

The Quest 1321

Chapter 1321: Clever (3)

Ling Huxiao nodded slightly.

Just like that, Ling Huxiao was considered to have "joined the team."

The next day, Mo Hua instructed Hao Xuan to take Ling Huxiao on a Monster Hunting trip.

Hao Xuan was in charge of scouting and setting up Formations, while Ling Huxiao handled the killing.

By evening, the two returned, and Hao Xuan exclaimed in shock, "Such powerful Sword Qi! With just one swish, that Monster Beast was dead."

"Today, we killed five Monster Beasts."

"Senior Brother Ling Huxiao is truly formidable!"

Ling Huxiao's expression remained indifferent, but when Hao Xuan praised him, he couldn't help but slightly purse his lips.

After all, he was still a young man under twenty. Though he didn't show it outwardly, being complimented did make him secretly happy.

At the Rushing Void Sect, no disciples ever praised him.

Because everyone knew he was a once-in-five-centuries Sword Dao genius.

As such, no matter how extraordinary his Swordsmanship was, others took it for granted.

Instead, this caused others to distance themselves from him.

But in the Taixu Gate, things were quite different.

Here, everyone worked as a team to hunt Monster Beasts, cooperating fully. The stronger his Sword Qi, the faster the Monster Beasts were killed, and the more Merit Points they earned.

Moreover, everyone shared in the Merit Points.

Thus, Ling Huxiao unknowingly became the "pillar" for Monster Hunting.

The praise from the Taixu disciples was also sincere.

Blending in with the Taixu disciples, Ling Huxiao found himself free from excessive scheming and felt a lot more at ease.

In addition, there was a specialized Sword-Casting Master—Ouyang Mu, who repaired and maintained his Spirit Sword.

Inherited Spirit Swords were extremely precious. Not only were they difficult to cast, but their daily upkeep and repairs after damage also required meticulous care and expertise.

Among the three sects, the Tai'a Sect excelled in Sword Casting.

Ouyang Mu was a successor of the Tai'a Sect. As such, many Taixu disciples would pay Merit Points for Ouyang Mu's help in repairing their Sword Weapons or Spiritual Artifacts when needed.

Ling Huxiao was no exception.

Over time, the two became quite familiar with each other.

Ouyang Mu was devoted to Sword Casting, while Ling Huxiao was focused on Sword Cultivation. With one being taciturn and the other solitary, they got along surprisingly well.

Just like that, over a month passed, and Ling Huxiao gradually integrated with the Taixu disciples.

Now, whenever he entered the mountains, he would head toward the Taixu Sect's domain.

And whenever he met Taixu disciples, someone would warmly pull him into their team immediately.

Others would track Monster Beasts and set Formations, while he was responsible for striking with his sword.

After killing the Monster Beasts and distributing the earned Merit Points according to contributions, everyone would contentedly descend the mountain.

The entire process felt relaxed and natural.

Sometimes, Ling Huxiao would even feel a bit dazed.

He would get the illusion that he wasn't actually a cultivator of the Rushing Void Sect, but rather a disciple of the Taixu Sect...

His mingling with the Taixu Sect disciples did not go unnoticed by the Chongxu Sect Elders who were privately watching over him.

The Elders reported back to the Chongxu Ancestor.

Stroking his beard, the Chongxu Ancestor pondered for a moment before saying:

"No problem, this is a good thing."

An Elder was puzzled, "How is this a good thing..."

The Chongxu Ancestor explained, "Our Rushing Void Sect is stronger than the Taixu Sect, and Xiaor's abilities are also superior to those of Taixu disciples."

"Him mixing with the Taixu Sect is like a lion walking among a pack of wolves: the lion leads, and the wolves follow."

"With Xiaoer's Sword Dao talent, his future is limitless."

"However, a cultivator is, after all, human. To follow the Dao, one must gain allies; to go against it, one finds oneself alone."

"For him to build connections with the Taixu disciples helps establish his network and prestige, making future endeavors easier."

"Furthermore, if the Taixu Sect declines in the future, they will necessarily rely on Xiaoer because of this bond."

Hearing this, the Elder nodded slightly in agreement:

"The Ancestor's insight is indeed far-reaching."

"However," the Elder hesitated, "he seems to be particularly close to a disciple named Mo Hua from the Taixu Sect."

"This Mo Hua kid is quite clever and quick-witted, with a silver tongue."

"Although Xiaoer acts cold on the surface, he does seem to take Mo Hua's words to heart and even follows through with them..."

The Elder appeared helpless.

The Chongxu Ancestor frowned a little. "This child, what is his background?"

"I made some inquiries... It seems he is highly valued by Taixu's Ancestor Xun. His aptitude is lacking, but he has learned Formation quite well," the Elder replied.

"Proficient in Formation?"

The Chongxu Ancestor pondered briefly and then nodded, saying, "This is no issue either..."

"Being skilled in Formation can complement Xiaoer."

"Though Xiaoer is emotionally reserved, he possesses the talent of Sword Heart Clarity. He is far from foolish and cannot be manipulated easily."

"Moreover, Formation, no matter how excellent, ultimately serves others. It cannot compare to Swordsmanship, where all power lies within oneself."

"Thus, it is inevitable that Xiaoer will take the lead in the future."

"And this generation of Taixu disciples can serve as a stepping stone to support Xiaoer!"

The Elder nodded in praise, saying, "The Ancestor is truly wise!"

Yet despite these words, the Elder retained some subtle unease in his heart.

The Ancestor's reasoning was impeccable, but it seemed to differ ever so slightly from the reality of the situation.

Especially since the Ancestor had not personally met that Mo Hua disciple. He had no idea just how "clever" that child truly was.

But even if he wanted to explain, he couldn't articulate it clearly.

After all, no matter how clever, what harm could it cause?

Besides, the Ancestor was preoccupied with sect affairs.

With impending changes to the sect system, the various Great Sects were rife with hidden tensions, leaving many concerns to deal with. It wasn't worth taking up the Ancestor's time over a mere Taixu Sect disciple.

Thus, the Elder said no more, bowed deeply, and took his leave.

The Chongxu Ancestor, his thoughts occupied with other matters, did not dwell further.

...

Meanwhile, at the Taixu Sect, Mo Hua found himself troubled.

He had already arranged Ling Huxiao's affairs.

But his own strength seemed to have hit a plateau.

With the fourth year approaching its end, his cultivation, Divine Sense, Sword Control, and Formation were all stuck in a bottleneck.

Chapter 1322: Clever (4)

Cultivation requires the persistence of water dripping to wear through stone. With Foundation Building Middle Stage cultivation, breakthroughs cannot be achieved in the short term.

His Divine Sense was stuck at Seventeen Patterns.

Eighteen Patterns was just within sight, but due to the limitations of Heavenly Dao Laws, there was a barrier in the way that he simply couldn't overcome.

Though his Sword Control was immensely powerful, it too had gradually reached a bottleneck.

He would have to wait until he mastered a new Sword Array or until Little Wood learned a new Sword-Casting technique to continue advancing.

He was practicing formations diligently every single day.

Especially the Five Elements Eight Trigrams Formation, which he had grown thoroughly tired of; there wasn't anything new or refreshing about it anymore.

Other than the Five Elements Eight Trigrams Formation, it had been quite some time since he had learned any new formations.

As for his cultivation, that was something that could only be improved bit by bit through grinding.

His Divine Sense might require some sort of opportunity or trigger.

