

The Quest 19

Chapter 19: Earth Solidification Array

The deposit for the Earth Solidification Array was twenty spirit stones, and Mo Hua took out ten from his previous earnings to give to the pudgy manager, receiving the Earth Solidification Array diagram and ten sets of paper and ink materials, with a deadline of twenty days.

After leaving the merchant's office, Mo Hua went to the pastry shop and spent two spirit stones on ten colorful cakes, then headed straight back to the sect, sharing some of the cakes with the three Hus.

The sect's meals were not great, and the three were often greedy for a treat, but there wasn't much good food around.

Buying some pastries was Mo Hua's way of treating them.

A few evenings later, after finishing his classes for the day, Mo Hua was in his room studying the Earth Solidification Array when he suddenly heard someone knocking.

Upon opening the door, he saw Shuang Hu standing there sneakily.

Shuang Hu quietly handed him a greased paper package, whispering:

"Keep it to yourself, don't tell others."

After looking around, he ran off like a thief.

The disciples' residence provided by Tongxian Sect was simple, with two modest wooden beds and tables in each room, just enough for living.

There were more luxurious accommodations within Tongxian Sect, but they cost extra spirit stones.

Mo Hua had had a sect mate as a roommate, but he dropped out this year—not because he couldn't afford the fees, but because he found cultivation tedious and was unwilling to continue, leaving Mo Hua alone in the room.

Mo Hua closed the door and opened the still-warm greased paper to find a freshly roasted chicken leg.

The chicken leg was the size of a fist, steaming hot, slightly charred, and emitting an enticing aroma, especially with a faint aura of spiritual energy.

It was the meat of a spiritual beast.

"This... it couldn't have been stolen, could it?"

The Hus couldn't afford such meat, and their sneaky demeanor suggested it was indeed stolen.

Mo Hua hesitated, then took a bite. It was slightly burnt and undercooked, unseasoned, and somewhat bland.

Culinary arts in the cultivation world are quite particular. Handling such ingredients is tricky without specific culinary training—like the meat of herbivorous demonic beasts, which is tough and requires intensive cooking.

The meat from spiritual beasts is finer, but cooking it still requires care.

Apart from meat, other vegetables and fruits carry their own flavors and some spiritual energy, which if not properly matched, can taste quite odd.

The chicken leg Mo Hua held was simply roasted, likely in a rush to avoid detection, which is why it wasn't very tasty.

But for Mo Hua, who hadn't eaten meat in over a month, it was good enough.

He finished the chicken leg with some effort, then lit a fire to burn the greased paper and threw the bones into the creek outside to completely erase the evidence.

After eating, Mo Hua spent some time refining the spiritual energy from the chicken meat, then returned to studying the array.

Sure enough, a couple of days later, Mo Hua heard that some Qi-cultivation disciples had stolen an elder's chickens, plucked them clean, and roasted them to eat.

The elder was furious, caught several disciples, and punished them severely.

A few days later, Mo Hua saw the three Hus with bruised faces and bumps on their heads.

They were stationed at Tongxuan Peak, and the elder had easily found them. They couldn't escape punishment, though it was mostly superficial, serving more as a warning to the other disciples.

The three Hus looked miserable but stood proudly; managing to steal a chicken right under an elder's nose was not something ordinary disciples could achieve.

They saw Mo Hua but pretended not to, and Xiao Hu even winked at Mo Hua, signaling him to pretend he didn't know them.

Mo Hua couldn't help but smile wryly, thinking he'd buy them more pastries next break.

It was still seven days until the next break, and thirteen days had passed since Mo Hua collected the array materials from the pudgy manager. His understanding of the Earth Solidification Array was not progressing well.

The array patterns in the Earth Solidification Array were unfamiliar to Mo Hua, much more complex than the basic earth-element array patterns taught by the sect, and quite challenging to grasp.

Mo Hua didn't find it too hard to memorize the array patterns, but practicing them on the stele consumed much of his spiritual sense and was prone to errors.

Either the drawn array patterns didn't form an array, or they were simply ineffective, unable to channel spiritual power.

After more than ten days of trial and error, Mo Hua was still clueless. Sometimes he thought he understood, but he would make a mistake as soon as he started drawing.

Finally, Mo Hua decided to seek advice from Instructor Yan.

One day after class

, while Instructor Yan was tidying up his desk, the students dispersed in small groups.

Mo Hua approached Instructor Yan with several basic earth-element array patterns, respectfully asking for guidance:

"Instructor, I don't quite understand these earth-element array patterns, could you please enlighten me?"

Instructor Yan looked at the array patterns Mo Hua handed over and said:

"These are basic Five Elements array patterns, quite standard and universal. If you're having trouble, just practice more."

The basic earth-element array patterns taught by the sect were indeed easy for Mo Hua, but he was actually curious about something else.

Mo Hua then brought out several earth-element array patterns from the Earth Solidification Array, saying:

"I came across these array patterns that seem different from what's in the textbooks, but I can't exactly point out how. They're also easy to mess up when drawing; I don't know what the issue is."

Instructor Yan was surprised and said:

"These are modified Five Elements array patterns, different from the standard ones taught by the sect. When drawing these, you need to change your brushwork and the order of strokes..."

Instructor Yan took a piece of paper and casually drew several array patterns, explaining as he went.

Mo Hua suddenly understood.

The method of drawing array patterns was somewhat similar to calligraphy; apart from the standard array patterns, there were also more unique ones, each with slight variations in brushwork.

These alternative array patterns were numerous and couldn't be classified, so the sect normally only taught the standard ones.

"No wonder they say the art of array is profound; the pitfalls are endless. If I hadn't asked the instructor, I wouldn't have figured it out even with two heads..." Mo Hua thought to himself.

"And to link these array patterns to form an array, like this kind of array..."

Mo Hua finally brought out the diagram of the Earth Solidification Array.

Instructor Yan glanced at it and recognized it, then looked at Mo Hua and said:

"This is the Earth Solidification Array; it's too early for you to be learning this."

"I was just curious and wanted to understand it thoroughly," Mo Hua earnestly requested.

"Well, knowing a bit in advance is good for you."

Instructor Yan was energized, having been teaching basic array patterns daily, and was clearly more excited to discuss a substantial array. He explained:

"Arrays are formed by the arrangement and connection of array patterns. Simple arrays contain fewer patterns and are straightforward; the more complex the array, the more array patterns it contains, and the more intricate the arrangement, spatial configuration, and connections. The Earth Solidification Array includes four patterns, which need to be drawn in a specific sequence and orientation..."

Instructor Yan spoke enthusiastically, and Mo Hua listened intently until the end. Instructor Yan seemed somewhat reluctant to stop, then added a warning:

"The path of array mastery is vast and profound. It's good for you to get a head start, but the things taught by the sect are just the basics, not even the basics. If you want to become a true array master, the difficulty and effort required are beyond your current imagination..."

Instructor Yan paused, then continued:

"Also, don't aim too high and attempt to draw arrays beyond your grasp. It's okay to look at them, but actually trying to draw them can easily lead to exhaustion of your spiritual sense, so remember this well!"

Mo Hua bowed respectfully: "I have learned much, thank you, Instructor!"