

The Quest 1311

Chapter 1311: Youth (3)

With a sharp and mournful cry, the Demon Wooden Eagle plunged from the sky.

As one sword was unleashed, Mo Hua, who was already prepared to escape at any moment, saw this and his expression lit up with joy.

The power of this explosive-type Sword Control was even stronger than he had anticipated.

From his experience, whenever flying Monster Beasts plummeted directly from the air, their injuries were bound to be severe.

Mo Hua decided to approach for a closer look.

If the Monster Beast was gravely injured and there was a chance to finish it off, then he'd deliver the final blow.

A Second Grade Middle Stage Monster Beast, even damaged by Sword Qi with an incomplete body, would still earn a handsome amount of Merit Points.

If this Demon Wooden Eagle's demonic power was robust and its injuries weren't too severe...

Then, it would be fortunate to escape with its life.

Mo Hua wouldn't provoke it further in that case.

Following the direction of the Demon Wooden Eagle's fall, Mo Hua searched the area, but when he arrived, he was somewhat stunned.

There was no trace of the Demon Wooden Eagle...

In front of him was a small section of a cliff.

It seemed that when the Demon Wooden Eagle hit the ground, it flapped a few times and, as luck would have it, fell off the cliff again.

Mo Hua peered down; the cliff wasn't very high. Though it was somewhat shrouded in mist, the forest below was faintly visible.

It didn't look dangerous.

After some thought, Mo Hua infused Spiritual Power into his hands and feet, clinging to the cliff as he descended slowly.

But the cliff was steeper than it seemed, and the mountain was taller than he had expected.

After nearly an hour, Mo Hua finally reached the bottom of the cliff.

At the base of the cliff, he found a lush woodland, but still no trace of the Demon Wooden Eagle.

Mo Hua released his Divine Sense, sensing the air and using Heavenly Secret Calculation to trace the threads of cause and effect. At last, he discovered blood stains seeping into the soil and a faint trace of causal aura on the ground.

He followed the aura forward.

After walking for about the time it takes to drink a cup of tea, he suddenly stopped, raised his head, and his gaze hardened.

He had found the Demon Wooden Eagle.

But his prey had been stolen by someone else!

The Demon Wooden Eagle was already dead, lying on the ground, completely drained of blood and devoid of life.

Its battered body bore not only tiny, fragmented golden sword scars but also a fresh and distinct sword wound, seemingly inflicted by an exceptionally sharp and powerful Sword Qi that had ultimately killed it.

Beside the lifeless Demon Wooden Eagle stood a young man.

The youth was dressed in a pale blue robe, appeared to be quite young, with handsome features and fair skin. His eyes carried an air of arrogance, and his gaze was as sharp as a blade.

It wasn't just his gaze—his entire being, standing there, exuded the presence of a Spirit Sword sharp and unyielding.

Mo Hua's own gaze darkened slightly. After some consideration, he chose not to deliberately conceal his aura and instead walked straight forward, stopping ten zhang away from the youth.

The youth sensed the approaching footsteps and slowly turned around. His cold gaze fell on Mo Hua, momentarily revealing a hint of surprise.

Mo Hua spoke bluntly, pointing at the Demon Wooden Eagle:

"This Monster Beast is mine."

The pale blue-robed youth heard this, and his expression grew colder, laced with obvious hostility.

"Yours?"

His voice, though clear and youthful, carried a sharp and icy edge like the point of a sword.

"Yes," Mo Hua nodded, pointing upward. "I killed it with my sword. It fell from the cliff up there to this place."

Killed with a sword...

The youth glanced at the sword scars on the Demon Wooden Eagle and grew even more hostile. He sneered coldly:

"Now it's mine."

Mo Hua froze, his gaze narrowing slightly as he coolly replied:

"You... want to steal my catch?"

The pale blue-robed youth faltered for a moment, then sneered coldly:

"So what if I steal it?"

The youth's tone was filled with defiance.

Mo Hua raised an eyebrow faintly.

He could tell that this youth in the pale blue robe, with cultivation at the mid-stage Foundation Establishment level and adept at Swordsmanship with refined Sword Qi, belonged to some sect or school.

But regardless of which sect the youth hailed from, no cultivators in the same realm as Mo Hua had ever dared to seize his possessions.

Even if they managed to steal from him, they would end up coughing it back up, along with their bones and blood.

Moreover, this youth's arrogant demeanor and apparent hostility toward him indicated that this wouldn't end easily.

Mo Hua's gaze deepened as he said slowly:

"If you dare steal my catch, then don't blame me for being impolite..."

The forest grew still, and the atmosphere suddenly became oppressive.

The pale blue-robed youth's expression was stern, though internally his heart sank slightly.

This little cultivator was awfully strange...

Despite having weak Blood Qi and thin Spiritual Power, his aura carried a faint but undeniable pressure.

In that instant, the youth realized that this little cultivator was far from ordinary.

This pressure was indescribable, yet unmistakably clear.

A Sword Heart Clarity instinct told him that the young man before him was undoubtedly a formidable "great enemy."

But this realization only fueled the youth's arrogance.

Sword cultivators, guided by their Sword Hearts, were meant to be fearless and relentless, moving forward without hesitation.

The pale blue-robed youth felt both nervous and exhilarated.

Only by defeating powerful foes could his Sword Dao grow stronger!

Though he didn't yet understand exactly what made this little cultivator formidable, intuition never lied, and the premonition of his Sword Heart could not be false.

The pale blue-robed youth slowly drew the longsword from his side.

His longsword was an ancient weapon, simple yet ethereal, carrying an enigmatic aura.

The blade glimmered softly, emitting a faint bluish glow like clear moonlight, while hiding a graceful yet deadly menace.

His expression grew focused, his gaze icy, as Sword Qi swirled around him with an air of unyielding dominance.

Mo Hua raised an eyebrow faintly.

What sharp Sword Qi.

Among peers, he hadn't encountered a sword cultivator this strong before.

Even Situ Jian didn't possess this level of Sword Dao puissance.

In the quiet forest, sword light flashed, and hostility surged.

Without uttering a single unnecessary word, the pale blue-robed youth pointed his longsword forward, unleashing a pale blue Sword Qi that sliced through the air like a crescent moon.

Chapter 1312: Youth (4)

Mo Hua moved like flowing water, calmly evading.

The Sword Qi slashed past Mo Hua, cutting through the tree trunk and embedding itself into the ground, leaving a clear sword scar.

This sword scar was almost identical to the one on the body of the Demon Wooden Eagle.

Mo Hua countered with a Fireball Technique in a reverse motion.

The Fireball Technique wasn't as powerful as the sword light from the youth in green, but it was both swift and precise.

The youth in green transformed into a streak of sword light, dodging several times to create distance. Yet, the Fireball Technique seemed to lock onto him; with a slight curve, it adjusted its path and continued flying toward him.

The youth's expression darkened slightly. With a swing of his longsword, a flash of sword light split the fireball in two, neutralizing it on the spot.

However, the power of the Fireball Technique clearly paled in comparison to the Sword Qi.

In the blink of an eye, a second fireball hurtled toward him.

The green-clad youth's pupils tightened.
This spell... was too fast.

He swung backhandedly, releasing another arc of sword light to neutralize the fireball.

"At least the power isn't much..."

The youth murmured to himself.

And so, the two engaged: you unleash fireballs, I parry with sword light. Both simultaneously utilizing movement techniques, darting through the forest, exchanging blow after blow.

Both were probing.

Mo Hua wanted to test just how formidable this green-clad youth's swordsmanship truly was.

The youth, meanwhile, sought to uncover what other tricks Mo Hua might have up his sleeve.

After a brief bout, Mo Hua felt he had a reasonable grasp of the situation.

His Sword Qi was strong, but it was merely at the pinnacle level of Foundation Establishment Middle Stage. He might have a deadly ace up his sleeve, but he definitely couldn't use it in front of Mo Hua.

The youth's movement technique seemed to also stem from the Sword Escape type of techniques.

Fast indeed, but not as fast as Mo Hua's. Moreover, like his sword light, it was straightforward—lacking versatility.

Mo Hua began contemplating which method to use to subdue this green-clad youth.

Should he engage in close combat with the Small Meteor Forbidden Technique, or maintain distance and employ Divine Sense Sword Control?

