

The Quest 1331

Chapter 1331: Jungle (2)

His top priority in Refining Demon Mountain was to ensure Mo Hua's safety.

Everything else was secondary.

Now that Mo Hua was safe, he finally had some time to investigate that monster cultivator.

Thin mist hung amidst the forest, with towering trees exuding a sense of primal desolation.

Xun Ziyou walked in circles through the forest, extended his Divine Sense and scanned several times, yet found nothing. He frowned deeply.

As a Golden Core Late Stage cultivator chasing a Foundation Establishment Late Stage monster cultivator, how could this prey slip from his grasp?

True, he might have relaxed somewhat over these years, but there was no way he had become so incompetent.

No, it wasn't because of him.

Xun Ziyou, slightly offended, turned to his right and said:

"You lost the trail too, didn't you?"

On his right, light and shadows shifted. A man dressed in a Rushing Void Taoist Robe emerged, his expression slightly awkward. Yet he responded:

"I was keeping an eye on Xiaoer; I didn't pay much attention to anything else."

"What?"

The Chongxu Sect Elder looked at Xun Ziyou and feigned calmness: "You lost the trail?"

Xun Ziyou was in no mood to humor him.

The two each extended their Divine Sense, searching the forest once more. Then, they both furrowed their brows. *f*

"It's truly gone..." The Chongxu Sect Elder's expression turned serious, and his confusion showed:

"What kind of method could that monster cultivator possibly use to evade the Divine Senses of two Golden Core cultivators?"

"Concealment Technique? Concealment Spiritual Artifact?"

Xun Ziyou shook his head.

The cultivation world was vast, filled with myriad cultivation techniques, Taoist skills, and spiritual artifacts. It was hard to determine anything definitively.

By logic, given the towering disparity in cultivation realms and Divine Sense strength, even if there were concealment methods or breath-hiding techniques, they shouldn't be able to escape their perception.

Moreover, there was an even more pressing question.

Xun Ziyou frowned and asked:

"Why would a monster cultivator appear in Refining Demon Mountain?"

The Chongxu Sect Elder's gaze grew intense:

"The surrounding formations seal the mountain, and near the mountain gate, there's a formation that detects demon monster qi. Every sect disciple entering the mountain undergoes a repelling evil scan. Meanwhile, we elders patrol the mountain regularly..."

"Within the mountain, there should only be sect disciples and us Golden Core elders conducting patrols. No other cultivators should be present."

"Why would there be a monster cultivator?"

"How did it enter the mountain? How is it hiding here? And just what could its intentions be?"

Their expressions grew solemn.

"Should we conduct a mountain-wide search?"

"No, such widespread activity would only provoke panic, cause unnecessary trouble, and might not even yield results..."

After all, this monster cultivator disappeared right under the noses of two Golden Core cultivators.

"Should we wait here for a while?"

Xun Ziyou shook his head: "We don't have that much time."

Their foremost duty was to protect Mo Hua and Ling Huxiao.

Both of them sighed.

The Chongxu Sect Elder took another look at the forest ahead. The more he looked, the more puzzled he felt. He murmured under his breath:

"What kind of method could possibly obscure our Divine Senses..."

Xun Ziyou also stared at the forest, frowning in incomprehension.

After a while, Xun Ziyou's expression suddenly shifted, his gaze darkening:

"Xuan Jian, you've been stationed at Refining Demon Mountain for quite some time. Have you ever seen this piece of forest before?"

The Chongxu Sect Elder froze, scrutinizing the forest in front of him once more as his brows slowly knit together.

"It does seem... unfamiliar."

Refining Demon Mountain was vast, with many forests.

But as an elder who had been stationed there for years, he was familiar with most places.

The forest before him appeared ordinary—just another stretch of woodland indistinguishable from others. At most, it extended far to the horizon, with no end in sight. But in comparison, its aura was unnervingly unfamiliar...

"Are you suggesting that it's not the monster cultivator's concealment skill at work but... there's something odd about this forest?"

The Chongxu Sect Elder asked.

Xun Ziyou nodded slowly.

The Chongxu Sect Elder extended his Divine Sense and swept it around.

But though they were Golden Core cultivators with powerful Divine Senses, they hadn't undergone a quality change, lacked sharp perception, and had no expertise in formations or array techniques.

The sweep of Divine Sense revealed nothing but empty forest.

The Chongxu Sect Elder asked: "What's strange about it?"

Xun Ziyou shook his head.

He hadn't figured it out yet.

Xun Ziyou frowned deeply in thought, and all of a sudden remembered Mo Hua.

He recalled that earlier, Mo Hua had been staring at this forest for quite a while, his eyes gradually lighting up as if he'd discovered something.

Afterward, he'd taken a step toward the forest, hesitated briefly, then left without entering. Yet before he left, he'd turned back for one last look at the peculiar dense woods—a glance laden with meaning.

Xun Ziyou pondered this carefully, finding it hard to believe.

Could that kid, Mo Hua... have figured something out?

"How could that be possible?"

If even two Golden Core cultivators failed to notice anything, then how could a Foundation Establishment cultivator have seen through it?

Xun Ziyou frowned.

But if it was true...

If that kid Mo Hua really had uncovered something...

Then it meant the strange secret of this forest was tied to something Mo Hua was highly skilled in—something Xun Ziyou himself was less proficient at.

That meant... formations!

Had this dense forest been shrouded in a formation, rendering it capable of subtly blocking the Divine Sense of two Golden Core cultivators and serving as a hiding place for the monster cultivator?

What kind of formation could it be?

Xun Ziyou looked ahead, seeing no trace of an array, no hint of a pattern. The forest appeared utterly ordinary. His face showed confusion.

What kind of formation could it possibly be?

And how could Mo Hua, a mere Foundation Establishment cultivator, have noticed it?

He was Golden Core, after all.

He'd lived for over two hundred years, yet somehow he couldn't discern it—while this teenager, not even twenty years old, managed to notice...

Xun Ziyou sighed deeply.

Geniuses were annoying.

Especially geniuses skilled in formations.

Array techniques were too obscure, their depths unfathomable.

Chapter 1332: Jungle (3)

Some Formation geniuses, you don't even know where their strength lies, let alone understand the extent of the gap between you and them...

Beside him, the Chongxu Sect Elder saw Xun Ziyou's changing expression and sighed repeatedly. He frowned and asked:

"Do you know something?"

Xun Ziyou froze, coming back to his senses. He thought for a moment, feeling that these were merely his speculations, and decided it'd be better not to speak out prematurely.

"No, just lamenting that we elders were negligent, allowing a Monster Cultivator to infiltrate." Xun Ziyou sighed.

The Chongxu Sect Elder nodded in agreement upon hearing this.

Xun Ziyou continued, "There's something suspicious about this matter. Let's report back to the Sect first and discuss a solution later. For now, let's not make this public to avoid any leaks."

"That sounds reasonable," the Chongxu Sect Elder nodded in agreement.

After finishing their discussion, they got ready to leave.

But just before leaving, the Chongxu Sect Elder suddenly remembered something, his tone laced with unease as he asked:

"By the way, what's the deal with the 'Sword Control'?"

Xun Ziyou feigned ignorance, "What 'Sword Control'?"

The Chongxu Sect Elder snapped, "Don't play dumb with me. I saw it with my own eyes—the kid was standing hundreds of zhang away. Without gathering Sword Qi, with just a shake of his Divine Sense, a Spirit Sword shot out, shimmering with golden light, exploding with Sword Qi, shredding that Monster Cultivator's demonized arm, staining half its body with blood..."

That child named Mo Hua was only at the Foundation Establishment Middle Stage.

To control a sword at such a Realm, with such fierce technique, at such a distant range, with such incredible speed, and such overwhelming power...

Recalling this now, the Chongxu Sect Elder still found it chilling.

Xun Ziyou wore an expression of "shock" and shook his head, saying:

"Impossible, how could that be? You must have seen it wrong."

The Chongxu Sect Elder looked incredulous, "How could I have seen it wrong?"

"You definitely saw it wrong," Xun Ziyou asserted seriously. "It wasn't Sword Control—it was just some kind of hidden weapon with formations engraved on it. Its power was actually quite ordinary. It was simply that the Monster Cultivator was already gravely injured and incapable of resisting, so it ended up being blown apart so miserably."