For now, all he could do was try and find some new formations to study.

Mo Hua thought about it for a moment and decided to seek out Elder Master Xun for advice.

"New formations?" Elder Master Xun was momentarily taken aback.

"Yes." Mo Hua nodded, "Master, aside from the Five Elements Eight Trigrams Formation, are there other formations I can study?"

"Even the Yuan Magnetic Formation would be fine..." Mo Hua added hesitantly.

He only had a few of the Seventeen Patterns Yuan Magnetic Formation scrolls, which had been rendered useless through repeated practice.

Elder Master Xun sighed softly.

Learning too quickly wasn't necessarily a good thing—now all the pressure fell squarely on him, the old master.

However, there were certain formations that Mo Hua was still too early to learn.

And others, though categorized within the legitimate formation schools, were borderline unorthodox or even dangerous, making them prone to leading an aspiring cultivator astray.

"I'll consider it..." said Elder Master Xun.

"Alright." Mo Hua replied obediently.

He was about to rise and take his leave when suddenly Elder Master Xun called out to him.

"Mo Hua."

Elder Master Xun furrowed his brows slightly, contemplating for a while before finally asking cautiously: "Can your Divine Sense still be strengthened?"

The question was asked with utmost deliberation.

Having just entered the Foundation Building Middle Stage and already possessing Divine Sense with Seventeen Patterns, Mo Hua had far surpassed cultivators of the same realm.

Yet Elder Master Xun couldn't help but feel that Mo Hua was capable of achieving even more.

As the disciple of that person, anything extraordinary was possible...

Mo Hua scratched his head. "Hard to say. It might depend on certain opportunities..."

For instance, if someone were to offer him a "meal."

Or perhaps if he could locate another altar of some sort.

These things indeed depended on lucky encounters.

But such details, Mo Hua definitely couldn't say outright.

Elder Master Xun's gaze grew slightly dark; it was unclear what crossed his mind as he nodded faintly. "I see."

From then on, Elder Master Xun didn't say another word.

Mo Hua, sensing it inappropriate to linger further, decided not to disturb him, especially since Elder Master Xun had seemed particularly preoccupied as of late, clearly pondering some significant matter.

Whatever grand matters the sect might be dealing with were beyond Mo Hua's ability to interfere, nor could he lend any assistance.

As long as he didn't cause additional trouble for the master, that would be enough.

Mo Hua bowed respectfully and then got up to take his leave.

But just as he reached the doorway, he turned and unexpectedly ran into a man clad in a Taoist Robe of Taixu Gate's Inner Gate, his appearance handsome and upright, his posture tall, with a nonchalant air in his expression.

Judging from his demeanor, he seemed to be a certain Elder from the Inner Gate.

This Elder, upon suddenly colliding with Mo Hua, was visibly startled, a flicker of unease crossing his face.

It was almost like someone caught doing something they shouldn't.

Yet this expression lasted only an instant before his countenance returned to normal.

If not for Mo Hua's keen Divine Sense, he wouldn't have noticed it at all.

Moreover, the aura emanating from this Elder felt oddly familiar...

Mo Hua was puzzled but still politely offered the disciple's greeting, saying:

"Greetings, Elder."

The Elder cast a calm and measured look at Mo Hua, as if he had never encountered him before, treating him merely as an ordinary disciple, and nodded faintly:

"Mm."

Then he walked past Mo Hua and entered Elder Master Xun's residence.

Watching the Elder's departing figure, Mo Hua felt perplexed and called over a nearby Taoist Child to inquire:

"Who was that Elder just now?"

The Taoist Child, being informed on countless visits and departures, was well-connected.

Moreover, he got along quite well with Mo Hua, so he readily shared all he knew:

"That was Elder Xun Ziyou, a descendant of Elder Master Xun. He currently serves as an Inner Gate Elder and oversees Refining Demon Mountain. Occasionally, he comes to visit the old master..."

Mo Hua froze, thinking about that unfamiliar yet somehow familiar figure. His expression turned thoughtful.

A moment later, Mo Hua's eyes glimmered slightly as he nodded with a meaningful tone:

"Ah... Elder Xun..."

Chapter 1323: Monster

Xun Ziyou stepped into the Elder's Residence and silently breathed a sigh of relief.

He hadn't expected that his sudden decision to seek advice from the Ancestor would lead him to coincidentally encounter Mo Hua at the doorstep.

The Ancestor's residence prohibited Divine Sense from probing.

Thus, he hadn't considered that Mo Hua might suddenly emerge from the house.

In this way, he, the "spy," ended up running right into the person he was spying on.

Xun Ziyou couldn't help but feel a little guilty.

Fortunately, being a Golden Core Late Stage Cultivator who had lived for two or three centuries, his temperament and experience were well established. In just an instant, he suppressed the unease on his face, pretended not to recognize Mo Hua, and managed to bluff his way through.

"It should be fine..."

Xun Ziyou silently thought.

It was just a chance encounter. Even if that kid is sharp, surely he wouldn't notice anything...

Besides, earlier, Mo Hua had bowed to him respectfully, calling him Elder, behaving in a perfectly orderly manner.

Xun Ziyou nodded slightly.

He walked deeper into the inner chamber and presented a Jade Slip to Elder Master Xun.

"The matter of reform has been mostly finalized..."

"The Taoist Court has already started proceeding with the formalities."

"The specific regulations are still under discussion, but overall, it amounts to determining the sect's ranking through the results of the Tao Discussion Meeting."

"Using this occasion to reshuffle positions and reconsider the Four Great Sects, the Eight Great Gates, and the Twelve Streams of Taoist merit slots."

"At the same time, this reform aims to change the sect structure within the Qianxue State Boundary, elevating the status of the 'Four Great Sects,' along with the share of Spirit Stones they would get from the Qianlong Spirit Mine."

"In other words, after the sect reform, the title of 'Four Great Sects' will be more significant than ever!"

"Whoever can seize the title from the existing Four Great Sects will simultaneously obtain power over the new 'Four Great Sects' and reap enormous Spirit Stone profits from the Qianlong Spirit Mine."

"Of course, if no one can seize it, then all of this will still belong to the current Four Great Sects."

Elder Master Xun's gaze grew slightly heavier.

Xun Ziyou sighed softly:

"This is an open scheme..."

"It's a plan the Four Great Sects have painstakingly laid out, setting their sights on becoming sect heads comparable to those in Taoist State Taoist Sect, step by step."

"With such a tempting piece of fat meat laid out in plain sight, even if other sects perceive the risks as high and the odds of success slim, they'll still want to gamble."

"Until the final loss, everyone believes they'll be the one to win."

Xun Ziyou felt a trace of emotion.

Elder Master Xun nodded faintly.

Yes, until the loss, everyone believes they'll win...

But now, he also wanted to gamble.

There was no choice but to gamble.

Elder Master Xun frowned.

Recently, he'd been feeling unsettled. Whenever he found the time to calculate, he discovered that the seemingly peaceful situation concealed ominous turbulence. No matter how he calculated, all he saw was foggy uncertainty.

It was strange.

Ordinarily, it should be possible to discern at least a glimmer of fortune or misfortune.

Though Elder Master Xun understood that his Heavenly Secret Calculations weren't particularly refined and his Cause and Effect Compass wasn't of a Superior Grade, making his results possibly inaccurate, it shouldn't reach the point of being entirely incomprehensible.

Not a single trace could be found.

This indicated that the Heavenly Mechanism and Causality had been locked down by something.

