

The Quest 441

Chapter 441: Corpse Formation (1)

...

How is that possible?

Zhang Quan's pupils constricted.

How could this kid be a Formation Master as well?

Was it him who forced Zhang Quan to show himself by detonating the Earth Fire Formation in the mines and then used an Earth Series Formation to counter the Escape Technique, preventing Zhang Quan from running away?

Zhang Quan looked at Mo Hua again.

Mo Hua's eyes were clear yet profound, bright and yet elusive.

At first, he only felt that this gaze was sinister and detestable.

Now, it seemed to indeed be a sign of exceptional intelligence and a powerful Divine Sense.

Zhang Quan thought of someone.

When that person got cunning and calculating, his eyes looked just like this.

And that person was a Formation Master, too.

This gaze did indeed resemble that of a Formation Master.

A chill ran through Zhang Quan's heart.

This is bad...

If this kid is a Formation Master, he most likely has seen through the formations on these Walking Corpses.

The problem now is, how much has he figured out?

Does he, after all, know what kind of Formation this is?

A cold light gradually appeared in Zhang Quan's eyes.

The best approach now was to silence him by killing him.

Once a person died, they would forever keep their mouth shut, and whatever they knew would be buried in the ground, never to be known by anyone.

But Zhang Quan knew all too well.

Under the current circumstances, he had no way to silence him by killing him.

The young man in white had profound cultivation and was valiant in battle; Zhang Quan couldn't take him down.

The beautiful girl's Taoist Skills were lethal and extremely dangerous; he didn't dare provoke her.

On the surface, this kid was the weakest among them.

But he was exceptionally cunning, full of schemes, and his methods were sinister and slippery, making him quite troublesome to deal with.

What's more, Zhang Quan remembered that this kid could conceal himself.

Whether it was by spell or Spiritual Artifact, his means of concealment were extremely clever, and even Zhang Quan's Foundation Establishment Divine Sense couldn't detect it.

That being the case, Zhang Quan couldn't catch him at all.

At this thought, Zhang Quan became angrily frustrated.

To be repeatedly humiliated by this kid despite being a mighty Foundation Establishment Cultivator, yet unable to do anything about it, was infuriating!

He couldn't kill any of the three of them.

Since he couldn't silence by killing, he had to "destroy the corpse and erase the traces."

He couldn't allow the traces of the Formation to remain!

Zhang Quan's decision was firm, and his expression became grave.

On the other side, Bai Zisheng had already started to help Mo Hua capture zombies.

He dodged the Iron Corpse and instead attacked the ordinary Walking Corpses, flicking his long spear to send Spiritual Power surging, crippling the limbs of the Walking Corpses so they couldn't move.

In a short while, four or five Walking Corpses were subdued by him.

Mo Hua also began to take action, coordinating with Bai Zixi to capture zombies.

Using the Water Prison Technique, Mo Hua immobilized the Walking Corpses, and then Bai Zixi would sever their limbs with her sword light.

The trio acted quickly and accurately, and in an instant, quite a few zombies were subdued.

Zhang Quan's eyelids twitched.

He couldn't wait any longer!

His gaze turned cold, and he shook the Blood Rope Marked Copper Bell in his hand.

The copper bell summoned corpses, and a chilly wind blew in gusts.

The situation on the battlefield abruptly changed.

These Walking Corpses, with ferocious expressions, stopped attacking Mo Hua and the others and began to fight and cannibalize each other instead, aiming to destroy the Formation near their hearts.

And that Iron Corpse began hunting the lower-level Walking Corpses, punching and clawing out their chests, leaving behind dark and black-blood oozing cavities.

The zombies began self-destructing, obliterating any traces.

Seeing this, Bai Zisheng angrily said:

"Damn you, can't you play fair?"

Zhang Quan sneered, disregarding him, and kept shaking the copper bell in his hand.

Mo Hua watched the copper bell intently, then pointed with his small hand and loudly said:

"There's a Formation within the bell, Brother, snatch his bell!"

Zhang Quan was startled.

Bai Zisheng's eyes lit up, and without bothering about the Walking Corpses, he teleported with his movement technique and thrust out with his spear, trying to knock the copper bell from Zhang Quan's hand.

Zhang Quan hastily retreated, avoiding Bai Zisheng's spear, and immediately put away the copper bell, cursing inwardly.

This kid's eyes are really sharp!

Dammit!

If this keeps up, he'll probably see right through to his underwear!

He couldn't drag this out any longer.

Zhang Quan dared not expose the copper bell anymore, but instead kept it hidden in his sleeve, quietly shaking it to activate the Self-Destroying Formation of Walking Corpses and to drive the Iron Corpse to protect his escape.

Bai Zisheng wanted to stop him, but with the Iron Corpse in the way, he couldn't.

The scene became chaotic for a moment, and Zhang Quan finally managed to escape.

Before leaving, Zhang Quan looked back at Mo Hua, recording the new and old hatreds in his heart.

He said with a dark tone:

"Little devil, I will remember you!"

"One day, I will kill you, refine you into a zombie, and keep you by my side to serve me tea and water, toil like an ox or horse, and be enslaved by me for life!"

After saying this, he ran off, not giving Mo Hua a chance to retort.

He was afraid Mo Hua would say something else that he couldn't withstand. Enjoy new chapters from empire

In this regard of infuriating people, he admitted he couldn't compare to this kid.

Mo Hua curled his lips and muttered:

"Runs after cursing, what a coward."

He had already thought of what insults to hurl, but Zhang Quan ran too fast for him to get a word in.

Mo Hua felt a bit of regret; it seemed he would have to wait for the next time.

Once Zhang Quan escaped, the battle stopped.

After an intensive battle, the mine was left in a complete mess.

Rocks shattered, mine tunnels utterly destroyed.

...

The ground was littered with the remains of walking corpses, some of which had their heart meridians gouged out and were twitching unconsciously on the ground.

Zhang Quan took the Iron Corpse away, and most of the remaining walking corpses killed each other, their chests destroyed, with only a few corpses' chests intact.

Besides that, there were the coffins on the mine.

These coffins should be used for corpse refinement and storage, totaling dozens of them.

The Iron Corpse was hidden in an iron coffin, while most of the other walking corpses were in wooden coffins.

After a fierce battle, Bai Zisheng was also very tired. He took a breath, recovered his Spiritual Power, and then asked:

"Should we continue the pursuit?"

Mo Hua thought for a moment and shook his head:

"Not in a hurry, let's cast a long line to catch a big fish."

Bai Zisheng was slightly taken aback, "Are there still big fish? Isn't Zhang Quan a big fish?"

"There are."

Mo Hua nodded, pointing to the coffins and walking corpses on the mine, "These are too few."

Bai Zisheng opened his mouth, "Are these considered few?"

Dozens of fearless walking corpses, in combination with the Iron Corpse, were likely more than a match for an average cultivator in the initial stage of Foundation Establishment.

Although Bai Zisheng's Cultivation was profound, he too felt tired after fighting to this point, and the consumption of his Spiritual Power was also significant.

If there were more walking corpses, other than fleeing, he would have been powerless.

Otherwise, he would eventually be worn down to death.

Mo Hua frowned and said:

"Zhang Quan has been hiring murderers for decades. In these decades, who knows how many mining cultivators have been killed, and then their bodies..."

"He must be buying these corpses for corpse refinement."

"So many bodies couldn't possibly add up to just these few dozen zombies."

"Elder Yu once told me about the cunning of the rabbit that has three burrows."

"Zhang Quan, doing such Demon Path deeds that the Taoist Court would not tolerate, must have left himself several escape routes."

"So I guess, he definitely has other hiding places, many many coffins, and inside those coffins, many, many zombies..."

Bai Zisheng opened his mouth wide, and then spoke indignantly:

"This Zhang Quan, really deserves to die!"

Mo Hua nodded in agreement.

Then he added, "Actually, there's another problem."

"The Formation?" Bai Zisheng asked.

"Yes." Mo Hua nodded and said, "Zhang Quan, at first glance, doesn't know about Formations, but the bell he uses for corpse control, the zombies he refined, including these coffins, they are all full of Formations..."

"This shows that there is someone helping him draw Formations!"

"This person must have high accomplishments in Formation principles and might even have comprehended the Ultimate Formation..."

"Such an Ultimate Formation might not be a regular Formation but one of the Evil Formations within the Ultimate Formations..."

Mo Hua had a somewhat grave expression.

"Ultimate Formation..."

Bai Zisheng also felt a chill in his heart, and looking at the zombies lying on the ground, he asked Mo Hua:

"Are the Formations on these walking corpses Ultimate Formations?"

Mo Hua propped up his chin in thought and said:

"Possibly..."

"Possibly?"

"Yes." Mo Hua looked at the zombies on the ground and nodded, "Right now, it's hard to say, I need to study it first..."

...

In the wasteland on the other side of the mine.

The ground bulged, rocks rolled, and Zhang Quan's figure surfaced as he gasped for air, feeling a sense of relief in his heart.

He had finally escaped.

He had never thought that in his lifetime, he would be chased by three young cultivators like a dog that had lost its home.

The surroundings were desolate, no other cultivators or Monster Beasts in sight.

Zhang Quan took a moment to catch his breath, a trace of doubt arising in his mind.

Why had he been found?

He had clearly discarded that needle...

Zhang Quan released his Divine Sense to scan his surroundings and suddenly, his gaze grew sharp as he fumbled through his messy hair, pulling out a fine needle after a long search.

Could there be another one?

Zhang Quan took in a sharp breath, panic setting in his heart.

He immediately snapped the fine needle and threw it away, then used Earth Escape again, fleeing to another hillside creek, letting the Iron Corpse stand guard, before he began to feel a little safer.

After that, he changed his clothes, washed the blood stains, bandaged his wounds, and examined himself with his Divine Sense. Finding nothing suspicious on the outside of his body, he finally completely relaxed.

Zhang Quan was somewhat sentimental.

Just a few kids, yet so deep in thought and so covert in action, it was impossible to guard against.

Zhang Quan was troubled.

Then he remembered something and became worried again.

Although he controlled the zombies with the Blood Rope Marked Copper Bell and destroyed most of the Formation, there were still a few walking corpses left behind.

Walking corpses left behind meant traces of the Formation were left behind.

Zhang Quan frowned, remembering that person's admonition:

"This Formation must not be discovered by anyone. Once discovered, you must either kill the witness or destroy the corpses and the evidence!"

That person's expression became terrifyingly stern when he said these words.

Zhang Quan pondered for a moment, then chuckled lightly.

He was worrying over nothing.

"A few zombies, a few pieces of incomplete Formation, probably won't reveal much..."

Learning Formation was difficult.

And this Formation for corpse refinement was even more abstruse, unfathomable, and transcending ordinary Formation principles.

Even a Formation Master would hardly be able to learn it.

That young boy, still in the Qi Refinement stage, understanding it would be strange.

Zhang Quan sneered, unconcerned.

Suddenly a mountain breeze blew, stirring the creek water, with the sunlight reflecting in the water shining brightly.

The clear and profound gaze of Mo Hua flashed through Zhang Quan's mind.

Zhang Quan's heart skipped a beat, and he muttered to himself:

"He should... not understand it, right..."

Chapter 442: Erase Tracks (1)

The cleanup at the mine was taken over by the Taoist Court.

Cleaning up the mine, dealing with the walking corpses, confiscating the coffins, and subsequent investigations—these tasks were all entrusted to Situ Fang.

Observing the chaotic scene, Situ Fang was also secretly shocked.

That so many zombies could be subdued and Zhang Quan driven into panicked flight...

You have to understand, Zhang Quan was a Foundation Establishment Cultivator.

Now it appeared that the matter of the Corpse Cultivator who had entered the Demon Path and refined an Iron Corpse was very dangerous and quite troublesome...

Yet he was still beaten to the point of revealing his trump cards and fleeing in disarray.

The capabilities of these few young cultivators from Mo Hua were much greater than she had expected.

Then Situ Fang felt a bit helpless.

They were the Taoist Court Officials, yet when it came to the pursuit of Zhang Quan, Mo Hua and his people always took a step ahead, leaving them only to wrap things up.

And now the cultivators of the Taoist Court were indeed wrapping things up.

Mo Hua, on the other hand, strolled around with his hands behind his back, casually pointing here and there, seemingly like a little "Supervisor" in action.

Watching this, Situ Fang couldn't help but feel a mix of amusement and frustration.

After a while, when Mo Hua wandered over, Situ Fang was about to give him a piece of her mind.

The Taoist Court of South Yue City wasn't established just to clean up messes!

But before she could voice her thought, Mo Hua, sensing that something was amiss, immediately called out sweetly, "Sister Situ," and then sincerely said,

"Thank goodness you were here to help out a lot!"

After saying that, he patted his little chest, looking genuinely relieved.

"So many zombies, they really scared me."

Situ Fang's expression was complex, unable to say anything.

Which part of you looked scared? Just now, when you were staring at the formations on the zombies' bodies, your face was more excited than anyone else's.

So Situ Fang could only sigh helplessly again.

Seeing she wasn't angry, Mo Hua quickly changed the subject, asking,

"Sister Situ, is this matter very serious?"

Situ Fang was slightly startled, her expression becoming grave as she nodded and said,

"Very serious."

Then looking at the coffins and walking corpses all around, she couldn't help but sigh,

"And it seems to be getting more serious..."

