

THE QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY

Chapter 9: The Blazing Fire Array

Within the sea of consciousness, Mo Hua's ethereal form looked just like his physical body and could move at will. However, it was not made of flesh or even spiritual power, but merely a shadow of spiritual sense.

Mo Hua's ethereal form held its breath and concentrated deeply, using a finger as a brush, he traced the pattern of the Blazing Fire Array on the Dao Stele.

Pale blue lines fluidly followed Mo Hua's finger movements on the dark Dao Stele, gradually forming intricate and mysterious patterns from simple beginnings.

After completing the second array pattern, Mo Hua began to feel an unprecedented fatigue and even pain as he continued drawing.

It felt as though a dam had been breached within his sea of consciousness, with spiritual sense flowing out like tidal waters.

The more the spiritual sense flowed out, the closer his sea of consciousness came to depletion, resembling a riverbed drying up, cracking under unnamed pressures, causing tingling pain and a numbness on his scalp.

Mo Hua's thoughts also became sluggish, and the third array pattern was drawn slower and slower.

Suddenly, a sharp pain surged from his sea of consciousness, causing a brief lapse in Mo Hua's focus, and he misaligned a part of the pattern on the stele.

Mo Hua had to stop, clutching his head, waiting for the pain to gradually subside.

After a long while, Mo Hua recovered and realized, "Drawing array formations requires a vast amount of spiritual sense, far more than other cultivation methods! Far more than I had imagined!"

"This is why the diagrams were specifically marked in red: 'Those not sufficiently advanced should study with caution.' If one's realm is inadequate and spiritual sense weak, forcibly drawing an array can lead to excessive consumption of spiritual sense, and even cause it to run dry..."

Depletion of spiritual sense brings intense pain to cultivators, potentially damaging the sea of consciousness severely, causing it to crack. If it cracks too deeply, the sea of consciousness could shatter completely, resulting in the cultivator's death.

This was mentioned in class, but Mo Hua hadn't paid much attention at the time. Now, recalling it sent chills down his spine.

"The Blazing Fire Array requires the third level of Qi cultivation, and I'm only at the second level... indeed, my spiritual sense is a bit lacking..."

Holding his head in his hands, Mo Hua lay on the floor of his sea of consciousness, pondering, "Though it's a bit lacking, it shouldn't be by much. My spiritual sense is inherently stronger than others, and I've studied array formation for so long, practicing a few more times might just work."

"If I can't get it right the first time, I'll draw it a second time, and a third... With each attempt, my spiritual sense strengthens a bit, and with each attempt, I draw more than before, I'll eventually be able to complete the formation..."

After considering, Mo Hua stood up, erased the incomplete array pattern from the Dao Stele, and his spiritual sense began to fill again.

It was as if he had never drawn an array before, but the strokes he had just drawn were etched in his mind.

Mo Hua couldn't help but marvel.

Thank goodness for this Dao Stele; otherwise, nearing spiritual sense depletion, I wouldn't know how long it would take to attempt a second drawing. By the time I learn the Blazing Fire Array, probably half a month would have passed, and the pawned spirit stones would have been deducted by then.

This thought pained Mo Hua's heart, sharpening his focus as he began to draw the Blazing Fire Array a second time...

In the vast whiteness of the sea of consciousness, there was no sense of time passing.

Mo Hua would draw a bit, stop a bit, rest a bit. When he could draw no more, he'd erase everything and start anew.

After countless attempts, he finally completed the entire Blazing Fire Array.

Mo Hua exhaled deeply, collapsing to the ground, feeling like a small salted fish whose spiritual sense had been squeezed dry.

After resting a bit longer, Mo Hua had the energy to stand up and admire his first completed array formation—the Blazing Fire Array.

On the black Dao Stele, a complete pattern of pale blue lines, strict and beautiful, held an unknown mystery. Between the light and dark of the array pattern, it seemed to contain unspeakable rules and power. RANŎBĚŚ

This is an array formation!

Mo Hua felt a moment of enlightenment, as if there was nothing more beautiful in the world than these rules-contained lines. Even just looking at them was mesmerizing...

But as Mo Hua continued to watch, something seemed off.

While drawing, the array lines were pale blue, but now they seemed to be fading, turning a light gray.

It was as if... the Dao Stele was telling Mo Hua that he had drawn it wrong...

Mo Hua froze.

"Drawn wrong?"

"Can't be..."

Mo Hua felt disheartened, but he gathered his spirits to carefully check each stroke and finally found that he had indeed made errors, and not just one.

Some lines were overdrawn, some connections at the wrong angles, some fusions of the fire patterns were incorrect...

Because of these errors, his spiritual sense wasn't consumed as much, allowing him to complete the Blazing Fire Array.

Scratching his head, Mo Hua made a note of the mistakes, then erased the array to draw it again...

This repetitive process left Mo Hua dizzy and numb. Amidst the pain in his sea of consciousness, looking at the array patterns on the Dao Stele seemed to blur into double images.

At some point, in a daze, Mo Hua completed the final stroke.

The Dao Stele seemed to tremble slightly, and the pale blue array lines emitted a gentle white light, within which seemed to flicker a firelight, like a bright candle in the darkness.

The Blazing Fire Array!

Mo Hua couldn't contain his excitement; a night's fatigue was swept away.

For the first time, Mo Hua personally felt the power of a cultivator, that sensation of comprehending the heavenly rules through one's own understanding and then manifesting them in an array formation, grasping the majesty of heaven and earth.

Though it was just a tiny step, a small bit of power, it was the first drop of water in the great river of the Dao!

Mo Hua was proud, even though the Blazing Fire Array was only used for illumination, one of the most common and least costly formations in cultivation, at least this formation lit the first step of Mo Hua's path in cultivation.

Wishing he could draw a few more times, Mo Hua knew his fragile spiritual sense was like a candle in the wind, unable to endure more.

If he continued, his sea of consciousness might not dry up, but he would certainly go mad.

After all, although spiritual sense does recover, the process of drawing an array was continually depleting, and it wasn't a comfortable one.

This was Mo Hua's first time drawing an official array, but it certainly wouldn't be his last.

He planned to practice the Blazing Fire Array every night, and once he became thoroughly proficient, he'd start using the materials from the array pavilion to draw arrays, exchange them for spirit stones with the managers, and ideally, gather enough to ease his parents' burden.

"Let's call it a night..."

The Blazing Fire Array shimmered brilliantly on the Dao Stele, Mo Hua admired it once more, involuntarily nodding, then somewhat reluctantly wiped the array away.

The instant he erased it, his spiritual sense ebbed and flowed like the tides, waned and waxed like the moon, receded like the sea only to return again, sunset followed by sunrise, those depleted senses instantly restored, filling Mo Hua's sea of consciousness anew!

Standing before the Dao Stele, his spiritual sense replenished, at that moment, it felt just as it had several hours ago when he first entered his sea of consciousness.

This feeling of spiritual sense filling and depleting, and then filling again, no matter how many times experienced, always felt profoundly mysterious.

And this experience was deeper than any before.

Mo Hua looked at the Dao Stele, its surface dark and deep, seemingly void, yet as if it contained everything, appearing to have nothing, yet perhaps capable of revealing all.

Transforming spiritual sense into array formation, and array formation back into spiritual sense, from existence to nonexistence, mutually generating and transforming.

A phrase from ancient texts surfaced in Mo Hua's mind:

"From existence, utility is derived; from nonexistence, use is found!"