There was "someone" preventing him from deducing anything...

Or perhaps, preventing everyone else from deducing anything.

For someone to mask the Heavenly Mechanism and Causality before a Hollow Void Cultivator like him, the culprit behind this matter might be harboring a "terrifying" presence.

Elder Master Xun had a faint guess in his heart, but he dared not confirm it yet.

After all, some matters were far too ancient.

Some dreadful presences had long been forgotten by most.

The current cultivators, living in peace for so long, had already lost their sense of reverence.

Unaware of danger and dying amid complacency, they lacked fear of the great terror that truly lingered in the world.

Now, the surface situation is complex, while in the shadows, ominous forces are brimming.

Trying to remain aloof and uninvolved no longer seemed feasible.

That left him with only one option—to gamble.

Elder Master Xun's gaze sharpened, and he asked, "How long will the sect reform take?"

Such large-scale reform could never be accomplished overnight. It involved numerous families and sects, touched upon vast interests, and deeply impacted the overall structure. Inevitably, it would require significant time to push forward step by step and implement thoroughly.

Xun Ziyou replied, "It's said to be ten years, over three Tao Discussion Meetings, gradually advancing the reform until everything is finalized."

Xun Ziyou hesitated momentarily before adding:

"But although that's the word, I suspect that by the next Tao Discussion Meeting, knives will begin to fall."

"By the one after that, lives will be decided."

"It may not even take until the final meeting—the situation will likely have settled, and the last Tao Discussion Meeting of the ten-year period will merely serve as the 'coronation' for the victor..."

Xun Ziyou's tone turned grave.

"Ten years, three sessions..." Elder Master Xun's gaze grew heavy as he murmured, "I hope this kid... makes it in time..."

...

After returning to the Disciple's Residence, Mo Hua continued his regular cultivation.

In his spare time, he reviewed all the formations he had studied.

From the First Grade Ultimate Formation to the Second Grade Five Elements Bagua Formation, Yuan Magnetic Formation, and even the Divine Tao Array he obtained from the small fishing village—he revisited them all.

He also began comprehensively pondering the framework of formations and the distinctions between different types of arrays.

This constituted an advanced level of insight into formations.

Ordinary Formation Masters his age and at his cultivation realm couldn't possibly access or master so many formations.

The number of formations Mo Hua had mastered was over tenfold, or even dozens-fold, compared to typical Formation Masters.

The difficulty of the formations he understood was also markedly higher.

Learning a lot necessitated summarization and integration, attempting to unify the Dao of Formations—or at the very least, reflecting them against each other and making connections between similar concepts.

If one only learned without summarizing, no matter how much one learned, it would merely amount to scattered grains of sand.

Yet this kind of summarization and insight was not something that could be achieved overnight.

Chapter 1324: Monster (2)

The categories of formations are numerous and vast as the sea of smoke and clouds.

To truly summarize them all, integrate and comprehend them into one, just thinking about it makes clear it's bound to be an immense and daunting task.

It requires a vast amount of time and effort.

At the same time, one also needs to learn so many formations.

Mo Hua estimated that even if he spent his entire life, he might not be able to do it.

But anything that is a great and challenging task is never simple.

The Great Dao is right in front of us; even if the journey is long, distant and the end is nowhere in sight, one must keep moving forward step by step.

Cultivators wholeheartedly pursue the Dao.

Even if they cannot reach the end until their lives expire, they should still fall on the path seeking the Great Dao.

One should not be afraid of the difficulty of the Great Dao, hesitating at the starting point until time is wasted and life ends, and the Dao disappears.

This thought firmed up Mo Hua's Taoist Heart a little further.

He began to calmly organize the formations.

As for other formations, Mo Hua has learned a lot and practiced proficiently.

But only "Divine Tao Array," though Mo Hua can render it, practices it often, he vaguely feels that he has not grasped the true essence of this type of formation.

The Divine Tao Array obtained from the small fishing village, though relatively complete, is really too superficial.

Mo Hua only knows that this type of formation has the role to a certain extent of "isolating" and "sealing off" Divine Sense.

It can seal the Sea of Consciousness, preventing weaker evil spirits from invading.

To a certain extent, it can also restrain evil spirits.

But its effectiveness is actually not strong.

It works against ordinary evil spirits, but stronger ones are a problem.

Evil Gods, or even the likes of Evil God's Divine Remains, are out of the question.

So it's useful, but somewhat like a chicken rib, totally not achieving Mo Hua's expected effect.

Moreover, Mo Hua always feels that his understanding of the Divine Tao Array is separated by a barrier.

Beyond any field, it's like a mountain barrier.

The knowledge of formations is the same.

This barrier is this "mountain."

So these Divine Formation Patterns, though Mo Hua can render them, he is always vague, half-knowing.

Far from the clear and transparent feeling when rendering other formations.

Mo Hua vaguely has a suspicion.

This type of "Divine Tao Array" seems to involve some complex formation principles and Dao Laws, similar to the Ultimate Formation...

Mo Hua thinks it's quite possible.

Only the inheritance of Divine Tao Array he has now is too little, unable to study more, comprehend and verify his conjecture.

Mo Hua sighed and thought to himself:

"There's almost nothing more to learn..."

"Let's talk about it next year..."

"After the year, see if I can speak to Elder Master Xun to lift my 'restriction,' so I can go outside to find Evil Gods, eat some demon monsters, and enjoy a feast."

"Even if I can't find Divine Tao Arrays, I can at least improve the 'diet,' feed the 'Heavenly Dao Laws' in the Sea of Consciousness, and lift the growth restriction of my Sea of Consciousness..."

...

In the days that followed, Mo Hua maintained a calm mindset, living stably.

It was just that on this Xun Rest day, Mo Hua ventured into Refining Demon Mountain to practice swordsmanship.

Practicing for most of the day, having killed two eagle demons, it was close to dusk, and he was just about to return to the sect when he noticed some commotion in the distance.

Mo Hua was somewhat curious, went closer, and saw a group of fellow disciples gathered together.

Some were holding pills, some were mixing medicinal juices, and some were holding golden needles.

Lying on the ground was none other than Cheng Mo.

His face was pale, lips parched, forehead sweating profusely, with a bloody wound on his chest, blood flowing continuously.

Mo Hua's face darkened, asking,

"What's going on?"

Ouyang Mu, looking anxious beside him, upon hearing this, appeared guilty and murmured,

"It's all my fault..."

Situ Jian shook his head, saying, "It's not your fault..."

Situ Jian's face was slightly pale, his breath somewhat weak, apparently with excessive spiritual power consumption, with some scratches on his Taoist robe, but fortunately, no obvious injuries.

Situ Jian sighed and explained to Mo Hua the reason:

"Junior Brother Ouyang needed some fox demon fur, claws, and bones for his sword refining. Cheng Mo, having some free time, volunteered to catch the demon, and I went along..."

"At first, everything was going well."

"We found a rare Blood Charming Fox."

"This kind of fox demon is extremely rare even here in the monster-infested Refining Demon Mountain, with no ready strategy. But having defeated many monster beasts, we have gained experience, following the procedure, like painting a gourd according to the model."

"Hao Xuan set up traps and formations, and we laid in ambush."

"Once the Blood Charming Fox fell into the trap, triggering the formation and suffering severe injuries, Cheng Mo and I rushed out, intending to kill the fox demon."

"We were about to succeed, but unexpectedly, this fox demon knew an enchanting technique."