Mining Cultivators disappearing, hoodlums murdering, Zhang Quan buying corpses, and now brazenly engaging in Demon Path activities, extensively refining corpses...

Situ Fang's face grew increasingly somber.

She had begun to guess that what lay before her was likely just the tip of the iceberg.

If just the tip of the iceberg had resulted in so many deaths and refined corpses,

What about the entire iceberg?

How many more would die, how many more corpses would be refined?

Just thinking about it made Situ Fang feel a chilling dread.

This could potentially be South Yue City's largest case in hundreds, or even a nearly a thousand, years.

Mo Hua's gaze flickered as he asked,

"Has the Court Leader of South Yue City said anything about this case?"

Situ Fang paused, then shook her head with a complex expression,

"The Court Leader hasn't said anything. I suppose he wants to keep things quiet. After all, if the situation gets blown up, he'll have to take responsibility. The best approach would be to play down major issues and dissolve the minor ones..."

Such a serious matter, and still it could be diminished and dissolved...

Mo Hua clicked his tongue and whispered quietly,

"Has he been involved in corruption and embezzlement, I wonder..."

Situ Fang gave Mo Hua a slight glare, "Don't put it so bluntly."

Mo Hua then softened his wording, "Could it be that he's succumbed to 'irresistible courtesies'?"

Situ Fang was taken aback for a moment, "Who taught you to speak like that?"

"Uncle Zhang..."

Situ Fang was at a loss for words, "Couldn't he teach you something more appropriate..."

He had taught something good too.

The Water Passing Step movement technique that Mo Hua used was taught by Zhang Lan.

But on that matter, Zhang Lan had told Mo Hua not to mention it, so Mo Hua had no choice but to nod and say,

"He didn't teach me anything good!"

Situ Fang silently took note, planning to go back and complain to a few uncles and elders of the Zhang Family.

She would accuse Zhang Lan of speaking irresponsibly and leading children astray outside.

Unaware of Situ Fang's thoughts, Mo Hua asked again,

"Sister Situ, what kind of person is the Court Leader of South Yue City?"

"What kind of person?" Situ Fang was briefly taken aback.

"Like..." Mo Hua thought for a moment and came up with several descriptors, "Is he sly or cunning, greedy or not, deep or shallow, bad-natured or not..."

"Not a single good word in there..."

"I don't think he's a good person, so I didn't use good words."

Situ Fang felt helpless but thought it best to tell Mo Hua,

"The Court Leader of South Yue City, his surname is Qian..."

"Qian?"

"Yes." Situ Fang nodded, "Coincidentally, his surname is Qian too, but he likely has no marital ties to the Qian Family of Tongxian City."

"The Court Leader, he..."

Situ Fang hesitated before lowering her voice and saying,

"It's not that he's outright bad, just greedy for wealth and pleasure-loving, coveting enjoyment, and not really concerned with the affairs of the Taoist Court..."

Mo Hua roughly understood and said, "So he's incompetent."

"You can't really say he's incompetent..."

"So he only has the ability to amass wealth and enjoy himself?"

Situ Fang nodded, "Pretty much."

Mo Hua thought for a moment, then added, "In that case, your Court Leader must have also accepted quite a few Spirit Stones from the Lu Family..."

Situ Fang shook her head, "I have no evidence, I can't just say anything. But logically speaking, it's impossible that he hasn't received any."

Mo Hua nodded, mulling over something in his mind.

Situ Fang grew curious, "Why do you ask this?"

Mo Hua's eyes shifted, and he replied with a sly smile, "Oh, it's nothing."

Situ Fang couldn't figure out what Mo Hua was alluding to, and couldn't help but ruffle Mo Hua's hair in exasperation,

"Aren't you afraid of zombies? You should hurry back."

"Mm-hmm."

Mo Hua bid farewell to Situ Fang with a smile and then departed.

After Mo Hua left, he did not go back but went to the other end of the mine and sat on a large rock, seemingly waiting for something.

A quarter of an hour later, Bai Zisheng came along with Big White, dragging a horse cart with him.

This horse cart was new, fairly simple, and was used by cultivators to transport goods and store cargo boxes.

Mo Hua waved, the cart stopped, and Bai Zisheng asked,

"You weren't discovered, right?"

"Yeah."

Mo Hua nodded, then ran behind the big rock, deactivated the Concealment Formation, revealing two coffins concealed beneath the formation.

Each of these coffins contained several Walking Corpses.

The formations on the chests of these corpses were relatively intact.

Mo Hua wanted to take them back for thorough research.

This matter had to be concealed not just from the Taoist Court but also from other cultivators, to prevent astute individuals from guessing their intentions.

Although it might be an unnecessary precaution, being careful and meticulous in their actions was always safe.

Bai Zisheng lifted the coffins onto the cart.

Mo Hua cast a Concealment Formation, and the coffins disappeared from sight, hidden from others.

But Big White was discontent.

Big White was very reluctant to pull the cart with zombie coffins, those defiled objects.

After a long time coaxing and offering some Spirit Grass to Big White, it finally relented for the sake of Mo Hua and the Spirit Grass.

So Bai Zisheng drove the cart, with Mo Hua and Bai Zixi sitting inside, watching over the coffins.

The three of them stealthily took away the coffins and zombies without anyone else knowing.

When entering the city, they were interrogated by the Enforcement Leader.

Mo Hua was acquainted with that Enforcement Leader, greeted him, and then handed him two Spirit Stones to get himself a drink.

The Enforcement Leader glanced carelessly and then politely let them through.

Once the horse cart entered the dwelling, Mo Hua found a quiet, secluded, and cool side room. After drawing Concealment, Defence, and Control Formations around it, he finally placed the coffins inside.

"Should we tell Master?" Bai Zisheng quietly asked.

Mo Hua thought for a moment and nodded, "We should!"

Mr. Zhuang was sure to know about their actions.

But knowing was one thing; they also had to dutifully inform Mr. Zhuang.

Respecting the master and valuing the way was the disciples' duty.

Mo Hua went to find Mr. Zhuang.

Before Mo Hua could speak, Mr. Zhuang waved his hand, "Study it carefully, and make sure to handle the aftermath cleanly. Such defiled objects should not be kept for long."

Mo Hua's eyes brightened, "Yes, Master!"

Mr. Zhuang indeed knew.

But Mo Hua didn't rush to start his research; he wanted to make some preparations first, reinforce the formations further, to prevent any mistakes that might let the zombies escape, dirty the courtyard, and disturb Mr. Zhuang's peace.

Little did he know, before Mo Hua could get ready, Situ Fang came to him the next day, appearing guilt-stricken, as if she had something difficult to say.

Mo Hua asked puzzled,

"Sister Situ, what's happened?"

Situ Fang looked somewhat remorseful, and after hesitating for a moment, she finally said,

"They're all gone..."

Mo Hua was surprised, "What's all gone?"

"The zombies, the coffins, and all the evidence at the scene... Everything's gone..."

Situ Fang said through gritted teeth.

Mo Hua frowned, "What happened?"

Situ Fang's eyes held a cold spark, "The Court Leader... he claimed that the zombies were filthy and feared they might cause a corpse calamity, bringing disaster to all sides. Thus, he burned all the zombies, the coffins were all destroyed, and all evidence was reduced to ashes..."

"By the time I found out, it was too late... Nothing was left."

Situ Fang's voice was hoarse, filled with deep self-reproach.

Mo Hua's gaze flickered.

The Court Leader of the Taoist Court, huh...

He patted Situ Fang's shoulder, sighed like an old soul, and comforted her earnestly,

"Life hardly ever goes as we wish, and some ups and downs are inevitable. We need to look ahead. Those zombies and such, if they're gone, then they're gone..."

After all, I have them all.

Chapter 443: Corpse Refinement (1)

Situ Fang couldn't help but laugh and cry, "Who taught you that line?"

"Elder Yu!"

"The Elder Yu from Tongxian City's Monster Hunting Guild?"

"Mm." Mo Hua nodded.

Situ Fang sighed and agreed.

"Elder Yu isn't wrong in what he says, you should listen to Elder Yu more in the future and not to your Uncle Zhang."

Mo Hua nodded on the outside but privately mocked in his heart:

"That's because you've never heard Elder Yu scold people, otherwise you wouldn't say that..."

Situ Fang hadn't really interacted with Elder Yu, so she was unaware of what kind of Elder he actually was.

She probably thought that Elder Yu was the kind of elder who was respectable and notable, with a "gentle and approachable" way of speaking...

Mo Hua shook his head inwardly and then said:

"Let the zombie be burnt. Zhang Quan did many evil deeds; there should be other clues. Just keep looking."

"However, this is not necessarily a bad thing," Mo Hua thought again and said:

"At least now we know the Court Leader's true colors, so we can be more cautious next time."

"Mm."

Situ Fang nodded, her mood slightly improved.

She had been busy the whole day yesterday and was quite exhausted. She had just rested for two hours, let her guard down a little, and the Court Leader had sabotaged everything behind the scenes, making all her efforts go to waste....

Situ Fang was anxious, self-blaming, and feeling guilty toward Mo Hua.

But she didn't expect that Mo Hua didn't mind and was instead comforting her.

Such a good kid...

Situ Fang said earnestly:

"I was negligent this time, consider it a favor I owe you. If you need help with anything in the future, just ask."

Mo Hua grinned and said, "Okay!"

After coaxing Situ Fang away, Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi stuck their heads out – they had been eavesdropping the whole time.

Bai Zisheng asked:

"We kept a few corpses; should we tell Sister Situ?"

"Let's not mention it for now."

"Why? She's on our side, right?" Bai Zisheng was puzzled.

Mo Hua considered Situ Fang's situation and said:

"It's enough to have Sister Situ help with the aftermath. After all, she is only at the Qi Refinement level, while Zhang Quan was at the Foundation Establishment level, and also a Corpse cultivator. If they were to confront each other directly, Sister Situ would be in great danger."

After considering this, Bai Zisheng said, "That's true."

Bai Zixi also nodded in agreement.

However, the three of them didn't realize that they were at the Qi Refinement level as well...

The matter of the zombies was put on hold for the time being.

The Taoist Court destroying the bodies and obliterating the evidence meant that there were no leads left, and the investigation could not proceed.

While it seemed to be a significant issue, it had fizzled out on the surface.

But no one knew that Mo Hua had secretly kept a few corpses, nor did anyone know what Mo Hua was planning to do with the zombies...

In a small compartment.

In front of Mo Hua were two coffins.

Inside the coffins were the zombies Mo Hua had stolen.

He had drawn Formations all around.

There were Formations like the Sound Isolation Formation, Energy Sealing Formation, Solid Earth Formation, Earth Fire Formation, Earth Prison Formation, Wood Binding Formation...

Bai Zisheng glanced around and couldn't help asking:

"Aren't there a bit too many Formations...?"

With a serious expression, Mo Hua said, "Even when hunting rabbits, the lion uses all its strength. We must be meticulous in our work and not afford any oversights..."

Bai Zisheng looked at the Formation Patterns surrounding them again and was somewhat speechless.

That's a little too "meticulous"...

It's like a spider's web...

Mo Hua, now with twelve Divine Sense Patterns, had Formation skills far beyond the first-grade.

These casually drawn first-grade Formations, laid out one after another at no cost, were piled up layer upon layer, quite a lot...

Bai Zisheng felt that Mo Hua was just itching to draw Formations for fun.

Mo Hua still seemed unsatisfied.

He checked the Formations again and, finding a few empty spaces, added several more around the corners of the room until it was completely full.

Now it looked comfortable...

Mo Hua nodded with satisfaction, then began the "coffin opening and corpse examination".

Bai Zisheng opened the coffin, and the zombies lay there rigidly, motionless.

As Mo Hua didn't fully understand the nature of zombies, he asked Bai Zixi:

"Junior Sister, these zombies won't move, will they?"

Bai Zixi explained, "There are many types of zombies. Some are naturally formed from corpses, while others are intentionally refined..."

"With the accumulation of resentment, the convergence of Yin energy, the infusion of Filthy Qi into the body, over the years, they can turn into zombies naturally."

"Those naturally formed zombies are ferocious, greedy for flesh and blood, and they will keep killing, eating people, and even other living creatures."

"The zombies refined by people will be weaker and need cultivators to control them with Evil Artifacts. If uncontrolled, they mostly sleep in their coffins, nurturing Corpse Qi, with only some instinctual minor movements..."

"But if these intentionally refined zombies lose control, they become like naturally formed zombies, drawn to Blood Qi, killing and eating people..."

"Oh, I see." Mo Hua nodded again and again, then pointed to the coffins and asked:

"So these haven't lost control, right?"

"They have lost control." Bai Zixi said.

Mo Hua was startled, "They have?!"

Bai Zixi nodded, "Yes, they have, but these low-level Walking Corpses are too weak, and they've exhausted their Corpse Qi. Even if they're out of control, they can't move, unless..."

"Unless you feed them blood?" Mo Hua said.

"Mm, anything with Blood Qi will do."

"And after feeding them?"

Bai Zixi's gaze flickered slightly, "They will come back to life on their own, ceaselessly seeking flesh and blood to consume..."

Mo Hua frowned, "That's still quite dangerous..."

Immediately after that, he weakly asked:

"So, if you get bitten by a zombie, will you turn into one?"

"It's possible."

"Why is it only possible?"

