

The Quest 451

Chapter 451: Discovery 443 (2)

Even for a moment, he felt as if Mo Hua had not only infiltrated the Corpse Walking Stronghold but even entered his secret chamber, currently hidden somewhere, silently observing him.

Zhang Quan broke out in a cold sweat, shaking his head repeatedly.

Impossible!

No matter how cunning that kid was, he couldn't possibly be that outrageous.

At most, he might have reached the outskirts of the stronghold...

Or perhaps, he only knew the general location and hadn't had the time to follow...

At this moment, Zhang Quan both hoped that the corpse cultivators would find traces of Mo Hua and hoped they wouldn't.

Soon, a subordinate came to report, "Householder, there are traces."

Zhang Quan was startled, "What kind of traces?"

"The Formation seems to have been tampered with."

"Formation?!"

Zhang Quan suddenly widened his eyes.

That kid, indeed knew about Formations!

"Quick, take me to see."

Zhang Quan followed the corpse cultivator out the door.

Mo Hua, hiding above a beam, touched his chin and pondered, "Where have I left any traces?"

Mo Hua remembered his actions had been quite clean this time.

Curious, he quietly followed to see for himself where he had slipped up so that he could pay attention to it next time, fix the oversight, and improve his technique.

A noisy group from Corpse Walking Stronghold was searching for Mo Hua.

And Mo Hua was following not far behind Zhang Quan, stepping on the rooftops of Corpse Walking Stronghold, all the way to a wall.

There were indeed traces of alteration on the wall's Formation.

Mo Hua looked at it and came to a realization.

He had indeed solved the Formation Patterns here and had redrawn some, but he had been somewhat careless, omitting a few Patterns. It wouldn't be noticeable ordinarily, but upon closer inspection, it gave him away.

Mo Hua took this to heart.

Formation work is precise; even the simplest Formation must be done meticulously and cannot be treated carelessly.

Mo Hua understood, but Zhang Quan did not.

He frowned and said, "This... what's been tampered with?"

The corpse cultivators looked at each other.

How could they know?

They were corpse cultivators, adepts in Corpse Refinement, not in Formation Painting...

Zhang Quan cursed, "A bunch of good-for-nothings! Call Mr. Yan to have a look."

After a while, someone brought Instructor Yan over.

Instructor Yan glanced at it and asked indifferently, "What's wrong with this Formation?"

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Zhang Quan asked, "Has someone tampered with it?"

Instructor Yan nodded, "I saw that this Formation was old, so I reinforced it."

Zhang Quan frowned, "You drew it?"

"Yes," Instructor Yan nodded, then said, puzzled:

"Is there a problem with this Formation?"

This question stumped Zhang Quan.

If he knew what was wrong with this Formation, he wouldn't have asked Instructor Yan.

But his instincts still told him that there was something strange about this Formation.

At that moment, a corpse cultivator suddenly said, "If you claim it's for reinforcement, why is this wall so easily damaged?"

After speaking, he struck the wall with a slash, and an obvious cut appeared.

This was because Mo Hua had solved the Formation; the original Formation was no longer effective, and the wall, without the Formation's reinforcement, was easily marked.

Instructor Yan wasn't flustered at all, but just glanced at the corpse cultivator lightly, "How can it take effect if I haven't finished drawing?"

The corpse cultivator was taken aback.

Instructor Yan then pointed at the cut on the wall and said, "Later, you fix this wall. Make it look exactly how it was before the slash, otherwise, I won't be able to draw the Formation."

The corpse cultivator, awkward and not knowing what to say.

Zhang Quan glared fiercely at the corpse cultivator and said to Instructor Yan with a clasped fist:

"My subordinate was rash, I apologize for the offense. Please don't take it to heart, Mr. Yan."

Instructor Yan nodded slightly.

Zhang Quan hesitated for a moment, his gaze flickering slightly, before he asked:

"Mr. Yan, do you think there could be someone sneaking into the stronghold?"

