

The Quest 384

Chapter 384: Spirit Field

Tao Cultivation encompasses a hundred trades.

In the vast Nine State, with its varied regional customs, Cultivators rely on the mountains and waters, adapting to local conditions to make a living through these trades.

As Spirit Farmers who till and plant Spirit Rice crops, they indeed belong to one of the hundred trades of Tao Cultivation.

Tongxian City, being mountainous and lacking arable land, sources its Spirit Paddy and Spirit Rice from an Immortal City to the west that lives off cultivating Spirit Fields.

This was the first time Mo Hua had ever seen Spirit Fields as extensive as those stretching out before him.

To the south of Thousand Families Town, the Spirit Fields stretched out in blocks, arranged like a grid and encompassing about a hundred acres.

Amid the Spirit Fields were verdant rice seedlings, with misty water vapor enriching the space between them.

The sky was high and distant, with clouds drifting lazily; the rice fields were lush and stretched out far and wide, like an emerald carpet unfurling towards the horizon.

Where the distant blue sky met the Spirit Fields was a range of mountains shrouded in layer upon layer of clouds and mist.

Mo Hua took a deep breath, the air crisp and refreshing. His spirits lifted, his eyes brightened, and he suddenly had an insight.

All beings are born of nature, and the earth nourishes all.

The heavens display the Great Dao, while the earth is an extension of it.

And indeed, traces of Formation could be seen amongst these Spirit Fields.

On the embankments of the Spirit Fields, there were hard soil and stones, upon which Formation Patterns were drawn.

But these weren't Ultimate Formations; they were simple Cultivating Soil Formations, designed to nurture Spirit Rice and accumulate moisture.

Mo Hua extended his Divine Sense and sensed only ordinary Cultivating Soil Formations. There was no special Formation aura, which was somewhat disappointing.

Thinking it over, he decided to explore deeper into the fields.

Near the Spirit Fields there were paths, and Mo Hua followed one for a while when he suddenly furrowed his brow.

It was just morning time, the sun was bright and pleasant, and there were Spirit Farmers working the land.

Most of these Spirit Farmers were older, their clothes tattered and stained with mud, their skin dark and lean, fingers rough and cracked.

Bent at the waist, they seemed oppressed by something, struggling to breathe.

In the bright morning sun, within the vibrant Spirit Fields,

these stooped, expressionless Spirit Farmers looked terribly out of place.

Mo Hua sighed.

As he walked on, he encountered an elderly man by the side of a Spirit Field.

The elder was probably also a Spirit Farmer, dried up and thin, his face as yellow as wax and carved wood, with a hint of despair upon it.

A little grandson followed beside him, wiping his tears with dirty little hands.

Mo Hua's heart softened, so he asked,

“Old man, is something the matter?”

The elderly man turned his head woodenly and, upon seeing a young, fair-looking Cultivator with clear eyes, he hesitated repeatedly before finally letting out a deep sigh,

“The field is ruined again...”

His voice carried a thick bitterness and hardship.

Mo Hua paused, concerned, and asked,

“How can the field be ruined?”

The elder pointed to the embankment and said hoarsely,

“The Formation is broken. Without the Formation, the Spirit Field becomes barren, unable to retain water, causing the crops to wither. There'll be no harvest this year...”

By the end of his sentence, the elder's voice was tinged with a slight choke.

Turning his head, Mo Hua saw indeed that a Cultivating Soil Formation on the embankment had failed, its Patterns present but devoid of Spiritual Power flowing through them.

Mo Hua exhaled in relief; he had thought it was something serious...

It was only a simple six-Pattern Cultivating Soil Formation.

“This Formation is simple, I’ll fix it for you,” Mo Hua offered.

The elder was stunned, “You... you know Formations?”

The child beside him looked at Mo Hua with eager eyes.

Mo Hua nodded modestly, “I know a little.”

“But that Formation is quite difficult...”

“I just happen to have studied it.”

Seeing Mo Hua’s young age yet composed demeanor, appearing confident, the elder believed him somewhat, but he was still conflicted,

“What if it’s worse off...”

“But it’s already broken,” Mo Hua pointed out.

The elder was taken aback and thought it made sense. After all, it was already ruined, and they had no other options. Yet, since the Formation was crucial to their livelihood, he still couldn’t let go of his worry.

After hesitating and struggling with himself, the elder seemed to resign himself to his fate and said despondently,

“Young man, go ahead and draw...”

He truly had no other solution.

Mo Hua took out his Formation Pen and dipped it in ink.

The elder's expression changed subtly. This young Cultivator seemed to know what he was doing...

He couldn't help but look forward with anticipation.

Then he saw Mo Hua approach the edge of the field, his small hand holding the pen. He casually drew a few strokes and then looked up, clearly saying to the elder,

"All done."

The elder hadn't even regained his senses, nor seen what Mo Hua had drawn, his expression one of disbelief,

"Is it... is it really fixed?"

Just a glance, a few strokes, and it was repaired?

"Yes," Mo Hua nodded, "It's quite simple."

The elder walked over to the field, examined the Formation, and indeed saw a faint yellow light glowing. He felt as if he were still in a dream.

The water vapor in the field was accumulating again.

The Spirit Rice no longer looked wilted, and their color turned a shade greener.