Bai Zixi replied, "Zombies carry corpse poison."

Mo Hua frowned, "Corpse poison?"

Bai Zixi raised her tiny index finger and explained:

"This so-called poison is essentially 'corpse qi', similar to spiritual energy but innately sinister."

Bai Zixi, looking at Mo Hua, added, "This kind of corpse qi turns into corpse poison, which can taint a cultivator's blood qi and cause them to turn into a zombie."

"If there's little corpse poison, or it's weak, the transformation is only partial."

"Once the corpse poison is too strong or invades the heart meridian, then the cultivator will become a zombie."

Then she cautioned Mo Hua, "You mustn't get bitten by a zombie. You are frail, and your blood qi is weak, so if you're poisoned, your injuries will also be more severe."

"Mm-hm."

Mo Hua nodded repeatedly.

Then he began to ponder, thinking he should come up with a way to restrain zombies, so he wouldn't be caught off guard and panic when faced with danger.

But this was not an urgent matter.

"Then how are zombies artificially refined?" Mo Hua thought for a moment and asked.

"It requires blood meals, filthy substances, some sinister herbs, and also a Corpse Refining Coffin, or what might also be called a Corpse Raising Coffin."

"I don't know the specifics of how to refine them, as I've never done it," Bai Zixi said with a clear voice.

Disciples of the Worldly Family aren't allowed to engage with the knowledge of evil arts and the Demon Path, to prevent the rise of sinister thoughts and corruption of character.

Only when they grow up and set out to travel or study are they carefully instructed by the elders at home, who inform them of the tactics of evil demons, allowing them to be vigilant and avoid falling into demonic traps, ending up with no place for their corpses.

The Bai Family likely does not teach this knowledge either.

Bai Zixi probably knows about it because she is a diligent student, with a rich knowledge of Tao Cultivation and wide-reaching interests.

Mo Hua looked at Bai Zixi as if she were an elegant and exquisite "Tao Cultivation Encyclopedia," and couldn't help but admire her, saying:

"Junior Sister, you truly know a lot!"

Bai Zixi's expression remained indifferent, but a pair of shining eyes revealed a hint of pride.

Bai Zisheng curled his lips, "Sycophant."

"And you know?"

"I... I don't know..."

Bai Zisheng muttered.

Zixi had great talent, a good memory, was serious about her cultivation, and had a breadth of knowledge.

In terms of scholarship in the path of cultivation, he indeed couldn't compare with Zixi.

Mo Hua patted Bai Zisheng on the shoulder and also nodded in praise:

"It's valuable to have self-awareness..."

It took Bai Zisheng quite a while to catch on and he couldn't help but scratch Mo Hua's little head in response.

After understanding the principles of corpse refinement, Mo Hua started to research formations.

First was the coffin.

This kind of coffin is called a Corpse Refining Coffin, or Corpse Raising Coffin.

Combining refining, storing, and raising of corpses, it is a type of evil artifact in the realm of demonic arts.

Each zombie has its own coffin.

The type varies with the level, and the quality of the coffins differs as well.

Zombies are categorized as Walking Corpse, Iron Corpse, Copper Corpse, Golden Corpse, etc., and the corresponding coffins are made of wood, iron, copper, and gold respectively.

A corpse of a certain class should be placed in a coffin of the corresponding level.

Mo Hua couldn't help but mock inwardly.

In life, people are distinguished by rank and status, and even in death, as zombies, their coffins are segregated into gold, silver, copper, and iron.

It's truly fussy even in death.

Zhang Quan ran a coffin shop.

He most likely crafted these coffins himself.

However, the formations on the coffins were definitely not his own work.

Zhang Quan was not a Formation Master and lacked the ability to do so.

Mo Hua studied the formations on the coffins and frowned.

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The formations on the coffins were not Ultimate Formations but rather common Earth Series Evil Formations.

The core of the formation was an Earth Series formation, only twisted in form; the ink was human blood mixed with bone powder, among other unnamed filthy substances.

The Formation media were bone shards embedded in the coffin.

The Formation eye was a decaying heart, which seemed treated or cured in some way—mixing blood qi, filthy qi, and spiritual energy to provide power for the Corpse Formation to operate.

This formation, while gruesome and bloody, had a somewhat crude underlying logic.

Mo Hua was not too impressed.

What truly caught Mo Hua's attention was the formation at the heart meridian of the zombies.

If his guess was correct, this formation was indeed an Ultimate Formation.

Mo Hua called out, "Junior Brother."

Bai Zisheng nodded, then, furrowing his brow and enduring the nausea, he took out a dagger and carefully sliced through the skin on the Walking Corpse's chest, revealing the formation integrated into the flesh.

Mo Hua watched and took notes on paper.

At the same time, he released his Divine Sense and engaged in Calculation, deducing the formation patterns.

This process was slow and prone to mistakes.

If a mistake was made, he had to start over.

Mo Hua spent a whole day studying several corpses, comparing them, and finally managed to piece together a complete formation.

Mo Hua looked at the formation on the paper, a serious expression on his face.

As expected, this formation contained twelve distinct patterns.

It was a proper First-grade Formation with twelve patterns, an Ultimate Formation!

But he dared not study it because this twelve-pattern Ultimate Formation was very likely an Evil Formation used for Demon Path corpse refining...

After all, he surely couldn't learn it to go and refine corpses...

Chapter 444: Contempt

...

When in doubt, it's better to refrain from overconfidence and ask Mr. Zhuang for advice.

Mo Hua then ran to the bamboo house to see Mr. Zhuang.

Mr. Zhuang sat in a bamboo chair, brewing tea, enjoying the breeze, and squinting comfortably.

After waiting outside for a while, Mo Hua suddenly looked up and saw Mr. Zhuang looking at him. His eyes lit up, and he ran forward, presenting the Formation he had restored, and asked:

"Master, can I learn this Formation?"

Without even looking, Mr. Zhuang nodded and said:

"You can."

Mo Hua was slightly stunned, "Isn't this an Evil Formation?"

Mr. Zhuang's expression deepened as he asked:

"Do you know how an Evil Formation differs from a normal Formation?"

Mo Hua furrowed his brows in thought and shook his head honestly.

He had never studied Evil Formations; he had only briefly glanced at a few Evil Formation Patterns and was unclear about the differences between them.

To know is to know, not to know is not to know.

Since he was unclear, he didn't feel comfortable making things up in front of Mr. Zhuang.

"What about their commonalities?"

Mr. Zhuang asked again.

Mo Hua pondered for a moment and tried to say:

"Whether it's a proper Formation or an Evil Formation, the basic framework of the Formation is the same, consisting of Formation media, Formation eye, Formation pivot, Formation Patterns..."

"It's just that the specific composition of the Formation is different, the Evil Formation is more bizarre, and the methods are more bloody and cruel."

Mr. Zhuang nodded slightly, "Not bad."

He then picked up the Ultimate Formation with the twelve Patterns that Mo Hua had restored, his eyes showing a hint of appreciation as he pointed out:

"So this Formation, apart from the White Bone Formation medium, Human blood Formation pattern, and Human heart Formation eye, the other parts of the Formation principle are indeed manifestations of the Heavenly Dao and fall within the range of normal Formations. In other words..."

Mr. Zhuang looked at Mo Hua.

Mo Hua's eyes gradually brightened as he continued:

"In other words, is this actually a proper Ultimate Formation that someone used bizarre methods to draw?"

Mr. Zhuang spoke with satisfaction, "Exactly."

Mo Hua frowned again, "If it's a proper Ultimate Formation, why not use it correctly? Why resort to these heretical Demons' methods?"

Mr. Zhuang's expression grew obscure:

"Because he couldn't draw it the proper way..."

Mo Hua was slightly taken aback.

After a moment of silence, Mr. Zhuang sighed and said:

"Following the Righteous Dao is actually very difficult..."

"Among the so-called cultivators of the Righteous Dao, while there are those who seek fame and pretend to be virtuous, there are also truly determined and upright people."

"Such cultivators have temperaments, methods, and breadth of spirit far beyond ordinary people, and the effort they put in, the refinement they experience, the hardships they endure, and the criticism they face are equally extraordinary."

"It is the same with Formations."

"The deeper one goes in the Formations of the Righteous Dao, the harder they become. You might put in ten times the effort and see only a tenth of the result."

"Therefore, many cultivators start looking for shortcuts."

"This shortcut is the Evil Formation."

"If the Divine Sense is insufficient, they blindly visualize and borrow the Divine Thought of others and other objects without discernment and purification."

"If the Formation is not well-practiced, they draw on skin compatible with Spiritual Power to reduce the difficulty of the Formation."

"If the understanding of the Formation pivot is shallow, they use human blood as ink and human hearts as eyes to forcibly promote the flow of the Formation's power..."

"The so-called Evil Formations, just like conventional Formations, are based on the same Formation principle."

"However, some cultivators don't want to think, learn, practice, or comprehend. They take shortcuts by using human lives and flesh as the framework and pivot of the Formation to draw Formations they otherwise couldn't..."

After finishing, Mr. Zhuang looked at Mo Hua and spoke meaningfully:

"That's why I didn't teach you the principle of Evil Formations before, to let you learn the Formations patiently, practice over and over, and not to be hasty or to think about taking shortcuts."

"You have great talent and a high aptitude. If you think about taking shortcuts and learn Evil Formations, falling into the Demon Path, your level of Formation mastery might skyrocket rapidly, advancing by leaps and bounds daily."

"But by doing so, once you taste the sweetness of shortcuts, you will no longer practice Formations diligently or be able to glimpse the true Great Dao."

"Learning Evil Formations is like trying to help the shoots grow by pulling them upward—it won't last long."

"In front of a true Formation Master who understands the Heavenly Dao, these so-called Evil Formation Masters are just opportunistic small fry..."

"The so-called Evil Formations are merely filthy with blood Qi, superficial imitations, the Righteous cannot be overwhelmed by the evil, they are vulnerable!"

Mr. Zhuang's eyes sharpened, and his entire presence became like a sheathed immortal sword, emitting an astonishing aura.

"You must remember, we cultivators do not follow the path of Heretical Demons, not because we cannot, but because we disdain it!"

Mo Hua was deeply moved and full of admiration.

Not following the Demon Path is not because we can't, but because we disdain it!

Mr. Zhuang's words were deeply engraved in his mind.

It was as if someone had inscribed these words onto his Taoist Heart with a sword.

Mo Hua's gaze grew steadier, and his expression became more resolute.

As he looked at the Evil Formation in his hands, he felt a great peace of mind; even though it was a Formation of heretical Demons, filled with oddities and eeriness, he remained calm and untroubled.

"Master, your disciple remembers!"

Mo Hua nodded earnestly with a serious face.

In the following days, Mo Hua began to study this Ultimate Formation.

To extract the essence of the Formation principle and discard the dross.

Focusing only on the most fundamental principles of the Formation itself while neglecting its opportunistic methods, like human skin Patterns, flesh and blood pivots, and human heart eyes.

Thus, the difficulty of the Formation increased exponentially.

For a first-grade twelve-Pattern Formation, Mo Hua's Divine Sense strength had just reached the threshold.

And Divine Sense was just the threshold.

With this Divine Sense, one still needed to practice the Formation's Patterns, analyze the layout of the Formation, and grasp the principles of the Formation.

This required a great deal of time and extensive practice.

The process was tedious and dull.

The Divine Sense would be exhausted over and over, then slowly recover, only to be exhausted again...

With the Taoist Stele not yet restored, Mo Hua could only rely on his ability, taking more time and consuming more energy, to practice over and over, slowly comprehending.

He kept Mr. Zhuang's teachings in mind, and though progress was slow, he was neither arrogant nor impatient.

Cultivation requires perseverance, as if dripping water penetrates stone.

It's the same with practicing Formations.

Each practice session is a drop of water, each contemplation is like raindrops falling on the stone.

...

As long as one persists, even a dripping water drop will wear through a stone.

The principles of Formation too could be deciphered, thoroughly understood, and mastered.

After such contemplation over a number of days, Mo Hua gradually grasped some essence. He had gained some understanding of the ostensibly "Corpse Refinement" Evil Formation.

But this understanding wasn't profound; it was hazy, as though obscured by a layer of gauze, unclear.

"It seems that my practice is not sufficient, my thoughts are not deep enough, and my realizations are not profound enough..."

Mo Hua sighed inwardly.

Just when he thought he needed more time,

A tremor suddenly echoed within the Sea of Consciousness, and the Taoist Stele began to slowly recover.

Mo Hua was delighted and quickly sank his Divine Sense into the Sea of Consciousness.

The grey on the Taoist Stele faded away gradually, and that ancient and profound aura began to fill the space with vigor once more.

Mo Hua tried drawing a few Formations and found that the Taoist Stele was usable, although its effects were not as strong as before.

After drawing the Formations and erasing them, he could only recover half of the Divine Sense he had used.

Mo Hua felt somewhat regretful.

It seems it hasn't fully recovered yet.

Nevertheless, it could still be barely used, which was, at least, better than having nothing.

Mo Hua touched the Taoist Stele and said affectionately,

"I won't put you through this again."

The Taoist Stele remained as silent as ever, seemingly a bit petulant, not accepting Mo Hua's apology. Find your next adventure on empire

Now that he had the Taoist Stele, although it was only a "incomplete" version, Mo Hua's practice of the Ultimate Formation saw a direct two or threefold increase.

