

The Quest 263

Chapter 263: Badge

The interrogation was complete, and Guang Toutuo was taken away to the Dao Prison.

Mo Hua asked Zhang Lan, “Uncle Zhang, was Guang Toutuo telling the truth?”

Zhang Lan pondered for a moment before responding slowly, “The beginning was true, but the latter part is unclear. It's probably half-true, half-false. This person is cunning; his words can't be fully trusted.”

Mo Hua nodded in agreement.

There was certainly something he was hiding about the map.

But what exactly the map pertained to, there were too few clues for Mo Hua to discern.

“Should we question that one-eyed cultivator again?” Mo Hua suggested.

He recalled that among the guilty cultivators, there was a one-eyed man who seemed to be a leader and might know more.

“Alright, when I have time, I'll interrogate him. For now, you should go back; this punishment chamber is not a pleasant place to be.”

Zhang Lan said, waving his hand in front of his nose as if to dispel the stench.

“Okay.”

Mo Hua also found the smell here unpleasant and oppressive if he stayed too long. He prepared to leave.

Zhang Lan suddenly added, “I'll come find you in a few days.”

Mo Hua turned back, puzzled, "What for?"

"Have you forgotten?" Zhang Lan winked at Mo Hua, "We agreed that if we caught Guang Toutuo, the Dao Court would give you a reward."

Mo Hua's eyes lit up, "What kind of reward?"

"You'll find out in a few days."

Zhang Lan kept the suspense.

A few days later, Zhang Lan indeed sought out Mo Hua and handed him a brocade pouch.

When Mo Hua opened it, he found a bronze badge inside.

The material wasn't particularly valuable, nor did it seem like a spiritual tool. Its design was somewhat ancient and even a bit crude.

"Just this?" Mo Hua felt a bit disappointed.

He had thought the Dao Court would give him some spell, cultivation technique, pill, or array.

Zhang Lan, exasperated, said, "Do you know what this is?"

Mo Hua shook his head.

"This is a badge of the Dao Court!"

Mo Hua's mouth dropped open, "Isn't it only the cultivators of the Dao Court who have official badges?"

"Correct." Zhang Lan nodded, "So this one is not official."

Mo Hua was stunned, “A fake?”

Zhang Lan sighed, “Unofficial.”

“Oh.” Mo Hua understood.

To become an official cultivator of the Dao Court, from the lowest Executors to the higher Deputy Chiefs and Chiefs, one had to pass rigorous examinations.

The examinations were stringent, covering many aspects like spiritual roots, techniques, martial arts or spells, family background, any criminal records, and whether there were any direct blood relatives who had been imprisoned or turned to evil within three generations.

Passing the examinations was no easy feat, often involving complex relationships and networks among cultivators.

For Mo Hua, officially passing the examination to become even a basic Executor was unlikely.

Getting an unofficial status was already a good deal.

“What’s the difference between unofficial and official status?” Mo Hua asked.

Zhang Lan explained, “Unofficial means you're not part of the official establishment. You can help the Dao Court in exchange for merit, which can be used to obtain spirit stones, techniques, spells, spiritual tools, and arrays.”

“But without official status, there's no promotion, no authority, and the benefits can't compare to those of a regular Dao Court cultivator.”

“Oh.” Mo Hua nodded, “So it’s like being a temporary worker.”

Zhang Lan snorted, “Many cultivators want even this and have no way to get it.”

Mo Hua leaned in and whispered, “Is this badge really that good?”

Zhang Lan pointed to the badge in Mo Hua's hand, "For others, it might just be a means to a job and some food. But for you, it's different. You're an Array Master; you don't rely on this to make a living, but you can use it to benefit from the Dao Court."

Mo Hua whispered back, "Uncle Zhang, aren't you part of the Dao Court? Encouraging me to take advantage of it, isn't that a bit improper..."

Zhang Lan glared at Mo Hua, "I'm not encouraging you."

"Don't worry, I won't tell anyone."