The old man couldn't help but smile. As he was smiling, he seemed to think that with a harvest secured, neither he nor his grandson would starve to death. Then he squatted by the field and began wiping his tears.

Mo Hua felt an inexplicable heartache.

Some cultivators in this world live such humble lives.

Merely being able to survive had already driven them to tears of joy...

“Thank you, young brother...”

The old man said earnestly, filled with gratitude. Having dealt with the fields all his life, he was at a loss for words and could only utter a “thank you”.

Mo Hua asked:

“Your Formation broke, haven’t you asked someone to fix it?”

The old man replied helplessly, “We asked, ten Spirit Stones to fix it once, but once fixed it breaks again, and when it breaks we repair it...”

“For the sake of repairing this Formation, I’ve poured in all the remaining Spirit Stones in my home, and now I’m in debt to the Sun Family for dozens of Spirit Stones... If we continue repairing, even if we give this year’s entire harvest to the Sun Family, I still won’t be able to pay off the debt.”

“The Sun Family?”

The old man pointed towards Thousand Families Town, “The wealthiest Sun Family in town.”

“This Formation is their ancestral skill. The Sun Family says only they can draw it and only they can fix it. So, whatever amount of Spirit Stones they ask for, that’s what we have to give.”

Mo Hua asked with confusion, “Haven’t you asked another Formation Master for help?”

The old man’s face grew troubled. “In Thousand Families Town, there are no other Formation Masters...”

“Occasionally, if a Formation Master passes through, they also wouldn’t help us to stay in the Sun Family’s good graces.”

“The Sun Family is like a local bully; those people don’t dare to offend them...”

Mo Hua’s feelings were complex.

He looked again at the Formation in the Spirit Field and noticed that there had indeed been attempts to repair it, but it was done with the cheapest ink, costing next to nothing, and the craftsmanship was extremely crude, showing only the most basic level of expertise.

It was likely the work of an apprentice or an unskilled Formation Master.

Or perhaps, the Sun Family had intentionally done a shoddy job.

Fixing it well meant it would be less likely to break again, which would mean they couldn’t exploit Spirit Stones from repairs as easily.

Ten Spirit Stones to fix it, just once...

Over time, it’s clearly not something an ordinary Loose Cultivator could afford to do.

Mo Hua then asked, “What if you can’t repay the Sun Family’s debt?”

The old man sighed, “Then we sell our sons and daughters to them. The boys become servants, the girls become maids.”

“Once they enter the Sun Family as slaves, they have to change their names, and they can no longer recognize their own parents. They can only work for them like cattle and horses...”

Mo Hua’s gaze grew sharp.

He finally understood where the numerous servants and maids serving the Sun Family had come from...

As the old man spoke, he suddenly came to his senses and apologized:

“I’ve taken up half the day with my complaints...”

Then, as if recalling something, he showed a look of shame, “For the spiritual stones to repair the Formation, I...”

He wanted to offer them, but his home was so poor that he couldn’t even produce a single Spirit Stone.

Mo Hua waved his hand dismissively, “It was nothing; don’t mention it.”

The old man still felt uneasy and said:

“Young gentleman, if you don’t mind, please come to my home for a simple meal.”

The look of guilt in the old man’s expression was strong.

Mo Hua thought for a moment and then agreed. He also had some questions he wished to ask.

Along the way, the two of them chatted idle.

Mo Hua learned that the old man’s surname was Ding, and his family of four lived near Thousand Lamps Town in East Mountain Village, and was a lineage of Spirit Farmers.

They could till Spirit Fields, but the income was meager, not enough to support a family.

So his son and daughter-in-law had gone out to make a living, only returning about once every year or two.

His grandson and he stayed home, subsisting on a few thin acres of land, enough to have a meal to eat.

Old Ding brought Mo Hua home.

As expected, Mo Hua saw that the home was indeed bare, very humble.

Old Ding awkwardly said, “This... my home really...”

Mo Hua shook his head, not minding it at all.

Being a Loose Cultivator himself, he knew what poverty was like.

Old Ding went to start a fire to cook.

After a while, a bowl of porridge, a dish of salty vegetables, and one free-range chicken were placed on the table.

The chicken was freshly killed.

When Mo Hua entered the house, he had seen it clucking in the courtyard.

Though this chicken was also raised by a cultivator and considered a Spirit Beast, it hardly contained any Spiritual Energy and wasn’t worth much, which was why some Loose Cultivators would keep a few, just feeding them grass.

But this was the only chicken Old Ding had.

The pickled vegetables tasted bitter and salty.

In the porridge bowl there were a few grains of rice, but this was only in Mo Hua’s bowl.

In Old Ding’s and his grandson’s bowls, the porridge was watery, without a single grain.

People who tilled the land, yet had no rice to eat.

Mo Hua fell silent for a moment.

“Loose Cultivators in Tongxian City have a hard life, but the vast majority of Loose Cultivators in the Cultivation World probably have it even worse than in Tongxian City.”

This was something Elder Yu had said to him, but it was the first time Mo Hua truly felt its weight.

He thought of the banquet the Sun Family had that morning, covering an entire table, as well as the remaining rice and meat that was disposed of without a second thought...

Mo Hua sighed.

Without toiling the fields, they dressed in finery and ate sumptuously, while the hardworking peasants couldn't even fill their stomachs.