His comprehension of the Ultimate Formation sped up significantly as well.

A few more days passed, and Mo Hua finally managed to draw the Ultimate Formation.

Within the Formation, Spiritual Power transformed into fine threads, moving independently and yet complementing each other, converging...

However, at the same time, Mo Hua furrowed his brows.

Something was off...

"This Ultimate Formation... is incomplete..."

Or rather, it was only a part of the entire Ultimate Formation.

Mo Hua had drawn it, but still felt it was lacking something. The Spiritual Power could flow and undergo special changes, but it was quite disparate, as if it were an abandoned segment.

"Why is it incomplete?"

Mo Hua didn't understand.

The Formation eye, Formation pivot, and Formation Patterns were all intact.

And what exactly was the effect of this Ultimate Formation?

Spiritual Power in the Formation was split into even finer filaments, like threads twisted together, each with a special flow.

Looking fascinating yet baffling...

What's the purpose of drawing this Formation on a Zombie's circulatory paths?

Mo Hua could not figure it out and, thinking that two heads are better than one, went to consult Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi.

Bai Zixi said with a slight frown,

"Perhaps, it's for Corpse control..."

"Corpse control?"

Mo Hua asked doubtfully, "Don't Corpse cultivators have their own methods to control zombies? Why would they need to use an Ultimate Formation?"

If one strictly needed an Ultimate Formation to control zombies, then there wouldn't be many Corpse cultivators in the world, nor many Cultivators capable of refining zombies.

After all, only a handful of Formation Masters know the Ultimate Formations.

Yet, Corpse Refinement and Corpse control are a relatively prominent school on the Demon Path.

Corpse cultivators engaged in Corpse Refinement are not rare in the Demon Path.

Bai Zixi pondered and said, "Controlling zombies is easy, but the quantity is an issue."

"Quantity?" Mo Hua was slightly startled.

Bai Zisheng, however, remembered something and nodded,

"Right, an ordinary Corpse cultivator can't control so many zombies."

"A few dozen zombies, that Zhang Quan controls with ease, is indeed curious. Moreover, he may have refined even more zombies. That's not right..."

Mo Hua became enlightened.

If a Corpse cultivator could control so many zombies, then leveraging the tactic of a 'zombie sea', no other Cultivator of the same rank could possibly be his match.

This was clearly too overpowering.

Bai Zixi continued, "Normally, a Corpse cultivator controls a few to a dozen zombies, never dozens like that."

Mo Hua's gaze sharpened.

That said, Zhang Quan could possibly control so many zombies thanks to the Ultimate Formation.

Where's the other part of the Ultimate Formation then?

Mo Hua pondered briefly, then his eyes brightened:

"That copper bell?"

Bai Zixi and Bai Zisheng also nodded slightly.

Zhang Quan uses a copper bell to control zombies. If the Ultimate Formation is incomplete, it's likely that the other part of the Formation is inscribed on the copper bell.

As for the principle behind this Formation, one has to wait until Mo Hua can find the complete Formation and study it to understand it.

"It seems that I need to find Zhang Quan..."

Mo Hua nodded and muttered to himself.

At the same time, he had another doubt.

The Ultimate Formation for controlling zombies, with a rank of one and twelve patterns, could it be... that Ultimate Formation of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect?

Mo Hua furrowed his brows, thinking carefully.

A Formation with one rank and twelve patterns, exceeding limits, is extremely rare.

It seems very unlikely for the Minor Wilderness state boundary to coincidentally have two Ultimate Formations of one rank and twelve patterns.

Moreover, the Spirit Pivot Formation, the Spirit pivot, the Spiritual Power pivot point...

It also sounds like the effect of controlling zombies.

If this Formation truly is the Spirit Pivot Formation, then who drew it?

Who can master an Ultimate Formation and is willing to draw it for Zhang Quan for corpse control?

Could the one who drew the Formation be the traitor from the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect?

Or perhaps... Instructor Yan?

Mo Hua's heart chilled, his expression turning complicated.

Chapter 445: Hiding (1)

The traitor from the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect deceived his master and annihilated his ancestors, likely falling into the Demon Path and refining corpses for others.

As for Instructor Yan... if his heart were set on revenge and he spared no means, it's also possible that he has gone astray.

Mo Hua sighed, deeply worried about Instructor Yan.

He hoped that Instructor Yan would be safe and sound, and also hoped that Yan wouldn't be blinded by obsession and stray onto the wrong path, committing some sort of misdeed.

Instructor Yan was undoubtedly upright, but even the most upright person could momentarily be driven to desperate measures in a surge of anger.

Bai Zisheng asked, "Should we go look for Zhang Quan?"

Mo Hua nodded, "We must."

Now, all the clues lay with Zhang Quan.

The death of the Mining Cultivator, the method of Corpse Refinement, the hiding place for the corpses, the complete Formation Diagram of the Ultimate Formation, and Instructor Yan's whereabouts.

All these, it was estimated, were related to Zhang Quan.

Bai Zisheng's eyes lit up as he rubbed his hands together in anticipation, "Then let's get going early, I want to slaughter him!"

The thought of Zhang Quan's actions in refining corpses had been infuriating him these past few days.

Bai Zisheng had deliberately learned a few Taoist Skills, planning to use Zhang Quan for practice.

Then he grew somewhat worried,

"After so many days, can we still find him?"

"It's hard to say, but there are still some clues."

Mo Hua nodded and then took out the Compass Parent-Child Disk.

On the disk, of the original three bright spots, only one remained.

This meant that one of the Compass Child Formations was still on Zhang Quan.

It could be that the needle was hidden so well that Zhang Quan had not discovered it.

Alternatively, it could be that he did find it, but deliberately left it there as bait, luring Mo Hua to come over and walk into an ambush.

Regardless, Mo Hua was determined to take a look.

He put the zombie back into the coffin and drew both Golden Lock Formation and Cold Ice Formation on it to lock the coffin and use the Cold Ice Formation to store the Walking Corpse at a low temperature.

It was precaution to prevent the Walking Corpse from escaping or decomposing.

The next morning, as soon as dawn broke, Mo Hua called upon Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi, and the three left Tongxian City. In a secluded place, they concealed their presence, then hastened towards the wild mountains west of South Yue City using movement techniques.

Mo Hua had looked over the Map of South Yue City.

The bright spot on the Compass Mother Formation Disk corresponded to the location of the wild mountains to the west of the city.

These wild mountains, similar to mining mountains, bore no minerals to be excavated and had no other resources. Therefore, Cultivators seldom visited, leaving them desolate.

The vegetation on the mountains was stunted, mostly pale green or gray-brown.

The exposed mountain rocks were dry and white.

Weeds rooted in the crevices of the rocks.

Occasionally, unknown Monster Beasts would emit strange cries from who-knows-where, echoing through the empty mountains.

Mo Hua crouched behind a large boulder, staring at the Compass Disk.

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi leaned over to look as well.

The moving point on the disk was extremely suspicious, constantly meandering through the mountains, unpredictably east and west, as if evading something or deliberately concealing itself, with no discernible pattern.

What was this Zhang Quan up to?

The three exchanged glances, all a bit puzzled.

"Could it be a trap?" Bai Zisheng said.

"If it were a trap, he should have stopped to set up an ambush, right? What's the point of running around?"

"True..." Bai Zisheng nodded, then speculated, "Could it be that he discovered the needle, removed it, and then stuck it onto a mountain pig or some other Monster Beast?"

Mo Hua stroked his chin, "That's possible..."

Bai Zisheng suggested, "Let's go take a look. If it's Zhang Quan, we'll capture him. If it's a mountain pig, we'll see whether it eats meat or grass..."

Mo Hua was taken aback, "What difference does it make whether it eats meat or grass?"

"If it eats meat, then we'll just slaughter it, no need to worry further; if it eats grass, after slaughtering it, we'll need to bring it back, I feel like eating pork..."

Bai Zisheng looked at Mo Hua with anticipation.

Bai Zixi sighed softly.

Mo Hua's expression was complicated, "I'm not going to cook it for you."

Bai Zisheng defended his position, "I don't really mind, it's mainly to show filial respect to Instructor..."

"I'll slaughter the pig, you'll cook it, and then we'll give Instructor a taste. But obviously, Instructor can't finish it by himself and as a disciple, naturally, I have to relieve Instructor of his worries..."

Bai Zisheng's calculation was making loud noises.

Mo Hua asked, "Can't you cook it yourself?"

"If you cook, it's a show of respect to Instructor. If I cook, it's like I'm poisoning Instructor..."

Bai Zisheng was quite self-aware of his own cooking skills.

"Fine..."

Mo Hua nodded his head.

The food in South Yue City was indeed mediocre, and Mr. Zhuang hadn't been eating much these days.

Bai Zisheng was overjoyed and promptly said,

"Then, let's set off quickly."

The three concealed their presence and, guided by the Compass, searched for the location of the bright spot.

Soon, beneath a hillside covered in shrubs, they found the position of the bright spot.

What was hidden in the shrubs was Zhang Quan, not a mountain pig.

It seemed that the Formation needle was still on Zhang Quan and not embedded in a pig.

Bai Zisheng felt both relieved and somewhat disappointed.

Zhang Quan was squatting in the shrubs, his gaze scanning around vigilantly as if he were on the lookout for something.

Mo Hua and his companions stayed concealed, watching from a distance.

After a while, Zhang Quan crept out of the shrubbery, made his way into the forest, changing directions several times, and vanished from sight.

Mo Hua looked at the Compass and pointed in a direction.

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi followed him to another mountain peak. From there, they looked down and saw Zhang Quan emerge from a cave entrance, taking another wary glance around before leaving a Formation in the spot.

They were too far away for Mo Hua to make out the details of the Formation.

However, based on the spiritual power calculations of the Formation, it seemed to be a type of trap Formation, with patterns ranking at grades one and two. It's somewhat obscure, but not highly ranked.

Zhang Quan set up the Formation, then continued down the mountain path.

After walking for a while, he turned onto a small path, burrowed into a forest, found a cave, and set up another Formation...

He repeated the cycle, tirelessly and seemingly without purpose.

Mo Hua frowned, "What's he doing..."

Bai Zisheng thought for a moment, "It seems he is guarding against something, probably afraid of being followed."

"Guarding against whom?"

Mo Hua didn't understand.

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi pondered briefly before both casting a silent glance at him.

Mo Hua was startled, "Me?"

Bai Zixi said, "You can conceal yourself, he probably fears that you're invisibly following him."

Mo Hua clicked his tongue, "Such heavy caution."

Meanwhile, Zhang Quan was in a state of panic.

"Why, why is there nothing?"

These days, he'd had a nagging feeling that something was off.

It seemed like he was being watched.

Every move he made, within someone else's grasp.

But after searching himself thoroughly, he found nothing suspicious.

Zhang Quan was utterly baffled.

Yet the intuition honed from years skulking in the shadows wouldn't deceive him.

Someone was definitely following him!

But who could track him without his notice?

After a moment, Zhang Quan had his answer:

It was that brat!

The one skilled in concealment, whose stealth even cultivators at Foundation Establishment couldn't detect!

Among the cultivators he knew, only that brat could employ such covert tactics, untraceably sticking to him like a relentless parasite.

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"Truly inexorable!"

Zhang Quan cursed inwardly.

He couldn't let that brat follow him!

Zhang Quan released his Divine Sense, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't find any traces of other cultivators—because initially, no one was indeed following him.

But he still felt restless, so he resorted to various means, winding through caves and forests.

He set down Formations, testing to see if anyone was following him.

But the Formations were undisturbed, untouched.

Zhang Quan was confused and at a loss.

Had he guessed wrong, or was that brat's tactics too cunning, eluding his detection?

...

Mo Hua also furrowed his brow.

Bai Zisheng asked, "Are you thinking of some cunning scheme again?"

"I'm not thinking of any schemes!"

Bai Zisheng humphed, "You can deceive others, but you would deceive your senior brother too?"

Ignoring him, Mo Hua expressed his doubt:

"This Zhang Quan, he's a bit too vigilant."

After pondering for a moment, Bai Zisheng spoke slowly:

"Having suffered so much and being in such a wretched state, it's not unreasonable for him to be extra cautious."

"Being cautious is fine, but his caution seems a bit excessive."

Bai Zisheng observed Zhang Quan from a distance, unable to discern his expression but noticing his furtive actions, feeling they were overly suspicious.

Bai Zixi's gaze sharpened slightly, "Is he afraid something will be discovered?"

Mo Hua nodded slightly, then looked around.

The surrounding barren mountains stretched on, with no end in sight.

In such a place, despite the desolation, the mountains concealed more than they revealed.

"Afraid of what being found?"

With furrowed brows, the three of them fell into thought, until suddenly, they all looked up, their eyes brightening, having understood.

"It's the place where he refines and hides the corpses!"

Mo Hua said, "We'll quietly follow, without startling the snake in the grass."

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi both nodded in agreement.

The three of them kept their eyes on Zhang Quan, intending to let Zhang Quan lead the way, hoping to trace back to his corpse lair.

But Zhang Quan's patience turned out to be even more outrageous than they imagined.

After another three or four days, he was still meandering in the mountains, darting about, ceaselessly testing with Formations and trail markers.

Mo Hua watched in irritation, while Zhang Quan continued painstakingly.

"This Zhang Quan... he really knows how to play it safe..."

