

THE QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY

Chapter 8: An Xiaofu

"Young Master An?"

The lavishly dressed chubby boy is the eldest young master of the An family from Tongxian City, named An Xiaofu. Perhaps his father didn't have much hope for him, hence the name Xiaofu, which implies 'small wealth'.

However, because he is chubby, his fellow sect members privately also call him "Little Fatty An."

Little Fatty An is somewhat slow and sometimes acts like a spoiled young master, but he isn't malicious at heart and often asks Mo Hua to help him with drawing array formations for his assessments.

He can't draw array formations at all, doesn't want to be punished by the tutor, nor does he want to go home and face his father's wrath, so he has no choice but to seek Mo Hua's help.

At this moment, Little Fatty An was fuming, "How could you, Mo Hua! I thought of you as a friend, yet you look down on me?!"

Mo Hua was baffled, "How have I looked down on you?"

Little Fatty An pulled out a formation diagram annotated in red ink from his robe, "You helped me with my array homework, and you got six places wrong! But when you helped that skinny monkey Qian Xing, you didn't make a single mistake! Isn't that looking down on me? Are you saying I'm worse than him?"

The 'skinny monkey' he mentioned was the thin young master, Qian Xing, a direct descendant of the prominent Qian family.

The Qian family is the most influential family in Tongxian City, with the An family a close second. Both families run businesses and are competitors, with a longstanding grudge between their ancestors. Even the younger generations are at odds in every aspect, including their opposing physical appearances—one fat, one thin—like fire and water.

Yet, both are similarly lazy in their cultivation practices and ignorant, which is considered "on par" with each other.

Although both are considered profligates, Qian Xing has a worse reputation for being arrogant and bullying others using his family's influence. Rumors say he's done many bad deeds behind the scenes, but because of his family's backing, they always get swept under the rug.

Compared to him, Little Fatty An just indulges in eating and drinking, flaunting his wealth without much oversight since his father keeps him on a short leash.

"So that's the issue?"

Seeing Mo Hua's indifference, Little Fatty An's face turned red with rage.

"I'm helping you here," Mo Hua said.

Little Fatty An looked at him skeptically, "How are you helping me?"

"How does your array formation compare to Young Master Qian's?"

Little Fatty An said confidently, "At least it can't be worse than his!"

Mo Hua was speechless. Was that something to be proud of?

Mo Hua continued, "Exactly, how could he draw an array formation without a mistake?"

"Of course, if I can't do it, he definitely can't either!"

"So, you know this, how could the tutor not notice? The tutor is always strict and will surely punish him and inform his father. Losing face, his father won't let him off easily..." řaNÓBĚŠ

Little Fatty An pondered for a moment, "That makes some sense, but I haven't heard about Qian Skinny getting beaten, are you lying to me..."

Mo Hua gave him a look, "Family disgraces are not aired publicly; a father hitting his son would definitely happen behind closed doors. You wouldn't know about it."

Little Fatty An nodded apprehensively, "You're right, my dad beats me and never lets anyone know!"

Mo Hua added, "Did Old Master An not only not beat you this time but also praise you?"

Little Fatty An instantly brightened up, "Right, the tutor gave me a 'B' grade, and my dad was so pleased that he even gave me lots of good things!"

Little Fatty An's mood changed quickly; he was no longer angry and even felt a bit guilty towards Mo Hua, "I misunderstood you! Let me treat you to a meal at the Spirit Meal Tower; my family owns it, eat as much as you like!"

Mo Hua didn't expect Little Fatty An to be unexpectedly generous but still declined, "No need, I have other things to do."

Little Fatty An was dissatisfied, "My dad always taught me to repay favors. If you don't go, it means you look down on me!"

Thinking about his previously bruised behind from his father's punishments, Little Fatty An insisted more firmly, "This favor is not small; you must go!"

Little Fatty An could be quite stubborn when he got into one of his moods.

Mo Hua was a bit headache-inducing; he glanced at the door of the Array Pavilion and suddenly

said, "Young Master An, let's skip the Spirit Meal Tower, but there's a favor you could do for me?"

Little Fatty An slapped his chest, "Say it!"

"Lend me ten spirit stones."

Little Fatty An frowned; he didn't actually have ten spirit stones on him. Old Master An, to prevent him from frivolously spending spirit stones, never allowed him to carry more than five.

