

The Quest 385

Chapter 385: Formation

Old Ding's youngest grandson lay sprawled out on the table, sipping the clear porridge that was devoid of a single grain of rice, forcing himself not to look at the chicken on the table. Yet occasionally, he couldn't help but sneak a peek.

The little grandson, around five or six years old, was named Ding Miao.

His name was likely chosen in the hopes that he would grow up just as smoothly and healthily as the seedlings in the fields.

The growth of the seedlings signified a year of abundant harvest.

The growth of a child signified a life of peace and smooth sailing.

Mo Hua finished the porridge in his bowl, ate a piece of chicken, then pushed the entire plate of meat towards Miao.

"I'm full, let Miao have it."

Old Ding hurriedly said, "How could we possibly accept this?"

Mo Hua said, "I'll ask you some questions, and you answer them for me. That will serve as payment for the Formation Painting."

Old Ding said, "Young master, ask whatever you need to, I'll speak without holding back. It's part of my duty, but this..."

However, Mo Hua wouldn't allow him to refuse. "It's settled then."

But Ding Miao shook his head, his childish voice speaking up:

"Big brother, eat."

Mo Hua patted his head, speaking gently, “You eat it.”

Ding Miao intended to refuse.

His grandfather had taught him to always treat guests well.

But he was truly hungry, and it had been so long since he knew the taste of meat.

He couldn’t resist and took a bite of the chicken.

Then, lost in the savory aroma of the chicken, he began to eat one piece after another...

Mo Hua patted his little head again.

Ding Miao looked up, eating the meat, his eyes bright and shiny.

Old Ding watched, his heart aching.

This was his own grandson, who often didn’t even have enough rice to feel full, let alone meat...

On one side, Ding Miao was wholeheartedly devouring a plate of chicken.

Mo Hua then asked Old Ding:

“Old Ding, were all the Formations in this field painted by the Sun Family?”

Old Ding nodded, “It’s been modified and improved across hundreds of years since the Sun Family ancestors started with it.”

“The ancestors of the Sun Family?”

With some emotion, Old Ding began to recount:

“The Old Ancestor of the Sun Family, in particular, was a famously great Formation Master and a first-rate kind man.”

“He was originally a cultivator from elsewhere who ended up here by chance. Seeing the cultivators in Thousand Families Town struggle, he showed kindness by painting Formations in the Spirit Fields.”

“These Formations enriched the soil and water, ensuring a bountiful harvest of Spirit Rice, and kept us from worrying about food and clothes.”

“The cultivators of Thousand Families Town were extremely grateful and tried fervently to retain him, even building a mansion for him...”

“That’s the very mansion belonging to the Sun Family now, though they’ve renovated it several times at great expense, and it no longer retains its original appearance.”

“What happened afterward?” Mo Hua asked.

“Later on...” Old Ding sighed, “the Old Ancestor of the Sun Family died for unknown reasons. There are rumors that he died from overstudying Formation Patterns, which shattered his Sea of Consciousness, but this is just hearsay; the internal affairs are unclear to me...”

“After the death of the Old Ancestor of the Sun Family, we remembered the kindness of the Sun Family and remained grateful to them. Every harvest, we would send some Spirit Paddy their way.”

“Gradually, the descendants of the Sun Family came to take this for granted. They felt we owed the Sun Family and ought to offer up ‘tribute’ to them.”

“In years of poor harvest, when we gave less, the Sun Family would curse us, calling us ungrateful wretches.”

“What’s worse is that they later harbored ill intentions, demanding not just the crop yield but also the village’s young women to serve as maids for them... How could we possibly agree to that?”

“Thus, a kindly gesture turned into enmity...”

“As time went on, our conflicts with the Sun Family deepened. The Sun Family, relying on these Formations, started making exorbitant demands, and we ended up having to give them most of our annual harvest.”

“But we can’t refuse. The land here is adjacent to the mountains and infertile; without the Formations, the Spirit Rice in the fields would soon wither away...”

Old Ding heaved a deep sigh.

Mo Hua listened, also feeling some emotion, and then asked:

“What about the Formations in the fields then? Are they the same as the ones painted by the Old Ancestor of the Sun Family, unchanged?”