Bai Zisheng complained.

And it seemed like he could keep it up for a long time.

But Mo Hua's gaze grew serious.

The more cautious Zhang Quan was, the more it indicated that his corpse refining and hiding place contained a great secret that couldn't suffer the slightest oversight.

That was why he didn't dare take any risk.

Every slight worry had to be thoroughly eliminated.

Mo Hua pondered for a moment, then said:

"Don't follow!"

Bai Zisheng was slightly surprised, "Why stop following?"

Mo Hua glanced at the distant desolate mountains, his brows slightly raised, and said:

"We've reached the doorstep. We can search on our own, no need for him to lead the way."

Chapter 446: Corpse Walking Stronghold (1)

Mo Hua took out the map of the wilderness surrounding South Yue City.

It was called a map, but it was crudely made, the lines were simple, and it only roughly outlined some mountain terrains; nothing else was included.

This wilderness was rarely visited, so there was no detailed map available.

The one Mo Hua held was previously obtained from Situ Fang. It was a map of the mountainous terrain recorded by the Taoist Court Official of South Yue City.

Mo Hua recalled the trajectory of the light spots on the Compass Disk and traced Zhang Quan's path on the map.

Zhang Quan's movements seemed chaotic, but all his routes were concentrated within the forest between two peaks to the east of the wilderness.

He came here to return to his lair.

Therefore, the place where he refined and hid the corpses had to be nearby.

And to avoid being tracked, he would certainly not linger near his lair.

So the location of his lair was probably to the west of where he lingered.

The two places were separated by a large mountain and faced each other from a distance.

Mo Hua shared his deductions.

Bai Zisheng asked doubtfully,

"How do you know this?"

Mo Hua said, "I am a Monster Hunter. I often track Monster Beasts in the mountains; this is the basics for a Monster Hunter."

"But Zhang Quan is not a Monster Beast."

"Close enough. Anyway, he can hardly be considered human anymore, I suspect his habits are very similar to those of Monster Beasts."

Bai Zisheng nodded, then asked,

"What if you guessed wrong?"

"If I'm wrong, then I'm wrong. It doesn't really affect anything," Mo Hua said indifferently.

Bai Zisheng sighed, "Alright then..."

After all, they needed to search, and having a direction was better than having none.

Putting aside Zhang Quan for the moment, Mo Hua and the other two crossed over a mountain range to the west of the wilderness to look for Zhang Quan's hiding place.

Mo Hua was not worried about Zhang Quan.

After all, with the Compass Disk, Zhang Quan couldn't escape from his grasp. He could be left to his own devices, letting him play a game of hide-and-seek with himself.

And as long as they found Zhang Quan's hiding place, they could even turn the situation around and lie in wait to catch him.

To the west of the South Yue wilderness, there was nothing special.

It was still the same withered grass, low trees, dry rocks, and steep mountains.

The three searched together for a while, then split up to continue the search, but still came up empty-handed.

At least on the surface, there was only barren grass and rocky hills.

Further out, there were more continuous wilderness hills, but the distance was much greater, and with such a wide range, it was not easy to search.

Bai Zisheng questioned doubtfully, "There's nothing?"

Mo Hua shook his head, "Not necessarily, we've only searched once."

A Monster Hunter won't just search the mountains once.

The first time is just to get a rough look at the terrain, to have an overall impression of the land in the Sea of Consciousness. Then, by comparing it with the map, one would have a clearer sense of the paths.

Afterward, based on experience, one would choose a route and search carefully.

Mo Hua recalled the terrain and speculated which places could be used for Corpse Refinement or as hiding spots, which locations had special terrain, and which places had a suspicious aura...

He then took out a pen and marked a route on the map before continuing the search.

This time, Mo Hua searched very meticulously.

At every place, he would sit cross-legged, release his Divine Sense, and sense the sparse flow of Spiritual Energy between heaven and earth, as well as the circulation of various auras in the mountains.

At the same time, he had to calculate in his mind to see if there were any traces of a Formation.

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi protected him from any Cultivator or Monster Beast that might attempt an ambush.

After Mo Hua finished searching, he opened his eyes and got up to move to the next location, searching one place after another.

This kind of search was rather tedious.

What's more, Calculation consumed a lot of Divine Sense.

Luckily, Mo Hua was patient enough, his Divine Sense was strong, and he had mastered the Meditation Technique, so his Divine Sense recovered quickly.

Stop and go, Mo Hua suddenly uttered a "huh" next to a cluster of bald rocks.

Bai Zisheng's eyes lit up, "Did you find it?"

Mo Hua nodded slightly, "There's a Formation."

Bai Zisheng released his Divine Sense and swept around, then said helplessly, "Where is it?"

He didn't find anything.

Mo Hua pointed to the group of bald rocks in front of them, "All these are part of a Formation."

Bai Zisheng looked at the rocks, which were shiny and bald, massive in size, and numerous. They were piled up together, completely blocking off one side of the mountain.

"What kind of Formation is this?"

Mo Hua shook his head, "I don't know. It looks like... some kind of Earth Series Illusion Technique. Just wait..."

After saying that, Mo Hua sat down cross-legged on the ground again.

He closed his eyes in contemplation, focused in thought, and found a tree branch to draw something on the ground.

Half an hour later, Mo Hua opened his eyes and pointed to the pattern on the ground, saying,

"The Formation Patterns are like this."

Bai Zisheng's mouth fell open, "You even figured out the Formation Patterns?"

Mo Hua corrected him, "It's 'Calculation,' not 'guess.'"

"Calculation" made it seem professional, like something a proficient Junior Formation Master should do.

"Guess" seemed too amateurish and hinted at a guesswork.

Bai Zisheng clicked his tongue in wonder and asked,

"Did your master teach you the Divine Sense Calculation?"

Mo Hua nodded.

Bai Zisheng couldn't help but feel envious.

If one learned Divine Sense Calculation, one could see through Formations.

The Formation Master in this wilderness had used Formations to hide their tracks, but because they had set up Formations, in Mo Hua's eyes, it was as clear as day.

Even through Calculation, they could deduce the specific Formation Patterns.

It was really shameless...

Bai Zisheng sighed.

What a pity, his Divine Sense was not sufficient, hence he couldn't learn it.

Of course, even if he could learn it, he probably wouldn't be able to use it as well as Mo Hua did.

In terms of Formations, his Junior Disciple was always a "little freak" in his heart...

Suddenly, Mo Hua's Divine Sense stirred, and he looked at Bai Zisheng with an unfriendly gaze,

"Talking bad about me again?"

Bai Zisheng felt completely helpless, "I was praising you in my heart..."

Mo Hua snorted, "Do you think I believe that?"

Bai Zisheng let out a sigh and had no choice but to apologize politely, then quickly changed the subject:

"How do we break this formation?"

Mo Hua replied, "There's no need to break it, this is just a decoy."

After releasing his Divine Sense and peeking through, he said:

"Follow me."

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi nodded.

Mo Hua walked straight up to a bare rock and then gently reached out, his fingers sinking into the stone.

Mo Hua continued to walk forward, his entire body going directly into the rock.

Bai Zisheng was startled, and Bai Zixi was also slightly taken aback.

This bare rock was merely an illusion, not a real object.

The two exchanged glances and followed Mo Hua inside.

Once inside the rock, all was pitch-black, but Mo Hua seemed to know everything like the back of his hand, leading the way with ease.

After walking for a moment, light appeared before them, revealing a large stone gate.

The gate was gloomy, entwined with a sense of death, and a faint putrid stench lingered at the entrance.

And on the gate, three mottled, crude characters were inscribed:

Corpse Walking Stronghold.

Mo Hua frowned, Corpse Walking Stronghold?

The trio didn't charge in directly but concealed their forms and found a large rock nearby to squat under, huddled together with their heads close.

"Another stronghold in the mountains..."

"A stronghold in the mountains is naturally a mountain stronghold," Bai Zixi said.

"Corpse Walking Stronghold... Could this stronghold be used for corpse refinement...?"

"It's possible."

"This is a bit troublesome..."

"What's wrong?"

Mo Hua thought for a moment and said, "Since it's a stronghold, it means that there isn't just one cultivator inside, there should be many of them..."

"Zhang Quan isn't a loner, he's likely a leader or at least a householder."

Bai Zisheng asked, "So what do we do now, storm in and slaughter them all?"

Mo Hua helplessly replied, "Can you kill them all?"

"How would we know without trying?"

Bai Zisheng's eyes shone excitedly, eager to rush in immediately and eradicate the stronghold.

Bai Zixi silently twisted his arm, which made him behave.

Mo Hua said, "We must take precautions before it happens; we cannot act rashly. I'll go in first using concealment to check the situation."

"You're going in alone?"

"Yes," Mo Hua nodded, "I'm familiar with this."

Back then, he had infiltrated Black Mountain Stronghold completely unnoticed, all by himself.

At that time, sneaking into Black Mountain Stronghold was somewhat dangerous.

But now things were different.

Now his Divine Sense was deeper, his Concealment Technique stronger, and his knowledge of formations was far beyond that of an ordinary first-grade Formation Master. He did not fear even Foundation Establishment cultivators.

Although Mo Hua couldn't defeat a Foundation Establishment cultivator, he could hide from them thanks to his skill at concealment.

Bai Zixi disagreed, "We should go together!"

Bai Zisheng nodded in agreement as well.

Mo Hua shook his head and said, "Your ability to conceal isn't good enough; you would be detected by Foundation Establishment cultivators."

Bai Zixi was still somewhat worried.

So Mo Hua said, "I'll go in, and you two stay here as backup. If something goes wrong, I'll set off fireworks, and you come in to help me."

Although he said this, it was very unlikely that such a situation would occur.

After some thought, Bai Zixi had no better solution and could only nod in agreement.

Bai Zisheng was a little disappointed and quickly reminded him:

"If there's trouble, don't be afraid. Just set off the fireworks, and I, your senior brother, will charge in and slay them... no, I mean protect you!"

Bai Zisheng was still thinking about fighting.

Mo Hua was somewhat exasperated.

Afterward, without saying anything more, Mo Hua concealed his form and quietly sneaked into Corpse Walking Stronghold.

Before entering Corpse Walking Stronghold, he released his Divine Sense to ascertain the positions of several cultivators at the gate, then quietly avoided them and slipped inside.

Then he found a hidden place and pushed his Divine Sense to the limit.

Each time he only released it briefly, then quickly withdrew it.

Like a dragonfly skimming the water, leaving no trace.

After the time it took to brew a cup of tea, he released his Divine Sense again.

After probing with his Divine Sense three or four times without noticing anything unusual, Mo Hua finally let out a slight sigh of relief.

It seemed there were no Foundation Establishment cultivators in Corpse Walking Stronghold.

Or even if there were, their Divine Sense was not strong enough to detect Mo Hua's surveillance.

Mo Hua felt much more at ease.

He began to scrutinize the layout of Corpse Walking Stronghold and the cultivators within.

The Corpse Walking Stronghold was built against a mountain, its layout simple, with constructed wooden houses and carved out caves.

What wasn't simple, was the dense Corpse Qi and the numerous deathly auras.

With just a light scan, Mo Hua could detect many coffins.

Most of these coffins were wooden, but there were a few that had an even heavier presence of Corpse Qi, crafted from refined iron and preserved with Evil Formations – iron coffins.

The corpses harbored within were likely the stronger Iron Corpses.

In the entire stronghold, there were more dead people than living ones.

Of the living cultivators, not all of them seemed to be Corpse cultivators.

Those who could control corpses were few, donned in gray robes, with pallid skin.

The rest looked more like bandits.

Mo Hua was surprised by this discovery.

Beyond this, there were the formations.

As expected, there were numerous formations laid out around Corpse Walking Stronghold.

The standards of these formations were mostly below the first grade, ranging from seven to eight Patterns, with the most complex having up to nine Patterns.

After dismantling a few formations and examining them closely, Mo Hua suddenly paused in shock.

He recognized the style of these Formation Patterns.

Neat and meticulous, yet somewhat rigid.

When he was learning about Formation Patterns at Tongxian Gate, it was with such Patterns as the template.

These were...Formation Patterns drawn by Instructor Yan...

Chapter 447: Instructor Yan (1)

"Instructor Yan is... drawing formations for the Corpse Walking Stronghold?"

Mo Hua's little face became anxious.

Could Instructor Yan have gone bad?

He wanted to find out, so he released his Divine Sense to see if anyone inside the Corpse Walking Stronghold was drawing formations.

As his majestic Divine Sense unfolded, the outline of the Corpse Walking Stronghold dissolved.

Within this expanse of void, pale blue, pale white, and dark gray auras intertwined and flourished.

This was the true form of Spiritual Energy beneath the surface appearances of the world.

Or perhaps, just a deeper layer of surface appearances.

Mo Hua steadied his breath and concentrated, searching through each room, scrutinizing each cultivator.

After the time it took to brew a cup of tea, he finally made a discovery.

In a secluded and cramped room, a cultivator resided alone, at the Qi Refining Ninth Level, sitting at a desk, focused on drawing a formation.

From the tip of his brush, neat formation patterns emerged one after another, and the formation beneath gradually took shape.

It seemed to be a Spirit Gathering Array.

While Mo Hua was spying on him with his Divine Sense,

The cultivator felt something, paused his brush, looked around, then revealed a puzzled expression.

"Someone?"