Instructor Yan frowned, "How would they sneak in?"

Zhang Quan was momentarily stunned, "This..."

Instructor Yan said displeasedly: "Both inside and outside the stronghold are covered by the formations I have laid. Unless the formations are broken, not even a mosquito could fly in, let alone a cultivator."

Zhang Quan said, "What if that person's proficiency in formation is somewhat profound..."

Instructor Yan's expression turned solemn as he spoke coldly:

"Are you implying that I, Yan, am not skilled enough? That my formations are inferior to someone else's?"

Zhang Quan gave an awkward smile, "Why would you say that, sir..."

Instructor Yan huffed disdainfully and said with arrogance:

"Not to boast, but although I am not yet recognized with an official assessment, my prowess is already that of a first-rank Formation Master. In South Yue City, although there are cultivators with formation skills surpassing mine, it is utterly impossible for anyone to break my formations without making any noise!"

After he finished speaking, he glanced at Zhang Quan, "Householder, could it be that you look down upon me, Yan?"

The temperament of a Formation Master is indeed unbearably foul and rigid, and they are particularly difficult to offend.

Zhang Quan grumbled to himself internally, but still politely said on the surface:

"Mr. Yan is taking my words too seriously. I'm just preparing for every possibility."

However, since Instructor Yan said as much, Zhang Quan also felt reassured.

Then he kicked the corpse cultivator with his foot, "Apologize to Mr. Yan."

The corpse cultivator could only bow and say, "Please forgive me, Mr. Yan."

Instructor Yan's countenance slightly cleared.

Seeing this, Zhang Quan then smiled and said, "Sir, I would like to ask you a question."

Instructor Yan nodded, "Householder, please speak."

Zhang Quan said, "Suppose someone is adept at concealment and wants to infiltrate Corpse Walking Stronghold, how should we defend against it?"

Instructor Yan was inwardly startled, but his expression remained normal as he said casually:

"Such trivial concealing techniques are hardly worth mentioning."

Zhang Quan's face brightened, "Please enlighten me, sir."

Instructor Yan said, "The Expose Shadow Formation would be best, for under it, no cultivator can hide, and all forms of concealment unravel themselves."

"However, this Expose Shadow Formation is quite challenging, and the stronghold doesn't possess the necessary Spiritual Ink for it. Moreover, it's quite cumbersome to set up and hence not very feasible."

"The best method would be to use the Expose Dust Formation."

"Set it up at the stronghold's main gate and around its periphery. Any cultivator who sneaks in would reveal their tracks..."

"Excellent!" Zhang Quan praised, "You truly live up to your reputation, Mr. Yan."

Zhang Quan had not heard of the Expose Shadow Formation, but he was familiar with the Expose Dust Formation.

Hundred Flower Tower had numerous Expose Dust Formations deployed to prevent those with peculiar proclivities from spying on intimate affairs.

Zhang Quan said, "May I ask if Mr. Yan could set up some Expose Dust Formations around the stronghold?"

Instructor Yan feigned ignorance:

"Set up Expose Dust Formations to guard against whom?"

Zhang Quan replied with a smile that wasn't quite a smile, "That's not something you need to worry about, sir."

Instructor Yan showed slight displeasure, pondered for a moment, but made up his mind and slowly nodded:

"Since the Householder has commanded, I shall naturally comply."

Zhang Quan breathed a sigh of relief, showing a pleased expression:

"Then I'll have to trouble you, Mr. Yan."

Instructor Yan also gave a bow.

Having handled Zhang Quan, Instructor Yan also let out a slight sigh of relief.

Afterward, he looked at the formation on the wall, his expression becoming distant.

This is... deciphering the formation, right?

Mo Hua, this child, can even decipher formations?

And looking at his technique, so effortless and obviously very proficient, he must have devoted great effort to this.

Instructor Yan became somewhat dazed.

The formation that he had painstakingly and sincerely painted was casually solved by this child...

