

The Quest 374

Chapter 374: Assessment Evaluation

After arranging accommodation, Mo Hua, accompanied by Mo Shan, took a stroll around the outer mountains of the Azure Cloud Sect.

At first, he only felt that the Azure Cloud Sect was vast, with many things to see, but after walking for several rounds, the novelty wore off, and each mountain, each water feature, each building, each platform, seemed to be much the same as the others, leaving not much left to explore.

Mo Shan then went back to his room to calmly review Formation methods.

However, common first-grade Formations were too simple and there was not much to review.

Mo Hua could only draw the Reversed Spirit Formation a few times and review the Formation Pivot of the Five Elements Slaughter Demon Great Formation.

When it was time to eat, he went to scrounge a meal at the Azure Cloud Sect.

The Formation Master assessment was managed by the Dao Court Tian Shu Pavilion and conducted by the Azure Cloud Sect.

The Azure Cloud Sect paid particular attention to it, daring not to be the slightest bit negligent.

Otherwise, not only would they be profaning the Daoist Court, risking accountability from the Daoist Court Official, but they would also offend the Formation Masters coming to participate in the assessment, causing the sect's reputation among Formation Masters to deteriorate.

Those who could partake in the assessment were all “prospective first-grade” Formation Masters, and the Azure Cloud Sect dared not treat them lightly.

Therefore, regardless of accommodation or food, all was meticulously arranged. They stayed in spacious accommodations and ate very abundant meals.

Mo Hua ate many kinds of Spiritual Meat that he had never tried before.

The texture of the Spiritual Meat was indeed finer, without the slightest hint of gaminess, and it was shrouded in dense Spiritual Energy. After eating and refining it, the Spiritual Power within his Qi Sea also increased slightly.

Only, the taste was quite ordinary. Because of the rich Spiritual Energy, it was a bit like “eating Spirit Stones,” and the flavor was nowhere near as delicious as what his mother cooked.

But Mo Hua was not picky with his food.

Furthermore, considering the preciousness of these Spiritual Meats, he would eat a little more.

Mo Hua was well-accommodated and well-fed, and the disciples of the Azure Cloud Sect were all respectful and polite, so he did not encounter any trouble.

After two days like this, the official assessment day arrived.

The location of the exam was set in the Wenxian Palace on the main peak of the Azure Cloud Sect.

The hall was broad and towering, solemn and majestic, with dozens of desks and cases inside.

The desks and cases were made of rosewood, with wide surfaces, delicately carved with cloud beast Patterns, and they felt weighty with a gentle sheen; they were clearly very valuable.

Around the desks and cases were Formations to isolate Divine Sense, sound, and sight.

If a Formation Master made any inappropriate move, it would trigger a warning from the Formation, and the offender would be expelled from the exam hall and stripped of the assessment qualification.

Mo Hua presented his Jade Slip to the examiner, entered the Wenxian Palace, found his desk, sat down quietly, and felt the solemn and serious atmosphere, which made him somewhat nervous.

He looked around and suddenly felt less nervous.

Mr. Zhuang was right; most of the people taking the exam with him were old Formation Masters with white hair, as well as some middle-aged Cultivators with strands of grey.

Mo Hua silently thought to himself,

"These uncles and grandpas have been studying and taking exams all their lives and still face the prospect of failing; I'm still young, and even if I don't pass this time, it's no big deal..."

With this thought, Mo Hua completely relaxed.

He then realized that everyone seemed to be secretly watching him.

It started with the examiners at the door.

His hair was half white, his demeanor stern, and his face rigid.

He wore a white Taoist Robe embroidered with a Seven Stars pattern on his chest.

The Seven Stars were in the shape of the Big Dipper, with the other six stars dim, only the chief star of the Big Dipper, that is, the Tian Shu star, shone brightly, emitting a soft starlight.

This signified that he was a Cultivator from the Tian Shu Pavilion within the central Seven Stars Pavilion of the Daoist Court.

He was also the chief examiner for the Formation assessment.

When Mo Hua handed him the Jade Slip, he could clearly see the astonished look on the examiner's face.

After looking at the Jade Slip and staring at Mo Hua for a while, he slowly nodded his head, admitting Mo Hua into the examination hall.