The Chongxu Sect Elder was skeptical, "Engraved formations on a hidden weapon? You're spouting nonsense!"

Xun Ziyou retorted, "Well, have you ever seen a Sword Cultivator at the Foundation Establishment Middle Stage controlling a sword across 160 zhang, and with such immense power?"

The Chongxu Sect Elder hesitated, "This... no, I haven't..."

Such a thing indeed defied his understanding.

"Moreover, Sword Control..." Xun Ziyou added, "Even your Chongxu Sect's Sword Heart Clarity genius disciple hasn't mastered Sword Control yet. As for Mo Hua, who isn't even a Sword Cultivator, how could he possibly use such formidable Sword Control?"

"True enough," the Chongxu Sect Elder could not help but nod.

If we're talking about Sword Dao talent, he was certain that Ling Huxiao was undoubtedly one of the finest talents in Chongxu Sect, and even within the entire Qian Learning State Boundary.

If Mo Hua truly mastered Sword Control, and to such a powerful extent, wouldn't that make him even more gifted than Chongxu Sect's Sword Dao genius?

This was absolutely impossible!

The Chongxu Sect Elder gradually accepted this explanation.

He had been standing far away and didn't see the details all that clearly. He merely "felt" that Mo Hua seemed to have controlled the sword, sending it across a great distance to strike the Monster Cultivator, Sword Qi bursting forth, creating a cloud of bloody mist.

But now, thinking back, Sword Control seemed implausible.

It was much more plausible to assume he used some kind of Spiritual Artifact that resembled a hidden weapon with special formations inscribed.

The Chongxu Sect Elder nodded slightly.

Seeing this, Xun Ziyou silently breathed a sigh of relief.

Finally managed to smooth things over...

Mo Hua keeps pulling off these "eye-catching stunts," and now I have to spin stories and concoct excuses for him, just to avoid drawing unnecessary attention.

Luckily, the stuff this kid does is increasingly "outlandish."

Saying it out loud, others probably wouldn't believe it either.

Instead, my excuses sound much more "reasonable."

Xun Ziyou sighed internally.

Not only do I have to protect him, I also have to make up lies to cover for him.

Is this easy for me?

"Someday, I'll make sure this kid treats me to drinks..."

...

Elsewhere, Mo Hua regrouped with Ling Huxiao and the others.

"Escaped, couldn't find it," Mo Hua sighed.

Those present felt a pang of regret; they could have killed that Monster Cultivator if only they had been a bit faster.

"Let's head back. We'll check on Cheng Mo's injuries first. As for that Monster Cultivator, since it's in the mountains, it won't escape forever."

Dare to target my Taixu Sect Junior Brother? Sooner or later, I'll skin it alive!

Mo Hua silently vowed.

The group began their journey back, though Ling Huxiao appeared preoccupied on the way.

Walking behind the group, he glanced at Mo Hua several times, and eventually couldn't resist asking:

"You know Sword Control?"

Mo Hua was slightly surprised but nodded, saying, "Just a little. It's not traditional Sword Control—it relies mainly on the formations on the sword."

Ling Huxiao responded with a short "Hmm" and said nothing more, but inwardly he regarded Mo Hua as an increasingly unfathomable "expert."

"Someday, I'll spar with him..."

Ling Huxiao resolved in his heart.

Arriving at the base of Taixu Sect's mountain, the group parted ways.

Ling Huxiao returned to Chongxu Sect.

Mo Hua and his group returned to Taixu Sect.

At the mountain gate, Situ Jian asked, "Junior Brother, should we inform the sect elders about the Monster Cultivator?"

Mo Hua thought for a moment, deciding the matter was suspicious. While it might not be necessary to tell outsiders, the sect elders must be informed.

"Yes," Mo Hua nodded.

He then sought out Elder Song, who oversaw various disciple-related matters including attendance, and reported about encountering the Monster Cultivator at Refining Demon Mountain.

"Monster Cultivator!"

Upon hearing this, Elder Song's expression immediately turned grave.

"Alright, I will notify the Sect Elders on duty at Refining Demon Mountain, so they can be vigilant and ensure the disciples' safety."

"The elders on duty at Refining Demon Mountain—are they Elder Xun, Xun Ziyou?" Mo Hua asked.

Elder Song was somewhat surprised, "You know him?"

Mo Hua shook his head, "We met once briefly. I've heard his name but don't really know him."

Elder Song nodded, "That's correct. If anything happens, Elder Xun will follow up with you."

Mo Hua nodded, "Alright."

After reporting the incident to the sect, Mo Hua felt at ease and went to check on Cheng Mo.

Cheng Mo's injuries had improved significantly.

"We avenged you—we severed one of that monstrosity's arms."

Mo Hua even showed Cheng Mo the severed arm, though he promptly put it away again.

Cheng Mo, pale and weak, managed a wry smile, "Thank you, Junior Brother."

Seeing Cheng Mo's dispirited demeanor, Mo Hua said:

"That Monster Cultivator was incredibly powerful. Even with five of us joining forces, we could only sever one arm before it escaped."

"Rest well and recover. Once you're ready, we'll go settle the score together—cut up that abomination and strip off its hide!"

Cheng Mo's eyes brightened at this. He smiled and nodded, saying:

"Alright!"

Chapter 1333: Secrets

Mo Hua exchanged a few more words with Cheng Mo, urging him to focus on recuperating, and then returned to the Disciple's Residence. There, he secretly retrieved the small section of the monster cultivator's severed arm.

This arm still carried traces of Monster Qi, which, according to sect regulations, was strictly forbidden to be brought into the sect.

However, Mo Hua had explained the entire sequence of events to Elder Song, effectively securing approval from him.

Though Elder Song wasn't sure what use Mo Hua had for this arm, it was, after all, a "trophy" of their victory over the monster cultivator.

When Mo Hua claimed it would be useful, Elder Song hesitated briefly but ultimately returned it to Mo Hua.

The severed arm still retained a faint trace of Monster Qi, though it was minimal and posed little risk even in Mo Hua's possession.

Besides, Mo Hua was a disciple highly regarded by Elder Master Xun.

With Elder Master Xun as his "backer," Mo Hua's requests, as long as they weren't overly outrageous, would usually be tolerated with little pushback.

Mo Hua expressed his gratitude to Elder Song. Once back in the Disciple's Residence, he immediately began his research.

First, he prepared a basin of Spiritual Medicine and soaked the arm to cleanse it of the bloodstains, as well as the fragments of blade and lingering Gold-series Sword Qi left behind after the Gold-Cutting Sword Formation's explosion.

This Spiritual Medicine was something he had specifically asked a Junior Brother skilled in alchemy to concoct for him.

After washing it thoroughly, the crimson hue on the arm faded, revealing its true flesh-colored surface beneath.

Upon its skin, a series of Formation Patterns began to emerge.

These patterns had an ancient and primal air, tinged with a streak of something macabre. Despite their antiquity, the Formation Pivot seemed imbued with a wilderness-like savagery.

They were Four Symbols Formation Patterns!

And upon closer inspection, it became evident that these Four Symbols Formation Patterns resembled pictographic scripts, mimicking the forms of various beasts.

The broad strokes were reminiscent of a demon's back, while the sharp edges echoed the claws and fangs, forming shapes akin to Wolf Patterns.

They appeared to constitute a Four Symbols Wolf Pattern Formation.

Mo Hua focused his mind, scrutinizing the patterns, his gaze thoughtful and pensive.

This was not his first encounter with Four Symbols Formation Patterns.

Previously, he had seen similar patterns on Bald Eagle's bald head.

Moreover, Elder Master Xun had taught him the basics of Four Symbols Formation Patterns as well.

But these two were vastly different.

The patterns taught by Elder Master Xun were upright and majestic, the veritable "Beast Patterns."

In contrast, the patterns on Bald Eagle's head, as well as on this monster cultivator's severed arm, obviously belonged to a distinct lineage.

Their structure was peculiar, their form was demonic, and they more closely resembled "Monster Patterns."

In the realm of Four Symbols Formations, Beast Patterns and Monster Patterns evidently shared a similar origin.