"Enchanting technique?" Mo Hua was startled.

"Yes," Situ Jian nodded, "It's a talent some monster beasts are born with, to enchant the cultivator's Divine Sense."

"It can cause cultivators to hallucinate, their Divine Sense to become confused, or arise various desires..."

Even Mo Hua, born as a Monster Hunter, rich with monster hunting experience, had only heard of it, never having seen such monster beasts.

"So you were enchanted?"

"A bit," Situ Jian said, "This Blood Charming Fox was still immature, only of Second Grade Primary Rank, its enchantment wasn't strong. Though it made Cheng Mo and I slightly dazed in Divine Sense, before it could deliver a fatal blow, we came to our senses."

"My Taoist robe was torn with a few cuts, nothing serious."

"Cheng Mo got a bit injured, but it's only flesh wounds."

Mo Hua frowned, glanced at Cheng Mo on the ground, pale as paper, bleeding profusely, and couldn't help questioning,

"Then what's wrong with him?"

Situ Jian's expression was solemn, "While we were enchanted by the Blood Charming Fox and dazed in Divine Sense momentarily, then regained our senses, teamed up to kill the fox demon, suddenly a 'monster' jumped out from the forest..."

Chapter 1325: Monster (3)

Mo Hua's gaze sharpened. "A monster?"

Situ Jian frowned and said, "Yes, a monster. It doesn't look like a Monster Beast, but it doesn't look human either. Or rather, it looks both like a Monster Beast and a human."

"It can stand on two legs or crawl on all fours. Its body is massive, wrapped in black cloth, completely shrouded in darkness, making it impossible to discern its features. The only thing visible are its eyes, blood-red like a pool of crimson..."

"The monster suddenly lunged out, its claws sharp, bringing a gust of rancid wind as it attacked. Everyone was caught off guard."

"Cheng Mo was the first to step forward and confront the monster."

"But the monster was too strong. With just one move, it opened a deep wound across Cheng Mo's chest."

"We hurried forward to assist, and the monster, seeing the numbers, let out a furious roar. It showed no signs of lingering and dragged the Blood Charming Fox's corpse as it fled toward the depths of the mountain..."

"Cheng Mo's injuries are severe and need immediate treatment. Moreover, the monster is far too powerful and moves like a ghost. We didn't dare to pursue recklessly and just brought Cheng Mo back..."

Situ Jian let out a long, heavy sigh.

Mo Hua's brows furrowed tighter and tighter. He glanced at the barely breathing Cheng Mo and asked, "How is Cheng Mo's condition?"

A disciple skilled in alchemy replied:

"He's lost a lot of blood, but we managed to save him in time. We applied hemostatic powder and gave him pills to stabilize his foundation and restore blood. Given that he's a Body Cultivator with a robust constitution, he should be fine."

"Once he's back at the Sect, Elder Murong can take another look to prevent any long-term effects."

"It's just..."

The disciple seemed troubled. "There's an unusual amount of demonic power lingering in his wound, and it doesn't seem easy to purge..."

"Demonic power?" Another disciple exclaimed. "That monster is half-human, half-demon. Could it be... a Monster Cultivator?"

"But only Sect disciples are permitted inside Refining Demon Mountain. Plus, before entering, the Elders carry out inspections. How could a Monster Cultivator infiltrate?" another disciple questioned.

The group was perplexed.

Mo Hua, however, seemed deep in thought.

Monster Cultivator...

Only Sect disciples permitted entry...

Evading inspection...

After contemplating for a moment, he turned to Situ Jian and said, "Take me to the spot where you were ambushed by that 'monster.'"

Situ Jian nodded. "I'll guide you."

Ouyang Mu stepped forward. "I'll go too."

He looked remorseful. "If I hadn't needed Fox Demon materials for sword casting, Brother Cheng Mo wouldn't have been injured."

Mo Hua consoled him. "This has nothing to do with you."

But Ouyang Mu, being somewhat stubborn, still looked guilty and wanted to do something to help.

At this moment, Ling Huxiao spoke up from the side:

"I'll go take a look."

Ling Huxiao was on good terms with Little Wood.

He was a Sword Cultivator, while Little Wood was a Sword-Casting Master.

Ling Huxiao's Spirit Sword was maintained and repaired by Little Wood.

The two were both deeply connected to swords and shared a compatible temperament.

Little Wood, however, had rather average cultivation and strength. If he were to encounter the 'monster' that had seriously injured Cheng Mo in a single exchange, his fate would surely be grim.

Although Ling Huxiao didn't outright express it, it was clear he wanted to help Little Wood.

Moreover, facing such a formidable non-human, non-demon opponent was a test worthy of a Sword Cultivator.

"Alright," Mo Hua nodded. "Ling Hu can come along too. As for Little Wood..."

Mo Hua looked at Ouyang Mu and said, "You follow the others and bring Cheng Mo back to the Taixu Gate. Don't worry about anything else or feel burdened by it."

"Cheng Mo is tough. He'll be fine..."

Ouyang Mu hesitated for a moment before slowly nodding.

"Let's go," Mo Hua commanded. "Hao Xuan, Brother Yang, you come along as well."

"Alright."

With Situ Jian leading the way, Mo Hua, Hao Xuan, Yang Qianjun, and Ling Huxiao followed closely behind. The group of five made their way along the mountain path, through the forest, and arrived at the ambush site.

The ground was stained with a large pool of blood.

Part of it was pale pink, faintly laced with demonic power—it was the Blood Charming Fox's blood.

The other part was deep crimson, mostly coagulated—this was Cheng Mo's blood.

The situation was exactly as Situ Jian had described.

Additionally, on the ground was a blood trail along with drag marks leading into the forest.

It was clear that the 'monster' had dragged the Blood Charming Fox's corpse into the forest before vanishing deep within.

Mo Hua's eyes narrowed slightly as he said in a low voice:

"Let's head into the forest and take a look."

Situ Jian and the others exchanged a glance and nodded in agreement.

Thus, the group proceeded cautiously, heading deeper into the forest...

Chapter 1326: Want to Run?

The sunlight shines brightly, streaming into the mountain forest, fragmented into scattered light spots by the overlapping branches and leaves, seeping into the woods and falling onto the ground, leaving a mottled pattern.

The fallen leaves on the ground are piled thick.

This is a dense, vast forest rarely visited by people.

Mo Hua compared the map in his mind and roughly judged the position.

These woods were situated on the border between the Outer Mountain and the treacherous parts of the Inner Mountain, incredibly remote. Even Monster Beasts rarely roamed here, and it was far from the Mountain Gate.

The journey to and fro was too long, taking too much time.

Thus, most disciples would never come to this place to hunt monsters.

A faint mist hovered amidst the forest, mixed with a pungent miasma. The atmosphere was lifeless and somewhat oppressive.

Mo Hua and the others followed the pink blood stains on the ground and the dragging marks of the Monster Beast step by step, heading deeper into the forest.

After the time it takes to drink a cup of tea, the blood stains vanished.

The ground was chaotic with mountain stones, grasses, and trees, showing no discernible traces.

Situ Jian and the rest silently looked at Mo Hua.

Ling Huxiao seemed confused and glanced at Mo Hua as well.

Mo Hua lowered his head, his eyes suddenly turning pitch black and profound. Heavenly secret patterns surfaced in the depths of his eyes, and the lines of cause-and-effect before him slowly intertwined.

A crimson aura gradually appeared, floating toward the distance.

