

The Quest 272

Chapter 272: Asking for Directions

Between the cliffs, on an invisible path, Mo Hua carefully walked.

After the time it takes to burn a stick of incense, Mo Hua finally reached the other side.

Climbing the opposite cliff, as soon as his feet touched the ground, the surrounding fog suddenly thickened, and the miasma became so intense that it made people feel dizzy and nauseous.

Mo Hua hurriedly took out two Miasma-Repelling Pills and swallowed them. He circulated his spiritual power to refine the medicinal effects, which made him feel a little better.

Looking around, he found himself in a small forest with no one else around.

Apart from the heavier fog and more toxic miasma, it was no different from the inner mountain.

"Where are those criminals? Could they not be here?"

Mo Hua muttered to himself.

He walked around cautiously for a while and found that the sunlight was obscured by the thick fog, making the forest misty and indistinguishable. He had no idea where he was anymore.

The most crucial point was that there were no traces of any cultivators.

Mo Hua sat on the ground, feeling a bit lost.

Could he have guessed wrong?

It shouldn't be...

Mo Hua thought for a moment and suddenly found it strange.

On the other side of the cliff, the sunlight was bright, and the fog wasn't that thick. But here, on this side, separated by a stone path, why was the fog so dense?

The sunlight on both sides was not very different, so even if the fog was thicker, it shouldn't be to this extent.

Mo Hua released his spiritual sense and took a closer look, suddenly frowning.

There was a faint weave of spiritual power in the fog, like a pattern, condensing around him.

Ordinary cultivators might not notice it, but Mo Hua could tell at a glance that this was an array master's work!

Mo Hua suddenly understood.

The dense fog in this deep mountain wasn't naturally this thick. It was an array set up by an array master, causing the fog in the deep mountain to become so dense that you couldn't see your hand in front of your face.

Mo Hua's spirits lifted. He followed the position of the array patterns and found a large tree. He took out a dagger and chiseled away the bark.

As the dried bark was peeled away, there indeed lay an array.

The array had nine patterns and was a First Grade array. The patterns were mainly water-based, with some variations in technique and a slightly unfamiliar form.

Mo Hua hadn't seen it before but guessed it must be a fog array.

The array's function was to condense water vapor, making it float between the ground and the forest, forming an enduring fog.

Mo Hua found it intriguing. Seeing no one around, he took out paper and pen and began to meticulously copy the array.

Typically, learning arrays is best done with array diagrams.

Array diagrams include detailed array patterns, brushstroke sequences, ink ratios, array types, array hub structures, and other considerations.

Reverse-engineering the drawing from an existing array is quite difficult.

But no matter how difficult, it was just an ordinary First Grade array. The patterns were somewhat special but still within the scope of Five Elements Arrays, which was not too challenging for Mo Hua.

After drawing it five or six times, Mo Hua had grasped about seventy to eighty percent of it and had a good understanding.

The fog can be deceptive, but the arrays set within it are fixed and cannot deceive, especially not Mo Hua.

Not only was this within the bark, but scattered around on the ground, rocks, and shrubs, this array was also drawn here and there.

Based on the positions of the fog arrays, he could roughly deduce the path within the fog.

With this thought, Mo Hua's vision cleared.

He didn't need to worry about the fog. As long as he used the fog arrays as landmarks, he wouldn't get lost.

The array master who set up the fog array intended to confuse the directions with the dense fog.

But the fog arrays instead helped Mo Hua find his way.

Mo Hua put away his paper and pen, expanded his spiritual sense to sense the positions of the fog arrays, and began walking deeper into the mountains.

After a few steps, Mo Hua suddenly thought, if others could set arrays, so could he.

In his storage bag, he had some stone needles marked with the Sima Compass Array from the inner mountain, which he could now use along the way.

If anything unexpected happened, he would be able to know in advance.

Preparation is key. Being unprepared leads to failure.

It's always better to be prepared than to be caught off guard in times of danger.

Mo Hua then walked along the path of the fog arrays, occasionally placing the Sima stone needles in hidden spots.

As he walked, Mo Hua became more familiar with the foggy forest's path.

However, after half a day, he still hadn't seen any sign of the criminals.

Mo Hua frowned. Had he missed something? Or were the criminals hiding too well?

Should he go back first and return another time?

Just as he was hesitating, he heard footsteps.

Mo Hua was startled. Seeing no rocks or dense vegetation around to hide, he quickly used the Passing Water Step to swiftly climb up a nearby tree.

Perched on the tree branches, Mo Hua realized he had already used the Concealment Technique. Generally, Qi refining stage cultivators couldn't see him or sense him with their spiritual sense.

But it's always better to be cautious.