Yet as to what that origin definitively was, and which of these—the Beast Patterns or the Monster Patterns—could be considered authentic, Mo Hua couldn't say for certain.

After all, his knowledge of the Four Symbols Formation was limited, based only on fragments of information gleaned from Elder Master Xun's teachings about its origins.

The Four Symbols Formation was an ancestral array passed down through generations among the Savage clan cultivators inhabiting the Wildland south of the Nine State.

The Wildland...

Mo Hua's thoughts stirred as he quickly reviewed in his mind everything he had seen and heard since entering Qianxue State Boundary...

Previously, through calculations and Formation Pattern comparisons, he had deduced that the Four Symbols Monster Pattern Formation likely stemmed from the handiwork of "Mr. Tu."

And the horned Evil God that Mr. Tu worshipped, known as the "Master of the Great Wilderness," evidently referred to the three thousand Barbaric Mountains of the Wildland.

The Four Symbols Formation originated from the Savage tribe cultivators of the Wildland.

The Horned Evil God was the Evil God of this Great Wilderness.

If that were the case, was the Four Symbols Formation itself a "legacy" from the Evil God's own homeland?

Were these monster cultivators bearing the Four Symbols Formation also merely henchmen of the Great Wilderness Evil God?

"If so, what are these monster cultivators doing hiding in Refining Demon Mountain?"

Mo Hua's heart harbored some suspicions, but no matter how much he pondered, he couldn't seem to grasp the core of the mystery.

Once more, he reviewed every detail of what he had seen and experienced on Refining Demon Mountain. Then, suddenly, a thought struck him like lightning:

"Monster Beasts!"

Thus far, the Monster Beasts he had encountered on Refining Demon Mountain, while rare in species—many of which he had seen for the first time—always carried an inexplicable air of familiarity.

The pig-headed demon snatched by Sever Gold Sect on their first clash.

The Blood Charming Fox that monster cultivators had fought over.

And numerous other ordinary wolf demons, snake demons, and bull or horse monster beasts...

All of these bore a faint resemblance to the demon monsters he had vanquished, slain, or even "devoured" during his encounters opposing the Evil God's forces.

Especially the massive Pig Head Demon, along with the pink-tinged, half-human half-fox demoness with seductive powers...

Both had been among the offerings he had "ordered" and "consumed" using the altar before.

Demon Monsters—hybrids of human and demon, blood-refined into fiends.

The demon monsters under the Great Wilderness Evil God's command were assembled from gruesome, blood-soaked limbs: half-human, half-demon abominations.

The humans' severed limbs came from cultivators who had been trafficked, had their clans annihilated, or were slaughtered and dismembered.

And the "demon" limbs in these demon monsters... most likely came from...

Refining Demon Mountain?!

A chill surged through Mo Hua's heart.

If that were the truth, then Refining Demon Mountain was nothing less than a "breeding ground" for an army of demon monsters, part of the Evil God's grand conspiracy?

"And that's not all..."

Mo Hua frowned deeply.

If the raw materials for blood-refined demon monsters primarily came from the Monster Beasts of Refining Demon Mountain, then the number of monster cultivators reduced to being pawns of the Evil God must be staggeringly high.

Moreover, relying solely on monster cultivators wasn't enough.

At most, monster cultivators could hunt monster beasts.

This entire process would necessarily require others to assist with transport, dismemberment, blood rituals, and so on...

And most crucially, it required absolute secrecy.

No one could uncover this operation.

Mo Hua then thought back to the vast, lifeless forest that had merged seamlessly with a Divine Tao Array. Within its shrouded depths, his Divine Sense had failed to detect any aura at all, sending a wave of dread surging through his chest.

In that seemingly ordinary stretch of forest, perhaps there lay concealed something far more terrifying than he had anticipated...

"Aside from monster cultivators, who else is aiding the Evil God?"

After only a moment's contemplation, Mo Hua arrived at a hypothesis.

Sever Gold Sect...

Chapter 1334: Hidden

The fat pig-headed monster was fighting with the Sever Gold Sect to snatch it from me.

At the time, I simply thought the Sever Gold Sect was just shameless, as they always were, liking to steal from others.

Indeed, the Sever Gold Sect is shameless and does love to take what belongs to others.

But now, upon closer reflection, there may be more hidden secrets behind this.

Moreover, afterward, the Sever Gold Sect suffered a setback and remarkably retreated quietly without causing further trouble with Taixu Gate.

This is definitely not the usual behavior of the Sever Gold Sect.

Looking back now, their retreat may have been to bury some sort of scheme, forcing them to endure and act low-key for the time being.

And that secret might just be...

The Sever Gold Sect is helping an Evil God hunt monster beasts and refine demon monsters!

Mo Hua's heart trembled, immediately filled with even greater confusion.

Where does the Sever Gold Sect get such daring courage?

Aren't they worried about the Taoist Court's accountability, severing their inheritance, destroying their foundation, sealing their legacy, and erasing their name?

And... what level of involvement does the Sever Gold Sect have in all this?

Is it all-encompassing, from top to bottom?

Or is it only a small faction of disciples or family groups secretly scheming?

Does the sect leader of the Sever Gold Sect know?

What about the ancestral elders in seclusion?

Furthermore, do they truly understand the magnitude of what they're doing?

The Great Wilderness Evil God is a god that has forsaken the Divine Way. It's a truly powerful Evil God...

This no longer is merely a case of making bargains with a tiger.

In the eyes of the Evil God, all things may be nothing but straw dogs; humans aren't even deemed as "human."

Aren't they afraid of being tricked by the Evil God, becoming its puppets or sacrificial offerings, doomed to eternal torment with no chance of redemption?

Mo Hua shook his head, reflecting deeply.

These people truly don't know the terror of the Evil God!

If I hadn't "consumed" several remnants and avatars of the Evil Gods myself, I wouldn't know either.

To ordinary cultivators, especially those who don't cultivate cultivation of divine thoughts, the Evil God is truly the ultimate "taboo"—unseeable, unknowable, unbeatable—an overwhelming dread...

This much Mo Hua understood clearly.

But matters concerning Evil Gods are hard to explain to others.

There are immense cosmic secrets wrapped up in all this.

The first challenge is that even if I spoke of it, others may not believe me.

The second is that trouble often starts with loose tongues—as soon as it's mentioned, if the wrong person finds out, I'd inevitably incur heavy karmic burdens and all sorts of trouble.

Furthermore, matters related to the Evil God involve far too many mysteries—Heavenly Secret Calculations, Tricky Calculations, Lord Yellow Mountain, studies of divinity, Divine Sense Proving the Dao, Divine Thought Devouring... and so forth.

It's impossible for me to explain all this clearly.

So, the fewer issues to get involved in, the better.

Besides, with so many powerful cultivators in Qianxue State Boundary, there's no need for me, a minor cultivator, to worry excessively about everything.

I should just focus on my own matters.

Mo Hua pondered a bit, thinking about what he should do next.

First and foremost, the secret of Refining Demon Mountain—related to the Evil God—is something I must investigate.

If I can disrupt the Evil God's schemes, I will certainly try.

Even if I don't mention the Evil God to others, I must expose the Sever Gold Sect's involvement to prevent them from causing more harm.

And then there's the altar...

I wonder if there are altars of the Evil God within Refining Demon Mountain.

If there are, it'll be quite the "feast" for me, one I absolutely can't miss.

Next, I need to capture a few monster cultivators and study the Four Symbols Formations carved onto their bodies.

Finally, there's the Divine Tao Array.

The Divine Tao Array contains applications of Divine Thought Power and has a restraining effect on divine beings.

In the near future, I may well come face-to-face with an Evil God or some other powerful evil spirit, so learning the Divine Tao Array is indispensable.

Yet the Evil God's schemes are deep and unfathomable, still difficult to perceive.

The monster cultivators are too powerful and difficult to capture as well.

Only the Divine Tao Array, laid within the mountain forests, stands still and motionless, seemingly "within reach."

But as for that mysterious mountain forest, even Mo Hua hesitates to enter.

No one knows what might be encountered within the forest.

If I were to run into a horde of monster cultivators or a Golden Core Realm evil cultivator, I'd be doomed.

