and 'C's.

Coming from a poor family, Mo Hua couldn't even afford a proper alchemy furnace. His grades in these subjects depended mostly on luck and were inconsistent.

But overall, his performance was commendable. As the saying goes, "one brilliant trait overshadows many flaws." Excelling in the difficult art of array formations was no small feat.

The educator spoke briefly before stepping out for a moment. The disciples began whispering and glancing at each other's grades.

"Mo Hua, you got an 'A' in arrays again!" a disciple whispered after sneaking a peek at Mo Hua's report card.

"Another 'A'..."

"I always get a 'B'..."

"I got a 'C'..."

"Arrays are so hard, my head hurts just thinking about them..."

The disciples gradually crowded around Mo Hua.

"Hmph!" a disciple from the Qian family, dressed in a silver-white robe, scoffed unhappily,

"What's so great about that? It's just the simple arrays of the sect that get you an 'A'."

"What did you get?" another disciple challenged.

"Why should I tell you?" the Qian family disciple retorted disdainfully.

Another disciple sneaked a look at his grades and laughed loudly, "He got a 'C'!"

The room burst into laughter.

"You got a 'C' and you're laughing at someone who got an 'A', shameless!"

"Thicker-faced than a forge!"

"Even though he's from the Qian family, he's dumber than me; I got a 'B'."

The Qian family disciple, red-faced with anger, retorted, "What does an 'A' matter? Without an Array Master, you rogues understand nothing!"

Pointing at Mo Hua and the others, he sneered, "You lot, just frogs in a well, without legacy, will never, listen carefully, never produce a real Array Master. If you don't understand, I can repeat it."

"Rogues never deserve to be Array Masters!"

The surrounding disciples fell silent.

Mo Hua looked at him as if he were foolish, then stood up, bowed respectfully to someone behind the Qian family disciple, and said,

"Good day, educator!"

The Qian family disciple turned stiffly, realizing the educator was standing right behind him, his face livid.

"The sect is meant for teaching and cultivation, not for your petty comparisons and slander!"

"You can't even master basic arrays, and yet you have the nerve to mock your peers?"

"Now, stand outside as punishment until dusk."

"Redraw the basic Five Elements Array patterns a hundred times. Show them to me when school resumes next year. If you can't, don't bother returning..."

The Qian family disciple's face turned ashen, but he dared not utter a word of rebuttal.

The educator, with high authority, could discipline even the Qian family's direct descendants, let alone this lesser branch member.

The Qian family disciple sulkily went to stand as punished.

The educator stood in front of Mo Hua, silent for a moment, then patted his thin shoulders and sighed, "Don't mind what others say, just focus on learning."

Mo Hua, expression unchanged, respectfully bowed to the educator, "This disciple will heed your words."

The educator nodded, then moved to the educator's seat and gave a few more instructions before announcing the sect's annual break, allowing everyone to go home.

The disciples, barely containing their excitement, bowed to the educator, thanking him for a year of guidance in cultivation, then scattered like birds and beasts.

The sect was on break, and the disciples were overjoyed.

Mo Hua watched them, his heart heavy.

These Qi-cultivation period disciples, mostly young and carefree, had no idea of the hardships of a cultivator's life.

Thinking of his father's scars from hunting demons and his mother's worn face, Mo Hua's heart ached, and he sighed deeply.

Becoming a ranked Array Master was still a distant dream, but within his means, he wanted to make life better for his parents.

With his grades in hand and twelve spirit stones in his pocket, Mo Hua left the Tongxian Sect, not heading home but towards the market instead.