Mo Hua entered the Wenxian Palace.

Soon after, he noticed that everyone was staring at him, either openly or covertly.

Watching him enter the door, walking through the aisle, approaching the desk, and sitting down straightforwardly.

In an instant, a collective gasp arose.

It seemed that they realized that this youngster in his teens was really here for the assessment, and all of the Formation Masters looked momentarily dumbfounded.

This was an assessment for a first-grade Formation Master, after all...

First-grade Formation Master!

The crowd exchanged glances, at a loss for words for a moment.

Even though Mo Hua had seen the collapse of Large Formations, at this moment, amid everyone's shocked, envious, or suspicious gazes, he too felt a bit out of place and embarrassed.

Fortunately, after half an hour, everyone had arrived, and the examination was about to begin, so no one was surreptitiously watching Mo Hua anymore.

Mo Hua also breathed a sigh of relief.

A moment later, the sound of the Azure Cloud Sect's bell rang out.

Everyone was silent.

The examiner looked around solemnly and said,

"The Dao Court Tian Shu Pavilion, Second Grade Black Mountain State Boundary, Azure Cloud Sect's Wenxian Palace, the official start of the first-grade Formation Master assessment!"

After finishing his speech, he raised an iron box with gold and jade inlay and announced solemnly,

"Now, in front of everyone here, I will unlock the Formation Seal of the exam questions."

The examiner manipulated several small Array Plates, combining them with the iron box, and after a flash of light, the Formation was unlocked, and the inlaid gold and jade all fell off.

This was a one-time Formation; once activated, the gold and jade fell, irreparable, to prevent someone from opening it in advance and stealing the exam questions.

The examiner opened the iron box to show everyone.

Inside the iron box were several dozen Jade Slips, which contained the questions for the assessment.

The examiner ordered the distribution of the Jade Slips, along with the Daoist Court's specified Formation Pen, Formation Paper, Spiritual Ink, inkstone, and other items.

This meticulous and complicated process aimed to prevent cheating among Formation Masters.

Afterward, the official assessment began.

Mo Hua looked at the Jade Slip.

The exam questions were in two parts: one part was Formation theory, which examined Formation methodology, including types of Formations, the origin stream of Formation Methods, the history of Formations, and interactions among Formation Patterns, etc.

Mo Hua was not particularly skilled at these, but that was in comparison to noble family's sons like Bai Zixi with rich family education. Having studied Formations with Mr. Zhuang and absorbed them over time, he was familiar with the basic first-grade Formation theory.

The second part was the actual Formation, which examined the depiction of practical Formations.

Mo Hua glanced at the exam's Formations and completely relaxed.

First-grade Melting Fire Formation, First-grade Golden Light Formation, First-grade Water Prison Formation...

They were all Five-elements Formation Methods, and all were Formations that Mo Hua had drawn many times.

The Five Elements Slaughter Demon Great Formation encompassed most of the confining and killing, as well as Architectural Formations within the Five Elements.

Mo Hua had constructed the Five Elements Slaughter Demon Great Formation, and he even drew out the Formation Pivot of the Large Formation, let alone the simple Single Formations used to fill it in.

But Mo Hua remembered the teachings of his father, "When hunting a rabbit, a lion must still use all its might."

The simpler the task, the more one must not be careless.

Mo Hua first completed the Formation Theories, and then began to seriously draw the Formation.

But no matter how serious he was, it was just an ordinary First-grade Nine Patterns Formation; frankly, there wasn't much difficulty.

Mo Hua started with meticulous care, drawing stroke by stroke.

As he drew, habit took over, his brush strokes became swift and powerful; with a few quick movements, the Formation was completed in no time.

Then Mo Hua was stunned:

"I seem to have finished the exam..."

He looked up at his surroundings; though the Formation obscured the view, he could still see vaguely.

Most of the Formation Masters had just finished the Formation Theories and were then starting to earnestly draw the Formation with a solemn expression, as if facing a great enemy.

But Mo Hua had already finished drawing his, and there was nothing left for him to draw...

He checked his work again and found there wasn't much to check.