Or perhaps secretly paint a Formation, set up an ambush, and then bombard him with spells afterward...

Mo Hua was somewhat undecided.

The dilemma lay in the fact that some methods were too powerful to use casually.

Though this youth had stolen his magical beast and had a poor temper, Mo Hua couldn't truly kill him over such a matter; otherwise, it would lead to big trouble.

Winning without killing was... quite challenging...

On the other side, the green-clad youth was becoming irritated.

Over and over, it was the Fireball Technique.

They had exchanged dozens of rounds, yet this odd little guy only used Fireball Techniques.

"Could it be he's trying to humiliate me?!"

The youth's anger flared slightly, and he said coldly, "Do you only know the Fireball Technique? What about your Sever Gold Sect swordsmanship? Why won't you use it?"

Mo Hua tosses another two fireballs and replied, utterly baffled, "I'm not from the Sever Gold Sect, why would I use their swordsmanship?"

The youth paused, stunned. He countered with two arcs of Sword Qi to dissipate the fireballs, then frowned and asked:

"You're not from Sever Gold Sect?"

Mo Hua retorted, "What about me looks like I'm from Sever Gold Sect?"

The youth pointed to the Demon Wooden Eagle. "You said you killed this eagle. These sword scars here, aren't they from Broken Gold Sword Qi?"

Mo Hua froze, suddenly understanding the misunderstanding.

He had used Divine Sense Sword Control to employ a sword array from Sever Gold Sect, so naturally, what it produced was Broken Gold Sword Qi.

Of course, there was no way he could admit to wielding Broken Gold Sword Qi.

Mo Hua said, "This Sword Qi is a family inheritance of mine. How does it make it Sever Gold Sect's Sword Qi?"

The youth furrowed his brow. "But this Sword Qi is of the golden element..."

"Gold is one of the Five Elements. There are countless Sword Cultivators in this world who refine gold-series Sword Qi. What does that have to do with Sever Gold Sect?"

Mo Hua replied confidently.

The youth was momentarily at a loss for words, left speechless.

What he said... wasn't entirely without merit.

Sever Gold Sect was renowned for its gold-series Sword Qi, but not all golden Sword Qi inheritances originated from Sever Gold Sect...

It was his own bias—upon seeing these golden sword scars, he had rashly concluded that this eagle demon had been injured by the Sword Qi of those Sever Gold Sect scoundrels...

Quietly, the youth sheathed his longsword.

Mo Hua was slightly surprised. "You're done fighting?"

The youth clasped his hands together in a sign of respect and admitted, "I was too presumptuous. My apologies..."

Though apologizing, his face was stiff, clearly uncomfortable.

Seeing him so direct in admitting fault, Mo Hua felt slightly surprised. He gestured toward the Demon Wooden Eagle and said, "Then, about this magical beast..."

The youth hesitated briefly but only for a moment before replying decisively:

"It's yours."

Hearing this, Mo Hua nodded in satisfaction.

Children who don't steal others' magical beasts are good children.

This was just a small misunderstanding, nothing worth holding a grudge over.

Mo Hua folded his hands behind his back, tidied his sleeves, and his gaze shifted from deep and imposing to tranquil and clear, withdrawing all traces of killing intent.

The youth eyed Mo Hua carefully, realizing that the strange oppressive aura around him, along with the unsettling sense of danger, had completely vanished in an instant. The realization left him somewhat shaken.

He gave Mo Hua a deep, serious look and asked solemnly:

"What Sect are you from?"

Mo Hua frowned slightly.

This youth's words were blunt, his expression cold, and he carried an air of arrogance, lacking much in the way of manners.

Mo Hua calmly replied, "Before you inquire about someone else's background, you should first announce your own."

The youth froze, realizing his impoliteness. He clasped his hands and said:

"I'm an Outer Disciple of Rushing Void Sect..."

"Ling Huxiao."

Mo Hua blinked in surprise.

Ling Huxiao?

Looking at the youth's icy expression, he thought to himself:

So this Ling Huxiao... doesn't seem to laugh at all...

Chapter 1313: Ling Huxiao

Ling Huxiao, who never smiles, formally introduced himself, then fixed his gaze like a sword on Mo Hua.

Mo Hua also clasped his hands and replied:

"Taixu Gate, Mo Hua."

Ling Huxiao was briefly taken aback, but soon recalled that Rushing Void Sect and Taixu Gate shared a common ancestral lineage and were considered affiliated sects. His expression softened, and the hostility in his eyes gradually dissipated.

Mo Hua's eyes shifted slightly, recalling earlier events, and he asked:

"Do you have a grudge against the Sever Gold Sect?"

Ling Huxiao hesitated for a moment before nodding slightly and saying: "More or less..."

"What kind of grudge?" Mo Hua asked curiously.

Ling Huxiao rarely engaged in conversation, but Mo Hua's resolute gaze made him feel it would be inappropriate not to explain.

Moreover, the conflict between the two earlier was caused by his own misjudgment. Though aloof by nature, Ling Huxiao felt compelled to clarify matters.

Ling Huxiao then spoke:

"The disciples of the Sever Gold Sect are vile and shameless. On this mountain, they've repeatedly stolen my prey."

"I've confronted them several times and amassed quite a bit of enmity."

"Today, when I saw this eagle fall from the cliff bearing golden sword marks, I naturally assumed it was a monster hunted by Sever Gold Sect. I thought it reasonable and rightful to take action and snatch it..."

Ling Huxiao paused and glanced at Mo Hua, "Furthermore, you weren't wearing your sect's Taoist robes either, so I couldn't identify your affiliation..."

...

"Oh..."

Mo Hua suddenly understood, his thoughts becoming clear.

Ling Huxiao had seen the Eagle Demon earlier and noticed the golden sword marks on its body, suspecting that they were caused by the Broken Gold Sword Qi of the Sever Gold Sect.

Indeed, his deduction wasn't entirely wrong. Those marks were caused by the Broken Gold Sword Qi of the Sever Gold Sect.

It was simply that Mo Hua had simulated such sword qi using the Gold-Cutting Sword Formation.

The Eagle Demon had actually been injured by Mo Hua's sword control.

Before entering this part of the mountain range, Mo Hua had swapped out Taixu Gate's Taoist robe for an understated gray outfit to act discreetly, following others' examples.

Ling Huxiao couldn't recognize Mo Hua's identity, so it was only natural for him to mistake Mo Hua as one of the Sever Gold Sect disciples.

Since Sever Gold Sect continually stole Ling Huxiao's prey, he retaliated by snatching back, which explained the apparent hostility.

Now that the misunderstanding was resolved, Ling Huxiao didn't stubbornly cling to his pride but instead openly admitted his mistake and apologized.

Though the Second Grade Middle Stage Demon Wooden Eagle was worth a considerable amount of Merit Points, Ling Huxiao generously returned it to Mo Hua as well.

Mo Hua nodded slightly.

While Ling Huxiao appeared aloof and difficult to interact with, this disciple of the Rushing Void Sect seemed quite principled and meticulous in his actions.

Mo Hua grinned and waved his hand, "Since it's a misunderstanding, let's leave it at that."

Then, he hesitated for a moment, scrutinizing Ling Huxiao before surveying the surroundings, and asked with some curiosity:

"You're hunting monsters in the mountains alone?"

Ling Huxiao tilted his chin upward, his tone tinged with confidence: "I'm enough on my own."

Mo Hua stared at Ling Huxiao in mild astonishment.

Judging from Ling Huxiao's demeanor, while he seemed a bit conceited, he didn't appear to be lying.

However, going solo—even for a talented individual—in a mountain range infested with Monster Beasts still seemed implausible.

Mo Hua glanced at the sword qi scars on the Demon Wooden Eagle's body, recalling Ling Huxiao's swordsmanship during their earlier exchange. Based on his own extensive monster-hunting experience, he began speculating.

This Ling Huxiao likely followed a "opportunistic style" of monster hunting...

Some Monster Beasts wounded by cultivators escape into the wilderness;

Others are gravely injured during territorial disputes among beasts.

These injured Monster Beasts are somewhat weaker.

With Ling Huxiao's refined swordsmanship and his inherited Spirit Sword, he could condense extraordinarily powerful sword qi to swiftly dispatch wounded Monster Beasts in a short period.