It's best to find a bodyguard.

But where could I possibly find such a bodyguard?

Mo Hua thought of Gu Changhuai, then immediately shook his head.

"What a pity..."

Uncle Gu isn't a sect cultivator, so he can't enter Refining Demon Mountain.

If he were, with him as a fallback, I could venture into the mountain forest of Refining Demon Mountain without a worry to "pick vegetables."

What I need is a Golden Core cultivator, who also happens to be a sect cultivator and is able to enter Refining Demon Mountain.

With these requirements combined, it's nearly impossible to find anyone.

Mo Hua let out a long sigh.

But midway through his sigh, he suddenly froze.

A silhouette and a familiar aura emerged from Mo Hua's memories once again.

Mo Hua frowned.

He remembered sensing someone watching him during his first trip to Refining Demon Mountain.

Lurking while Mo Hua was hunting monsters in Refining Demon Mountain, this mysterious sensation often reappeared.

The feeling was at its peak when Mo Hua derived Song Jian's Sword Qi and calculated the Sever Gold Sect's Gold-Cutting Sword Formation.

Initially, Mo Hua thought he was imagining things.

But later, at Elder Master Xun's doorstep, Mo Hua encountered that elder named "Xun Ziyou"...

Xun Ziyou is Elder Master Xun's successor.

When he saw me, his expression clearly betrayed a brief flash of guilt.

Though he acted distant in conversation, his gaze carried a peculiar familiarity when looking at me.

More so, his aura always struck me as oddly familiar.

Now, connecting all the dots, Mo Hua began to piece things together.

"This bodyguard... maybe I don't need to go searching for one at all?"

Mo Hua's expression faltered slightly as he murmured softly:

"Perhaps the possibility is... I already have a 'bodyguard'?"

...

Refining Demon Mountain, deep within the dense forest.

A dark and lightless place, beyond visibility.

Chapter 1335: Secrets

A demon cultivator, missing one arm and half his body maimed, crawled and stumbled his way into a mountain valley.

He took out a white bone and ignited it with a ghostly green flame.

The eerie, green-glowing monster Qi slowly spiraled upward.

The demon cultivator stood where he was and waited.

Before long, heavy footsteps could be heard. A tall man dressed in black had appeared without notice, walking slowly toward him.

"What happened?"

The black-clad man's voice was deep, carrying a bitter chill.

"I..." the demon cultivator's breathing was ragged, "I was ordered to hunt a Blood Charming Fox, but I was intercepted halfway by several sect disciples."

"The Blood Charming Fox is extremely rare. I spent a full month tracking this one down."

"Originally, I didn't plan to make a scene. I intended only to profit as the fisherman, swooping in while they fought among themselves to snatch the monster beast."

"But... I..."

The demon cultivator's face suddenly turned pale. "My Monster Pattern malfunctioned, my demonic power backfired, and it attacked my Sea of Consciousness, leaving my Divine Sense muddled and dizzy."

"After that, I don't know what exactly happened. I have only blurry impressions — it seems I managed to steal the monster beast, almost killed one of the disciples, and then their fellow sect members came after me."

The black-clad man frowned. "What realm were they?"

The demon cultivator answered in a low voice, "Foundation Establishment Middle Phase."

The black-clad man sneered coldly, "You're at Foundation Establishment Late Stage, practiced demon techniques, and engraved Monster Patterns, yet you couldn't handle a few Foundation Establishment Middle Phase sect disciples? Could you be any more useless?"

The demon cultivator panicked, hurriedly defending himself:

"It's not my fault — those disciples were far too strange."

"Which sect?"

"They weren't wearing sect Taoist robes, and their methods were all over the place — swordsmanship, spells, formation arrays, they used everything. I couldn't make sense of it..."

The black-clad man grew increasingly impatient.

To fight someone and not even discern their origins?

Indeed, practicing these demon techniques seemed to rot the brain.

"What sort of swordsmanship and formation arrays did they use?"

The demon cultivator said, "One was a fire-series sword technique, impressive in power, but not too troublesome."

"Their spells were water-series — they were incredibly irritating..."

"The formation arrays they laid down were overwhelming in strength and sheer numbers, but... I don't understand formations at all, and couldn't tell them apart..."

"Aside from that, one disciple was a sword cultivator, whose eyes carried the sharpness of a blade, and whose aura was overwhelmingly intense. He wielded a moon-white longsword, and his Sword Qi was terrifyingly fierce — hardly something a Foundation Establishment Middle Phase cultivator could possess..."

Upon hearing this, the black-clad man's pupils contracted.

"A moon-white longsword, fierce Sword Qi... Rushing Void Sect..."

A name of a Rushing Void Sect sword Dao genius emerged in his mind.

The black-clad man's gaze darkened as he looked at the demon cultivator. "Was it this sword cultivator who injured you?"

"No, it wasn't..." The demon cultivator trembled with lingering fear, his eyes filled with terror. "I was wounded by... Broken Gold Sword Qi!"

At those words, the black-clad man immediately barked angrily:

"What nonsense are you spouting?!"

His gaze turned icy. "How could you possibly be injured by Broken Gold Sword Qi?"

"It's true..." The demon cultivator's voice quivered. "And it wasn't ordinary Broken Gold Sword Qi — it was Sword Control! It was a Spirit Sword controlled by the legitimate, immensely powerful 'Sever Gold Sword Control Jue,' striking from at least one hundred and sixty zhang away, severing my arm and nearly killing me!"

The demon cultivator was both furious and deeply frightened.

The black-clad man's gaze sharpened like a blade as he examined the demon cultivator's wound. Sure enough, traces of sharp Broken Gold Sword Qi were visible on the injury. His expression turned glacial as he asked in a grim voice:

"Who controlled the sword?"

The demon cultivator shook his head. "I don't know, but it definitely wasn't those sect disciples..."

"A sword control strike of one hundred and sixty zhang, with Dao power of that magnitude — it would require at least a Foundation Establishment Peak or even an Initial Golden Core realm to wield such Sword Control techniques."

"Those sect disciples aren't capable of it."

"And I've fought them — among the five, none practiced the Sever Gold Sword Control Jue."

"So, whoever attempted to kill me with Sword Control must have been a hidden swordmaster, stealthily attacking me from the shadows!"

"And this person not only practiced the Sever Gold Sword Technique but mastered the Sever Gold Sect's most orthodox and advanced Sword Control techniques!"

The demon cultivator's voice turned icy.

The black-clad man's expression grew heavy as water. "You mean to say..."

The demon cultivator lowered his voice and clenched his teeth. "The Song family!"

The black-clad man's gaze turned murderous.

The demon cultivator braced himself and insisted, "There's no other explanation."

The Song family practices the orthodox Sever Gold Sword Control Jue.

The Song family has always been at odds with the Jin family.

The Song family understands the Jin family best.

And except for the Jin family disciples, only the Song family disciples could wield such powerful Sword Control techniques.

"I suspect..." Blood spilled from the demon cultivator's mouth as he grimly said, "Some of our plans have been seen through by the Song family. They're likely plotting to use other sects as pawns to bring down the Jin family, clearing the path for the Song family to rise..."

The black-clad man remained silent, but the surging murderous intent radiating from his body grew increasingly intense.

A chilling, bloodthirsty demonic power swirled around him like a coiled serpent, threatening to break through the skies.

Fortunately, the black-clad man forcibly suppressed the violent fury in his heart.

A moment later, the killing intent subsided.

The black-clad man's aura settled, becoming deep and obscured like a mountain.

"I understand..."

He said faintly.

After this, he glanced at the demon cultivator again and asked in a somber tone, "Where is the arm you lost?"

The demon cultivator groaned in pain. "It was shredded by the Sword Qi, turned into nothing but a mist of blood..."

The black-clad man nodded slightly. "That's good."

He looked at the demon cultivator again and tossed him a bright red blood-flesh healing pill. "Take it."

The demon cultivator's face lit up with joy. He immediately swallowed the pill and gratefully said:

"Thank you, Boss!"

The black-clad man replied with a soft "Hmm," before speaking indifferently, "Heal your wounds quickly, and don't forget your mission. Mr. Tu said the plan has been moved up; you need to act faster."