"No, this is the Corpse Walking Stronghold. There can't be outsiders..."

"But..."

He furrowed his brows.

He had indeed sensed a faint breath just now.

This breath was very familiar, like that of an old friend, but upon close inspection, it had vanished without a trace.

"Perhaps it's just my imagination..."

He shook his head as if reminded of something, sighed softly, and then continued to draw the formation.

Mo Hua opened his eyes.

It was the aura of Instructor Yan!

He pondered for a moment, then hid his figure, employed his movement technique, and stealthily hopped to the roof of a building. He lay prone and poked out his little head to look inside.

The interior of the cramped room was simply furnished, equipped with only a bed, a desk, and a chair.

Apart from that were Formation Books and Formation Diagrams, as well as other miscellaneous items related to formation drawing.

Someone inside was drawing a formation, dressed plainly, with a straight posture.

He looked serious and tired, but his eyes were determined.

It was Instructor Yan, whom Mo Hua recognized so well!

Mo Hua felt a slight excitement in his heart.

Ever since Instructor Yan left Tongxian City, Mo Hua had not seen him.

Instructor Yan had enlightened Mo Hua in formations, and occasionally, Mo Hua worried about him.

He wondered how Instructor Yan was doing, whether his path in cultivation was going smoothly, whether his formation skills had improved, and whether he had found a Tao companion...

Later, upon arriving in South Yue City, when Mo Hua heard that Instructor Yan had gone missing in the mines, he had been somewhat anxious.

Now that he saw Instructor Yan safe and sound, Mo Hua was relieved.

Mo Hua thought for a while, decided not to rush out to meet Instructor Yan suddenly, but instead to observe and see what exactly Instructor Yan was up to.

As time passes, hearts can change.

Mo Hua was not sure if the current Instructor Yan was still the same person he knew before.

Whether he had really helped the Corpse Walking Stronghold do evil deeds.

Mo Hua calmed down and watched attentively with a stern little face.

Instructor Yan continued to draw the formation, with a meticulous and serious attitude, unaware that his former student was "peeping" at him.

After finishing the formation, Instructor Yan then looked at some Formation Books, browsed through a few Formation Diagrams, and made some annotations.

Mo Hua nodded slightly; this was how Instructor Yan had taught him in the past.

To learn formations, one must be diligent.

One should read a lot, learn a lot, think a lot, and also record a lot.

After a while, Instructor Yan was interrupted by someone while reading his Formation Books.

A corpse cultivator clad in gray with a deathly pale complexion knocked on Instructor Yan's door.

"Mr. Yan."

Instructor Yan frowned and showed displeasure; he did not like being disturbed while studying formations, but he still got up, opened the door, and said indifferently,

"What's the matter?"

The corpse cultivator said, "The formation on the west side of the stronghold is broken..."

Mo Hua knew about this because he had deliberately caused the damage!

Instructor Yan furrowed his brow, "Broken?"

The corpse cultivator bowed and said, "Please ask Mr. Yan to have a look."

Though the corpse cultivator said "please," his expression was indifferent, without the attitude of a request and seemingly not giving Instructor Yan the option to refuse.

Instructor Yan nodded, "Wait a moment."

Then he went back inside, picked a few brushes, chose several bottles of ink, and found a Formation Diagram, putting them all into his Storage Bag, before saying to the corpse cultivator,

"Let's go."

The corpse cultivator led Instructor Yan out of the room.

Before leaving, Instructor Yan locked the room and activated a formation.

It seemed that he did not want others to enter this room.

But no formation could prevent Mo Hua from entering.

After Instructor Yan left, Mo Hua quietly disabled the room's formation and gently tiptoed down from the roof into the room.

He did not touch anything, only scanning the room to judge what formations Instructor Yan had been drawing based on the aura and types of formation patterns.

Most of the formations in the room were Five Elements Formations.

Mo Hua was very familiar with the Five Elements Formations, so he could recognize them at a glance.

They were standard and orthodox formations, not Evil Formations.

Besides, there were a few rare formations that were not difficult either.

A few Formation Diagrams were on the table, showing signs of being looked through frequently.

These Formation Diagrams were for the Melting Fire Formation, Earth Stone Formation, and other formations consistently used in the Formation Master Grading assessments.

It seemed that Instructor Yan was still working hard to become a First-Grade Formation Master.

After looking at a few Formation Diagrams drawn by Instructor Yan, Mo Hua nodded subtly, initially judging that Instructor Yan had reached the standard of a first-grade Formation Master.

Unfortunately, his exploration was not broad enough.

If the Formation used in the assessment were more obscure and tricky, the difficulty of grading would be quite high.

It would then depend on a bit of luck, or rather, fate.

Besides, there were no Ultimate Formations, nor any Evil Formations.

Mo Hua was both somewhat disappointed and very relieved.

Disappointed that there was no clue to the Ultimate Formation.

Relieved that Instructor Yan had not mastered the Ultimate Formation, nor had he become a confederate of evil by painting Evil Formations for the Corpse cultivators in the Corpse Walking Stronghold to help them with Corpse Refinement and corpse-raising.

Mo Hua guessed that Instructor Yan had probably just been kidnapped.

Because of his identity as a Formation Master, he had preserved his life; yet due to that same identity, he was coerced by the Corpse cultivators and had no choice but to join the Corpse Stronghold, painting various Formations for their camp's construction.

After all, no matter where, Formation Masters are rare talents in the world of Tao Cultivation.

That was even more the case for someone like Instructor Yan, who had a level of competency near that of a first-grade Formation Master.

But this was just his own speculation. To know for certain, he would have to ask.

Mo Hua then found a stool, sat in a corner, concealed his presence, and quietly waited for Instructor Yan to return.

An hour later, Instructor Yan came back.

The Corpse cultivator had escorted Instructor Yan all the way to the door, watched as Instructor Yan entered the house, and then turned to leave.

After entering the house, Instructor Yan sighed and continued over to the table to read more Formation Books.

While reading, Instructor Yan muttered to himself:

"How could a Formation just break?"

Suddenly, he had a startled expression, feeling that something was amiss.

A Formation could not just break for no reason.

Then Instructor Yan was shocked, his pupils contracted slightly.

It seemed that someone had been in his room!

He immediately stood up and swept the room with his Divine Sense, but found nothing.

Though the desk, chairs, and books seemed untouched, he had a strong intuition that someone had been in there, going through something.

Who could it be?!

And for what reason?

Instructor Yan's brows knit tightly, his expression grave.

Just then, a small hand gently patted Instructor Yan's shoulder.

A chill ran down Instructor Yan's spine, his scalp tingling.

Was there someone in the room?

And was that person standing right behind him at this very moment?!

While Instructor Yan was in turmoil, a crisp voice asked by his ear:

"Instructor Yan, why are you acting like a thief?"

The voice was that of a child, crisp and pleasant to hear.

Moreover, it was extremely familiar...

Instructor Yan whirled around, his mouth agape, and it took him a moment before he could speak:

"Mo... Mo Hua?!"

Mo Hua smiled brightly, "Instructor Yan, it's been a long time."

Instructor Yan was completely stunned.

He blinked, looking at Mo Hua.

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Mo Hua still looked the way he remembered—delicate and cute, with clear eyes. He had just grown a few years older and a bit taller.

Beyond the sparkling eyes, there was something unfathomable, like a deep and lustrous jade stone.

Instructor Yan blinked again and looked at Mo Hua, then said with sudden realization:

"I must be dreaming..."

Old people often like to reminisce.

It seems he had recalled the events in Tongxian City, along with Mo Hua, the child...

Instructor Yan relaxed somewhat, his expression somewhat wistful.

Mo Hua was somewhat speechless, yet also somewhat helpless as he said:

"Instructor Yan, it's me. I came to find you."

Instructor Yan was momentarily stunned.

As far as dreams go...

That voice was strangely clear.

The expression on Mo Hua's face was also too vivid.

He focused his gaze, as though he could see Mo Hua's exquisite little face.

Instructor Yan looked up again, saw the dim mountains, an overall chill, but there was indeed a sun hanging high in between the cliffs.

In broad daylight, how could one have dreams?

Instructor Yan was startled and then with trembling hands, gently touched Mo Hua's shoulder, incredulously asking:

"Is it... really Mo Hua?"

Instructor Yan's voice was trembling slightly, and the corners of his eyes were moist.

He had not expected that in his lifetime, he would really be able to see Mo Hua, his student, once again...

Mo Hua, somewhat moved, nodded and said:

"It's me!"

Instructor Yan suddenly became stern and he asked with concern:

"But how did you... how did you get here?"

"I came to find you."

Instructor Yan was taken aback, "To find me?"

Mo Hua replied, "Not just you, I'm also looking for Zhang Quan, the Zombies, and... a Formation."

Instructor Yan listened, confused, and then remembering something, his gaze shook:

"You're also searching for... the Spiritual Pivot Formation?"

Mo Hua nodded, confirming his thoughts.

It appeared that the Formation on the zombie was indeed the treasured Spiritual Pivot Formation of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect, inherited from the Ultimate Formation of the Great Hidden Spirit Sect over a thousand years ago:

The Spiritual Pivot Formation!

Chapter 448: Spiritual Pivot Formation (1)

"Instructor Yan, what exactly is the Spirit Pivot Formation?"

Mo Hua couldn't help but ask.

Just as Instructor Yan was about to answer, he suddenly paused, "How do you know about the Spirit Pivot Formation?"

Instructor Yan was somewhat surprised.

The Spirit Pivot Formation Chart was supposed to be the ultimate technique of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect. How did Mo Hua come to know of it?

"Manager Mo told me!"

Mo Hua immediately sold out Manager Mo.

Instructor Yan's mouth twitched.

He made a mental note of Manager Mo's indiscretion.

This plump junior brother was so loose-lipped, he actually spilled such important information to Mo Hua.

"Instructor Yan, can you tell me?"

Mo Hua's face was filled with anticipation, her big eyes twinkling.

Instructor Yan didn't want to speak, but looking into Mo Hua's eyes, he couldn't refuse. He hesitated for a moment and then heaved a deep sigh.

The Minor Hidden Spirit Sect had already perished; keeping these things secret was meaningless now.

"Alright," Instructor Yan nodded as he looked at Mo Hua and began to speak about the origins of the Spirit Pivot Formation:

"When I was studying in the Sect, I was highly regarded by my master. Through casual conversations, I also heard some stories and secrets of the past..."

"The legacy of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect was inherited from the ancient Great Hidden Spirit Sect."

"Most of the legacies within the Sect are incomplete remnants from the predecessors, so it's not rare to have only bits and pieces of them..."

"Only this Spirit Pivot Formation, it's extremely profound and exceptionally difficult to grasp. It's truly a Formation that could be used as a Sect-protecting technique."

"However, this Spirit Pivot Formation is too mysterious, too difficult to comprehend. For hundreds of years, not a single cultivator of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect has been able to penetrate the mysteries of this Formation."

Instructor Yan sighed, "First-grade Formations end at nine patterns, but this Spirit Pivot Formation actually has twelve..."

"Twelve patterns in Divine Sense, ah, only achievable by Foundation Establishment, and impossible without being a Second Rank Formation Master!"

Mo Hua, who was at the eighth level of Qi Refinement with twelve patterns in her Divine Sense, silently didn't speak.

After thinking for a while, Mo Hua asked again:

"Did the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect ever have a Second Rank Formation Master?"

"Yes," Instructor Yan nodded, "Two hundred years ago, there was an Ancestral Master, at the Mid Foundation Establishment stage, who had attained the proficiency of Second Grade Initial Stage in Formation methods."

"Did he not learn the Spirit Pivot Formation either?"

Instructor Yan shook his head with regret: "No."

Mo Hua frowned slightly, confused:

"A Mid Foundation Establishment cultivator should have around fourteen patterns in their Divine Sense, right? With that, he still wasn't able to learn the Spirit Pivot Formation? Is it so hard to learn?"

"It's not that simple..."

Instructor Yan organized his thoughts, explaining to Mo Hua:

"For a Formation Master, Divine Sense is a threshold, a reliance, but that's all it is."

"Without enough Divine Sense, one cannot learn a Formation."

"With Divine Sense, you only have the qualification to learn a Formation, but that doesn't mean you can certainly master it."

"You have to study more, practice more, think more, and comprehend more..."

"If you're not diligent, no matter how good your natural gift for Divine Sense, you'll just be squandering time, wasting your talent, unable to become an extraordinary Formation Master."

Mo Hua nodded.

Mr. Zhuang had taught her the same.

Instructor Yan's gaze became intense as he continued with a sigh:

"And the Spirit Pivot Formation is a type that, even if one's Divine Sense is sufficient, is extremely hard to comprehend..."

Mo Hua said, "Is it because it involves understanding the Heavenly Dao and the origin of Spiritual Power?"

Instructor Yan looked surprised and nodded:

"Correct."

Then, he became reflective:

"Mr. Zhuang truly is a remarkable man. Mo Hua, at such a young age, you already know about these deep levels of understanding in Formation techniques."

It seems that his choice back then was not wrong; otherwise, he would have really wasted such a talented Formation sapling.

Mo Hua then asked, "So that Second Rank Ancestral Master of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect, did he fail to learn the Spirit Pivot Formation because he couldn't grasp the Great Dao origin of the Formation?"