In this way, one person with one sword could slay a beast and claim the Merit Points all for himself.

Even if the efficiency were slightly lower, as long as he succeeded intermittently, he could earn quite a bit.

Still, though it sounded simple, the process was fraught with challenges.

Beyond mastering swordsmanship and achieving deadly strikes, there was a need to sense Monster Qi, locate the beasts, avoid danger, and ensure survival—all at once.

Moreover, this method relied heavily on luck.

After all, encountering wounded Monster Beasts wasn't exactly common.

If unexpected danger arose, leading to personal peril, there would be no one around to lend a hand.

Thus, when hunting Monster Beasts, it was often best to form a small team with sect members for mutual support.

"Why don't you hunt with fellow sect members?" Mo Hua asked again, curious.

Ling Huxiao's face darkened slightly, and he replied coldly: "I said, I'm enough on my own!"

Mo Hua understood then.

The sect members didn't include Ling Huxiao in their group activities.

Maybe it was because his exceptional talent made others jealous and led to exclusion.

Or perhaps his cold personality left him with poor rapport, and he had no friends, forcing him to hunt solo in the wilderness.

Mo Hua asked again: "What about the Sever Gold Sect? Can you handle them alone?"

Ling Huxiao replied coolly: "Three to five individuals are no match for me. If there are more people, I can use Sword Escape to flee—they wouldn't be able to catch me. It's just..."

Ling Huxiao's expression turned angry, then disdainful: "Those Sever Gold Sect scoundrels resort to diverting attention, with two or three holding me off while the others steal my prey."

"When I retaliate by taking their loot and running, they truly reveal themselves as... vile and shameless!"

Mo Hua observed that Ling Huxiao didn't seem particularly skilled at cursing.

Despite his evident frustration, he repeatedly defaulted to calling them "vile and shameless."

Nevertheless...

Mo Hua pondered briefly.

To fight three to five opponents head-on with swordsmanship alone...

This young man named Ling Huxiao clearly wasn't some nameless disciple in the Rushing Void Sect. Even if he wasn't their top prodigy, he was likely among the elite in the Sword Dao.

As Mo Hua mulled over this, Ling Huxiao suddenly fixed his sharp gaze on Mo Hua and said with decisive seriousness:

"Mo Hua, I want to challenge you to another duel."

Mo Hua was stunned. "Why?"

Ling Huxiao's eyes darkened slightly. "You don't look particularly strong, but I have a sense that your power runs deep and immeasurable. I suspect you're an expert—I seek a match to determine who is superior."

Chapter 1314: Ling Huxiao (2)

Mo Hua roughly understood why this man had no friends.

Though talented, his personality was aloof and prideful, always eager to fight.

And his mind seemed a bit peculiar...

"Not interested." Mo Hua shook his head.

"Why not?" Ling Huxiao asked in confusion.

Mo Hua replied confidently: "If there's no benefit in it, why should I bother?"

After all, he was very busy.

Sparring in this child's-play manner was a complete waste of time.

With this time, he could be cultivating, studying formations, practicing sword control, hunting monster beasts, or earning merit points instead...

Ling Huxiao froze for a moment, feeling frustrated, then angrily said:

"A sword cultivator asking for a duel should always be fearless and undaunted! Only by moving forward and defeating strong foes can one temper the ultimate swordsmanship and forge a powerful sword heart..."

Mo Hua said indifferently: "I'm not a sword cultivator. The ultimate swordsmanship and powerful sword heart have nothing to do with me..."

"But didn't you learn swordsmanship too?"

"I just picked it up casually—I'm not relying on it to make a living..."

Ling Huxiao was dumbstruck.

He found that Mo Hua was someone you couldn't sway with anything—absolutely pragmatic. Mo Hua couldn't understand the prideful pursuit of a sword cultivator. This made Ling Huxiao somewhat resentful, angry for a long while, before coldly squeezing out a few words:

"If we walk different paths, we shouldn't seek common ground!"

"Alright." Mo Hua half-heartedly nodded.

The two fell into silence.

Seeing the hour growing late, Mo Hua glanced at Ling Huxiao, then at the Demon Wooden Eagle nearby. After thinking for a moment, he said:

"Do you want this eagle? I'll split it with you."

Ling Huxiao paused, then shook his head, "I said it's yours—I don't need it!"

Mo Hua said: "While I injured the eagle, you delivered the finishing blow. Strictly speaking, we killed it together. So you should get a share."

"I dislike taking losses, but I don't want to take advantage of others either."

"Half each—fair and square."

Ling Huxiao fell silent.

Mo Hua thought for a moment and added: "Are you sure you don't want it? This is a second-grade middle-stage monster beast, and a flying type. Converted to merit points, it's worth around two or three thousand points. Split in half, that'd be roughly over a thousand points for each of us."

"Over a thousand merit points."

Over a thousand merit points?!

Ling Huxiao's heart skipped a beat; he immediately felt tempted.

He didn't know much about flying monster beasts or their grades.

But earlier, when he unleashed Chongxu Sword Qi to forcefully kill this beast, he clearly felt unprecedented pressure.

Judging by that, the monster beast's grade must be high, likely between primary rank and middle stage.

But he hadn't expected that it was indeed a second-grade middle-stage flying beast!

And this seemingly unremarkable junior disciple from the Taixu Gate named "Mo Hua," with only mid-stage Foundation Establishment cultivation, had somehow used his family's swordsmanship to inflict heavy damage on a sky-bound eagle demon, causing it to crash to the ground...

As Ling Huxiao thought about it more carefully, the longer he thought, the more astonished he felt.

At the same time, he felt a surge of passion and excitement against a strong foe.

He spoke again, "Fight me in a duel."

"Maybe another time..."

Mo Hua wasn't interested, brushing him off casually.

Then he asked once more, "Do you still want these thousand merit points or not?"

Ling Huxiao was silent again.

Seeing his expression, Mo Hua could tell he wanted them.

Being alone, Ling Huxiao's efficiency in hunting monster beasts and earning merit points certainly couldn't be very high.

Over a thousand merit points was undoubtedly a fortune.

But with his prideful personality, he might not be willing to ask outright.

Mo Hua sighed, "Skin the eagle and debone it. Afterward, we'll head together to the mountain gates to exchange for merit points—half for each of us."

Ling Huxiao said nothing. After a brief moment of silence, he quietly began to work, skinning and deboning the Demon Wooden Eagle...

Those thousand merit points were too tempting—he couldn't refuse.

Once Ling Huxiao processed the beast materials and put them in a storage bag, he handed it to Mo Hua.

Mo Hua accepted it and tucked it into his coat before saying to Ling Huxiao:

"Let's go—down the mountain together."

Without waiting for Ling Huxiao's response, he strode forward, swaggering down the mountain.

Ling Huxiao hesitated for a moment as he watched Mo Hua's retreating figure, then quietly followed...

...

After the two left, in the nearby wilderness, a cultivator slowly revealed himself.

He watched the pair's fading silhouettes, deep in thought.

A moment later, he suddenly froze and turned to his right. Only then did he realize that, at some point, a second figure had silently appeared beside him.

The two who had suddenly met startled each other.

They stared at each other, their expressions subtly shifting.

"Ziyou?"

"Xuan Jian?"

"What are you doing here?"

The two asked simultaneously, and then immediately became mutually aware of the situation.

Xun Ziyou said, "Your Chongxu sect's ancestor sent you to secretly watch over that Sword Dao genius from your Chongxu sect?"

The Chongxu Elder known as "Xuan Jian" sighed and said, "Sword Heart Clarity—once in every five hundred years. Of course, the ancestor treasures him."

"The issue is that he's reclusive and works alone. If I don't keep an eye on him, he could die in these mountains and be devoured by monster beasts, bones and all, and no one would even know..."

"True..." Xun Ziyou nodded in agreement.

A Sword Dao genius seen once in five hundred years—if Taixu Gate had one, they'd treasure him too.

Though Refining Demon Mountain served as a training ground, officially requiring disciples to face life-and-death situations to develop crisis-handling skills, such rare talents were exceptions. If someone like that truly perished here, it would be an immense loss for the sect.

The Chongxu Elder asked Xun Ziyou, "And you? What are you here for?"

Xun Ziyou's gaze shifted slightly, "Oh, I just... happened to be wandering by."