He could put the meal at Spirit Meal Tower on his dad's tab since it was just food and went through the accounts, which his dad wouldn't mind. His dad feared him wasting spirit stones on frivolous things with no paper trail, not knowing where the money went could cause big trouble.

Little Fatty An took out the five spirit stones he had and then looked at his servant, "Give me all your spirit stones; I'll give them back to you at home."

The servant reluctantly handed over his spirit stones, just enough to make ten.

Little Fatty An handed the spirit stones to Mo Hua, "Here you go, you don't need to return them!"

Mo Hua shook his head, "I'll return them in a few days."

Mo Hua weighed the spirit stones in his hand, then carefully pocketed them, bid farewell to Little Fatty An, and returned to the Array Pavilion, which was still devoid of customers, with the manager still dozing off.

Mo Hua entered, tiptoed, and placed the ten spirit stones on the counter.

"I've brought the spirit stones!"

The manager woke from his nap at the sound of the bell, saw Mo Hua and the spirit stones on the table.

The manager picked up the spirit stones, inspected them, and found them to be of decent quality, nodded, then reached under the counter and pulled out a storage bag.

"Here's a diagram for the Blazing Fire Array, along with ten array papers and spirit ink, enough to draw ten copies of the Blazing Fire Array. This order has a ten-day deadline; if it's late, all deposits will be forfeited. For each correctly drawn Blazing Fire Array, you'll earn a spirit stone, but if you make a mistake or it doesn't meet the standards, a deposit of one spirit stone will be deducted. These are the general rules of the trade, your brother should be aware of them."

Mo Hua nodded.

If all the array formations are successfully completed, he could earn ten spirit stones; if all fail, he would owe ten spirit stones, with a profit if he succeeds in more than half.

The manager added a reminder, "Remember, ten days. Don't forget, or I'll keep the entire deposit."

Mo Hua quickly nodded, then thanked the manager and left.

After returning home, Mo Hua locked himself in his room and focused on understanding the array formations.

The potential to earn up to ten spirit stones was significant. Although he earned twelve spirit stones helping his fellow disciples with their array homework, such opportunities were rare throughout the year.

Moreover, helping fellow disciples with array homework wasn't really proper. It was okay occasionally, but over time, it could hinder their progress.

Working with the merchant, on the other hand, could offer a steady income of spirit stones and also practice in array formation, achieving two goals at once.

Mo Hua spread out the diagram of the Blazing Fire Array in front of him.

The diagram was previously prepared by another array master, serving as a template.

Attached to the diagram were detailed instructions for the array, documenting the required array patterns, the usage of ink and brush, and other essential notes—a common method in the cultivation world to record array techniques.

The instructions for the Blazing Fire Array included annotations on where to use fire-related array patterns, how to connect these patterns, the mixing of the ink, and the proportions of ink to use. Many of these concepts were unfamiliar to Mo Hua and somewhat challenging to grasp.

This was Mo Hua's first encounter with an official array instruction guide; previously, in his sect, he had only learned the most basic arrays—though called arrays, these usually consisted of only one or two simple patterns, used primarily for beginner disciples to get a start in cultivation, quite different from the more widely used arrays in the cultivation world.

The final line of the Blazing Fire Array instructions noted:

Blazing Fire Array, a fire-based array containing three array patterns, requires a cultivation level above the third Qi level.

But what particularly caught Mo Hua's attention was the line written in small red characters just after this:

For those below the required level, beware insufficient spiritual sense!

Being only at the second level of Qi cultivation, Mo Hua frowned.

Every action in a cultivator's life requires spiritual sense—directing spiritual energy, manipulating spiritual power, casting spells, controlling spiritual tools, and crafting pills or artifacts, all these activities necessitate the use of spiritual sense.

Of all these, drawing array formations is known to consume the most spiritual sense, a well-acknowledged fact among cultivators. But the specific warning of "insufficient spiritual sense, beware!" and the emphasis on the required cultivation level, highlighted in red ink, made Mo Hua realize that he might have underestimated just how much "more" this could be.

"Could it really be that drawing array formations requires so much spiritual sense?" Mo Hua pondered, stroking his small chin.

"Never mind, I'll get familiar with the array patterns first, practice on the stele tonight."

After memorizing the Blazing Fire Array diagram, Mo Hua had dinner with his parents and returned to his room to practice with ordinary paper and ink, getting a feel for the array patterns. When it reached the hour of the rat (midnight), he lay down on his bed, closed his eyes, and the ancient, ethereal stele floated into his mental view.