Mo Hua pointed in that direction and said:

"This way."

After speaking, Mo Hua took the lead, following the direction where the threads of cause-and-effect aura extended, heading deeper into the woods.

Situ Jian and the others naturally followed behind him.

Only Ling Huxiao appeared a bit bewildered.

"How... did he figure that out?"

Watching as Mo Hua and the others quickly walked away, Ling Huxiao didn't dare to chase after them with more questions and could only silently follow.

After proceeding for a while, Mo Hua suddenly stopped, his expression slightly heavy, and warned:

"Be cautious; it's just ahead."

Situ Jian and the others immediately became alert and nodded solemnly.

Ling Huxiao froze for a moment, still unable to understand.

How had he determined that again?

Ling Huxiao's Sword Heart Clarity allowed him strong perception, and his Divine Sense wasn't weak either. Yet within the range of his Divine Sense, he hadn't detected even the tiniest trace.

And Mo Hua had already found the enemy?

How strong was his Divine Sense?

Ling Huxiao was secretly astonished but, given the circumstances, had no choice but to suppress the questions in his heart.

Under Mo Hua's guidance, the group restrained their aura, held their breath, and tread lightly. After proceeding gingerly for a while, Ling Huxiao's pupils suddenly contracted.

He sensed a powerful presence.

This presence, mixed with a bloodthirsty Monster Qi, caused his Sword Heart to faintly tremble.

After a few more steps, Situ Jian and the others also detected the ferocious presence, their expressions collectively growing serious.

Mo Hua, in contrast, appeared composed. Once they reached a hundred feet away, he stopped and made a hand gesture, signaling the group to hide.

They found a large tree densely covered with shrubs and hid behind it, peering through the thick woods toward the front.

From afar, they saw several ancient trees with massive trunks, under which lay a Fox Demon with blood-red fur and pink Monster Blood, its slender and alluring figure already lifeless.

It was none other than the Blood Charming Fox.

Beside the Blood Charming Fox was a tall figure cloaked in a black robe, obscuring its appearance and body—a "monster."

This monster was crouched beside the Blood Charming Fox, consuming its Monster Blood, swallowing the blood greedily. Crunching sounds of flesh filled its breaths, reminiscent of a wild beast.

Eating Monster Beasts raw?

Mo Hua and the others felt an unsettling chill.

Hao Xuan was about to speak when Mo Hua made a "silence" gesture. He then waved his hand, leading everyone to retreat further. Only after putting more distance between them did Mo Hua nod, signaling that they could talk.

Hao Xuan lowered his voice and asked:

"What is that thing?"

"Is it human? Or a Monster Beast?"

"Or perhaps... a Monster Cultivator?"

"Could be a Monster Cultivator..." Situ Jian murmured quietly.

"Do any of you know how to differentiate Monster Cultivators?" Hao Xuan asked again. "Or, what sets Monster Cultivators apart from Demon Cultivators?"

Situ Jian and the others looked puzzled.

In daily practice, Monster Cultivators and Demon Cultivators were often lumped together, and they couldn't tell the specific differences between them.

After all, according to Taoist Law, whether Monster Cultivators or Demon Cultivators, both were to be eradicated.

Seeing their confusion, Mo Hua thought for a moment before explaining:

"According to the Taoist Court's classification, Demon Cultivators actually refer to 'Cultivators of the Demon Path,' a collective term for Cultivators practicing Heretical Demon cultivation techniques. This includes, but isn't limited to, Monster Cultivators, Corpse Cultivators, Evil Cultivators, Ghost Cultivators, and Demon Cultivators..."

"When classified by cultivation method, different categories of Demon Cultivators each have their own characteristics."

"Monster Cultivators consume human flesh, Corpse Cultivators refine human corpses, Evil Cultivators harvest Vital Energy, Ghost Cultivators refine souls, while Demon Cultivators primarily absorb and extract Spiritual Power from others."

"Since Demon Cultivators have the largest influence, other Heretical Demon Cultivators mostly rely on Demon Cultivators' sects, so generally, Monster, Corpse, Evil, and Ghost Cultivators are all grouped under the term Demon Cultivators..."

These were insights Mo Hua had specifically inquired from Uncle Gu Changhuai during past bounty hunts to better understand how to 'slay monsters and eliminate demons.'

Hao Xuan nodded approvingly and praised:

"Junior Brother, you really know a lot."

Then, he asked curiously: "But this 'monster,' eating monsters instead of humans—what exactly is it?"

Situ Jian shook his head and remarked, "Who says it hasn't eaten humans? If it can eat Monster Beasts raw, it surely wouldn't hesitate to eat humans."

"And judging by its appearance, its Divine Sense might be somewhat compromised, with its demonic nature overtaking its human nature."

Mo Hua nodded slightly. "That's right."

He could sense that the "monster" had intelligence, but the fluctuations of its Divine Thought were abnormally chaotic, seemingly disrupted by an inverse flow of demonic power. For the moment, it had lost reason and devolved into a wild beast.

Situ Jian asked, "What should we do now?"

He glanced at the monster that was ripping apart the beast and devouring its flesh, his brows furrowed. "Judging by its presence, it likely has Foundation Establishment Late Stage strength—it won't be easy to handle..."

Chapter 1327: Think You Can Escape? (2)

Mo Hua stared at the monster for a moment, weighed his thoughts, and his gaze turned cold:

"Kill it!"

Situ Jian asked, "No survivors?"

Mo Hua shook his head, "This monster is too powerful. We don't have the luxury of leaving it alive. Strike with deadly blows, no hesitation."

"Besides, if it's a monster cultivator, sparing it might not yield any useful information anyway."

"If it really holds some secret, even in death, its corpse can 'speak'."

The group exchanged looks and nodded solemnly:

"Understood!"

Mo Hua calculated inwardly for a moment, then concisely laid out his plan before giving Ling Huxiao a glance and reminding him:

"Linghu, your swordsmanship is excellent, but don't act recklessly. Stick to the plan and coordinate with Situ and the others."

Ling Huxiao's expression was one of arrogance, but he still sensibly nodded his agreement.

While he had a love for combat, he knew when to prioritize.

Then the group began executing the plan.

Mo Hua and Hao Xuan each moved to set up formations around the area.

The monster's mind was chaotic and bloodthirsty, focused solely on devouring flesh, completely oblivious to the trap being laid.

Once the formations were ready, Mo Hua gave a signal to Ling Huxiao.

Ling Huxiao slowly unsheathed his sword, his aura surged, spiritual power coursing through his meridians, enhancing his sword qi. His eyes grew increasingly luminous, sharp as a blade's gleam.

In the oppressive forest, the murderous intent emanating from the sword qi began to build.

When his sword qi reached a critical point, the monster consuming the flesh of the "monster beast" seemed to sense something was amiss.

Its feeding slowed.

After briefly hesitating, the monster suddenly turned its head to stare at Ling Huxiao.

Beneath a black robe, the monster's face was an empty void. Only its vertical-pupiled eyes emitted a bloodthirsty gleam.

Ling Huxiao felt a chill in his heart, but at the same time, his sword qi had already been honed to its peak.

The ancient, moonlight-colored longsword pointed forward, and a dazzling Chongxu Sword Qi burst forth, like a beam of moonlight infused with piercing killing intent, slicing toward the monster.

This strike carried immense power.

As the sword's radiance approached, the monster—formidable as it was—instinctively realized it could not face it head-on.