"Yes!" The demon cultivator bowed his head in acknowledgment.

After consuming the pill, a surge of blood Qi roared within his body, rapidly restoring his injuries and regenerating his flesh.

Though this method of forcibly healing through a blood-flesh pill would leave lingering side effects, consuming more blood-rich supplements in the future could slowly counteract them. At least this was preferable to dying now.

The black-clad man said, "Follow me back to the valley."

The demon cultivator followed dutifully.

After walking a few steps, the black-clad man suddenly halted, turning to look toward the direction outside Refining Demon Mountain, coldly snorting to himself:

"Rushing Void Sect, the Song family..."

"Daring to sabotage my grand plan — one day, I'll make you all pay the price!"

The black-clad man sneered, the sound chilling, before turning away and leading the demon cultivator into the bloodiest, darkest shadows of the dense forest...

Chapter 1336: Divine Way Forest

Taixu Gate.

Mo Hua, while cultivating and attending lectures, was silently waiting.

Waiting for Elder Xun to come look for him.

Logically speaking, about the matter of the demon cultivator, Mo Hua had informed Elder Song, who then passed it on to Elder Xun.

Elder Xun was the Elder on duty at Refining Demon Mountain.

Both emotionally and rationally, he should have come to question me and inquire about the specific details.

After all, the matter of the demon cultivator is no trivial matter, especially since it's taking place within Refining Demon Mountain.

Yet Mo Hua waited for a long time, and still there was no movement.

The entire Sect seemed to act as if it wasn't of any importance.

Elder Xun didn't come to look for him either.

Mo Hua touched his chin, lost in thought.

The fact that he didn't come to me indicates two possible reasons:

First, this Elder Xun might be a "troublemaker," neglecting his duties and completely indifferent to the affairs of Refining Demon Mountain, simply wanting to muddle through.

But that doesn't make sense.

The matter of the demon cultivator is extremely serious—even if Elder Xun were to neglect his duties, it's impossible that he wouldn't recognize the severity of the problem.

Moreover, his surname is Xun and he's a descendant of Elder Master Xun.

With Elder Master Xun's strict nature, if this Elder Xun were truly so idle and lazy, he wouldn't even qualify to be an Elder.

Then it must be the second possibility:

The matter of the demon cultivator, this Elder Xun must have already known long ago.

In fact... he could have been watching all along.

Because he already knows, there's no longer any need for him to come ask me.

This, to some extent, confirms Mo Hua's hypothesis.

Mo Hua's eyes glimmered as his thoughts began to stir...

...

Refining Demon Mountain, the main hall at the mountain gate.

It was the time for the tri-monthly rest period, when disciples from various sects would hunt for monsters in the mountains.

Xun Ziyou had also arrived early for his duty.

As was customary, two hours later, Mo Hua would arrive at the mountain gate, and then either in groups of three to five or alone, idly head into the mountain.

Once inside, he might hunt monsters, practice sword techniques, or tinker with some strange and peculiar activities.

Before that, however, Xun Ziyou had some time on his hands to brew a pot of tea, enjoy the mountain scenery, and browse through the bulletins sent by the Taoist Court to check on the latest developments in the Barbaric Wilderness.

As Xun Ziyou entered the mountain gate, brewed his tea, and had just taken his seat, he glanced out of the window—and instantly his hand trembled, spilling tea all over the place.

A handsome face was suspended right outside the window.

Mo Hua was leaning on the windowsill, staring at him intently.

Xun Ziyou took a deep breath, his eyelid twitching, and snapped, "You brat, what are you doing this early in the morning?"

He had just been brewing his tea, feeling relaxed and leisurely, completely unaware that there would be a Mo Hua at the window.

Mo Hua placed both hands on the windowsill, looking serious as he spoke:

"Elder Xun, I have something very important to discuss with you!"

Xun Ziyou was momentarily startled, then sighed lightly and beckoned him inside: "Come in."

Mo Hua promptly jumped off the windowsill and walked into the room.

"Tea?" Xun Ziyou asked.

Mo Hua nodded.

"Sit," Xun Ziyou said, and then personally poured Mo Hua a cup of tea. "Go ahead. What's this important matter?"

Mo Hua sipped the tea, found it flavorful but a bit too hot, so he silently set the cup down. Then, with a solemn expression, he got straight to the point:

"Elder Xun, there's a dangerous demon cultivator in Refining Demon Mountain!"

Xun Ziyou paused in disbelief.

Turns out it's just this, making it seem so dramatic.

"Oh," Xun Ziyou replied softly.

"Elder, you already knew?"

Mo Hua's gaze was sharp, his eyes clear and piercing, staring directly at Xun Ziyou's expression.

For some unknown reason, Xun Ziyou felt oddly uneasy under Mo Hua's scrutiny, and reflexively responded:

"Not yet..."

"But," Mo Hua's eyes lit up. "Didn't Elder Song already mention it to you?"

Xun Ziyou froze.

Oh no, he had forgotten about that...

Elder Song had indeed mentioned it to him.

But since he had known about this long before, he had merely brushed it off and not given much thought to it.

Now, however, things looked contradictory.

He couldn't reveal his covert tracking of Mo Hua, so he couldn't admit he knew about the demon cultivator.

But Elder Song had said something to him earlier, so he "should" already be aware of the demon cultivator.

Xun Ziyou's head started to ache.

Great, I've been set up by this brat!

His mind raced, and he solemnly replied:

"Elder Song did mention it, but this matter is quite dangerous. It's not something you disciples should concern yourselves with, so it cannot be disclosed to you."

Xun Ziyou then glanced at the sky outside and said, "It's getting late. You'd best get into the mountain early and return early..."

Xun Ziyou wanted to quickly send Mo Hua away.

"Alright," Mo Hua nodded, finished the tea in his cup, stood up, and left.

Xun Ziyou let out a sigh of relief.

This brat, so young, yet how is he like such a "wise fox"? Talking to him always feels like walking on thin ice.

Anyway, I managed to bluff my way through it.

Xun Ziyou thought silently to himself.

But Mo Hua only got halfway out before turning back, his gaze deep and contemplative as he looked at Xun Ziyou.

Xun Ziyou tensed up and asked, "What now?"

Mo Hua thought for a moment and asked:

"Elder Xun, the demon cultivator has burrowed into a nearby forest. Later, when I go there to have a look, will you join me?"

Xun Ziyou's eyelid twitched. After hesitating for a moment, he finally let out a sigh.

"Alright."

This brat is full of tricks—if he really decides to go, I won't be able to stop him.

Rather than letting him go alone, it'd be safer to accompany him.

Besides, Mo Hua had formally invited him.

His participation would be in the capacity of Elder Xun, officially investigating the demon cultivator case alongside Mo Hua.

Not merely acting as a covert "bodyguard."

Therefore, it wouldn't count as breaking the secrecy or violating the Ancestor's orders.

Xun Ziyou justified to himself internally.

"Elder Xun, let's set off then," Mo Hua said and swaggered out in front.

Chapter 1337: Divine Way Forest

Xun Ziyou followed behind, observing Mo Hua's confident silhouette, feeling a slight sense of confusion in his heart.

This kid... Could he have guessed my identity?

No way...

Xun Ziyou furrowed his brows.

...

Within the Refining Demon Mountain.

Mo Hua led the way. After about an hour, the two arrived at the dense forest.

This time, with a "bodyguard," Mo Hua exuded confidence.

Looking at the forest ahead, Xun Ziyou tried to act composed and asked, "That Monster Cultivator, did it really sneak into this forest?"

Mo Hua quietly stared at him.

Xun Ziyou, pinned by Mo Hua's gaze, felt a bit embarrassed and sighed inwardly with resignation.

Forget it...

He then asked, "Can you find that Monster Cultivator?"

Mo Hua shook his head, "Not at the moment."

His eyes traveled far, taking in the dense forest, "Within this forest, a Formation has been set up. We need to reconstruct and study the Formation first to find a path deeper into the woods, and only then can we locate the whereabouts of that Monster Cultivator."

Xun Ziyou nodded slightly, thinking to himself that he guessed right.

Sure enough, this forest had a Formation, blocking Divine Sense detection.

