

The Quest 39

Chapter 39: Grading

Mo Hua frowned slightly.

Something wasn't quite right...

Why would the third-level Qi cultivation array examination include a formation with six array patterns? Could it be that the instructor had handed out the wrong exam papers?

It seemed unlikely for the instructor to make such a mistake—could there be a deeper meaning?

At this point, several disciples were fervently writing, but most likely they knew nothing and couldn't leave the paper blank, so they were blindly sketching with their eyes closed.

Mo Hua collected his thoughts and reminded himself:

"If the instructor has chosen to test us on a formation with six array patterns, there must be a purpose behind it, perhaps to show us the profound and extensive nature of array formations, and to prevent us from becoming arrogant..."

After calming his emotions, Mo Hua focused on studying the array.

The name of the formation was "Steady Water Formation," and while its purpose was not specified, it was well annotated. Although the formation included six array patterns, the patterns were fairly simple and had been discussed frequently during lectures, so they were not obscure.

Still, memorizing the array patterns and learning to draw the formation in a short period of time, let alone completing it, was highly unlikely.

If everyone failed to draw it, the instructor would likely grade based on the completeness of the formation.

Mo Hua did his best to remember as much as he could.

Once he began focusing on drawing the formation, time passed quickly, but when the examination time ended, Mo Hua had only managed to draw slightly more than five array patterns. He hadn't had time to check the drawn patterns for errors, which was a bit regrettable. He deeply understood that he still had a long way to go in mastering array formations.

After completing the formation, it was sent to the Hall of Virtue at Tongming Peak.

All the instructors of Tongxian Sect would archive and grade the coursework there.

Yan Jiaoxi, usually a stern instructor, now showed a displeased expression, looking quite dissatisfied at a middle-aged cultivator wearing the elder's robe of Tongxian Sect:

"Elder Qian, what is the meaning of this? Weren't we only supposed to test the first two patterns of the Steady Water Formation? Why was the entire formation tested?"

"The path of array formations is profound and extensive. I wanted the disciples to understand this early on."

"And then?" Yan Jiaoxi raised an eyebrow.

"Then, they will understand the difficulty and not foolishly aspire to become array masters."

Elder Qian calmly stated, "A formation with six array patterns is the threshold for becoming an array master. Such a challenging formation is not something these talentless outer sect disciples can learn."

Yan Jiaoxi, suppressing his anger, said, "I am the instructor of the outer sect. Isn't Elder Qian being a bit too interfering?"

"Elder Yan, these outer sect disciples will never become array masters. Teaching them is a waste of time."

"How so?"

Elder Qian's demeanor became more polite, "Elder Yan, we are all aware and greatly admire your level of skill in array formations. But with your talents, teaching these dim-witted outer sect disciples, especially those who are independent cultivators, don't you think it's beneath you?"

"What do you mean?" Yan Jiaoxi's gaze sharpened.

Elder Qian earnestly said, "If you agree, the Qian family would be honored to hire you as our instructor to teach our family members about array formations. Whether it's spirit stones, spiritual items, or inheritance of formations, just say the word, and we will do our best to satisfy your demands."

Yan Jiaoxi blinked slowly, not speaking.

Elder Qian paused, then added, "Of course, if you prefer not to leave Tongxian Sect, that's fine too. I can recommend you to become an elder of the inner sect and teach array formations to the inner sect disciples, even the direct disciples. At that time, all the sect's direct disciples would have to respectfully address you as 'Master', and your status would be much higher than that of a regular elder."

Yan Jiaoxi was silent for a moment before slowly saying, "And if I don't agree?"

Elder Qian's expression cooled, "Why must Elder Yan be so stubborn?"

"I teach array formations to pass on knowledge, not for these worldly gains," Yan Jiaoxi said.

Elder Qian scoffed, "Fine, keep your noble act!" and left without another word.

Zhou Jiaoxi then said, "Elder Yan, why bother? The Qian family is powerful, and we cannot afford to offend them."

Yan Jiaoxi sighed, "I just can't stand it. If things continue this way, the sect and the families will be indistinguishable, and these lower-level independent cultivators will have

no way to pursue cultivation."

Zhou Jiaoxi also sighed, "When the old Sect Master was in charge, he could withstand the pressure from the Qian family. Now that he is aging and about to step down, Tongxian Sect might change..."

Yan Jiaoxi also looked worried.

"From my point of view, Elder Qian did show you respect. You have indeed been very dedicated in teaching these outer sect disciples, but what good does it do? There aren't many who can go far on the path of array formations, and the lack of array masters among independent cultivators isn't without reason."

Zhou Jiaoxi advised, "Don't let it come to a point where you can't even be an instructor."

Unmoved, Yan Jiaoxi replied, "As long as I am an instructor, I will do what needs to be done."

Zhou Jiaoxi shook his head and said no more.

Yan Jiaoxi sighed again and calmed himself before opening the array formation examination papers on his desk.

Even if there were errors in the exam questions, he still took the grading seriously.

Naturally, the results were a mess.

Most disciples could only draw one or two array patterns, and some who didn't know how to draw anything sensible doodled random things to bluff their way through.

Yan Jiaoxi silently noted down these disciples' names. Not knowing was understandable, but doodling carelessly was not.

Some did better, usually those from wealthier families in Tongxian City who had been exposed to array formations from a young age. These disciples could generally draw three array patterns, which was the limit for a third-level Qi cultivator's spiritual sense, and already quite commendable.

Yan Jiaoxi thought of Mo Hua, a child of an independent cultivator with an exceptional talent for spiritual sense, who was rare indeed.

Based on Mo Hua's progress, he estimated that he could draw about four and a half array patterns, possibly more if he hadn't slacked off during the summer break.

As Yan Jiaoxi continued grading, he finally came across Mo Hua's paper and was startled when he opened it.

The paper was neatly filled with five and a half array patterns. The last half-pattern was clearly rushed due to lack of time, but there were no mistakes in the technique.

That is to say, Mo Hua, a third-level Qi cultivator, had managed to draw five and a half array patterns on his first attempt at the Steady Water Formation!

Five and a half array patterns...

This not only required experience and insight into array formations but also robust spiritual sense support.

Yan Jiaoxi had seen Mo Hua draw array formations before. While he could draw four patterns, it was a bit forced, and his spiritual sense was not yet sufficiently broad.

But two months had passed, and he had managed to draw five and a half patterns of the Steady Water Formation.

If true, this indicated that not only was Mo Hua naturally gifted with extraordinary spiritual sense, but also that his spiritual sense was growing at an astonishing rate. Aside from cultivation progress, there were no known rapid methods to enhance spiritual sense.

Yan Jiaoxi held his breath, unable to believe what he saw, and re-examined Mo Hua's paper before slowly exhaling, murmuring to himself, "This can't be possible..."

Hearing this, Zhou Jiaoxi noticed Yan Jiaoxi's distracted state and asked, "Elder Yan, what has happened?"

Regaining his composure, Yan Jiaoxi considered for a moment before saying, "Some disciples' array formations are just too far off the mark. I was momentarily taken aback..."

Zhou Jiaoxi showed a look of understanding, "Teaching these disciples is indeed not easy, Elder Yan, don't take it too seriously. You should cultivate your character and maintain your calm..."

Yan Jiaoxi nodded, but his eyes remained fixed on Mo Hua's paper, his emotions fluctuating.