The monster dropped to all fours, trying to crawl away.

Just then, Mo Hua pointed a finger, summoning a blue light that quickly condensed into a prison of water, restraining the monster's movements.

Water Prison Technique!

Though the Water Prison Technique lasted only moments before the monster broke free, those fleeting seconds were enough.

During that brief delay, Ling Huxiao's fully charged Chongxu Sword Qi descended.

It was like moonlight reflecting on a lake.

The sword light pierced through flesh.

The chilling, ethereal sword radiance struck the monster's back, shredding the black robe and ripping into its flesh.

Black blood sprayed outward.

The monster let out a deafening roar, a violent aura swept out carrying a foul wind.

Mo Hua and the others' pupils contracted.

Such formidable demonic power!

And as the black robe was torn apart by the sword qi, the monster's true form was revealed.

As suspected, it was a monster cultivator!

Though sprawled on all fours, its humanoid form was discernible. Beneath the black robe, its exposed flesh was reddish-brown, interspersed with long strands of hair.

Its claw-like hands resembled those of a monster beast.

Its head was still covered by the black robe but revealed canine-like fangs and a cruel, mindless glare. The figure was unmistakably similar to a demonized "werewolf".

Mo Hua yelled in a deep voice:

"Brother Yang!"

Yang Qianjun responded by charging forward, his spear crackling through the air with a glimmer of golden light, aiming directly for the monster cultivator's throat.

He was clad in a customized set of armor.

This armor, called Yunshan Armor, featured cloud patterns, solid as a mountain, with internal engravings of wind and Earth Stone formations, providing sturdy defense without impairing movement technique.

Yang Qianjun, though a body cultivator, had a different fighting style compared to Cheng Mo.

Cheng Mo was good at tanking damage and dealing explosive blows, making him suited to wearing heavy armor and taking on enemies one-on-one.

Yang Qianjun, on the other hand, came from a Taoist soldier background and excelled in close-range skirmishing.

With Cheng Mo injured, Yang Qianjun was left as the main frontline fighter.

The objective wasn't for Yang Qianjun to overpower or vanquish the monster cultivator.

His goal was to maintain defensive tactics, attack opportunistically, engage it in close quarters, and simply hold it off.

Yang Qianjun managed to stall the monster cultivator.

It swung clawed limbs like a wolf demon, lunging savagely, but with scrambled mind and primal instincts, its strikes were frequently evaded by Yang Qianjun's seasoned movements.

When evasion wasn't possible, Yang Qianjun relied on the sturdiness of his Yunshan Armor to endure the hits.

Though each blow churned his blood qi and inflicted pain on his flesh, he could still hold his ground for now.

Meanwhile, Situ Jian and Ling Huxiao began wielding their sword qi to attack.

The Li Fire Sword Qi and Chongxu Sword Qi intertwined in mid-air, relentlessly shredding the monster cultivator's flesh.

The intense melee in the forest surged on.

The monster cultivator's injuries worsened bit by bit.

But the first to falter would undoubtedly be Yang Qianjun.

Facing such a strong opponent head-on was overwhelmingly taxing, requiring complete focus and tense Divine Sense with no room for error.

A single mistake or opening would result in catastrophic consequences.

As the monster cultivator's wounds deepened, its aggression escalated, its attacks growing faster and fiercer.

Yang Qianjun endured with gritted teeth, though nearing his limit. Even with Mo Hua casting spells for support to divert the monster cultivator's attention, his stamina waned.

Seeing this, Mo Hua called out:

"Hao Xuan!"

Hao Xuan immediately retrieved a Demon Pungency Pill and crushed it.

This pill, refined from Demon Smelly Grass, emitted a putrid smell that, like the grass itself, could lure monster beasts.

As the Demon Pungency Pill's scent spread, the demonized monster cultivator, driven by instinct, halted its movements.

Chapter 1328: Want to Run? (3)

It sniffed the air while suspended in the sky, and drool mixed with monster blood dripped from its mouth. Then, its blood-red eyes instantly locked onto Hao Xuan.

Hao Xuan felt his hair stand on end and, without a moment of hesitation, turned and bolted.

In mere moments, the monster cultivator let out a howl, carrying a foul wind as it charged straight at Hao Xuan.

Yang Qianjun seized the moment of respite, immediately sitting down to consume pills and regain his spiritual power.

Meanwhile, the monster cultivator moved with incredible speed, forcing Hao Xuan to push his movement technique to its limits as he desperately ran.

But he wasn't fleeing aimlessly.

He was following Mo Hua's instructions, leading the monster cultivator into the formations that had long been laid out in the surrounding area.

Soon, the surrounding formations began to activate one by one.

There were trapping formations like the Quicksand Formation, Earth Prison Formation, and Golden Lock Formation, as well as killing formations like the Earth Fire Formation, Di Sha Formation, and Gold Blade Formation.

The deep forest was filled with the constant roar of explosions.

Trees swayed, grasses and stones were overturned, and the light of Five Elements and Eight Trigrams spiritual power fluctuated unceasingly.

Ling Huxiao watched, stunned.

Even Situ Jian and the others, who were familiar with Mo Hua, couldn't help but feel alarmed.

"Just how many formations did Junior Brother bury..."

Indeed, Mo Hua had laid many formations.

And among them, a great number were entry-level Second Grade High-Level formations of the Seventeen Patterns.

Mo Hua usually kept a low profile; the formations he provided for his fellow disciples were mostly Second Grade Middle Stage formations.

Even when he personally used Seventeen Patterns High-Level formations, he would secretly mix them into combinations with Second Grade Middle Stage formations.

Occasionally, the power of some formations would appear "exceptionally" strong.

But since the fellow disciples merely "saw" them with their eyes, they wouldn't realize that some High-Level formations were hidden within.

Of course, the usage of formations inherently had its limitations.

Second Grade High-Level formations couldn't yet be utilized by Situ Jian and the others.

The monster cultivator was relentlessly led by Hao Xuan through the forest, enduring a constant barrage of explosions from the formations. It was battered and bruised, transforming from a werewolf-like creature into a half-charred "stray dog."

Finally, with a dull thud, it collapsed to its knees.

Yang Qianjun immediately wanted to rush forward and finish it off, but he was halted by Mo Hua.

"It's playing dead."

Yang Qianjun froze.

Situ Jian's gaze slightly darkened, "If it's playing dead, doesn't that mean..."

Mo Hua nodded, "The demonization has receded, and its rationality has returned."

Situ Jian understood and immediately condensed a searing streak of Li Fire Sword light, aiming straight for the seemingly dying monster cultivator's heart.

Ling Huxiao was unwilling to be outdone and struck almost simultaneously with a streak of Chongxu Sword light, targeting the monster cultivator's forehead.

The fallen monster cultivator abruptly opened its eyes.

Those once savage, beast-like eyes had lost their ferocity and now gleamed with cunning.

"A group of crafty little brats!"

It cursed angrily in its mind.

But faced with the two razor-sharp streaks of sword light, it had no choice but to dodge.

The monster cultivator landed on all fours, suddenly pounced, rolled across the ground, narrowly avoiding the two lethal sword strikes, and then slowly stood up.

In the dimly lit forest.

The monster cultivator's figure grew shorter and shorter until it had completely shed its "demonization," reverting to a tall "cultivator."

Its black robe was in tatters, and it was covered in wounds.

Its face, however, was obscured by disheveled and unkempt long hair, revealing only a pair of greedy eyes.