Zhang Lan sighed, "The Dao Court is vast and resource-rich. If you can benefit from it, it's due to your own abilities."

Only someone like you could have the Chief willingly give out a badge...

Zhang Lan thought silently.

Mo Hua pondered and asked, "How exactly do I benefit?"

Despite being a badge of the Dao Court, it only had some simple patterns and no inscription, looking like an ordinary bronze token with no special features.

Even though Zhang Lan said it could be beneficial, Mo Hua didn't know how.

Realizing he was always asking Zhang Lan questions, Mo Hua patted his chest and generously said:

"Eat and drink as you please today; it's on me."

After all, the restaurant was owned by his family.

Zhang Lan laughed, shaking his head, and explained:

“If you help the Dao Court without this badge, it counts as a favor. A favor can be light or heavy, and may not be reliable.”

“But with the badge, you earn merit, which can be exchanged for spirit stones, pills, and spiritual tools.”

“For example, you helped us capture Guang Toutuo. Without the badge, it’s merely a favor known to me and the Chief, but not necessarily recognized by others.”

“Now with the badge, this favor is recorded as merit, acknowledged by the Chief, and noted in the merit ledger. This is concrete recognition, undeniable by anyone.”

Mo Hua understood and asked, “How is this merit calculated?”

Zhang Lan took a sip of tea and continued:

“Firstly, it’s divided by grade. You’re at the Qi Refining stage, so your merit is Grade One.”

“Then it’s categorized by size: A, B, C, and D. Different levels of merit exchange for different things, but with limitations.”

“This time, for capturing Guang Toutuo, the Chief recorded a ‘B’ level merit for you, worth about a thousand spirit stones.”

“That much?” Mo Hua was shocked.

Over twenty people were involved in capturing Guang Toutuo, and Mo Hua alone could earn a thousand spirit stones.

“This is just the merit calculation. There are also bounties and miscellaneous rewards.”

“Is Guang Toutuo worth that much? Shouldn’t we catch more of them for a fortune?”

“What are you thinking?” Zhang Lan lightly rubbed Mo Hua’s head, “You think Guang Toutuo is a turnip? Catch as many as you want?”

Mo Hua thought about it and nodded.

Indeed, among those guilty cultivators, Guang Toutuo was at least a “big brother.”

Even if he was a turnip, he was the biggest one.

“But this merit is best saved for later. Exchanging it for spirit stones is a waste.” Zhang Lan added.

“Is there a particular reason?”

“The Dao Court is backed by the Dao Court with deep heritage and abundant resources. What they offer as rewards might not be the most valuable but are comprehensive.”

Zhang Lan patiently explained, “In future cultivation or array crafting, you may need some rare but not necessarily precious items. Even if you have spirit stones, they might be hard to find, and this is the trickiest part.”

“With this badge, you can directly exchange these from the Dao Court’s warehouse, saving a lot of trouble.”

Mo Hua nodded repeatedly.

Without Zhang Lan's guidance, he would have been unaware of these details.

Mo Hua then asked worriedly, “Does having this badge mean I must obey the Dao Court's orders?”

He didn’t want to become a “Dao Court’s lackey,” forced to act at their command.

“Don’t worry.” Zhang Lan raised his brows at Mo Hua, “This is another advantage of this bronze badge: you follow orders, not commands.”

“The Dao Court can call upon you, but they don't have true authority over you. If you don't rely on this job for a living, you can just throw the badge away, and no one can do anything to you.”

“Is this what they call ‘no desire leads to strength’?”

Zhang Lan pondered and nodded, “Something like that. As long as you don’t act selfishly, seeking only gains, it’s quite easy.”

Hearing this, Mo Hua felt relieved.

He was an Array Master and didn't rely on this for a living; the badge was just a means to benefit from the Dao Court.

Mo Hua sighed, “My identity is getting complicated now.”

He was primarily an Array Master, then a Demon Hunter, and now a little rogue benefiting from the Dao Court.