Instructor Yan shook his head, feeling both shocked and comforted, and couldn't help murmuring to himself:

"To what extent has Mo Hua's skill in formations actually reached?"

Chapter 452: Attack the Fort (1)

Instructor Yan looked at Mo Hua's Formation with some shock in his heart.

Mo Hua, on the other hand, was equally shocked as he looked at Instructor Yan.

The forthright-faced Instructor Yan, when deceiving someone, didn't even blink an eye.

He not only lied and deceived Zhang Quan but also provided himself with cover, easing Zhang Quan's concerns.

Indeed, one should never judge a book by its cover.

Mo Hua realized he had underestimated Instructor Yan.

But would Instructor Yan really help Zhang Quan set up the Expose Dust Formation?

Mo Hua was curious.

Inside the Corpse Walking Stronghold, if the Expose Dust Formation really were to be established, although he could still find a way to get in, it would become more troublesome.

Instructor Yan left to prepare the "Expose Dust Formation."

Mo Hua followed him and realized everything with a glance.

What Instructor Yan prepared was not the Expose Dust Formation at all, but rather a relatively obscure, and also not very useful, Earth Series Formation with five Patterns.

When this Formation was activated, it would indeed raise some dust, but it had no effect on revealing or concealing anything.

It looked similar but was actually nothing like it.

It was because most Cultivators in the Corpse Walking Stronghold were "Formation Blind" that Instructor Yan dared to blatantly deceive them...

Mo Hua's young face turned serious, and he concluded in his mind:

One must indeed read more, broaden one's experiences, and learn more about Tao Cultivation knowledge.

That way, one can blatantly deceive others, and they won't even notice.

Otherwise, if one were to be fooled like an idiot, they wouldn't even be aware of it.

Mo Hua was a bit worried soon after.

What Instructor Yan was doing was risky.

If he was discovered and Zhang Quan became suspicious, or worse, held a grudge, Instructor Yan would have a hard time extricating himself and might even be in danger of losing his life.

Instructor Yan was taking this risk to protect him...

He needed to rescue Instructor Yan as soon as possible, then eliminate the Corpse Walking Stronghold, capture Zhang Quan, and steal his bell.

Mo Hua nodded his head, then again, without anyone noticing, he quietly left the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

After leaving the Corpse Walking Stronghold, Mo Hua found Bai Zixi nearby.

Bai Zixi was sitting under a stone, hugging her knees, her delicate hands fiddling with a twig, drawing something on the ground, and occasionally looking up in the direction of the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

When Mo Hua approached invisibly, Bai Zixi suddenly looked up toward the empty space and said with a melodious voice,

"Junior Brother?"

Mo Hua revealed himself, asking in confusion,

"Senior Sister, you've seen through my Concealment Technique?"

Bai Zixi shook her head, "I guessed."

Mo Hua clearly didn't believe her but didn't inquire further. Instead, his gaze shifted to the ground.

He remembered that Senior Sister was just drawing something on the ground.

The ground was covered with a layer of fine, soft soil.

What Bai Zixi was drawing were a series of smiley faces, each one next to the other, some with eyes but no eyebrows, some with mouths but no noses.

"Senior Sister, what are you drawing here?" Mo Hua asked out of curiosity.

Bai Zixi pointed at Mo Hua, "You."

Mo Hua was startled, "Me?"

"Yes." Bai Zixi nodded slightly, "One face for every two hours, to see how long you would keep me waiting."

Mo Hua was somewhat embarrassed. He had inadvertently spent a bit too much time inside listening and had forgotten that Senior Sister was waiting outside for him.

Immediately after, Mo Hua looked down at the little faces on the ground and muttered softly,

"I'm not that ugly, am I...?"

Bai Zixi's eyebrows furrowed slightly with a hint of anger,

"You think my drawing is ugly?"

Mo Hua shook his head repeatedly, "No, not ugly, not ugly."

Bai Zixi was then satisfied and nodded before asking,

"Have you found out everything?"