The Chongxu Elder frowned, "I'm being honest with you, yet you're making fun of me? Wandering by, here of all places, while concealing your presence as if you're some kind of thief?"

Chapter 1315: Ling Huxiao (3)

Xun Ziyou remained silent.

The Chongxu Sect Elder snorted, glanced at the departing Mo Hua, and mused, "His demeanor and temperament are indeed somewhat exceptional, but his aptitude... seems rather average at first glance."

The Chongxu Sect Elder turned his head and asked Xun Ziyou:

"What's this kid's background? Where did he come from? What's so special about him that you have to personally keep an eye on him?"

Xun Ziyou knew he couldn't hide it, so he pondered for a moment and sighed:

"His talent in Formation is quite good..."

"Formation?" The Chongxu Sect Elder was momentarily stunned, "Since when did your Taixu Gate focus on cultivating Formation?"

"What about Swordsmanship?"

The Chongxu Sect Elder expressed frustration, "Even the Tai'a Sect, which is primarily known for Sword Casting, focuses heavily on Swordsmanship. Our Chongxu Sect may lag in some areas, but when it comes to Sword Qi, we're still the leaders in the Qianxue State Boundary. And your Taixu Gate? What about your Swordsmanship?"

Xun Ziyou shot him a glare, "Divine Thought into Sword—would you dare to learn it if offered?" The Chongxu Sect Elder froze, thought for a moment, and then nodded:

"True. I wouldn't dare to learn it. I'm not worthy..."

The idea of "self-destruction"—only a deviant would willingly study something like that.

Xun Ziyou let out a long sigh, "With our sect split into three factions, Taixu Gate's true expertise can't even be passed on. What can we do? We just muddle along..."

The Chongxu Sect Elder didn't respond.

Indeed, from the perspective of Taixu Gate, their situation was undeniably difficult.

"But," the Chongxu Sect Elder added with some doubt, "That kid—his name is 'Mo Hua,' right? How good could his Formation skills possibly be to warrant your personal attention?"

Xun Ziyou thought to himself:

If I told you, it would scare you to death.

But I won't tell you.

"Just average, really. Picking the tallest among the short ones, slightly better than his peers—by a hair's breadth." Xun Ziyou said with deliberate ambiguity.

The Chongxu Sect Elder was unconvinced.

A disciple whom the ancestor had ordered Golden Core Elders to secretly supervise—his Formation level absolutely could not be "average."

This shameless Xun Ziyou must be lying.

The Chongxu Sect Elder mused silently.

Yet, as to how exceptional the kid might truly be, he remained skeptical...

Taixu Gate was not a Formation Sect, nor renowned for Formation expertise.

No matter how strong this disciple was in Formation, could he surpass Twelve Streams' Ten Thousand Formations Sect, or the Four Great Sects—especially the Qian Daoist Sect with its Formation roots?

But the circumstances were what they were; even a resourceful woman cannot cook without rice.

Taixu Gate had done their best, and for now, this was all they could do.

The Chongxu Sect Elder was understanding.

"Let's have a drink together sometime." The Chongxu Sect Elder said.

"We'll see when the time comes..."

Xun Ziyou's expression was complex.

That Mo Hua kid never let him have peace of mind.

The Chongxu Sect Elder was just casually suggesting this anyway; he was also very busy. Watching over the aloof, Sword Heart Clarity-bearing genius of Sword Dao was no easy task.

Before leaving, he paused to remind:

"You're aware of the sect reforms, I take it. There's no need for me to speak further. Just be cautious yourself."

Xun Ziyou frowned, "Tai'a Sect wants to join the Four Great Sects. Is that what Chongxu Sect is aiming for as well?"

The Chongxu Sect Elder chuckled, "Our Chongxu Sect is far from that. It's just..."

He sighed lightly, "Once the reforms take place and the dynamics shift, the sect will be like a boat going against the current—either advancing or fading away."

"For our Chongxu Sect, the goal is merely stability through advancement—remaining among the 'Eight Great Gates' is sufficient. As for the Four Great Gates, it's not something we're considering for now..."

Xun Ziyou nodded slightly.

The Chongxu Sect Elder smiled faintly but held a trace of contemplative thought in his heart.

"For now" they weren't considering it...

If Ling Huxiao could fully unleash his talents and master Chongxu Sword Qi to its peak...

Chongxu Sect might have the potential to go further.

On the surface, Tai'a Sect appeared to be the strongest of the two, but ultimately, who would make the leap into the Four Great Sects first?

Until the dust settled, it truly was hard to say.

Ling Huxiao's talent in Sword Dao was far more terrifying than outsiders could imagine...

Even within Chongxu Sect, only a handful of direct-lineage Elders, alongside the ancestor, were privy to the extent of his abilities.

The world only knew that Chongxu Sect had produced a Sword Dao genius seen only once every five hundred years, but few knew exactly how far this genius went in terms of being a "genius."

The Chongxu Sect Elder's heart quivered slightly.

Xun Ziyou naturally had no idea what he was thinking.

The two chatted idly for a while before bidding each other farewell.

...

Meanwhile, this Sword Dao genius of Chongxu Sect was already silently following behind Mo Hua, traversing mountains and crossing ranges, arriving at the mountain gate of Refining Demon Mountain.

"Materials from a Second Grade Middle-level Demon Wooden Eagle—in exchange for merit points, please."

Mo Hua handed over a storage bag and spoke politely.

"Second Grade Middle-level?" The disciple managing materials at the mountain gate was taken aback, "Didn't you usually hunt Second Grade Primary-level creatures? You managed to kill a Middle-level one?"

Mo Hua had often sought him out before to trade merit points for materials from Second Grade Primary-level hawk and eagle demon types, so this disciple was quite well-acquainted with Mo Hua.

Mo Hua smiled, "I got lucky and scored an easy kill."

The disciple shook his head.

Luck isn't always that convenient...

Still, it wasn't his place to ask too many questions.

Regardless of the method used, killing a monster beast was an accomplishment.

He quickly checked the feathers, bones, claws, fangs, and head of the Demon Wooden Eagle, calculated in his mind, and said:

"A total of 2,672 merit points—take a look."

Mo Hua reviewed the inventory list, verified there were no errors, and nodded in confirmation.

The merit points were transferred into his Taixu Token, and Mo Hua then divided half of them and handed them to Ling Huxiao.

Ling Huxiao was startled.

He hadn't expected Mo Hua to be so generous, giving away such a large sum of merit points without hesitation.

Up until now, Ling Huxiao had never met a sect disciple so "wealthy" and generous.

Moreover, the person being so generous to him wasn't a member of Chongxu Sect but rather a Taixu Sect disciple he had only met once—and with whom he'd had a minor misunderstanding.

Ling Huxiao felt conflicted.

Mo Hua, however, was scrutinizing Ling Huxiao, his thoughts shifting slightly.

This young Sword Dao genius truly had exceptional Swordsmanship.

Judging from his Sword Qi, Ling Huxiao was likely cultivating Chongxu Sect's sect-protecting ultimate technique, the Chongxu Sword Qi Skill.

Such a sword technique was definitely beyond Mo Hua's ability to learn.

Such sword qi was also not something Mo Hua could achieve.

But if such a formidable sword cultivator could be roped in, even just as a "henchman," it would be advantageous...

Mo Hua's eyes twinkled mischievously, resembling a cunning little fox as he grinned.

Chapter 1316: Chips

On the way back, Mo Hua just so happened to be traveling the same route as Linghu Xiao.

Taia Sect's Taia Mountain, Rushing Void Sect's Mount Chongxu, and Taixu Sect's Taixu Mountain—all part of the Three Mountains—were situated close to each other.

Their directions to return to their respective sects overlapped.

Linghu Xiao remained as cold and distant as ever; he didn't smile or speak. But occasionally, he would glance at Mo Hua.

Mo Hua noticed his gaze and turned, puzzled:

"What is it?"

Linghu Xiao replied seriously, "You promised to spar with me."

Mo Hua froze. "When did I ever say that?"

Linghu Xiao seemed a little angry. "Just now, in the mountains!" He frowned. "Do you intend to break your promise?"

Mo Hua thought for a moment, then shook his head. "What I said was, 'We'll see when there's time...'"