Instructor Yan nodded with a bitter expression:

"Yes, the Ancestral Master probably knew what the origin of the Spirit Pivot Formation was, but he just couldn't comprehend it, much less draw out the Formation..."

"Sometimes, even if he managed to draw it, it would be merely an empty shell without spirit; utterly ineffective."

Mo Hua nodded in understanding.

When she first learned the Thick Earth Formation, she didn't know she needed to connect with the Taoist meaning of the earth. The Formation she drew only had the physical patterns but lacked the original effect of the Formation technique.

It was like a pattern that had lost its soul.

"Then what effect does this Spirit Pivot Formation really have?" Mo Hua asked curiously.

Instructor Yan said, "The specifics, since no one within the Sect had mastered it, I'm not quite clear on them..."

"But according to the Ancestral Master's deductions of the Sect, at the core of this Formation method should be the word 'control'."

"Control?"

Instructor Yan nodded, "Control of Spiritual Power."

Mo Hua thought of Zhang Quan, who controlled corpses.

It seemed her guess was correct; Zhang Quan was first refining corpses, then using the Spirit Pivot Formation to increase the number of corpses he could control.

However...

"This... doesn't seem that impressive," Mo Hua said weakly.

It was merely the effect of controlling Spiritual Power.

Zhang Quan used it to refine corpses, and although the numbers of zombies he could control were significant and dangerous, it still wasn't something particularly fearsome.

If it really came to a fight, there were still many methods that could be used to counter it.

"No," Instructor Yan said with a grave expression, "the Spirit Pivot Formation is actually very powerful."

Mo Hua was taken aback.

Instructor Yan explained to Mo Hua:

"Controlling Spiritual Power is extremely important. Controlling corpses is just a minor application."

"In other aspects of Taoist cultivation, from small wood and stone puppets to large mechanical beasts, and even giant Taoist soldiers, formations like the Spirit Pivot Formation are needed for central control."

"Ordinary formations do not have such a strong effect on controlling Spiritual Power."

"For an individual cultivator, the effect may not be obvious, but the more cultivators there are, the larger the power, the deeper the schemes, and the more massive the mechanisms, artifacts, and cultivation engineering involved, the more crucial the Spirit Pivot Formation becomes!"

Upon hearing this, Mo Hua was shocked.

It seemed she had underestimated its importance.

The Cultivation World is vast with extensive territories; there are indeed many aspects of cultivation knowledge that she had not yet understood.

The Spirit Pivot Formation was actually so formidable...

"Instructor Yan, do you know about Zhang Quan?" Mo Hua couldn't help asking.

Instructor Yan's expression turned solemn, "You've seen him?"

"Mhm." Mo Hua nodded.

Instructor Yan frowned, "This person is treacherous and ruthless; it's best not to have conflicts with him."

Mo Hua whispered:

"It's too late for that; now he probably dreams of killing me..."

Instructor Yan's mouth fell open, "You... what have you done to him?"

Mo Hua thought for a moment and said, "It seems like not much, mainly because his mind is narrow, and he tends to hold grudges."

All I wanted was to catch him, but I failed, to snatch his bell, but didn't get it, and in the end, I only snatched away a few zombies.

And that was with the help of my senior brothers and sisters.

Who would have thought Zhang Quan would only target the weak and not hold a grudge against his senior brothers and sisters, focusing his resentment solely on me.

Mo Hua muttered to himself.

Instructor Yan didn't know what to say.

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Zhang Quan was a Foundation Establishment cultivator, and a corpse cultivator to boot, having dealt with corpses all the time, his hands stained with countless lives.

And now he bore a grudge against Mo Hua...

Instructor Yan was filled with worry.

Mo Hua then whispered, "Instructor Yan, is the Spirit Pivot Formation stored on Zhang Quan's body?"

Instructor Yan was slightly startled and slowly nodded, "I had assumed so as well..."

Mo Hua nodded and seemed to remember something else. He asked, "Instructor Yan, how did you end up at the Corpse Walking Stronghold?"

Instructor Yan looked melancholic, pondered for a moment, and still spoke slowly,

"Two years ago, I went to South Yue City, seeking that traitorous deserter who dishonored our sect..."

"But there was no trace of that traitor in South Yue City."

"I concealed my identity, sought for a long time with no news; just when I was about to leave, I noticed something strange about the mine. Thinking the traitor might be causing trouble, I rented a room near the mine, intending to investigate."

"One night, I heard some noise, went out quietly, and after some trouble, discovered several cultivators transporting coffins near the mine..."

"I was very cautious, but never expected there to be Foundation Building cultivators among them."

"Was it that Zhang Quan?" asked Mo Hua.

"Hmm," Instructor Yan nodded, then said with some embarrassment, "I focused solely on studying formations, so my Taoist skills aren't polished. I was no match for them, had no hope of escape, and thus fell into their hands."

"Zhang Quan searched through my storage bag, saw that I was a formation master, and made me work for them."

"I didn't want to help a tyrant, but with deep hatred for my sect to avenge, I had no choice but to..."

Instructor Yan's face showed shame, "... to compromise and survive, I joined this Corpse Stronghold and started drawing formations for them."

Mo Hua asked, "Then have you seen the Spirit Pivot Formation Chart on Zhang Quan's body?"

Instructor Yan said helplessly, "I haven't seen it..."

"I suspect that the zombies he refined were marked with Spirit Pivot Formations, but Zhang Quan never let me draw formations for the zombies, nor allowed me to come into contact with those walking corpses..."

Mo Hua said, "Is he afraid of exposing some secret?"

Instructor Yan nodded, "Very likely."

Mo Hua rested his little chin in his hand, contemplating for a while.

This Zhang Quan harbored plenty of secrets; I must find a way to uncover them.

The Spirit Pivot Formation Chart is crucial; I must find a way to obtain it.

This Corpse Walking Stronghold, with its killing and corpse refining, must also be dealt with.

Mo Hua planned what he needs to do next, and then said,

"Instructor Yan, stay a few more days. In a few days, I'll get you out of here."

Instructor Yan was astonished, "How are you going to do that?"

This place is the Corpse Walking Stronghold, with bandits, corpse cultivators, walking corpses and Iron Corpses, and Foundation Establishment phase Zhang Quan may return at any moment.

"Don't worry," Mo Hua assured.

He wanted to take Instructor Yan out of there right then.

The Corpse Walking Stronghold was, after all, no good place.

But he had sneaked in while invisible, and didn't yet possess the strength to strike down all his enemies, even with the protection of his junior brothers and sisters. During a fight, he couldn't ensure Instructor Yan's safety.

It was better to take the long view, to prepare thoroughly before acting.

With the identity of a formation master, those corpse cultivators probably wouldn't make things difficult for Instructor Yan.

Having decided on his plan, Mo Hua remembered something else and said with earnest concern to Instructor Yan,

"Instructor, the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect is gone; you shouldn't be fixated on revenge. Think more of yourself, live well, find a partner, and start a family..."

"What you just said..." Instructor Yan frowned, "Why does it sound so familiar to me?"

Mo Hua said crisply, "Manager Mo asked me to tell you this."

Instructor Yan's expression was complex as his mind added another tally against Manager Mo.

It wasn't enough for him to nag; he had to get Mo Hua to do it too.

Later on, he would settle accounts with him slowly.

After Mo Hua gave more instructions, he took his leave, "Instructor Yan, I'm going back now. I'll come find you again in a few days."

Mo Hua's tone was light and casual, leaving Instructor Yan feeling bewildered.

It was as if this place wasn't the Corpse Walking Stronghold, but an inn in South Yue City, where Mo Hua would come visit again in a few days...

And then, in front of Instructor Yan, Mo Hua disappeared from sight.

Instructor Yan's pupils contracted.

Although he had anticipated it, knowing that Mo Hua had a way to stay hidden, he was still taken aback.

Mo Hua had arrived without his notice, and left without a trace.

This method of concealment was remarkably clever.

Who taught him?

Mr. Zhuang perhaps...

Instructor Yan stood quietly for a moment, then suddenly startled as he recalled a question:

What did Mo Hua want with the Spirit Pivot Formation Chart?

Mo Hua always had many questions, continuously asking them when at Tongxian Gate.

As an instructor, Instructor Yan habitually answered them for Mo Hua.

So whatever Mo Hua asked, he answered.

But now, he suddenly realized.

Why had Mo Hua gone to such lengths to find this formation chart?

An unbelievable thought suddenly crossed his mind.

That child Mo Hua wasn't really planning to learn it, was he?

Impossible...

A first-grade twelve-pattern, requiring divine sense...

Instructor Yan froze.

He realized that Mo Hua had entered the room completely undetected by his divine sense, and had left noiselessly.

Moreover, his presence was obscure and unfathomable.

This was a sign of powerful divine sense.

Could it be...

Instructor Yan looked at the empty room, towards the place where Mo Hua just disappeared, and felt a sudden tremor in his heart.

"The Spirit Pivot Formation..."

Instructor Yan murmured, a flicker of hope glowing in his eyes.

He, too, wanted to see if anyone could truly master this first-grade twelve-pattern Spirit Pivot Formation Method, the ultimate technique of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect, that for hundreds of years, no one had managed to comprehend!

Chapter 449: Behind the Scenes (1)

Mo Hua followed the roof, avoiding the Corpse Cultivators, left the gate of the Corpse Walking Stronghold, went under a large rock, and met up with Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi.

Bai Zisheng asked, "Why did it take you so long?"

Mo Hua chuckled and said, "I found Instructor Yan!"

"Instructor Yan is alright, isn't he?" Continue your adventure with empire

"Yes," Mo Hua nodded, "We'll rescue Instructor Yan in a few days."

Bai Zisheng looked perplexed, "Why wait a few days? Just rescue now. I'll rush in and slaughter all those Corpse Cultivators!"

Mo Hua was indifferent, "Sure, then you go."

Bai Zisheng paused, then scratched his head and said:

"Forget it. You're craftier. Let's follow your plan."

Mo Hua was displeased, "You're the one full of crafty ideas."

Bai Zisheng muttered to himself:

"I wish I could have more crafty ideas. Sadly, my nature is too upright to think of such things."

Mo Hua murmured softly, "I think you're just dull..."

Bai Zisheng ruffled Mo Hua's hair, "You dare call your senior brother dull again?"

...

The two bickered and argued incessantly.

Bai Zixi picked up a stick and knocked each of their heads once, "Focus on the matter at hand!"

"Oh."

The two quickly complied.

And so, the trio began to discuss what to do next.

Bai Zisheng thought for a while and then said:

"We set up an ambush on the inevitable path, then capture Zhang Quan. With no leader, the Corpse Walking Stronghold will be in chaos, and we can take the opportunity to wipe it out..."

Just as Mo Hua was about to nod, something suddenly occurred to him, and he shook his head and said:

"No, that won't work."

"Why not?" asked Bai Zisheng, puzzled.

Mo Hua pondered, "Behind Zhang Quan, there must be someone else."

"Who?"

"The person drawing Formations for him."

Mo Hua's expression grew serious, "The Formation Diagrams Instructor Yan drew for the Corpse Walking Stronghold were standard Five Elements Formations, and they were all for architectural purposes."

"But the ones used for Corpse Refinement are completely different Evil Formations."

"Zhang Quan cannot draw such Formations, and from what I've seen, it seems that no one else in the Stronghold can, either."

"At least from the Corpse Cultivators I've seen, none can produce such Formations."

"Moreover, these are the Spiritual Pivot Formations of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect, which are not something ordinary Formation Masters can produce."

"Without figuring out who this person is, killing Zhang Quan and razing the Black Mountain Stronghold won't solve anything."

"Formations are the key, as long as this person knows about Formations, they will continue to kill people, buy corpses, refine corpses..."

"And," Mo Hua paused, then sighed, adding:

"This Ultimate Formation is an inheritance of Instructor Yan's Sect, and I don't want any Cultivator to use it for evil..."

Bai Zisheng nodded and said, "Alright, I'll listen to you."

Bai Zixi also slightly nodded and asked Mo Hua:

"Have you figured out what to do?"

"Yes," Mo Hua nodded, then said:

"We'll let Zhang Quan return to the Corpse Walking Stronghold, then we'll spy on him to see who he meets with, who is helping him with Formations..."

"After clarifying these matters, we'll inform Sister Situ and join forces with the Taoist Court to take down the Corpse Walking Stronghold."

"Then capture Zhang Quan, take his Corpse Controlling Bell, and restore the Spirit Pivot Formation Chart."

"And best of all, we'll drag out the Cultivator behind him as well..."

"Eliminate the root to prevent future troubles..."

...

Mo Hua explained everything systematically.

Bai Zisheng nodded his agreement but still expressed his concern:

"It probably won't go that smoothly..."

"Master always said to plan ahead and prepare for the unexpected, but plans can't keep up with changes. We'll have to adapt accordingly when the time comes," Mo Hua said.

"Alright!"

After the discussion, the three of them began to act according to their plan.

The first step was to wait for Zhang Quan to return to the Stronghold.

But this first step met with some unexpected trouble.

Zhang Quan seemed overly cautious...

He was still wandering around the desolate mountains, crawling into caves, hiding in the forest, setting traps, fighting a battle of wits with the air. He stubbornly refused to return to the Stronghold.

Zhang Quan thought he was being thorough, but he didn't know that all his actions were being observed by Mo Hua.

Mo Hua was puzzled by his behavior.