Old Ding scratched his head, trying to remember. He said:

“It seems not...”

“According to the elders among the cultivators in the village, the Formations painted by the Old Ancestor had no trace and needed no repairs, lasting for many years.”

“Most of the Formations now were painted by the Sun Family’s descendants, often break, and need frequent repairs.”

But he was unclear on the specifics.

The matters of the Old Ancestor of the Sun Family were somewhat ancient, and what he knew was hearsay, and as for the workings of the Formations, he was completely ignorant and couldn’t provide an explanation.

Mo Hua furrowed his brows.

This was strange.

If they were indeed Formations, how could there be no trace?

The descendants of the Sun Family should know the Formations their ancestor painted, so why repaint them?

Was it simply to extort and exploit the cultivators who farmed the land?

Did the Sun Family know what the Formations their ancestor painted were like?

Unable to figure it out, Mo Hua thought of another question:

“The Sun Family wants you to sell your sons and use your daughters as servants, but they didn’t ask you to sell them the land?”

Normally, Spirit Fields are the most valuable.

The Sun Family not seizing this large opportunity must have had a reason.

“The Sun Family has a family precept...”

“A family precept?”

Old Ding nodded and said, “The Old Ancestor of the Sun Family stipulated a rule long ago: No member of the Sun Family shall ever seize an inch of land from Thousand Families Town, or they would be stripped of their surname, their name removed from the family records, and cast out of the family!”

Mo Hua was surprised and exclaimed, “That Old Ancestor of the Sun Family truly was a broad-minded and good Formation Master, a pity that...”

A pity the descendants were unworthy.

On the other side, Ding Miao had finally finished eating the chicken. He looked at Mo Hua, his face flushed with embarrassment.

The chicken was originally for Old Ding to entertain Mo Hua with, but he had eaten it all.

Mo Hua then smiled and said:

“I’d like to take a look at the fields, could you take me there?”

The now full Ding Miao nodded vigorously, “Mhm!”

Afterward, Old Ding and Miao led Mo Hua to tour the Spirit Fields.

Mo Hua asked some questions, and Old Ding answered them all.

But Mo Hua still couldn’t find a clue about the Ultimate Formation.

Looking around, there were only Cultivating Soil Formations with six Formation Patterns in the Spirit Field.

As dusk approached, Mo Hua made his goodbyes and returned to the Sun Family.

After greeting Mr. Zhuang, Mo Hua went back to his room to exchange information with Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi.

Bai Zisheng said,

“The Family Head of the Sun Family, Sun Yi, is an idiot!”

“How so?” Mo Hua didn’t quite understand.

Bai Zisheng looked around and whispered,

“He’s been studying Formations for seventy or eighty years, he’s even reached Foundation Establishment, but his Formation skills haven’t reached First Grade, and his Divine Sense hasn’t reached ten Patterns...”

Mo Hua’s mouth fell open, “Is he blockheaded?”

Bai Zixi glanced silently at Mo Hua and said indifferently,

“Not everyone learns Formations that fast.”

Mo Hua was slightly stunned and whispered, “It shouldn’t be that slow... What does he do all day?”

Bai Zisheng curled his lip, “Eating, drinking tea, watching women dance, and he even invited me and Zixi to watch...”

“Doesn’t he study Formations?”

“He does,” said Bai Zisheng. “He practices one Formation Painting every day...”

Mo Hua fell silent.

No wonder...

Practicing just one Formation Painting a day is less than a fraction of a fraction of what’s needed...

In what year of the monkey or month of the horse would he become a First Grade Formation Master?

It seemed not a lack of aptitude, but an indulgence in ease and lazy temperament.

“What about the Formation skills of the other people in the Sun Family?”

Bai Zisheng was even more disdainful, “A bunch of cowards and incompetents.”

“With the Family Head like this, don’t even think about the others; his son, Sun Ze, can only draw four Formation Patterns to this day...”

Mo Hua couldn’t help but sigh.

The ancestors of the Sun Family once had a true Second Grade Great Formation Master who could bring immense benefits to the Cultivators in the area.

Moreover, this Second Grade Formation Master likely even comprehended an Ultimate Formation.