"Then when do you have time?" Linghu Xiao asked.

Mo Hua sighed.

He had only said that casually.

Who in their right mind would be so bored as to actually spar with him...

"By the way," Mo Hua changed the topic quickly, afraid Linghu Xiao would press the issue further, "the Sever Gold Sect has been stealing your monster beasts this entire time. Don't you want to take them back?"

"That's my own business," Linghu Xiao said.

"But if they keep stealing, doesn't that mean you won't earn any merit points?" Mo Hua pressed on.

Linghu Xiao remained silent. Then, his expression turned slightly colder, and a sharp Sword Intent flashed in his gaze—his entire presence exuding a cutting edge:

"Once my Sword Dao is complete, none of them will be able to withstand even a single sword from me. I'll settle the score thoroughly then."

Mo Hua nodded slightly.

A genius spoke with such confidence, indeed.

"But right now, your Sword Dao isn't complete, is it?"

Linghu Xiao froze again.

It was true—his Sword Dao wasn't yet perfected. At this point, he still couldn't "dominate all around," so he had no rebuttal.

Mo Hua pondered for a bit, then began to gently "guide" him:

"You're cultivating the Sword Dao. Whether you need a Spirit Sword, Heavenly Materials and Earthly Treasures, or top-secret sect cultivation techniques or swordsmanship, they all require merit points, don't they?"

"From my perspective, your merit points don't seem very abundant..."

Linghu Xiao had originally wanted to argue that his swordsmanship was strong and that he earned quite a lot of merit points by slaying monster beasts.

But when he thought about how Mo Hua had casually handed over more than a thousand merit points to him without even blinking an eye...

He realized Mo Hua's "family's wealth" was likely as deep and unfathomable as his abilities.

Linghu Xiao lost the confidence to refute.

Mo Hua continued seriously:

"You're being robbed of monster beasts by Sever Gold Sect. You're not earning merit points. That means both your Sword Heart and your Sword Dao progress slower, and the day you perfect your Sword Dao gets further and further away..."

"And you'll have no chance to regain your dignity."

"The less merit points you earn, the slower your Sword Dao cultivation. The further behind you fall, the more Sever Gold Sect will provoke and humiliate you..."

"It's a vicious cycle..."

"Someday, when your Sword Dao finally achieves perfection, and you want to take revenge against those Sever Gold Sect disciples—"

"By then, they might have already graduated and be off enjoying their lives somewhere far away."

"If you won't even encounter them in the future..."

Mo Hua sighed. "In this life, you might never be able to avenge yourself. You might never be able to let go of this grudge..."

Linghu Xiao, hearing Mo Hua's words, was momentarily stunned and thought it made a lot of sense.

If things kept going as they were now, Mo Hua's prediction would most likely become a reality.

This grudge—if not resolved now—might well linger forever.

Observing Linghu Xiao's expression, Mo Hua added:

"So, as the saying goes, a gentleman doesn't delay revenge until the next day. If it's possible to settle the score, you should do it early; otherwise, it'll be too late once even the flowers wither."

Linghu Xiao, silent for a while after hearing Mo Hua's reasoning, frowned and said:

"Why are you telling me this?"

Mo Hua sighed. "You and I met by fate. Besides, we're all part of the Three Mountains lineage—our ancestors were one family. We should help each other and not make distinctions."

Linghu Xiao was a bit skeptical, but his instinct told him that Mo Hua wasn't lying or trying to set a trap for him.

It seemed like Mo Hua was sincerely trying to help.

"How do you intend to help me?" Linghu Xiao asked hesitantly.

Mo Hua's face lit up with a bright smile, exuding warmth:

"Come hunt monster beasts at Taixu Sect's mountain. Sever Gold Sect is too afraid of us to cross the boundary, let alone rob your monster beasts."

Linghu Xiao froze, frowning slightly.

Too afraid of Taixu Sect to trespass...

Since he joined the mountains late and was somewhat reclusive, he mostly focused on his swordsmanship and seldom paid attention to other matters. He wasn't aware of the disputes between Taixu Sect and Sever Gold Sect.

However, in his impression, Taixu Sect wasn't necessarily stronger than Sever Gold Sect.

And Sever Gold Sect was known for its shamelessness and underhanded tactics. How had they ended up being intimidated by Taixu Sect?

Linghu Xiao couldn't quite understand.

"Moreover..." Mo Hua seized the opening while Linghu Xiao was distracted. "You could team up with Taixu Sect disciples to hunt monster beasts together, which would help earn merit points faster."

Mo Hua had already calculated this. With the power of Linghu Xiao's Sword Qi, he only needed to pair up with someone to scout monster beasts, set traps, and arrange formations.

Once the formation exploded and weakened the monster beast, Linghu Xiao could likely finish it off with one sword stroke.

If one sword wasn't enough, then two swords at most.

But Linghu Xiao looked a bit resistant.

"I don't team up with others," he said.

"Why not?" Mo Hua asked.

Linghu Xiao lifted his head slightly, his voice cold:

"I aim to perfect my swordsmanship, and the path of a Sword Cultivator is destined to be a lonely one..."

Mo Hua was speechless. After a long moment, he took a deep breath, visibly exasperated:

"Why are you obsessing over this nonsense?"

"What does perfecting swordsmanship have to do with being lonely?"

"If your swordsmanship becomes strong, you can choose to be lonely if you want. If your swordsmanship is weak, what's the point of being lonely? You might be cut down by someone, and no one will even bother to bury you..."

"The key is cultivating swordsmanship!"

"And cultivating swordsmanship requires merit points."

"Right now, the priority is to earn as many merit points as possible, as quickly as possible, and then concentrate your resources to rapidly improve your Sword Dao..."

Chapter 1317: The Stakes

"Is someone helping you earn Merit Points and you refuse? Are you an idiot?"

...

Mo Hua spoke with crisp clarity and rapid pace, unleashing a torrent of words.

Ling Huxiao was left dumbfounded by Mo Hua's remarks.

He wasn't truly averse to strangers; it was merely that his extraordinary aptitude had spurred envy and caused others to distance themselves.

Over time, this led to his isolation.

He grew reluctant to engage in communication.

If this persisted until Core Formation or even Feather Transformation, he'd likely become an incomparably powerful, yet eccentric and socially disconnected Sword Cultivator.

But now, things had begun to shift.

Mo Hua's words echoed in Ling Huxiao's ears. After pondering for a long time, he silently nodded: "Alright..."

Mo Hua, who had expected to spend more effort persuading him, was slightly surprised.

Nevertheless, Ling Huxiao's agreement was undoubtedly good news.

Mo Hua habitually patted Ling Huxiao's shoulder with a friendly demeanor and natural motion.

Ling Huxiao stiffened momentarily but did not reject the gesture.

"Next rest period, go to those hills near the Refining Demon Mountain's entrance and find the disciples of Taixu Gate. Just report my name."

"Your Swordsmanship is so extraordinary—one sword, one Monster Beast. You could earn plenty of Merit Points in a single day."

Mo Hua painted him a "grand picture."

Naturally, it wasn't an exaggeration but rather the truth.

Ling Huxiao nodded again.

At the crossroads, the two parted ways and went back to their respective Sects.

Back in the Sect, Ling Huxiao spent several consecutive days preoccupied with his thoughts.

Mo Hua's words and deeds would often surface in his mind.

From their initial meeting—the latent killing intent, the enigmatic and overwhelming aura, along with the fluid ease of Mo Hua's Spells and movement techniques;

The slain Demon Wooden Eagle with its unusually sharp golden Sword Qi penetrating its flesh and bone, alongside the fragmented sword blade embedded within;

The later moment when the killing intent dissipated—like being bathed in a springtime breeze, accompanied by an utterly sincere and composed smile;

And the radiant warmth and casual grace conveyed in his words...

All these conflicting and somewhat incongruous images intertwined.

Ling Huxiao etched this name deep into his memory:

"Mo Hua..."

...

As for Mo Hua, upon returning to the Sect, he completely forgot about Ling Huxiao.

His schedule had become overwhelmingly packed, juggling cultivation, classes, Formation practice, and considerations related to Artifact Refining and Sword Casting, leaving little space for other thoughts.

Occasionally, when researching Sword Arrays, Ling Huxiao would cross his mind.