Mo Hua thought for a moment and replied, "I've found out some things, but since we've been discovered, we'll have to make the first move."

"Okay."

Bai Zixi glanced at Mo Hua, wiped away the little faces on the ground, and then said, "Let's go."

"Okay."

Mo Hua nodded his head and looked at the ground one more time before leaving.

One more smiling face remained on the ground, its lines simple, the strokes natural, and the smile sketched at the corners of the mouth, innocent and pure.

Just looking at it made one's heart overflow with joy.

Mo Hua couldn't help but wonder, what was Senior Sister thinking while drawing these little faces?

What expression did she wear as she drew them?

Was it like these little faces, also with a smile at the corners of her mouth?

What did Senior Sister look like when she smiled?

Mo Hua was a bit distracted.

"Junior Brother?"

Bai Zixi turned her head and saw Mo Hua standing still, so she called out to him.

"Oh."

Mo Hua came back to his senses, squinting his eyes as he smiled, and with a movement technique, quickly followed her.

After leaving the Corpse Walking Stronghold, Mo Hua found Situ Fang.

Bai Zisheng had already informed Situ Fang of the situation.

Situ Fang said, "I've written back to the Clan and informed Elder Jin about this matter too. The Clan has also agreed to the eradication of the Corpse Walking Stronghold..."

"This will be under the name of the Taoist Court, but in fact, the people we'll use are from my Situ Family."

Mo Hua nodded.

The Taoist Court's forces were unreliable, and to eradicate the Corpse Walking Stronghold, the Taoist Court's manpower would definitely be insufficient.

But the Situ Family...

Mo Hua then asked, "How many Cultivators will the Situ Family deploy?"

"Over two hundred," Situ Fang replied.

Mo Hua was surprised, "That many?"

South Yue City was only a little Immortal City, and Situ Fang was there only for training, yet she was able to mobilize so many Cultivators.

And these were not ordinary Cultivators, but those skilled in battle, ready for the eradication mission, proficient in Taoist Skills.

Situ Fang explained, "I utilized my father's connections."

Mo Hua wondered, "Isn't this... a bit of an overkill?"

"That's over two hundred cultivators, not too bad, right..." Situ Fang said.

"No," Mo Hua thought for a moment and then spoke more frankly:

"This matter doesn't actually benefit the Situ Family much, does it..."

Clans have vastly different family traditions.

Some clans are undoubtedly profit-driven, exploiting and bullying others with their power.

But there are also families with upright traditions, whose members loathe evil—should any family member deviate from ancestral teachings and make a mistake, they would be severely punished.

In more extreme cases, they would be expunged from the family records and expelled from the clan.

Even if the Situ Family is particularly upright in its conduct, it's unlikely they would mobilize so many people for something as unrelated as the Corpse Walking Stronghold in South Yue City.

Situ Fang hesitated briefly and decided there was no need to hide the truth, and thus she said to Mo Hua:

"It's not of much benefit to the Situ Family, but it's beneficial to me."

Mo Hua was somewhat puzzled.

Then Situ Fang explained:

"The status of a clan's disciples isn't determined solely by their cultivation or talent."

"Cultivation through personal experiences is actually a form of assessment."

"Whoever performs well during these experiences, achieves great merit, and makes significant contributions is more valued, and their future status within the clan will also be higher,"

"This time, it was my father thinking of my future, who used his connections to mobilize some clan manpower."

"Eliminating the Corpse Walking Stronghold—if I can earn merit in this, the Situ Family will bypass the Taoist Court's officials in South Yue City and report directly to the Taoist Court."

Of course, this is only part of the reason.

Situ Fang glanced at Mo Hua and the other two.

The willingness of her father to agree was, to a certain extent, influenced by Mo Hua's three's presence.

A Formation Master with boundless prospects and two children from great clans—even if not consciously courting their favor, it was necessary to cultivate a good relationship with them.

Thinking of this, Situ Fang said with a bit of shame:

"So, I do have a personal interest in this matter..."