Yet his descendants were bossing others around, indulging in pleasures.

Even after reaching Foundation Establishment, they hadn’t become First Grade Formation Masters.

“What about you, did you find anything out?” Bai Zisheng asked Mo Hua.

Mo Hua reported what he had learned, including the matters of the Sun Family ancestors, the monopoly on Formation for profit, and the Spirit Farmers without rice to cook and so on.

Listened and Bai Zisheng grew a bit angry, “I didn’t think he was not only an idiot but also a scoundrel.”

Mo Hua asked, “Wouldn’t the Taoist Court officials care about such things within the Sun Family?”

Bai Zisheng didn’t understand and looked toward Bai Zixi.

After thinking for a moment, Bai Zixi said softly,

“Usually, they wouldn’t care.”

“The Taoist Court is established in the Immortal City and governs the territory of the Immortal City. The areas beyond the city are governed by the local Clans, Sects, or local Elders. They just have to pay some Spirit Stone taxes every year.”

“For small places like this, the Taoist Court has the right to intervene, but its reach is limited, and generally, they won’t bother unless there’s a serious issue.”

Mo Hua nodded.

The layers of the Taoist Court are strictly hierarchical, but there are many fragmented places below, where interests are intricately interwoven, and governance is relatively loose.

As long as it doesn’t affect the stability of the Taoist Court, many things are overlooked by those above.

Mo Hua couldn’t help but turn to Bai Zixi and praised,

“Senior Sister, you know so much.”

Bai Zixi nodded slightly, her expression calm, but her long eyelashes fluttered, revealing a hint of pride amidst her prettiness.

“So, you still haven’t found any clues about the Ultimate Formation?” Bai Zisheng asked.

Mo Hua shook his head regretfully.

“What do you plan to do next?”

“I’ll have some free time to go check out East Mountain Village and the Spirit Paddy again. I’ve done the Calculations, and there should be some clues in the Spirit Paddy.”

Even though the hundred-acre Spirit Paddy might not have it now, it was likely that the Old Ancestor of the Sun Family once painted an Ultimate Formation there.

It was the “traceless and markless” Formation that Old Ding mentioned...

In the following days, when Mo Hua found the time, he would still visit East Mountain Village.

The people from the Sun Family reported his movements to Sun Ze.

Sun Ze then reported them to his father, the Family Head of the Sun Family, Sun Yi.

“Dad, what exactly does this brat want to do?” Sun Ze said unhappily.

Sun Yi frowned, saying nothing.

“I’ve sent people to ask around. A few days ago, the kid went into the Spirit Field, fixed a Cultivating Soil Formation, had a meal at an old man’s house, and then wandered around the Spirit Field a few more times.”

“He’s been going there almost every day these past few days.”

A flash of brilliance crossed Sun Yi’s eyes, “You said he fixed a Cultivating Soil Formation?”

Sun Ze nodded.

Sun Yi found it hard to believe, “This little brat is actually able to fix a Cultivating Soil Formation with six Patterns?”

He then looked at his son with a mixture of frustration and disappointment, saying,

“If you spent a fraction of your attention on important matters, you could go beyond just being able to draw four Patterns, and not bring shame to our Sun Family!”

“Dad, you’re not much better yourself, not even a First Grade Formation Master after reaching Foundation Establishment...”

Sun Ze muttered inwardly, but didn't dare to speak out or argue back. He then said,

“Dad, what exactly does this unassuming brat want to do?”

Sun Yi's expression became more solemn, and then a glint of shrewdness burst in his eyes,

“Formations... He couldn't be targeting the Sun Family's Formation heritage, could he...”

Sun Ze was also taken aback, and then he frowned, a bit disheartened, saying,

“But, dad... What heritage does our family have to pass on?”

Aren't they all just common goods?

Deceiving those who don't understand Formations and only know how to farm.

To say that the Formations in the fields must be repaired by our Sun Family.

But anyone with clear eyes knows that they are just ordinary Cultivating Soil Formations.

“Dad, you can fool others, but don't delude yourself...” said Sun Ze.

Sun Yi rebuked, “What do you know? Our Sun Family has a secret heritage that isn't passed to outsiders!”