Ling Huxiao's Sword Qi was, without doubt, the strongest Sword Qi Mo Hua had encountered within the Foundation Establishment Realm.

It far surpassed the Gold-Cutting Imperial Sword Technique of Sever Gold Sect by more than one level.

Of course, given Ling Huxiao's current cultivation level, his strong Sword Qi might not yet be wielded with total mastery.

Additionally, limited Spiritual Power might prevent him from unleashing multiple strikes at full strength.

In actual combat scenarios, vulnerabilities could still be exploited.

Nonetheless, his power was undeniably formidable.

If utilized properly, within the Foundation Establishment Realm—particularly among cultivators in the Middle Phase—it could wreak havoc.

And then there was the matter of the Chongxu Sword Qi...

Mo Hua was greatly intrigued. Chongxu Sect was renowned for its Chongxu Sword Qi, but what was the true source of its strength?

Could this Sword Qi perhaps be amplified or simulated through a "Sword Array?"

If a Sword Array could generate Chongxu Sword Qi, wouldn't that elevate the power of his own Sword Control to a whole new level?

"Someday, I'll have to delve further into this."

"It wouldn't be appropriate to steal knowledge of Chongxu Sword Qi, but if I don't learn it, merely studying it should be fine..."

Mo Hua pondered silently to himself.

...

Meanwhile, at the Elder's Residence of the Taixu Gate.

Elder Master Xun, who hadn't returned to the Sect for several days, had just arrived back and summoned a seasoned Inner Gate Elder, speaking slowly:

"I intend to use the Taixu Heavenly Mechanism Lock to bind some causes and effects. For this matter, I'll need approval from your Murong Ancestor."

"But since he occasionally goes into seclusion, it wouldn't be appropriate for me to disturb him rashly."

"Inform your clan—when your Ancestor finishes his seclusion, notify him. Or, if there's a specific hour determined, I'll visit in advance."

The Elder froze briefly upon hearing this.

The activation of the Taixu Heavenly Mechanism Lock undoubtedly signified a matter of utmost importance.

Such matters were not something he could inquire further about. He merely folded his hands and said, "Understood. I obey your command."

Elder Master Xun nodded slightly.

Shortly after the Elder left, Xun Ziyou arrived.

He came to provide routine updates on Mo Hua's activities, lest the Ancestor assume he was slacking off.

Xun Ziyou saluted Elder Master Xun and proceeded to recount Mo Hua's actions at Refining Demon Mountain in recent days.

These included practicing Sword Control, hunting Monster Beasts, forging connections with the Tai'a Sect's Ouyang Family—especially with a young man named Ouyang Mu—and encountering the Sword Dao Genius of Chongxu Sect.

Elder Master Xun felt a subtle tinge of astonishment.

Mo Hua's actions were always unexpected...

"Understood. Keep a close watch," Elder Master Xun instructed.

"Yes," Xun Ziyou agreed with folded hands.

Elder Master Xun lowered his head, his thoughts shrouded in mystery.

Xun Ziyou hesitated, seeming to seek the right moment to speak.

Elder Master Xun lifted his gaze slightly and said indifferently:

"If you have something to say, speak."

Xun Ziyou paused briefly, then furrowed his brow and said, "Ancestor, there's one matter I don't understand... Who is truly driving this Sect restructuring?"

Elder Master Xun's gaze turned sharper as he looked at Xun Ziyou, countering with a question: "What do you think?"

"On the surface, it seems to be led by the Four Great Sects," Xun Ziyou said cautiously, his expression grave, "but when one delves deeper, it appears quite odd..."

Elder Master Xun raised an eyebrow and watched Xun Ziyou with an impassive expression, asking:

"What's odd about it?"

Xun Ziyou furrowed his brow and said:

"The aim of restructuring the Sect is to change its current structure, to first dismantle and then rebuild, to replace the old with the new..."

"But the Four Great Sects—they are already the top-tier Sects in the Qian Learning State Boundary. What structure do they need to change?"

Chapter 1318: Chips

"If the sect restructuring truly happens, the best scenario is that they remain one of the Four Great Sects."

"But if an unforeseen accident or upheaval occurs, and they lose their position, falling out of the Four Great Sects, wouldn't that be a great joke?"

"For such a critical matter, they would not be so careless, nor would they treat it as child's play."

"Therefore, there must be some deeper meaning behind all this..."

Xun Ziyou said in a low voice.

Elder Master Xun seemed somewhat surprised, silently observing Xun Ziyou, then asked in his aged voice:

"What do you think?"

Xun Ziyou gave a bitter smile, "I'm unsure, which is why I wanted to ask you..."

"Speak your mind," Elder Master Xun's tone softened slightly, "there's no need to hold back."

After brief contemplation, Xun Ziyou slowly said:

"In my view, the Four Great Sects seem to be planning to... 'reshuffle' all the sects?"

Elder Master Xun's brows lifted slightly.

Seeing that the elder did not reprimand him, Xun Ziyou continued:

"Recently, I've taken some time to discreetly probe a few old friends within various families and sects."

"Based on the information I've gathered..."

"It seems the Four Great Sects intend to reshuffle the entire sect structure within the Qian Learning State Boundary—from the Eight Major Gates, the Twelve Streams, the Qian Learning Hundred Gates, all the way down to the medium and small sects beneath them."

"Those who comply will prosper; those who resist will perish."

"Sects that refuse to heed their command will be ousted from key positions, replaced by those who are obedient."

"By restructuring everything from top to bottom, the Qian Learning State Boundary will be established under a new sect order, with the 'Four Great Sects' at its core."

"The Four Great Sects would become the sect overlords, a dominating force."

"Meanwhile, the Eight Major Gates, Twelve Streams, and all other Qianxue Sects would be relegated to subordinates, under their thumb, without the slightest room for defiance."

Xun Ziyou sighed, "In this world, most powerful forces, once they grow strong, inevitably monopolize and become oligarchies, ruling unilaterally. This is an inevitability."

"But there are two problems with this approach..."

Xun Ziyou's expression turned perplexed, "First, how can the Four Great Sects be certain they won't fail during this sect restructuring or the upcoming Dao Conferencing, and risk falling from their position as the Four Great Sects?"

"Second, if they're truly aiming for a reshuffle, then first to be implicated would be our Taixu Gate, as well as..."

Xun Ziyou paused and gravely said, "Two other sects from the same lineage as us... the Tai'a Sect and the Rushing Void Sect!"

"Yet the Tai'a Sect and the Rushing Void Sect seem entirely oblivious to this. Not only do they not oppose the restructuring, but they're actively supporting its implementation."

"They even appear to be thinking of using this sect restructuring as an opportunity to climb higher, aspiring to become one of the Four Great Sects..."

Xun Ziyou's face was filled with worry.

Elder Master Xun nodded slightly, and his gaze toward Xun Ziyou carried a hint of approval.

Learning to think critically wasn't a bad thing. At least it spared him some concern.

"You're partially right, but also not entirely," Elder Master Xun said.

"The Four Great Sects undoubtedly aim to become sect overlords—true 'Four Great Sects,' dominating a region, commanding thousands of sects, leaving none daring to defy them."

"But behind this, there must be deeper, more terrifying secrets, shrouded in darker, more sinister intentions..."

Elder Master Xun's eyes grew profound before he sighed, "But such matters aren't for me to explain further."

"As for the Tai'a Sect and Rushing Void Sect, even if they remain unaware of these hidden machinations or the far-reaching consequences, they should at the very least be aware of the Four Great Sects' schemes."

Xun Ziyou frowned, "Then why would they..."

Elder Master Xun shook his head, "The fisherman casts the bait, and the fish bites willingly."

"How can you tell, until the very end, whether it's the fisherman who catches the fish, or the fish that swallows the bait, snaps the line, and drags the fisherman into the water?"

"For the Four Great Sects, this is a gamble."

"If it succeeds, they will wield supreme authority, commanding an entire state boundary with a thousand sects under their decree."

"But for the Tai'a Sect and Rushing Void Sect, this is just as much a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

"If they seize the chance and push forward courageously, they could soar to the top and truly become 'premier' sects."

"Everyone is gambling."

"But..." Xun Ziyou furrowed his brows, "Gambling with the future of one's sect— isn't that too reckless? It feels somewhat..."