Mo Hua asked in a deep voice, "Who are you? Why are you in Refining Demon Mountain?"

The monster cultivator sneered coldly, its gaze venomous, and said nothing.

Mo Hua hadn't expected it to answer anyway.

The question was simply asked in passing.

Unless this monster cultivator was truly "dim-witted," it wouldn't possibly reveal its identity and background so easily.

Mo Hua acted immediately, casting a Fireball Technique that flew straight at the monster cultivator.

At the same time, Ling Huxiao, Yang Qianjun, Situ Jian, and Hao Xuan attacked in unison.

With a five-on-one battle, both sides instantly descended into a chaotic melee.

Mo Hua's group, being fellow sect members and seasoned monster hunters, were highly coordinated.

Ling Huxiao, though a disciple of the Rushing Void Sect, had spent considerable time among the Taixu Sect disciples and was somewhat aware of Mo Hua and the others' common strategies.

Moreover, Ling Huxiao was inherently a Sword Dao genius who adapted quickly to their offensive and defensive rhythm within just a few exchanges.

The monster cultivator, having shed its demonization, had its combat prowess greatly diminished.

Furthermore, it had already sustained heavy injuries from the onslaught of the formations.

Now once again facing Mo Hua and the others, subjected to alternating assaults of spears, sword qi, and spells, it could barely cope.

Within just over ten rounds, its disadvantage became apparent, and it was suppressed at every turn, capable only of taking a beating passively.

An icy chill gripped the monster cultivator's heart.

It was going to lose!

At most, it could endure another twenty rounds before inevitable defeat!

With this thought, the monster cultivator stopped holding back, bit through its tongue, swallowed a bit of essence blood, and suddenly, eerie patterns lit up on its arm.

Mo Hua froze, his pupils contracting in shock.

"This is..."

"Monster Patterns?!"

"Watch out!" Mo Hua immediately warned.

Yang Qianjun, who was preparing to attack the monster cultivator's heart with spear strikes as fierce as a dragon, became instantly cautious upon hearing the alert. He shifted to a defensive stance, sweeping his spear horizontally across his chest.

The monster cultivator's right hand lit up with its monstrous patterns, and its arm swelled abruptly, resembling a ferocious wolf claw wrapped in potent demonic power, which slashed violently at Yang Qianjun.

The strength of this claw was terrifying.

Yang Qianjun couldn't withstand it; his spear was sent flying, his chest armor was torn apart, and his body was flung back to crash onto the ground.

The monster cultivator advanced immediately, drawing close to deliver a finishing blow and take Yang Qianjun's life.

Situ Jian and the others promptly stepped in to assist.

But midway through its attack, the monster cultivator suddenly shifted sideways, exploiting the opening created by Situ Jian and the others rushing to aid Yang Qianjun, and instead aimed to strike Situ Jian.

Situ Jian was unable to react in time.

Ling Huxiao instantly unleashed a streak of Chongxu Sword Qi, targeting the monster cultivator.

The monster cultivator clicked its tongue in annoyance and was forced to abandon Situ Jian. Raising its demonized arm, it blocked the incoming sword qi.

Chapter 1329: Thinking of Running Away? (4)

Sword Qi tore open the flesh of his arm.

But it activated the Monster Pattern. After demonization, his arm surged with demonic power, and the hardened flesh, despite taking the hit directly, didn't suffer any significant injury.

Still, the monster cultivator knew—this was as far as it could go.

If the fight dragged on, even killing one or two of these pesky brats would end with him defeated.

Dying wasn't an issue. But he absolutely couldn't die here.

Leaving behind a corpse was even worse!

The monster cultivator shot Ling Huxiao and his companions a vicious glare, etched this grudge deep into his heart, and decisively turned away.

"Don't even think about running!"

Situ Jian saw this, his face darkened with anger. Instantly, he activated the Li Fire Sword Qi, condensing it into a fiery red sword light that shot straight towards the monster cultivator.

The sword was swift. The monster cultivator had no time to dodge and was struck on the back by one sword.

The monster cultivator staggered, gritted his teeth against the pain, spat out a curse, and continued fleeing toward the distance.

At the same time, Ling Huxiao had already condensed his Sword Qi. Then, he pointed with two fingers.

The piercing Chongxu Sword Qi broke through the air, aiming for the monster cultivator's legs, intending to cripple the wretched beast and halt its escape.

The monster cultivator's eyes trembled briefly but quickly twisted into a sneer. He leapt like a wild hound, narrowly evading the Chongxu Sword Qi.

Just then, Mo Hua struck out of nowhere, employing the Water Prison Technique.

The Water Prison Technique hit its mark flawlessly, immobilizing the monster cultivator for a brief moment.

The monster cultivator's expression shifted sharply.

"Damn this disgusting spell again!"

It struggled with all its might, breaking free from the Water Prison Technique.

But before it could fully regain footing, the Chongxu Sword Qi arrived in an instant. The monster cultivator tried to evade desperately but still couldn't avoid it completely. The sword light grazed him, missing his thigh but leaving a bloody gash on his calf.

The monster cultivator burned with rage.

Sooner or later, he vowed to shred these insufferable brats into pieces!

Discarding all dignity, he endured his injuries, dropped to all fours like a wild hound, and sprinted ferociously, covering dozens of yards in several bounds.

Ling Huxiao attempted to condense another Chongxu Sword Qi to stop the fleeing monster cultivator but found that, in the span of mere moments, the beast had already escaped too far, moving like a wild animal.

The layers of the forest blurred with depth, and the monster cultivator's figure receded into the distance, vanishing from sight.

At this distance, Ling Huxiao could no longer lock onto him with his Divine Sense.

He could only watch helplessly as the monster cultivator disappeared from his field of vision.

Ling Huxiao grew frustrated, his expression filled with resentment. Just then, he suddenly froze.

He sensed a familiar aura of Goldstone Sword Qi beside him.

Turning his head, Ling Huxiao realized Mo Hua had already drawn a golden Spirit Sword at some unknown moment.

The Spirit Sword was crudely forged, its appearance peculiar, yet it exuded an uncanny air of fatality.

"Trying to run?"

Mo Hua's eyes turned icy. Then, in an instant, his pupils turned pitch-black, as if pools of dark water.

Powerful Divine Thoughts stretched out like tendrils, tightly controlling the Spirit Sword before him.

Simultaneously, his Divine Sense locked unwaveringly onto the figure of the fleeing monster cultivator, now 150 yards away.

"Go!"

Mo Hua murmured softly.

The moment he spoke, waves of potent Divine Thought radiated outward.

The Spirit Sword hummed sharply before transforming into a streak of golden light. It shot out at an unimaginable speed, weaving through the forest and tracing a sharp, flickering golden line directly toward the escaping monster cultivator.

The further the monster cultivator fled, the closer he felt to freedom. Just as he was about to relax his breath—

A sudden sense of alarm overwhelmed him.

It was as if some unspeakably terrifying Divine Sense had fixed itself on him.

At the same moment, a chilling, murderous intent with razor-sharp precision hurtled towards him at unimaginable speed.

"What's happening?!"

The monster cultivator's heart was filled with dread.

He turned his head, wanting to see what was behind him. Then, he saw—the strand of fatal golden light.

This... sword light?

Sword Control?!

The monster cultivator's pupils contracted violently. In a split-second decision, he forced the Monster Patterns on his right arm to their limits, using the surging demonic power and bloodied, hardened flesh to shield his head and chest.

