

The Quest 18

Chapter 18: Choices

"Let's focus on the task at hand for now..."

Mo Hua mused to himself, then earnestly began to flip through the lower-tier techniques.

"Minor Five Elements Technique": A lower-tier technique suitable for cultivators with Five Elements spiritual roots. It allows for the cultivation of spiritual energy for seventy cycles. To achieve full mastery in the Qi-cultivation phase, at least one thousand spirit stones are needed, along with heaven-and-earth treasures like Century-Old Soil.

"Rejuvenation Technique": A lower-tier technique suitable for cultivators with Wood spiritual roots. It allows for the cultivation of spiritual energy for seventy-five cycles. To achieve full mastery in the Qi-cultivation phase, at least one thousand one hundred spirit stones are needed, along with heaven-and-earth treasures like Evergreen Wood or leaves older than ten years.

"Hundred Flames Technique": A lower-tier technique suitable for cultivators with Fire spiritual roots. It allows for the cultivation of spiritual energy for sixty cycles. To achieve full mastery in the Qi-cultivation phase, at least nine hundred spirit stones are needed, along with heaven-and-earth treasures like Magma Stone.

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Lower-tier techniques require a significant number of spirit stones for cultivation, but they are more accessible compared to superior techniques.

However, there are trade-offs: while lower-tier techniques consume fewer spirit stones, the spiritual energy cultivated is also less potent.

With Mo Hua's lower-tier spiritual roots, practicing lower-tier techniques means his spiritual energy is roughly only a bit more than half of those cultivators with superior-tier spiritual roots in the same realm.

This disparity is just the tip of the iceberg, as the difference in spiritual energy becomes more profound with superior mid-tier and high-tier techniques. The further one progresses in cultivation, the more significant the disparity in spiritual roots becomes.

Indeed, some are blessed by the heavens from birth...

Mo Hua shook his head, realizing that dwelling on unchangeable spiritual roots was pointless.

Mo Hua turned to the last page of the "Technique Catalogue" and was stunned by the fine print at the bottom.

"Technique Inheritance Fee... What is that?"

Mo Hua read the note below:

The techniques of the Tongxian Sect have been painstakingly compiled, studied, and refined by successive sect leaders and elders, representing the culmination of generations of effort.

Disciples must pay a certain number of spirit stones to qualify for inheritance.

The inheritance fee for superior-tier techniques is eleven hundred spirit stones, discounted to nine hundred ninety-eight for those with rare superior spiritual roots.

The fee for lower-tier techniques is slightly less, and even less for the lowest tier, but still requires two hundred spirit stones.

Mo Hua was dumbfounded.

There's an inheritance fee? I've never heard of such a thing before.

How can the sect charge fees so arbitrarily? That's way too exploitative!

With only eight spirit stones to his name, Mo Hua sighed helplessly.

This world of cultivation is all too real and harsh...

"Once you've chosen a technique and paid the inheritance fee, the sect will impart the technique to you. These matters are significant; it's best to discuss them with your parents or elders before deciding. Don't aim too high or miss your future path due to shallow judgment."

After delivering his advice, Instructor Yan left, his demeanor suggesting he was somewhat reluctant to enforce such matters.

As soon as he departed, the disciples gathered in small groups, buzzing with chatter:

"What's this inheritance fee? I've never heard of it before..."

"Who knows, if the sect charges it, can we even refuse?"

"The 'Heaven and Earth Mystique' alone costs over a thousand spirit stones just in fees, tsk tsk..."

"If you really study it, you might as well sell yourself to the sect."

"Thanks, my spiritual roots aren't even suitable."

"My parents both have mid-tier spiritual roots; why am I stuck with low-tier roots? There's hardly any technique I can choose..."

"You should read 'The Theory of Spiritual Root Evolution Among Cultivators' to understand why you, the offspring of mid-tier parents, ended up with low-tier roots..."

"Are there really any superior spiritual roots among us?"

"Yes, I have a distant cousin with superior roots, but his dad gambles and his mom is lazy. Their family is dirt-poor, and he ended up choosing a mid-low-tier technique, completely wasting his potential. It's truly tragic..."

"Even if I had superior roots, I couldn't afford to cultivate them."

"You could marry into a wealthier family..."

"Not a chance!"

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The disciples' discussions buzzed around Mo Hua, who propped his chin thoughtfully.

This sect inheritance fee was more than he had anticipated.

There were techniques in the "Technique Catalogue" that Mo Hua could choose from, but his parents had just scraped together his allowance, and they couldn't afford to pay so many spirit stones soon. Even if they managed to scrape together the funds,

it would be a huge burden on his family.

"If that's the case, I'll have to forego choosing a technique for now. I'll just make do with the 'Breathing Technique' for the time being, and once I've saved up enough spirit stones through drawing array formations, I'll pick a technique from the catalogue to practice. After all, I've only reached the third layer of Qi-cultivation; there's still some time before I break through to the fourth layer."

Mo Hua tossed the "Technique Catalogue" into his storage bag, with no immediate plans to bring it back to his parents. His priority was to earn spirit stones by drawing array formations.