Xun Ziyou fell silent for a moment but eventually voiced the words:

"Foolish..."

Elder Master Xun smiled faintly, "Don't view it from an outsider's perspective. The so-called clarity of a bystander is often an illusion."

"Most bystanders who think themselves clear-headed only turn out to be more foolish than the players once they enter the game."

"The Tai'a Sect is gambling, the Rushing Void Sect is gambling, and do you think our Taixu Gate doesn't want to gamble?"

"Our Taixu Gate simply lacks the chips. If we had them, we would've laid out our game long ago."

"What's more, history tends to judge the merits and faults of a gamble after the fact."

"If the Tai'a Sect and the Rushing Void Sect win, it will be praised as foresight and strategic brilliance."

"If they lose, it will be derided as greed and overreach."

"For now, the dust has not settled, the outcome remains undetermined. How can you judge whether their actions are 'strategic brilliance' or 'overreach'?"

"And who's to say they will lose?"

"What if they win?"

Elder Master Xun's gaze burned with intensity, piercing through.

Xun Ziyou froze, rendered speechless by the elder's questions.

Only now did he realize how easy it was to presume clarity when looking at matters unrelated to oneself.

But when faced with solving the challenges directly, the fog thickened, the links became unfathomable, and decisions turned extraordinarily difficult.

Xun Ziyou let out a deep sigh, unable to utter another word.

After a moment, he softly asked, "Then, elder, what should our Taixu Gate..."

Elder Master Xun replied, "Given the shallow foundations of our Taixu Gate, we should remain docile, observe the shifting tides, and adapt accordingly..."

Xun Ziyou sighed inwardly.

It was no surprise—such sage words from the elder made perfect sense yet also gave no clearer direction when examined in detail.

Elder Master Xun fell into silence for a moment before sighing again:

"The Tai'a Sect seeks to advance boldly, while the Rushing Void Sect hopes to maintain stability through progress. On the surface, they seem far stronger than our Taixu Gate."

"But in truth, we're all just grasshoppers tied to the same rope—none of us fares much better than the others."

"This sect restructuring may appear as mere waves on the surface, but beneath lies a surging tide of blood and chaos..."

"Our Taixu Gate struggles to protect itself, and they can only seek their own fortunes. Whether they can win their gamble will depend on their own providence."

...

Xun Ziyou furrowed his brows tightly, a weight pressing on his heart.

The matters the elder had to contemplate far surpassed those of the sect elders like him...

Though Elder Master Xun's expression remained placid, his heart carried its own weight of concern.

For all they spoke of seeking their own fortunes, the Taixu, Tai'a, and Rushing Void Sects shared a lineage. In the eyes of elders with such extended lifespans, they remained bound by blood and kinship.

With storm clouds brewing, he couldn't bear the thought of seeing any among the three sects falter or meet calamity.

But such significant affairs were beyond his control...

Elder Master Xun's thoughts were heavy as he raised his gaze and saw the troubled expression on Xun Ziyou's face. Shaking his head slightly, he said:

"Don't concern yourself too much. Just remember my instructions—take good care of Mo Hua; leave the rest alone."

Xun Ziyou sighed in resignation, cupping his hands, "Understood."

Elder Master Xun nodded slightly and, as if recalling something, asked, "You mentioned that Mo Hua has connections with disciples from both the Tai'a Sect and the Rushing Void Sect?"

"Yes." Xun Ziyou nodded. "Their relationships seem quite good."

"The sword prodigy from the Rushing Void Sect and Mo Hua became acquainted in a rather unconventional way. Though it was their first meeting, they conversed quite a bit afterward."

"As for the Tai'a Sect, the Ouyang family's young disciple has an even closer relationship with Mo Hua. He's been helping Mo Hua craft swords daily and even greets Mo Hua as 'senior brother' whenever they meet..."

"Senior brother?" Elder Master Xun was momentarily taken aback.

"Senior brother," Xun Ziyou confirmed.

Elder Master Xun nodded.

Mo Hua, that child, truly had a knack for forging connections—even a disciple from the Ouyang family in the Tai'a Sect called him 'senior brother'...

Elder Master Xun pondered for a moment before pausing abruptly.

An audacious idea suddenly surfaced in Elder Master Xun's mind.

So daring, even Elder Master Xun involuntarily drew in a sharp breath.

Calming himself, he thought carefully, his feelings an ocean of turbulence. Inwardly, he muttered:

"It seems our Taixu Gate might not be entirely without 'chips'..."

"What if we... place an even bigger bet?!"

His gaze flickered with astonishment, then slowly deepened in resolve.

Chapter 1319: Clever

Elder Master Xun was brewing a grand plan in his mind.

As for Mo Hua, he continued attending classes and cultivating diligently, completely focused.

Soon, it was time for the monthly break again.

At Refining Demon Mountain, Mo Hua sat on a large tree with a Spirit Sword placed in front of him, bored as he killed the hawks and falcons flying overhead.

Second Grade Primary Rank hawks and falcons were no challenge for him now.

He could kill one with just one sword strike.

After hunting for a while, he inevitably felt bored.

At the same time, he patiently waited.

Waited for Ling Huxiao to show up.

Once that happened, he'd have a "Sword Dao Genius" to act as his "enforcer."

And this Sword Dao Genius was one with potential for growth—perhaps someday he would become increasingly powerful.

Mo Hua continued waiting on the tree, all the way past noon, nearing dusk, as the setting sun tilted west.

Still, Ling Huxiao was nowhere to be seen.

"Is he not coming?"

Mo Hua sighed.

Failed to catch the fish...

Well, then we'll try again next time.

Mo Hua prepared to pack up and leave, but after reconsidering, decided to wait a little longer.

What if that young man was waging an internal battle within himself?

These introverted youths, although they seemed indifferent on the outside, often had plenty of inner turmoil.

Sitting atop the tree, Mo Hua took out a flask of fruit wine and leisurely waited while enjoying the sunset.

Soon enough, after another thirty minutes had passed, a figure appeared in the mountain trail hidden within the dense forest.

It was Ling Huxiao, wearing his signature pale-green robe.

"He's here!"

Mo Hua perked up, standing on the tree and waving from afar:

"Ling Huxiao!"

Ling Huxiao froze momentarily and looked up, noticing a young cultivator waving at him from a large tree hidden within the dense mountain forest.

Judging by his figure and demeanor, it was undoubtedly Mo Hua.

Ling Huxiao frowned slightly.

From such a distance, how could this "Mo Hua" little cultivator have noticed him?

Both were Foundation Establishment cultivators. Was his Divine Sense really this strong?

Ling Huxiao was puzzled but continued striding toward Mo Hua.

When the two met, Mo Hua skipped the idle chit-chat about why he had come so late or any pleasantries, and instead directly got to the point:

"The day is getting late. I'll take you to hunt some Monster Beasts."

Ling Huxiao kept his expression cold and asked:

"What kind of Monster Beasts?"

"You'll find out soon enough," Mo Hua replied.

After speaking, he took the lead and walked ahead.

Ling Huxiao hesitated for a moment, reluctant, but eventually followed Mo Hua at a slow pace.

"Let me show you how we at Taixu Gate hunt Monster Beasts."

Mo Hua explained as they walked.

Initially, his plan was to have someone else guide Ling Huxiao through the process.

But Ling Huxiao, being a Sword Dao Genius from Rushing Void Sect, prompted Mo Hua to reconsider—he decided it would be better to personally teach him to demonstrate respect.

After all, although his days were fulfilling, they were also somewhat dull.

This was a good opportunity to make friends and spend some time with Ling Huxiao.

Taixu Gate's Monster Hunting procedures, refined after repeated study, practice among disciples, and optimization based on practical situations, had become incredibly stable and efficient.

The target this time was a Kui Wood Wolf.

Mo Hua identified its trail, set traps, laid the Formation, and then pulled Ling Huxiao to hide behind a large stone.

The Kui Wood Wolf triggered the Formation, which exploded with lethal force.

Flames surged, smoke rose.

The Kui Wood Wolf was severely injured by the blast.

"Slash it!" Mo Hua commanded.

Ling Huxiao drew his sword, and a radiant, sharp Sword Qi, shimmering like moonlight, tore through the air and struck the injured Kui Wood Wolf.

The Kui Wood Wolf died instantly.