Did he really need to be this cautious...

And it seemed like he could keep this up indefinitely.

Mo Hua was finding it exhausting just watching.

Even someone as patient as Mo Hua was starting to run out of patience.

So the three of them agreed to split up and proceed separately.

Mo Hua went back to the Corpse Walking Stronghold first, to get a clear picture of the internal layout and map out the Architectural Formation, and also to chat with Instructor Yan to see if anything had been overlooked.

Bai Zixi stayed outside the Stronghold to back up Mo Hua.

Bai Zisheng went to find Situ Fang to discuss manpower arrangements in advance, to prepare for the extermination of the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

It took a full five days before Zhang Quan returned to the Stronghold.

He looked haggard and worn out, but inside, he felt a great weight lifted.

After an intellectual struggle with an invisible, and actually nonexistent, pursuer, Zhang Quan expended a lot of wit and tricks and finally confirmed that he had shaken off Mo Hua's tracking. Only then did he dare to return confidently to his den of Corpse Refinement.

Occasionally, he still felt a subtle sensation.

As if something, like a bone-clinging maggot, was sticking to him.

But after spending so much time and employing so many measures, even if there was something following him, it should have been thrown off by now.

Zhang Quan sneered to himself.

Having lived for so many years, his experience in Tao Cultivation far exceeded that of the greenhorn he was dealing with.

That little ghost skilled in concealment would never be able to trace my steps again!

Zhang Quan felt greatly relieved, filled with joy, and with big strides, he returned to his secret, unknown to others, and unspeakable Corpse Walking Stronghold.

At this time, Mo Hua had already been waiting for him at his old home for a long time.

Seeing Zhang Quan enter, Mo Hua felt even happier than Zhang Quan did.

Staying in the Corpse Walking Stronghold these past few days, Mo Hua hid himself well, nearly having figured out everything about the stronghold, and he was starting to get bored, looking for things to do.

He even counted how many coffins there were in the stronghold...

Zhang Quan swaggered through the entrance of Corpse Walking Stronghold.

Mo Hua's eyes lit up as he executed the Water Passing Step, lightly leaping across rooftops, and then entered the deepest room. He climbed up onto the beam, sat cross-legged, and waited patiently.

This room was spacious, concealed, and the formations were complete, and it was filled with everything related to Corpse Refinement.

He guessed this was Zhang Quan's secret chamber.

As expected, after a while, Zhang Quan walked into the room, right beneath where Mo Hua was perched.

Mo Hua hid himself, even drawing a Concealment Formation nearby in advance.

Zhang Quan was completely unaware.

The room was silent; on the surface, it seemed that only Zhang Quan was present.

Zhang Quan let out a long sigh of relief, then burned incense and bathed, changed into a respectable set of clothes, sat in meditation to regulate his breathing for a while before Corpse Cultivators came one after another to report the situation of the stronghold to him.

The Corpse Cultivators reported respectfully; Zhang Quan sat elevated, listening intently, while Mo Hua, sitting above his head, pricked up his ears to eavesdrop.

Most of the things reported by the Corpse Cultivators were minor affairs of the stronghold.

That month, they robbed several traveling merchants, killed a few Cultivators, bought a few corpses...

They refined several Walking Corpses, succeeded with a few, failed with several;

Spent many Spirit Stones, consumed numerous materials;

Which Corpse Refinement materials were running low and needed restocking, which Zombies had lost control and needed to be dealt with, and so on...

These were all scattered details.

Listening from above, Mo Hua gradually understood the operation and procedures of Corpse Walking Stronghold.

The stronghold had bandits, had Corpse Cultivators.

Ordinary bandits that dared to kill people, were willing to kill people, and had killed before, could join Corpse Walking Stronghold.

But entering Corpse Walking Stronghold did not guarantee being taught the ways of Corpse Refinement.

One had to go through an assessment, endure some seniority, and gain Zhang Quan's trust, to become a legit Corpse Cultivator.

Corpse Cultivators were those who refined corpses and controlled corpses, the Corpse Path Demon Cultivators.

Corpse Cultivators refining corpses required Cultivator corpses.

The sources of corpses were several.

One was through robbery and murder.

The Cultivators within the stronghold, before joining, were either Sin Cultivators or bandits, accustomed to robbing and murdering.

But this "loot" included not just Spirit Stones and Spiritual Artifacts, but also the bodies of Cultivators.

The bandits of Corpse Walking Stronghold would kill people, then bring the corpses back to be used for Corpse Refinement.

The second was to buy.

Employing people like Wang Lai to kill Mining Cultivators, buying corpses.

Or to purchase them from tomb raiders who dug up graves.

Of course, the main source was still the Mining Cultivators.

After all, there were many mines in South Yue City and numerous Mining Cultivators, and in their eyes, Mining Cultivators' lives were cheap, not worth much Spirit Stones.

After buying the corpses, came Corpse Refinement.

Mo Hua had taken a cursory look at this before.

The means of Corpse Refinement, indeed as Sister Situ said, required herbs, Corpse Raising Coffins, Corpse Controlling Bells, etc.

But the specific techniques became somewhat complicated.

Which herbs to use, in what proportions, to boil into a foul-smelling medicinal juice.

Then, to soak the corpse in the medicinal juice.

After enough soaking time, place it into a Corpse Raising Coffin for refinement.

During Corpse Refinement, Corpse Cultivators would walk back and forth around the coffin every day, while walking, shaking the Corpse Controlling Bronze Bell.

This process had numerous steps, but the division of labor was clear.

Just like the herbs in Alchemy, the refined iron in Artifact Refining, the Corpse Cultivators of Corpse Walking Stronghold saw corpses as a "material" for refining, not as people.

Their expressions were cold and numb, as if it were perfectly natural.

Mo Hua frowned as he watched.

He even thought of directly drawing some Reversed Spirit Formations, to collapse the Corpse Walking Stronghold altogether.

But upon reflection, he held back.

Impatience could ruin grand plans; he could not act impulsively.

The Corps Cultivators of Corpse Walking Stronghold, continued to report the minor matters of the stronghold, but did not touch on the formations related to Corpse Refinement.

Mo Hua listened for several days without any clue, until after three days, he overheard something.

A Corpse Cultivator, in a low voice, asked Zhang Quan,

"Householder, shall we send the corpses?"

Hearing this, Mo Hua was intrigued.

Send corpses?

What corpses? Where to? Why send them?

Could it be... for Formation Painting?

Mo Hua remembered that in Corpse Walking Stronghold, some of the newly refined Walking Corpses had no formations on the heart meridian.

Since there were none, then they must be painted.

Send corpses... that means it's not that he himself would paint them, nor that they would be painted within Corpse Walking Stronghold, but instead they were sent out for someone else, for someone else to help him paint?

Mo Hua strained his attention, very curious to know exactly where these corpses were being sent, to whom, and who would help Zhang Quan with the Formation Painting?

But Zhang Quan just shook his head, "No."

That Corpse Cultivator looked a bit startled before hesitatingly saying,

"If we don't send them soon, it might be too late. Those Zombies... can't be controlled..."

Zhang Quan's gaze turned cold, "If they can't be controlled, then dispose of them, feed them to other Zombies. Do I need to teach you this?"

That Corpse Cultivator quickly bowed his head and said, "Yes."

After the Corpse Cultivator stepped down, Zhang Quan huffed coldly and began to meditate.

Mo Hua, however, frowned slightly.

This Zhang Quan, he seemed not very cooperative.

Chapter 450: Discovery (1)

Zhang Quan guessed that he had been targeted, so to be safe, he dared not rashly enter Corpse Stronghold, fearing that he might lead the wolf into his house.

He dared not to "send corpses" either, fearing that it would reveal secrets.

What he didn't know was the "wolf" had already entered the house and was watching him from his rooftop at this very moment.

Mo Hua was crouching on the roof beam, frowning in thought, and still decided to give Zhang Quan another chance.

If Zhang Quan were to send corpses during this time, he could live a bit longer.

Otherwise, Mo Hua would take action immediately.

Read the latest on empire

Report to the Taoist Court Official, gather people, take down the Corpse Walking Stronghold, capture Zhang Quan, send him to Taoist Prison, and interrogate him under torture, beat him severely, then kill him, to give an explanation to the Mining Cultivators who died at his hands, as well as the female cultivators from Hundred Flower Tower!

Mo Hua thought viciously.

While Zhang Quan was talking to a Corpse cultivator, he suddenly felt a chilling breeze behind him. He looked around, found nothing, and frowned.

"Householder, what's the matter?" asked that Corpse cultivator.

Zhang Quan was slightly distracted, shook his head, "It's nothing..."

But in his heart, he remained extremely wary.

It was as if a powerful Divine Sense was coldly staring at him.

"It must be an illusion..."

Perhaps it was because he had been ducking and hiding lately, being jittery, that he was overly sensitive to such feelings.

Zhang Quan consoled himself.

Seeing Zhang Quan's reaction, Mo Hua also felt a bit puzzled.

He had only thought about killing Zhang Quan, and Zhang Quan had actually reacted?

Was Zhang Quan's mind too sharp, or could Divine Sense itself intimidate and instill fear in others?

If Divine Sense became powerful enough, could it also directly condense into a force of slaughter?

In Mo Hua's memory, he had never seen an example of cultivators killing with Divine Sense.

The Little Green-faced Ghost in the Contemplation Map could parasitize the Sea of Consciousness and consume the Divine Sense of others, which was akin to killing with Divine Sense.

But that was because it was inherently a sinister and evil thought that could invade the Sea of Consciousness and harm another's Divine Sense.

It seemed that ordinary cultivators could not employ this method...

Mo Hua noted this doubt in his heart, planning to ask Mr. Zhuang when he had the time; for now, he still needed to keep an eye on Zhang Quan.

However, in the following days, Zhang Quan was as cautious as ever, revealing not a single clue.

Mo Hua was becoming impatient.

Just as he was considering whether to take action directly and take down the Corpse Walking Stronghold or to wait and see if there were any other clues, Zhang Quan discovered the needle within his body.

It was the Compass Child Formation Needle from the Compass Parent-Child Formation.

Mo Hua had made it, inscribed the Formation on it and given it to Bai Zisheng.

Bai Zisheng, during his confrontation with Zhang Quan, had taken the opportunity to stab him with it.

There were a total of three needles, one on clothes, one in hair, and one inside a wound.

Having found the first two, Zhang Quan had yet to discover the third.

After consuming Corpse Blood Pills and fighting repeatedly, escaping in tatters, Zhang Quan had suffered bruises all over.

Upon returning to the stronghold, preoccupied with many affairs, he could only rest briefly, slowing his recovery.

One day, while cleaning his wounds, Zhang Quan suddenly sensed something was off. Some meridians felt obstructed as if something was lodged in his flesh and blood.

Zhang Quan took out his dagger, cut open the wound again, and from within the flesh, extracted a silver-white fine needle.

Watching him pluck out the needle, Mo Hua sighed silently.

But Zhang Quan inhaled sharply in shock.

How the fuck could there be another one??!

When did this needle affair happen?

Zhang Quan felt a chill in his heart, his expression astonished.

"That little ghost, he wouldn't already know my location, would he?"

Or even worse, he hasn't already infiltrated Corpse Stronghold, has he?!

Zhang Quan immediately stood up, his heart pounding with fear.

The Corpse Stronghold had been discovered, and it was even possible that someone had covertly sneaked in!

The little ghost had extremely clever methods of concealment.

Such unbelievable acts weren't impossible.

Zhang Quan immediately shouted:

"Men!"

A Corpse cultivator strode in, bowing and said: "Householder."

Zhang Quan pointed at him, his voice trembling slightly:

"Martial law throughout the stronghold! Then go search!"

"Every inch inside and out, I want you to search thoroughly, to see if anyone has sneaked in!"

That Corpse cultivator looked bewildered, "This..."

Zhang Quan, anxious, kicked him, "Get the fuck going!"

Only then did the Corpse cultivator flusteredly respond: "Yes."

"Wait."

Zhang Quan called him back, then took out a wooden box, put the fine needle inside, handed the box to the Corpse cultivator, and ordered:

"Find someone to get rid of this wooden box, cast it far away... no, throw it into the river, where the current is swift, let it be carried downstream..."

"Yes!" The Corpse cultivator took the order and left.

But in just a short while, the entire Corpse Walking Stronghold erupted into noise.

The Corpse cultivator led the bandits to patrol and search.

Not a single room, coffin, or corner was overlooked.

Mo Hua shook his head, feeling a bit of pity.

He wasn't worried about Zhang Quan discovering him.

Not a single cultivator in the entire Corpse Stronghold could surpass Mo Hua in Divine Sense so naturally, they couldn't see through his stealth.

Moreover, Corpse Stronghold was a mountain stronghold with many buildings and formations within those buildings.

In such a place with abundant formations, Mo, who excelled at drawing and deciphering formations, thrived as easily as a fish swims in water, having an inherent advantage and not fearing their searches at all.

Mo Hua was disappointed because, by startling the snake, Zhang Quan definitely wouldn't send corpses anymore.

He would also be unable to find out who exactly was helping him with the Corpse Refinement Drawing Formation.

Additionally, with the stronghold on high alert and the Corpse cultivators vigilant, taking down the stronghold would require more effort.

Mo Hua frowned, calculating his next move.

Meanwhile, Zhang Quan was still fraught with paranoia.