Xun Ziyou asked, "Do you know what kind of Formation is in this forest?"

Mo Hua nodded, "It's a type of special Divine Formation. By transforming Divine Sense through foundational Formation Patterns, it achieves the effects of restriction, sealing, and suppressing Divine Thought power..."

Xun Ziyou looked blank.

Divine Formation?

Within the current system of Formations—Eryi, Three Talents, Four Symbols, Five Elements, Six Yao, Seven Stars, Eight Trigrams—where is there such a thing as "Divine Formation"?

Even though he wasn't proficient in Formations, it didn't mean he was entirely ignorant about them either.

Besides, his ancestor was one of Taixu Gate's top Fifth Grade Formation Masters, one of the few in the entire Qianxue State Boundary.

Having grown up influenced by his surroundings, even if he hadn't "eaten pork," he had certainly seen "pigs run."

He might not be able to draw Formations, but he could still recognize their origins.

But in all his years of Tao Cultivation, he had never heard the words "Divine Formation."

Not even his ancestor had ever mentioned it.

Looking at Mo Hua, who spoke with such conviction, Xun Ziyou almost thought this Foundation Establishment disciple was earnestly pulling his leg...

Mo Hua, speaking enthusiastically, glanced at Xun Ziyou. Seeing the peculiar expression on his face, he realized something and asked:

"Elder, do you know about Divine Formations?"

Xun Ziyou was momentarily stumped by the question.

He hesitated for a moment, coughed lightly, and nodded calmly, "I've heard a little."

Mo Hua nodded in admiration, "No wonder you're an Elder; you truly know a lot."

Xun Ziyou felt far from pleased.

He, a dignified Late Golden Core Elder, had to resort to such trivial lies just to maintain his standing in front of a disciple.

Unaware of Xun Ziyou's inner thoughts, Mo Hua continued:

"The specifics of this Divine Formation aren't clear yet. I need to find the location where the Formation was set up within this forest, copy down the Formation Patterns one by one, and then study them..."

Upon hearing this, Xun Ziyou felt a sense of reverence.

So-called "professional" Formation Masters were probably just like this...

Xun Ziyou nodded and said, "Alright, I will accompany you inside. Focus solely on finding the Formation; don't worry about anything else."

Mo Hua beamed brightly, "Thank you, Elder Xun!"

Having a Late Golden Core stage "bodyguard" put him at ease, allowing him to openly "harvest" without concern!

Mo Hua stepped forward into the forest.

Xun Ziyou followed behind.

The two wandered around like this for nearly half an hour, yet Mo Hua's brows gradually furrowed.

"Nothing..."

Although his senses told him the Divine Formation was widespread in the forest, everywhere, upon entering and searching for half the day, he had yet to find a single piece of Formation media.

Not only Mo Hua, but Xun Ziyou also felt perplexed.

They said there was a Formation, but where was it?

The entire forest seemed empty. Despite scanning with Divine Sense repeatedly, they found nothing.

Xun Ziyou turned his gaze to Mo Hua. Just as he was about to say something, he saw Mo Hua suddenly pause, step toward a large tree, and fall into contemplation.

Xun Ziyou walked closer and examined the tree.

The tree was a Second Grade ancient tree, with several hundred years of age. Its bark was mottled, its branches towering, and it was about the size of five people encircling it.

"Is there something wrong with this tree?"

"Yes." Mo Hua nodded decisively, "If my guess is right, the Formation is hidden inside, and it's no ordinary concealment."

If it were standard concealment methods, his experience would have uncovered them long ago.

Mo Hua pondered, "It's possible... These Formations were carved into the tree when it was still young. Over the years, as the tree grew, the Formations merged with it, becoming an inseparable whole, making it undetectable by others."

Xun Ziyou was inwardly shocked.

Could there truly be such meticulous Formation techniques?

To achieve this level, this child Mo Hua, could he truly discern it?

Moreover...

Xun Ziyou's gaze tightened.

If this were indeed the case, it meant someone had started setting up this kind of Formation in Refining Demon Mountain hundreds of years ago.

Mo Hua evidently realized this as well and asked:

"Elder Xun, can you determine the exact age of these trees?"

He had never planted trees before, so he wasn't sure.

But Elder Xun, being the Elder of Refining Demon Mountain, should know more than him.

Xun Ziyou looked again at the towering tree before him, thought briefly, and said slowly:

"Judging by appearance, it's likely around four to five hundred years old..."

"Four to five hundred years..." Mo Hua frowned.

This timeline was quite distant.

Seeing Mo Hua's furrowed brows, Xun Ziyou couldn't help but ask, "Are you thinking of something?"

Mo Hua thought for a moment, then nodded and said:

"Four to five hundred years—that means someone began planning long, long ago, setting up Divine Formations in this forest to conceal traces and provide a haven for Monster Cultivators."

Chapter 1338: Divine Way Forest

"Just don't know, what exactly is their purpose..."

Xun Ziyou's expression was solemn, lost in thought.

Mo Hua glanced at Xun Ziyou, thinking to himself that this was as far as he could remind him.

He couldn't say any more.

Xun Ziyou silently noted this matter in his heart, planning to investigate it thoroughly when he returned.

But the urgent matter at hand was still Mo Hua's so-called "Divine Tao Array."

Xun Ziyou asked Mo Hua:

"Do you want me to split the tree open to show you the formation inside?"

"No need," Mo Hua replied, "it would be too conspicuous, and the formation in this forest is likely interconnected with divine thoughts as eyes and the woods as pivots. Interfering even slightly could trigger a chain reaction, potentially affecting the flow of divine thought and alerting the core of the formation, alarming the snake in the grass."

"There's also a possibility that the trees serve as media for the formation, integrating seamlessly. If a tree is cut, the formation inside might become ineffective..."

Xun Ziyou nodded, somewhat half-understanding.

The child was speaking in a profound way; he didn't fully grasp it.

Anyway, the trees couldn't be cut.

"Then what will you do?" Xun Ziyou asked.

If he couldn't cut the trees, how could he observe the formation patterns?

"I'll just take a look," Mo Hua answered.

"Look?"

Xun Ziyou was momentarily stunned.

How to look?

Just as Xun Ziyou was puzzled, he saw Mo Hua sit cross-legged, take out pen and paper, and stare intently at the large tree.

Meanwhile, an aura both bizarre and mysterious emanated from Mo Hua.

This was completely different from the feeling he gave before.

Xun Ziyou's pupils slightly contracted.

This aura...

Elder Xun was considered "one of us," so Mo Hua didn't conceal some methods.

Of course, Elder Xun was not a Formation Master and didn't walk the path of Divine Sense Proving the Dao, so even if Mo Hua used some divine thought techniques, Elder Xun probably wouldn't grasp the details.

Mo Hua merged Heavenly secret Tricky Calculation and Heavenly secret Calculation, his gaze clear yet unified, concentrating as he observed the tree, analyzing the aura of the formation that was one with the tree.

This aura was wrapped deep inside by the tree's wood energy.

Layer upon layer of barriers covered it.

Mo Hua gradually deduced as his divine sense infiltrated layer by layer.

Finally, after an indeterminate time, Mo Hua sensed some faint white aura.

This aura was not the spiritual energy of flora or the spiritual power of a formation, but the aura of divine thought.

But this divine aura was faint white, a mist-like divine thought, merely ordinary cultivator's divine thought, not yet transformed.

Moreover, though this divine thought was faint white, it was cold and felt somewhat sinister.

It was clear that the cultivator who drew these formations was not respectable.

Moreover, there was even a trace of the Great Wilderness Evil God's aura.

This trace of aura was extremely subtle, almost undetectable.

If not for Mo Hua's extensive dealings with the Great Wilderness Evil God, having even consumed its offerings, devoured divine remains, eaten the Evil God's incarnations, and absorbed much of the Great Wilderness Evil God's Divine Marrow.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to sense it.

"Indeed... on the surface, the Great Wilderness Evil God seems absent everywhere, but in the shadows, He is lurking everywhere..."

Mo Hua sighed slightly in his heart.

Then he settled down, beginning to deduce while recording formation patterns.