And then, the Golden Sword struck. The golden light exploded.

Sword Qi surged furiously as the Spirit Sword shattered. The mutual destruction unleashed a blast of blood spray.

The monster cultivator felt as though his eyes would never open again. His right arm burned with the agony of a "thousand cuts," the pain so excruciating it threatened to tear his mind apart.

The intense Sword Qi ravaged his physical form.

When he managed to push through the agony and regain his senses, he found himself thrown over ten yards away by the Sword Control strike.

His right arm was gone.

Half his body was dripping blood, resembling the aftermath of being gnawed on by hundreds of monster beasts.

The monster cultivator's eyes were filled with terror. Gritting his teeth through the pain, he summoned the last of his strength to crawl away into the dense forest until his figure disappeared.

Within just ten breaths' time, Mo Hua performed the Water Passing Step and caught up.

Sword Qi had exploded blood over the ground, but the monster cultivator was nowhere to be seen.

Mo Hua released his Divine Sense, searching momentarily, when he let out a soft "Hmm?" and walked to a corner of the woods. From the dirt and stones, he unearthed a small, blood-soaked fragment of an arm.

It was the monster cultivator's arm.

Most of its right arm had been shredded by Sword Qi, bursting into a mist of blood, leaving only this small fragment.

The Monster Patterns on the arm were faint but still discernible.

Mo Hua examined the Monster Patterns closely for several moments. His eyebrows raised slightly, and his eyes lit up gradually.

"So it really is..."

"The Four Symbols Formation Pattern!"

Chapter 1330: The Dense Jungle

This monster is a demon cultivator, not just any demon cultivator.

Aside from practicing evil skills and possessing a body capable of "demonization," it also bears mysterious Four Symbols Monster Patterns upon its flesh!

Mo Hua lightly licked his lips.

The Four Symbols Formation!

This is a formation system distinct from the Five Elements and Eight Trigrams systems.

The Taixu Gate keeps it strictly forbidden.

It's so rare that even most sects don't possess the Four Symbols Formation inheritance.

"I must capture this monster, strip off its hide, and copy down the formation patterns..."

Mo Hua's eyes lit up as he pushed the Water Passing Step technique to its limit, his footsteps swift as the wind, following the blood trail to pursue the heavily injured demon cultivator.

The demon cultivator had lost an arm, its half-bloodied body crawling on the ground, leaving behind a distinct blood trail.

However, being a demon cultivator, its physical recovery was rapid.

The blood trail, which initially gushed like a spring, gradually became a trickling stream and eventually left only scattered marks.

But no matter how faint the blood stains became, they couldn't escape Mo Hua's divine sense.

Especially since he could rely on his calculations.

With the guiding threads of causality, this demon cultivator had almost no chance of escape.

After pursuing for thirty minutes, the blood trail had faded to near imperceptibility, leaving only a faint metallic scent lingering in the air.

Mo Hua could only rely on the faint reddish threads of causality to continue the chase.

But after another fleeting moment, the causal threads suddenly broke.

Frowning, Mo Hua looked up to realize he had unknowingly wandered into the depths of the mystical forest.

The dense trees stretched endlessly before him, shrouded in veils of mist.

On all sides, there was no recognizing where he was.

At a glance, it was impossible to discern his surroundings.

What was even more unsettling was when he extended his divine sense—at first glance everything seemed normal, but upon careful scrutiny, he realized his divine sense "saw" nothing...

It was as if something was silently absorbing the probing of his divine sense.

Or perhaps the entire forest had woven an invisible veil of divine thought "mist," obstructing a cultivator's divine sense.

The heavily wounded monster had vanished into the woods, as if it were a fish diving into the sea, a fierce tiger returning to the forest, and had disappeared completely.

"Lost the trail?"

Mo Hua's expression froze momentarily, his frown growing deeper and deeper.

With his refined divine sense and meticulous calculations, he almost never lost a trail—especially not of a severely injured cultivator...

This forest...

Mo Hua stood still, staring at the dense woods for a long time, his thoughts churning. Suddenly, a realization struck him, his pupils trembling.

What could block divine sense?

Such a vast area of divine sense obstruction must be the result of formations!

But ordinary formations are actually incapable of "blocking" divine sense entirely.

Most secretive formations are designed to block sound and impede divine sense.

However, these so-called "blocking" formations don't truly obstruct divine sense; rather, they rely on chaotic spiritual power generated by the formations to create a "barrier" that disrupts divine sense perception.

At the core, the principle lies in spiritual power confusion, not the isolation of divine thought.

When divine sense probes such formations, it perceives a distinct, obstructive "barrier."

But this mystical forest had no such barrier.

No obvious "barrier" could be perceived, yet divine sense was entirely blocked, preventing any discernment.

A formation that could truly "block" perception on the level of divine thought must involve some application of divine thought power.

In other words, the formation within this mystical forest must be...

A Divine Path Formation?!

Mo Hua took a sharp breath, his face tinged with astonishment.

Could it really be...

Buy one, get one free?!

Never in his wildest dreams did he expect that here, in the seemingly ordinary outer Refining Demon Mountain, under his very nose, such rare formations would coexist in secrecy.

The Four Symbols Formation on the demon cultivator's body.

And now, the Divine Path Formation integrated with this mystical forest...

Mo Hua released his divine sense again to probe. Yet, as soon as his divine sense entered the dense forest, it was as though it dove into the ocean—utterly silent, with no response.

Had his divine sense not been exceptionally refined and transformed, his acute perception of divine thought honed to the extreme, he wouldn't have even noticed that when probing this mystical forest, his divine sense was effectively "seeing" nothing.

The divine sense "sees yet sees not"...

In his divine sense, this mystical forest both existed and yet did not exist.

Mo Hua was inwardly full of awe.

What an exquisite technique.

What a formidable formation!

Mo Hua instinctively wanted to step into the forest to study the Divine Path Formation further. Yet, as soon as he lifted his foot, he hesitated.

"This forest feels dangerous..."

The injured demon cultivator had fled into these woods.

This suggested that the forest was likely its sanctuary. f

Such a vast tract of forest and such an advanced Divine Path Formation couldn't have been created by an ordinary cultivator.

The depths of this forest very likely harbored allies of that demon cultivator.

Birds of a feather flock together.

Anyone associating with a demon cultivator would undoubtedly be other ruthless demon cultivators—or worse.

Their cultivation realms were likely no lower than Foundation Establishment, and perhaps even had Golden Core experts among them.

As a solitary mid-stage Foundation Establishment cultivator, without protection, rashly venturing into the forest would indeed be far too risky.

Mo Hua sighed deeply.

After hesitating at the forest's edge for a long time, weighing his options repeatedly, all he could do was temporarily abandon his pursuit.

"Such a pity..."

With the Divine Path Formation right before him.

Yet under the current circumstances, he couldn't afford to recklessly gamble on entering. It was better to retreat and make thorough preparations before returning.

After all, the forest wasn't about to suddenly sprout legs and run away.

Mo Hua glanced back at the mystical forest wistfully, as though beholding his own private vegetable patch.

"Once I'm ready, I'll come back and harvest my crops!"

Mo Hua nodded to himself before reluctantly turning to leave.

...

After Mo Hua left, Xun Ziyou watched his departing figure, estimating Mo Hua's likely trajectory. Once certain that Mo Hua wouldn't face imminent danger, Xun Ziyou stepped forward into the mystical forest.