Mo Hua nodded in understanding, but did not mind. Instead, she said confidently:

"As long as we can eliminate the Corpse Walking Stronghold, we are doing a good deed. It's only right to benefit from a good deed."

"Uncle Zhang Lan once told me that in this world, some people do bad things and reap benefits, only to be admired; while some who do good, and receive some benefits in return, end up criticized..."

"That's definitely not right."

"Humans have selfish desires, so Sister Situ, you don't need to take this matter to heart."

Situ Fang was taken aback by the words and felt somewhat relieved; she then said in surprise:

"Zhang Lan has said that to you?"

Mo Hua nodded vigorously, trying to salvage Zhang Lan's image:

"Uncle Zhang isn't always lazy and frivolous, sometimes he makes a lot of sense..."

Situ Fang hesitated.

Are you actually praising him, or putting him down...

Afterward, Situ Fang thought of something and frowned:

"It's just that I don't know how strong the Corpse Walking Stronghold really is... Whether these two hundred cultivators from the Situ Family can eradicate it or not."

Mo Hua thought for a moment and said, "It's a bit of a stretch."

Situ Fang quickly asked, "How do you know?"

"I went in and saw it for myself; I even counted how many coffins were inside," Mo Hua said matter-of-factly.

Situ Fang was taken aback and then sighed helplessly after a long pause:

"You're really bold."

And quite capable, too.

Being able to infiltrate a mountain stronghold of corpse cultivators and gather detailed intelligence.

Situ Fang looked at the young Mo Hua with increasing disbelief.

Mo Hua, unaware of Situ Fang's thoughts, counted on her fingers as she listed the strength of the Corpse Walking Stronghold:

"I've got everything figured out..."

"In Corpse Walking Stronghold, there's only one Foundation Establishment cultivator, Zhang Quan."

"But there are four or five Iron Corpses."

"These Iron Corpses are slightly less powerful than Foundation Establishment cultivators, but with skin as hard as iron, they won't be at a disadvantage in a real fight."

"Besides, there are not too many living beings in the stronghold, just over two hundred."

"Some of these are bandits, who bully the weak and fear the strong, and are easy to deal with."

"The rest are corpse cultivators..."

"Corpse cultivators who refine corpses are average in both their cultivation and Taoist skills, just like Zhang Quan, but the tricky part is that they can control corpses..."

"Once corpse cultivators control the corpses, even if one person only controls two or three walking corpses, the stronghold's power can double or even triple, which poses a significant problem."

"In addition, there are formations in the stronghold—although..."

Mo Hua was about to say "not very clever," but then remembered that these formations were created by Instructor Yan.

Instructor Yan had the capabilities of a First-Grade Formation Master, and in a usual Second-Grade Prefecture, such mastery of formations would be considered quite exceptional.

So Mo Hua modified her statement, "Although... the formations are quite troublesome. With the formations' enhancement, the entire stronghold is easy to defend and difficult to attack. A direct assault will definitely lead to many casualties..."

...

Mo Hua laid bare the entire foundations of the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

Situ Fang's mouth hung open, unsure of what to say.

If she didn't know Mo Hua, she might have suspected that Mo Hua was the "Camp Leader" of the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

What has this child Mo Hua done?

How could she have such clear intelligence on the Corpse Walking Stronghold?

But certainly, this must relate to Mo Hua's cultivation technique or Taoist skills, and Situ Fang felt it would be better not to inquire.

For Mo Hua's sake, it was safer the less people knew, including herself.

Immediately after, Situ Fang furrowed her brows again.

Calculating this way, to eradicate the Corpse Walking Stronghold was not just "a bit of a stretch"—the chances of victory were very slim.

Even with the addition of the Taoist Court officials from South Yue City, it still wouldn't suffice.

And even if they were to win, it would likely be a Pyrrhic victory, with an unknown number of Situ Family cultivators dead or wounded.

Situ Fang felt distressed.