Mo Hua continued his daily routine just like before, practicing cultivation, attending classes, and drawing array formations in his spare time.

Life in the sect was monotonous but still quite pleasant.

Tongling Peak was beautiful, shrouded in light mist with lush greenery and frequent birdsong, and scented with flowers.

After class, the outer sect disciples often wandered the mountains, admiring the flowers in groups. The female disciples were pretty and paired up for walks.

The male disciples chased after spirit beasts around the mountain. There were budding romances among male and female cultivators whispering sweet nothings in the flowery valleys, and jealous disciples occasionally fought.

But none of this concerned Mo Hua, who was devoted entirely to learning about array formations. Besides eating and attending classes, he spent all his time studying array formations, even practicing drawing array patterns on stone slabs in his sleep.

Among the familiar disciples, Da Hu was at the fifth layer of Qi-cultivation, while Shuang Hu and Xiao Hu had already reached the fourth layer. They were practicing at Tongxuan Peak. Although the two peaks were not far apart, they knew Mo Hua was focused on learning array formations and generally did not disturb him if it wasn't necessary.

Mo Hua had a kind and unassuming face, appearing harmless to humans and animals alike, and was generally well-liked on Tongling Peak. No one thought to bully him.

Moreover, Mo Hua was doing well in his studies of array formations, highly regarded by Instructor Yan. If anyone tried to bully him, and Instructor Yan found out, the consequences would be severe. Instructor Yan detested disciples causing trouble and not focusing on their cultivation. If he learned of any disturbances, the punishment would be extremely harsh.

Furthermore, Da Hu and the others always looked out for Mo Hua. They were tall and took the path of physical cultivation, planning to enter Dahei Mountain to become demon hunters.

They usually looked for opportunities to spar when there was nothing else to do. If something happened on Mo Hua's side, they would roll up their sleeves and hurriedly run over from Tongxuan Peak.

Mo Hua focused on his cultivation without distraction, the only exception being with An Xiaofu.

Mo Hua had borrowed ten spirit stones from An Xiaofu before the year's end and was now returning them.

When Mo Hua handed over the spirit stones, An Xiaofu was stunned. He had clearly forgotten about them and took a long time to remember.

The An Family was a prominent clan in Tongxian City, and he indeed did not care much about ten spirit stones. It could also be simply because he was forgetful.

After furrowing his brows in recollection for a while, An Xiaofu's expression became complex as he said, "You're the first one who's borrowed spirit stones and actually thought to return them."

Mo Hua felt a mix of emotions inside. This must be what they mean by the foolish son of a landowner.

Some of the lent spirit stones might have been forgotten by An Xiaofu himself, while others might have been intentionally not returned by others. He truly did not lack spirit stones, so he had grown accustomed to it over time.

"You're so... naive, be careful not to be deceived by others."

Mo Hua had started to say "foolish" but switched to a more tactful word, patting An Xiaofu's shoulder gently.

An Xiaofu's expression grew even more complex, even slightly touched:

"Little Mo brother, everyone says I'm stupid, but only you know I'm just kind-hearted. Of all the disciples I've met, you're the smartest. No wonder you're so good at drawing array formations!"

Mo Hua was at a loss for words for a moment.

A month passed, and the sect had a ten-day break, giving them two days off.

Mo Hua left the sect and headed to Destiny's Shop on North Street, where he handed over the Blazing Fire Array he had drawn to Manager Wang, then asked:

"Is there a more challenging array than the Blazing Fire Array that could earn more spirit stones?"

Manager Wang glanced at Mo Hua. "Did your brother ask you to inquire?"

"Yes!" Mo Hua nodded.

"There is

indeed," Manager Wang said, bending down to rummage through a drawer behind the desk before pulling out a diagram with several unfamiliar array patterns.

"The Earth Solidification Array can solidify soil and stone, commonly used by cultivators to construct and reinforce buildings and windows. It's a bit more challenging than the Blazing Fire Array, and each Earth Solidification Array pays two spirit stones."

Two spirit stones... that's double what the Blazing Fire Array paid.

"Can I take a look at the array diagram first?"

Manager Wang rolled his eyes at Mo Hua. "What's the use of you looking? It should be your brother."

Despite his words, he handed over the diagram to Mo Hua. Basic array diagrams like these weren't particularly rare, so there was no harm in letting others see them.

Mo Hua examined the diagram and realized many of the array patterns were unfamiliar, never taught by the sect instructors.

"I wonder how long it will take to learn this array..."

The inheritance fees for the sect's techniques were too expensive, and it would take a long time to earn spirit stones with the Blazing Fire Array.

Mo Hua wanted to draw a new array but hesitated. If he didn't draw well, he might lose spirit stones, and if he couldn't learn it within the deadline, the Array Pavilion would deduct the entire deposit.

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained!"

Mo Hua made up his mind. Even if he didn't learn it within the deadline and lost all twenty spirit stones, he could always go back to drawing the Blazing Fire Array to earn them back.

To become an array master, he would eventually need to draw arrays far more challenging than just one Blazing Fire Array for the rest of his life.