It was just a First-grade Formation; he could see through it at a glance. What was there to check?

Mo Hua thought about drawing some other Formations for fun to pass the time, but he had no extra Formation Paper left.

Suddenly, he found he had nothing to do...

Should he hand in his paper early?

Mo Hua thought about it and then shook his head.

That would be too showy, and it would also be disrespectful towards the "First-grade Formation Master assessment".

"The nail that sticks out gets hammered down."

His mere participation in the assessment at his age was already high-profile enough; it was better to keep a low profile at this time.

"I'll wait until everyone else hands in their papers, and then I'll hand mine in along with them..."

Mo Hua decided.

Afterwards, he sat up straight for a while but still felt extremely bored.

The Formation Master examination provided a full day's time; he used to think this was good and ample. Now, however, he found it was perhaps a bit too generous...

He certainly couldn't just sit here and do nothing all day.

With nothing better to do, Mo Hua, without any ink or paper, leaned on the table, tracing Formation Patterns on the smooth surface idly with his finger to relieve the boredom.

But it was really too boring...

Mo Hua's small face pressed against the table surface, and as he drew, his upper and lower eyelids began to fight, and soon he fell asleep with soft snores...

His snores were light and gentle.

But soon they were discovered by an examiner.

The examiner's face was as still as water, silently muttering the name on the jade slip:

"Tongxian City, Mo Hua!"

When Mo Hua entered, he had taken note of him.

What kind of child, only in his teens, comes to take part in a Formation Master's assessment?

What kinds of backdoors had he gone through?

Whose connections had he relied on?

He originally thought that this child was recommended by some noble family or Sect.

He was planning to order the local Taoist Court to revoke their nomination rights for fifty years.

But to his greatest surprise, it turned out that the child was recommended by the Taoist Court itself!

To bribe the Taoist Court, what a hefty price that must have been, truly extravagant!

During the assessment, it's unavoidable that some under-the-table dealings happen; usually, the Taoist Court turns a blind eye and lets it go.

But they shouldn't go too far!

Letting a child take part in an assessment, are they treating everyone as fools?

The assessment for a First-grade Formation Master is an extremely serious matter; now it's been turned into child's play by these people, how preposterous!

The examiner was furious inside.

He didn't confront the situation immediately to avoid affecting the assessment of the other Formation Masters.

Moreover, he still harbored a slim hope that this child might genuinely possess some talent for Formation and actually qualify for the assessment, so he intentionally or unintentionally kept an eye on Mo Hua's answers.

The supervising position in the Wenxian Palace was a high platform. Standing on it, everything was in clear view,

Naturally including all of Mo Hua's behaviors.

The child at first answered the Formation Theories with some seriousness.

But it wasn't long before, whether he had finished or didn't know how to continue, he put the Theories aside and started drawing the Formation.

His initial drawing of the Formation was also serious, stroke by stroke, with great precision.

But as he drew, his true colors showed.

He glanced at the Formation Diagram only once, then completely abandoned it, brushing with swift and fluid motions, as if he was doodling without a care.

He quickly used up several sheets of Formation Paper...

Having wasted all his Formation Paper, he became bored and started laying his head on the table, his little hands tracing something or another.

While tracing, he actually...

Actually!

He fell asleep!

The examiner's eyelids twitched violently with rage.

How outrageous!

This was a mockery of the Taoist Court, of Formations, of the examination hall, and him as an examiner!

The examiner looked at Mo Hua again, thinking about getting angry, but seeing him sleeping so sweetly, looking so innocent, he felt a pang of softness in his heart, and he couldn't help but sigh,

"A child, what does he know?"

Then his gaze turned cold.

This surely must be the scheme of the family or Sect behind this little cultivator, bribing the Taoist Court official to let this Junior Formation Master, who hadn't studied Formations for long, to take part in the First-grade Formation Master's assessment.

The child probably came in a daze, unable to answer the questions nor draw the Formations, not sure what to do but to lie down and sleep.

The examiner sighed and silently said to himself,

"Let him sleep for now; this matter can be pursued later..."

Thus, during the First-grade Formation Master's assessment, after completing his exam, Mo Hua laid down on his desk and slept soundly, from beginning to end...