These cultivators had been mobilized through her father's connections.

Even though they were all in the Qi Refinement Realm, the life of a Qi Refinement cultivator is still a life.

One day, they too might reach Foundation Establishment, or even cultivate into a Golden Core, and become a valuable asset to the clan.

If they were all to be lost in the Corpse Walking Stronghold...

Situ Fang's brow remained furrowed, but then, seeing the relaxed look on Mo Hua's face, she asked with curiosity:

"Do you have another plan?"

Mo Hua's eyes brightened as she nodded with a radiant smile and said, "Yes, I do!"

Chapter 453: Engaging in Battle (1)

"I'll infiltrate first, rescue Instructor Yan, and then dismantle the Formation at Corpse Walking Stronghold. Without its Formations for defense, attacking the stronghold will be much easier,"

"For the regular Corpse cultivators and Walking Corpses, although I can tamper with the Formation, there are too many of them and too little time, so I'm not in a good position to make a move. That'll have to be left to you,"

"But as for those Iron Corpses, I'll figure out a way to deal with them..."

Mo Hua planned methodically.

Startled, Situ Fang asked:

"How do you plan to deal with the Iron Corpses?"

Mo Hua raised two fingers, "There are two methods..."

"The best one would be to steal Zhang Quan's Corpse Controlling Bell. Without the bell, Zhang Quan can't manipulate the Iron Corpses, which is akin to cutting off his own arms,"

"But since the Corpse Controlling Bell is extremely important, Zhang Quan will undoubtedly carry it on his person, so it might not be possible to steal it."

"If I can't steal it, I'll tamper with the Formation on the Iron Corpses, making them go out of control. With such chaos inside the stronghold, everyone can then rush in and attack, ensuring the end of Corpse Walking Stronghold,"

Mo Hua's planning was clear and straightforward.

Situ Fang furrowed her brows.

It sounded simple enough, but the actual execution was likely to be fraught with considerable risk.

She couldn't help but express her concern, "Can it really be done?"

Mo Hua calculated, "Dismantling the Formation is easy, I'm ninety percent confident..."

Mo Hua actually wanted to say one hundred percent, because, for him now, solving a first-grade Formation, or even those just below first-grade, was trivial.

However, one should never be overly confident. It's always good to leave some room for error, hence he claimed only ninety percent.

"...Stealing Zhang Quan's Corpse Controlling Bell has a very small chance, probably just ten to twenty percent confidence;"

"Tampering with the Iron Corpses has about a fifty to sixty percent chance, mainly because I'm not clear on the specific Formations placed on the Iron Corpses, as I've never studied them, and, secondly, the Iron Corpses are closely guarded, so I might not have an opportunity to approach them..."

Mo Hua's voice was crisp and clear.

Situ Fang felt somewhat embarrassed.

This kid Mo Hua could gather intelligence, analyze it, and come up with strategies based on it.

His thoughts were meticulous, and he conducted himself carefully and composedly.

And he was a Formation Master...

No wonder Zhang Lan said that Yang Jiyong was going to great lengths to recruit Mo Hua into the Taoist soldiers Court.

Situ Fang nodded and said:

"Alright, let's do as you say."

Afterward, Situ Fang invited two elders from the Situ Family.

One was Situ Jin, and the other was a slender Foundation Building Cultivator.

They discussed the specifics, including the time of the attack, places to lie in wait, equipment of Spiritual Artifacts, purchase of Pills, and coordination of the Cultivators.

Once everything was agreed upon, two days later, more than two hundred Cultivators from the Situ Family assembled and set off towards the desolate mountains near South Yue City at night.

The wild mountain was shrouded in darkness, the moon cold, the forest deep.

Dried grass and strange trees cast bizarre shadows.

Occasionally, Monster Beasts would lowly moan, as if weeping and complaining, adding to the quiet solitude.

Clothed in black, the group moved swiftly and silently, until around midnight, they arrived outside Corpse Walking Stronghold under Mo Hua's guidance.