What if it was a Foundation Building cultivator?

The footsteps came closer, and the vague outlines of two figures appeared in the thick fog, accompanied by some indistinct conversation.

"Brother... is it this way? You didn't lie to me, right?"

"Don't worry, it's correct."

"This fog is too damn thick... we've been walking for so long..."

"If the fog wasn't thick, we would be discovered, wouldn't we?"

"Can we get in?"

"Don't you trust me?"

...

As they got closer, it turned out to be two cultivators, one fat and one thin, both at the late stage of Qi refining.

Mo Hua breathed a sigh of relief. As long as they weren't Foundation Building cultivators, it was fine.

Even if these Qi refining cultivators saw through his Concealment Technique, he had ways to deal with them.

Moreover, Qi refining cultivators couldn't see through his Concealment Technique unless they had Foundation Building spiritual sense.

Mo Hua carefully observed. In the fog, he couldn't see their faces clearly, but he noticed their different clothing and heard their distinctive voices—one sharp, one carefree. Their actions were a bit sneaky, suggesting they weren't good people.

"Could they be criminals?"

Mo Hua's eyes lit up. If they were criminals, then there was a clue.

Even if they weren't the deep mountain criminals, they must know the way inside the deep mountain.

The fat and thin cultivators walked side by side. Mo Hua quietly climbed down the tree and stealthily followed them.

The two walked and chatted, unaware that they were being followed.

They wandered through the foggy forest, occasionally checking maps and pointing out mountain paths. After turning several corners, they stopped in front of a large tree stump.

"Is this the place?" the thin cultivator asked.

"Yes," the fat cultivator nodded.

"What now?"

"Wait."

"Wait for what?"

"Midnight."

Mo Hua's heart skipped a beat, recalling the saying:

"At midnight, the path reveals itself."

It seemed they were outsiders looking to join the deep mountain criminals.

Mo Hua frowned. Did he also need to wait with them?

It was getting late, and he wanted to return early.

But he had come this far. If he didn't follow them, the clue would be lost, and it would be hard to find another opportunity.

"Let's wait..."

Mo Hua decided to be patient.

By noon, the fat and thin cultivators were bored and hungry, so they took out some dry food to eat.

The thin one spat after a few bites:

"This is so dry and hard, like bird droppings, really awful!"

The fat cultivator glanced at him indifferently, "Better than nothing. Otherwise, you'd be eating prison food in the Dao Court."

The thin cultivator grinned, "Can't eat much prison food before it's execution food."

The fat cultivator shook his head.

Suddenly, the thin cultivator asked, "Brother, how many lives have you taken?"

The fat cultivator thought for a moment, raised an eyebrow, and said, "Just six."

The thin cultivator gave a thumbs up, "Brother, you're impressive. I only have four."

He started counting, "An old man over a hundred, a cultivator in his thirties, a female cultivator, and her child."

The fat cultivator was slightly shocked, "You count the child too?"

"If not, it's only three. I didn't want to embarrass you."

"No matter." The fat cultivator patted his shoulder, "Follow me into this deep mountain, and we'll have plenty to eat and drink, no one will look down on you."

The thin cultivator was delighted, "I'll rely on you, brother!"

The fat cultivator took out a bundle from his pocket, which contained a piece of jerky and a flask of wine.

"I saved this specially. We met by fate, escaped from the Dao Court's dogs, and traveled a long way to this deep mountain. It's worth celebrating."

The thin cultivator's eyes lit up, "You thought of everything, brother."

They shared the meat and wine. Though it wasn't much, they were content.

After eating, the fat cultivator noticed it was almost time. He suddenly frowned and pointed to the tree stump:

"Looks like something is there."

The thin cultivator, slightly drunk, stood up and checked.

The fat cultivator quietly moved behind him and, taking advantage of his distraction, swiftly stabbed him through

the heart with a sword.

The thin cultivator felt a sudden pain in his chest, looked down to see the sword tip protruding from his chest, piercing his heart. As the sword was withdrawn, blood spurted out.

He turned slowly, eyes filled with disbelief.

The fat cultivator remained indifferent, "Good brother, this meal was your execution meal."

The thin cultivator showed anger and sorrow, tried to struggle, but the fat cultivator grabbed his throat, pressed him against the tree stump, and decapitated him with a swift stroke.

The head rolled away, blood splattering everywhere, staining the fat cultivator's clothes.

He didn't care.

"We were brothers. You drank my wine, ate my meat. It's fair I use your head."

He then picked up the head and threw it toward the dark mountain wall.

As the head hit the ground, the mountain wall vanished.

A bloody and eerie mountain gate appeared, with three ancient characters above:

Heishan Stronghold.