Xun Ziyou stood silently behind him, vigilantly watching the surrounding forest for any monster cultivators or demon cultivators appearing, or dangerous monster beasts threatening Mo Hua's safety.

Meanwhile, he also used the corner of his eye to glance at what Mo Hua was recording.

But soon he realized he couldn't comprehend it...

It was an extremely unconventional set of formation patterns, completely different from any known formation system.

Each stroke formed a self-contained system, constructing a complete formation logic.

Yet, to the eyes, it made no sense at all.

Xun Ziyou suddenly felt a bit relieved.

Thankfully, at the start of his cultivation, he hadn't forced himself to learn formations, obeying the ancestor's command to become a Formation Master.

Otherwise, studying formations to this day, only to find himself unable to understand a second grade junior Formation Master's formations, wouldn't his Taoist Heart collapse?

Xun Ziyou sighed deeply, giving Mo Hua a profound look before dismissing his thoughts, no longer watching what Mo Hua was drawing—since he couldn't understand anyway—and instead focusing all his energy on guarding the surroundings, watching for hidden dangers.

Before, he thought the ancestor was making a fuss, sending a late Golden Core Stage to covertly care for a Foundation Building Middle Stage youngster.

Now it seemed, with such formation talent, it was already fortunate that the ancestor hadn't sent a Feather Transformation Realm to secretly protect him...

After a period of thirty minutes, Mo Hua captured most of a Divine Tao Array on one tree, then put away his pen and ink and stood up, saying:

"Let's move ahead."

Xun Ziyou glanced around, nodding.

Mo Hua proceeded forward, looking around and again finding a large tree. He sat down to continue deducing and recording the formation patterns.

Xun Ziyou remained on guard beside him.

In this manner, they spent the entire day, with Mo Hua recording a thick stack of formation patterns.

During this time, all was calm with no monster cultivators or other dangers appearing.

As the sun set and darkness approached, Xun Ziyou said, "Let's go back first."

"Alright," Mo Hua agreed.

Before uncovering the secrets deep within this forest, it was best not to stay overnight among the trees.

The two headed back.

Xun Ziyou accompanied Mo Hua to the mountain gate, bidding farewell, "I must remain in the mountains. Be careful on your way back to the sect."

"Hmm," Mo Hua nodded.

Xun Ziyou thought for a moment and added, "Tomorrow is still a rest period. If you want to return to the forest to copy the formations, remember to find me, I'll take you inside."

Mo Hua's eyes lit up, smiling, "Thank you, Elder Xun!"

Elder Xun nodded slightly.

Then Mo Hua, on his own, left the Refining Demon Mountain and headed towards the Taixu Gate.

As he walked, anticipation brewed in Mo Hua's heart.

He wanted to return to the sect as soon as possible to categorize and study the thick stack of divine formation patterns he had copied, to see if he could recreate the complete Divine Tao Array set up within the dense forest.

Moreover, this Divine Tao Array was evidently much more profound than the one he had acquired previously in a small fishing village.

If his conjecture was correct, the functionality of this Divine Tao Array would be greatly beneficial to him!

Mo Hua's lips curled into a smile, his steps light, but before reaching the Taixu Gate, he encountered a familiar face.

It was Ouyang Mu.

Accompanying Ouyang Mu was another disciple from the Tai'a Sect, appearing to be from a higher class, tall and lanky, with a long face.

Mo Hua greeted, "Little Wood."

Hearing this, Ouyang Mu turned to see Mo Hua, his face lighting up with joy, and hurriedly responded:

"Brother Mo."

The long-faced disciple from the Tai'a Sect beside him looked slightly surprised.

Mo Hua approached, and Ouyang Mu introduced,

"This is Senior Brother Ma from our Tai'a Sect, who is in the same class as my elder brother."

Mo Hua then remembered seeing this "Senior Brother Ma" when he first entered the Refining Demon Mountain and met Senior Brother Feng.

Following standard etiquette, Mo Hua greeted him.

Senior Brother Ma returned the greeting.

"Senior Brother Ma has brought me some pills, spiritual artifacts, and jade slips needed for cultivation, entrusted by my elder brother..."

Ouyang Mu said with a smile.

Despite having such an excellent elder brother, constantly being compared, and facing a lot of criticism, Ouyang Mu still held great respect and admiration for his elder brother.

Ouyang Mu had also just left the Refining Demon Mountain and was returning to the sect, conveniently traveling the same path.

Mo Hua walked with Ouyang Mu for a stretch, and along the way, they chatted about some trivia concerning the Refining Demon Mountain.

Senior Brother Ma, on the other hand, spoke rarely, his gaze carrying a hint of caution.

At a fork in the road, Mo Hua said goodbye to them.

Ouyang Mu and Senior Brother Ma headed back to the Tai'a Sect.

Mo Hua entered the Taixu Gate.

But just as he entered the mountain gate, Mo Hua's face gradually turned cold, his eyes carrying a hint of seriousness.

He had just sensed from "Senior Brother Ma" a trace of...

The Evil God's aura.

Chapter 1339: Divine Way Compound Formation

This trace of the Evil God's aura was very faint; an ordinary cultivator wouldn't be able to sense it at all.

Even Brother Ma himself might not be aware that he carried this trace of evil aura.

But there should be no mistake...

Mo Hua silently pondered in his heart.

He was an "old acquaintance" of the Great Wilderness Evil God—although the Great Wilderness Evil God might not necessarily recognize him.

Then Mo Hua couldn't help but frown.

But why did Brother Ma have the aura of the Evil God on him?

Could it be that this Brother Ma was one of the Evil God's henchmen?

Or did he just accidentally come into contact with some divine statue or offering related to the Evil God?

If that were indeed the case, it would mean that the Evil God had already unknowingly begun to infiltrate the sect, and not just the Sever Gold Sect, but perhaps the other Twelve Streams, Eight Great Gates, and even the Four Great Sects might not be spared.

Even if it hadn't been erosion, it had at least begun to penetrate.

Desires lurk in human hearts, and without cultivating the Taoist Heart, one definitely couldn't outplay the Evil God.

"The situation probably isn't looking too good..."

Mo Hua sighed.

Also, it seemed like Brother Ma was deliberately getting close to Little Wood.

Could he have some other motives?

"Should I give Little Wood a heads-up?"

Mo Hua pondered for a moment, then shook his head.

Little Wood was too simple; his thoughts were all written on his face. If he were told, it would be too easy to give it away.

Brother Ma would basically be able to tell at a glance that Little Wood suspected him.

So, it was not the right time to reveal it and risk alarming the snake in the grass.

It was better to keep an eye on it himself.

Moreover, regarding Brother Ma, this was just his own suspicion. He might have just inadvertently come into contact with some Demon Wraith related to the Evil God, not necessarily having any real connections.

"Hopefully that's the case..."

Mo Hua silently thought to himself.

He then looked up, gazing at the mist-shrouded, ancient and elegant, towering and majestic Taixu Gate.

"If the Tai'a Sect really had begun to be infiltrated by the Evil God..."

"Then what about our Taixu Gate?"

Mo Hua's gaze turned stern, and after pondering for a moment, he realized that the Taixu Gate should still be fine.

If there were signs of infiltration by the Evil God within the Taixu Gate, he would have already noticed it, and any disciples under the Evil God's control wouldn't escape his eyes.

Mo Hua gently exhaled a breath.

"That's good..."

Then Mo Hua was taken aback.

Why?

Why did other sects, even those like the Tai'a Sect, which had historical ties with the Taixu Gate, show signs of being corroded by the Evil God, while the Taixu Gate alone could "maintain its purity"?

Mo Hua frowned in confusion.

Suddenly, he sensed something, raised his head, and looked far away, past the long, straight mountain steps, past the pavilions and temples bearing the marks of time, past the mist-enshrouded peaks, towards the deeply hidden, ancient and majestic back mountain.

A name surfaced in his mind:

"Taixu Mind Transforming Sword True Jue..."

Mo Hua was stunned, his eyes bright.

...

Afterwards, returning to the Disciple's Residence, when it was time for dinner, Mo Hua called Yu Er to go to the dining hall together to have dinner.

Influenced by Mo Hua, Yu Er also particularly loved eating chicken drumsticks.