Sparse stone forests stood before them.

In a low voice, Mo Hua said, "I'll go in first and take a look. Wait for my message."

No sooner had he finished speaking than he vanished without waiting for Situ Fang to respond.

Situ Fang was taken aback.

The two elders from the Situ Family behind her also startled, then their eyes showed shock.

Gone? Just like that, with no trace of presence, he disappeared?

They were Foundation Builders, yet they had no idea how Mo Hua disappeared. Even with their Divine Sense, the area around them was utterly empty, without a single trace.

Could they really not detect the concealment technique of a Qi Refinement Cultivator?

What kind of Concealment Technique was this?

While they were astonished, Mo Hua had already used the Water Passing Step to sneak into Corpse Walking Stronghold.

In front of the gate of the Corpse Walking Stronghold, compared to the previous days, there were four or five more people guarding.

It seemed that Zhang Quan was still not entirely at ease.

And around the gate, a counterfeit version of Instructor Yan's "Expose Dust Formation" had been laid out.

Mo Hua, hidden from view, strolled past the "Expose Dust Formation" and then, with light steps, leapt onto the roof and, knowing the way well, found Instructor Yan's room.

The sky had darkened, and Instructor Yan was still reading Formation Books.

Mo Hua released his Divine Sense, saw that there were no people around, and then quietly entered, whispering to Instructor Yan:

"Instructor Yan, I will help you escape tonight. You should start packing."

Instructor Yan was intently reading his book when suddenly a whisper echoed from the dark corner, startling him.

Once he recognized whose voice it was, he was surprised but didn't speak; instead, he remained calm and nodded.

Afterward, Instructor Yan began to get up and quietly gathered his Formation Books and Formation Diagrams.

While Mo Hua took advantage of this time to dismantle the defensive formations of the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

Mo Hua dismantled them quickly.

Because he did not need to conceal traces nor worry about damage to the Formations, Mo Hua's strokes were assertive and rough.

By dawn, when the great battle began, these Formations would all be destroyed.

Thus, Mo Hua had no need to be polite.

Whatever was convenient to dismantle, he dismantled a bit.

For the more complex ones, which he was too lazy to dismantle, he drew some Reversed Spirit Formations.

Once these Formations were activated, they would self-destruct due to the aberrant flow of Spiritual Power and chaotic Formation Patterns.

However, this kind of destruction was minor and nowhere near the extent of Formation Collapse.

Mo Hua's intention was also just to destroy the Formations,

Not to use them to injure the corpse cultivators of the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

He did not have the leisure for that now.

In the vast Corpse Walking Stronghold, Mo Hua, familiar with the paths, darted back and forth.

Climbing walls, scaling rooftops, balancing on rafters, or wriggling through caves...

He either dismantled or destroyed each Formation within the stronghold one by one.

This route had also been planned by Mo Hua in advance, and he had simulated it several times in his mind.

He aimed to invalidate as many Formations as possible in the shortest amount of time.

After two or three hours, the Formations inside the Corpse Walking Stronghold had been almost entirely sabotaged by Mo Hua.

Feeling a bit tired, Mo Hua rested for a while, thought it over, and made another trip to Zhang Quan's secret chamber.

Zhang Quan was resting in meditation.

His Corpse Controlling Bell was placed inside his Storage Bag, which was attached to his waist.

Mo Hua had been observing him for many days; Zhang Quan never parted with his bell or his bag.

The Corpse Controlling Bell, he always carried with him in the Storage Bag and it had never been taken out.

Unless he was caught off guard, it was impossible to get the Storage Bag or steal the Corpse Controlling Bell.

And since Mo Hua only had Qi Refinement, facing off directly, he definitely was no match for Zhang Quan.

He did not possess the innate talent or Cultivation level of his Junior Brother and Sister.

Even with a sneak attack, he would not be able to knock out Zhang Quan.

Mo Hua felt somewhat regretful.