The Monster Hunt was over.

Ling Huxiao was stunned.

The entire process had taken less than two hours.

Most of the time had been spent tracking the Monster Beast, stalking it, setting traps, and laying the Formation.

The actual combat only lasted from when the Formation was triggered, to his sword strike, to the Monster Beast collapsing dead—no more than thirty minutes.

Just like that, simple and straightforward, a Second Grade Primary Rank Monster Beast was hunted.

It was so simple that he felt even a "fool" could follow the procedures step-by-step and achieve the same result...

Was this how Taixu Gate had always hunted Monster Beasts?

What Monster Beast could withstand such methods?

Ling Huxiao felt his perception was completely overturned.

Mo Hua glanced at the sky. "There's still time; we can hunt one more. After that, we can head back."

Using the same method, under Mo Hua's well-planned Monster Hunting arrangement and Ling Huxiao's powerful Sword Qi attack, another Monster Beast fell easily.

They stripped the materials and took them to the Mountain Gate to sell.

"Two Monster Beasts. After deducting the Formation costs, the rest is split evenly—eight hundred Merit Points per person," Mo Hua said, transferring eight hundred Merit Points to Ling Huxiao.

Ling Huxiao was momentarily dazed.

Just like that...

In a little over half a day, strolling in the forest, swinging his sword two or three times, he had earned eight hundred Merit Points?

This made him reflect on his previous solitary hunts. Deep in the mountains, he'd been in constant vigilance, pushing his Sword Heart to its limit, battling Monster Beasts to the death, scheming against Sever Gold Sect, often spending several days—or even two or three months—to kill a single Monster Beast and earn around a thousand Merit Points. Now, he felt like a "fool"...

On the way back, Ling Huxiao mulled it over for a long time before finally speaking indifferently:

"This kind of Monster Hunting isn't good. I won't participate next time."

Mo Hua asked in confusion, "What's wrong with it? Isn't it quick?"

Ling Huxiao shook his head. "It's too opportunistic. It's not conducive to refining Sword Dao. It can also numb the Sword Heart, leading to carelessness and laziness."

"Moreover, relying on ambushes and Formations beforehand is somewhat dishonorable."

Chapter 1320: Smart (2)

"This goes against my Sword Dao and will make me lose the courage to face formidable enemies..."

Mo Hua froze briefly, then sighed and said: "One day, you're going to die from stupidity."

Ling Huxiao was stunned, then showed a hint of anger and said coldly: "You're the stupid one! What do you even know? You don't even cultivate sword techniques, nor possess the talent for Sword Heart Clarity. How could you understand the pursuit of Sword Dao?!"

"What is Sword Heart Clarity?" Mo Hua asked curiously.

Ling Huxiao's face darkened, tilting his head upward: "Even if I told you, you wouldn't understand."

"Oh." Mo Hua glanced at Ling Huxiao, thought for a moment, and then asked, "Are you planning to stay in the Sect for your entire life?"

Ling Huxiao didn't quite understand why Mo Hua asked this, but still shook his head and replied:

"How could that be..."

Mo Hua said solemnly: "Then, do you know how cultivators behave outside the Sect? Do you know what methods Sin Cultivators, Evil Cultivators, and Demon Cultivators use to kill others for Replenishment, absorbing spirit or blood, or cultivating Evil Skills?"

Ling Huxiao was silent for a moment after Mo Hua's question. Although he had taken on a few reward missions, the times he had ventured out weren't many. He had barely encountered truly heinous Evil Demon Cultivators.

Mo Hua sneered and said, "Those Evil Demon Cultivators, if they want to kill you, they'll use whatever means they have at their disposal—be it despicable or shameless. Do you think they'd care?"

"If you get killed by them, your body dismembered, your blood turned into formation drawings, your flesh fed to demon monsters, your so-called 'Sword Heart' extracted as a medicinal catalyst and refined into an Evil Pill..."

"Even your Divine Soul might be devoured..."

"At that point, are you going to reason with them? Are you going to accuse them of being dishonorable in victory?"

"Who would care about that?"

Mo Hua's words were cold and sobering.

Ling Huxiao's face turned visibly pale.

A moment later, he looked at Mo Hua, who appeared younger than him, with an innocent boyish demeanor but unusually deep eyes, and frowned as he asked:

"These things... How do you know about them?"

Demon Cultivators dismembering bodies, blood as formation ink, flesh feeding demon monsters, heart and veins refining into pills, Divine Souls eaten alive...

Such bloody matters—how does Mo Hua, a sincere Sect disciple, know them so clearly?

"Because I saw them with my own eyes..." Mo Hua silently thought to himself.

But such things were not suitable to be spoken out loud.

If word spread, it would destroy his image of being naive and innocent among fellow sect disciples.

"This was told to me by an uncle named Gu, who works as a Court Official in the Taoist Court, specializing for years in capturing Sin Cultivators and dealing with Evil Demons."

Mo Hua once again brandished the name of "Uncle Gu" to bluff his way through.

Ling Huxiao, seeing that he spoke so convincingly and with such detail, naturally believed him.

"So," Mo Hua said, now looking serious, "people often say Tao Cultivation is treacherous, but we Sect Disciples don't actually realize what true 'treachery' is."

"These true dangers could be far more shameless, vile, malicious, insidious... and utterly preventable."

"If you hold onto such naive thoughts as confessing 'dishonorable victory,' you'd suffer significant losses when you truly step into the cultivation world."

"You might end up with your Spirit Sword broken, your Sword Heart polluted, your foundation in Sword Dao destroyed entirely, and even your own life lost..."

Sword Dao foundation, destroyed entirely...

When it came to matters regarding Sword Dao, Ling Huxiao showed a grave expression.

Mo Hua continued: "Thus, if you want to live long, seek the Great Dao of longevity, and reach the true peak of Sword Dao, you must abandon the meaningless persistence of your ideals."

"You must resort to any means necessary to improve your sword techniques, even if it means relying on external aids without hesitation."

"Only by surviving and continuously growing stronger can you ultimately reach the end of Sword Dao!"

Mo Hua, who knew nothing about Sword Dao, was simply spouting nonsense based on his understanding of formations.

But all Great Daos converge ultimately, so it shouldn't be too far off the mark.

Indeed, Ling Huxiao's expression shifted, showing he was contemplating deeply.

Seeing Ling Huxiao hesitating, Mo Hua finally urged with a mild tone:

"You should start by simply killing these lower-level monster beasts, earning some merit points, and upgrading your strength."

"Later, when we have the time, we'll find more people to form a team and hunt Second Grade Middle Stage, or even High-Rank monster beasts together."

"It's by battling strong monsters at the edge of life and death, enduring immense pressure, that you can truly temper your Sword Heart and hone your swordsmanship."

Ling Huxiao shivered in excitement.

Hunting Second Grade Middle Stage, or even High-Rank monster beasts?!

Ling Huxiao's eyes lit up immediately, his body bursting with intense battle intent, and he promptly nodded in agreement, saying: "Okay! I'll join you for monster hunting!"

Mo Hua secretly sighed in his heart.

A single-minded Sword Cultivator like Ling Huxiao is so easy to deceive.

As soon as he hears about hunting middle and high-rank monsters, he becomes as energetic as a chicken on steroids.

However, Second Grade Middle Stage monster beasts are a whole level stronger than Primary Rank ones—their Blood Qi and demonic power are more potent, and killing them will be quite troublesome.

High-Rank ones are even worse—not just troublesome but outright dangerous.

Still, when "painting a picture," you always make it look a little grander.

Besides, when Cheng Mo and the others achieve higher cultivation levels, trying to slay stronger monster beasts will indeed be required.

So, it's not entirely a pipe dream.

As for when it'll happen, that's open to interpretation.

Could be one or two months later, or perhaps one or two years, even two or three years—it's hard to say...

Ling Huxiao certainly did not have as many cunning ideas as Mo Hua.

He thought Mo Hua's words indeed made sense.

Efficiently hunting low-level monster beasts, quickly earning merit points and improving swordsmanship.

Then, challenging fiercer and stronger monster beasts to temper his Sword Heart and refine his sword techniques!

Previously, he misunderstood him.

Mo Hua, it turns out, isn't without a desire for victory, but rather, is meticulous and steady, seeking a more enduring path toward the Great Dao.