After the meal, Mo Hua checked Yu Er's Formation homework.

This was at Wenren Wan's request.

She knew that Mo Hua had "studied" from Elder Master Xun and was skilled in Formation, so she gave Mo Hua a lot of good things, asking him to guide Yu Er in Formation whenever he had time.

Aunt Wan treated him very well, not to mention it was to teach Yu Er, so Mo Hua naturally agreed.

Nowadays, Mo Hua was considered half a "Formation Master" to Yu Er.

In addition to his own cultivation and classes, or during tea breaks and after meals, he would tutor Yu Er in Formation studies.

Because Yu Er was young and still at the introductory stage, he learned the basics, which made it easy for Mo Hua to instruct him.

And because Mo Hua was teaching, Yu Er was very earnest in his studies and improved rapidly.

Mo Hua was very gratified.

After reviewing Yu Er's Formation homework, Mo Hua took Yu Er back to his room, and then returned to his own quarters to formally research the "Divine Tao Array" he had transcribed from the forest.

He had recorded a total of eighteen sets of Divine Tao Array manuscripts.

Each array's internal layout was the same, and the Formation Patterns were similar, clearly showing they were the same type of "Divine Tao Array."

But the specific Formation Patterns of each array had differences.

It was like the seemingly identical leaves on a tree, each with its own distinct patterns.

This seemed to be...

"A Compound Divine Array?"

Which made sense, given such a large forest, the effect of a single array would be limited.

It required combining single formations into Compound Formations of a certain scale to better conceal Divine Sense and hide secrets.

But at most, it would only be a Compound Formation.

A Large Divine Array above a Compound Formation would be utterly impossible.

The legacy of Divine Tao Formations was already scarce, and there were very few Formation Masters capable of mastering Divine Tao Arrays.

Where would anyone find the ability to gather so many Divine Array Masters and expend so much telekinesis to construct a grand "Large Divine Array"...

To build a Compound Divine Array would already be quite impressive.

"So, what kind of Compound Divine Array is laid in the dense forest?"

Mo Hua silently pondered.

"Divine Tao Array" was a generic term for a type of formation; each Divine Tao Array should have its own name.

Including the Four Symbols Formations as well.

Mo Hua had now seen two Four Symbols Formations, one on the bald eagle's head—an eagle-type Four Symbols Formation—and the other on the monster cultivator's arm—a wolf-type Four Symbols Formation.

Based on their characteristics, they could tentatively be called "Four Symbols Eagle Pattern Formation" and "Four Symbols Wolf Pattern Formation."

But what about the Divine Tao Array?

The Divine Tao Arrays in the small fishing village and the dense forest seemed to have the same origin, but the Formation Patterns differed, indicating that they were two different types of Divine Tao Arrays.

Chapter 1340: Compound Formation of the Divine Way

The Divine Tao Array of the small fishing village is like a "gate."

Once closed, it can conceal certain causes and energies.

When placed over one's forehead, it can also isolate some evil qi and demon wraiths.

Meanwhile, the Divine Tao Array in the dense forest is like a mass of "fog."

Through divine thought formation patterns, it weaves a mist of divine thought, faint and obscure, making it impossible for one's divine sense to discern the details beneath the mist.

But what exactly are the names of these two types of formations?

Mo Hua has no clue at all.

After all, these formations themselves are but incomplete "half-learned" legacies, all obtained by "fleecing," naturally without any heads or tails.

"I don't know the names of the formations..."

Mo Hua shook his head and continued his research.

He needs to calculate and compare each of the eighteen peculiar divine formation patterns transcribed from the dense forest, and then deduce the common patterns to uncover their mysteries.

In the elegantly simple Disciple's Residence, the light was bright.

Mo Hua sat upright, his expression focused, his eyes bright and sparkling under the light.

His divine sense was being steadily consumed, and his calculations were advancing step by step.

The formation patterns under his pen were being gathered stroke by stroke.

By 1 p.m., Mo Hua extinguished the light, lay on the bed, and let his divine sense dive into his Sea of Consciousness, continuing the calculations on the Taoist Stele.

The calculations on the Taoist Stele progressed several times faster.

Soon, Mo Hua had some insights.

This is a relatively simple structured divine compound formation.

Somewhat similar to the Subsidiary Compass Re-formation Array, using a core mother formation to control multiple individual sub-formations, connecting them into a singular divine "mist."

The difference is that the individual "sub-formations" in the Subsidiary Compass Re-formation Array are identical, duplicated from a single mold.

However, the "divine compound formation" before him, all its "sub-formations," are the same formation but with structural variations.

It's like a big tree, where each leaf has its own vein pattern.

The overall structure of this formation also resembles a "Spiritual Pivot Formation."

Each secondary sub-formation has a corresponding formation "sequence" to distinguish the formation's structure.

"In the dense forest, there are many such unknown divine formations, and each formation is similar but unique."

"They have similar formation pivot structures but different sequence patterns..."

"The structure of the compound formation is simple, but involves a multitude of specific formation patterns, making it very complex..."

Mo Hua slowly exhaled.

He had roughly figured out the outlines of these divine formations.

But at this stage, he still couldn't deduce a unified formation pivot structure, nor could he discover the patterns among these sequential formation patterns.

Of course, the deeper formation principles are even more elusive.

However, it's only the first day, and he has only transcribed a dozen formation patterns.

The dense forest is still vast, with many more formation patterns to copy and research, and he believes he will eventually thoroughly understand and master these "mist-like" divine formations in the forest.

Mo Hua nodded.

Then, after a short rest, he continued his inference on the Taoist Stele, wanting to familiarize himself more with these divine formation patterns and see if he had any oversights or could gain other inspirations...

...

At Taixu Gate, Elder's Residence.

Xun Ziyong pondered deeply, then decided to report to the Ancestor first.

"Divine Tao Array?"

Elder Master Xun's expression was calm, but his heart sank.

How could it be a Divine Tao Array...

Although that sect's legacy is famous for heavenly secrets and formations.

Half positive and half weird, two calculations of heavenly secrets, Immortal Sky Formation Flow, myriad formations as one... but there had never been heard of any legacy of the Divine Tao Array remaining.

Even that kid surnamed Zhuang, who is extraordinarily talented with extraordinary formation skills, has never used any Divine Tao Array in his life.

The Divine Tao Array itself, like the Yin and Yang Dualities Formation, is an ancient array from a very long time ago.

Yin and Yang Dualities are difficult due to their obscurity, as the Great Dao is simple yet elusive in meaning.

The Divine Tao Array is difficult due to its complexity, being mysterious and unpredictable, and contains unknown dangers.

Both types of formations are nearly lost.

But the Yin and Yang Dualities still remain within the formation system.

The Divine Tao Array, however, is distinct.

To this day, ordinary cultivators and even some high-level formation masters are unlikely to have heard of the term "Divine Tao Array."

Where did this child Mo Hua... hear of it?

And judging by the situation, he seems quite familiar?

Elder Master Xun frowned, his thoughts raging temporarily:

Was it taught to him by someone else? Or did he figure it out on his own?

Or is it truly a special legacy left by his master?

After all, their sect is unfathomable with a legacy that is extremely ancient and profound, and every generation's disciples are unbelievably talented geniuses.

Just because the boy named Zhuang doesn't know, doesn't mean the legacy doesn't exist.

If there is...

Then it's probably because he knew his end was near and left this particular legacy for Mo Hua before passing.

Elder Master Xun felt a pang of sentiment.

Knowing that his death tribulation was approaching, he still painstakingly left such a legacy, showing how much he valued Mo Hua...

With his aloof and rebellious nature, he had probably never worked so diligently for anyone in this lifetime...

Elder Master Xun felt somewhat melancholic for a moment.

These past events, Xun Ziyou didn't know.

He saw the Ancestor's changing expression and wasn't unfamiliar with the term "Divine Tao Array," so he guessed that this Divine Tao Array was likely the Ancestor's favoritism, privately passed on to Mo Hua.

But now he thinks about it, and it seems reasonable.

Without enough talent, even if passed on, it would be useless.

At least if the Ancestor passed this formation on to him, he certainly wouldn't be able to learn it.

Since he can't learn it, he can't blame the Ancestor for being partial.