It looked like his guess had been correct; under normal circumstances, stealing the Corpse Controlling Bell was impossible.

Zhang Quan was no fool; he wouldn't give Mo Hua that chance.

Mo Hua then made another trip to the Corpse Hiding Cave.

The Corpse Hiding Cave was used by the Corpse Walking Stronghold for refining and cultivating Zombies.

The coffins of several Iron Corpses were placed in the deepest part of the Corpse Hiding Cave.

Mo Hua glanced over and saw several corpse cultivators guarding overnight, and nearby were Early Warning Formations, making it impossible to approach.

These Iron Corpses were previously unguarded.

It seemed that having suffered a loss, Zhang Quan had learned his lesson and did not dare to be negligent in the slightest.

"Now, this is troublesome..."

Mo Hua frowned slightly.

He couldn't steal the bell, and he couldn't lay a hand on the Iron Corpse.

If they really started fighting, they would surely be at a disadvantage.

After thinking for a moment, Mo Hua shook his head slightly.

It seemed that for the time being, he couldn't solve the problem on his own.

So, Mo Hua stood up and left the Corpse Walking Stronghold first.

Outside the stronghold, he met with Situ Fang and reported truthfully:

"I've broken the formation, but I couldn't steal the Corpse Controlling Bell, nor could I get close to the Iron Corpse."

Situ Fang was slightly startled.

Being able to break the formation was already beyond her expectations.

As for the Corpse Controlling Bell and the Iron Corpse, she had not dared to hope for them.

"No matter, breaking the formation is already very good," said Situ Fang. "Shall we proceed with the plan now?"

"Yes." Mo Hua nodded. "But we need not launch a strong assault; we'll mainly harass them, causing chaos within the stronghold."

"Alright," said Situ Fang.

Mo Hua then glanced at Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi and said:

"Let's take advantage of the chaos to rescue Instructor Yan first."

"Hmm," both Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi nodded.

So, taking advantage of the dawn not yet breaking and the weariness of the people,

Situ Fang, along with two Foundation Building Elders from the Situ Family, led more than two hundred cultivators of the Situ Family, all clad in black, and stealthily infiltrated the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

At the entrance of the stronghold, a few corpse cultivators were making a fire and drinking, muttering indistinctly among themselves.

The Foundation Building Elders took the lead, leveraging their swift movement techniques; in an instant, they were beside these few corpse cultivators, and then they struck with all their might, with the swiftness of thunder, wiping out all the corpse cultivators keeping watch!

Afterward, ensuring there was no one around, they signaled for the other Situ Family cultivators to follow.

Despite killing several groups this way, they were eventually discovered by the corpse cultivators.

The alarm bells of the Corpse Walking Stronghold rang loudly.

In the pitch-black night, torches lit up one after another, illuminating the entire stronghold.

The bandits drew their swords, and the corpse cultivators shook their Corpse Controlling Bells.

One coffin after another shook, their lids were flung open, and walking corpses crawled out from within...

A cold light flashed in Situ Fang's eyes as she said in a chilling voice:

"Kill!"

The cultivators of the Situ Family no longer hid their presence, drawing their swords and activating their spiritual power. They shouted loudly:

"Kill!"

The Corpse Walking Stronghold, in an instant, was filled with a murderous aura.

The clash of swords and the explosion of spiritual power resonated through the air.

Meanwhile, on another front, Mo Hua had already rescued Instructor Yan along with Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi.

Mo Hua said, "Junior Brother, Junior Sister, you two escort Instructor Yan out first."

"What about you?" asked Bai Zisheng.

"I have something else to do."

Bai Zisheng shook his head and said, "No, it's too dangerous here. You and Zixi take Mr. Yan out, and I'll stay behind to cover the retreat!"

Bai Zisheng spoke with righteous indignation.

However, Mo Hua saw through his intentions at a glance. "You just want to stay and fight, don't you..."

Bai Zisheng defended himself, "Nonsense, am I that kind of person?"

But as he said it, he still seemed somewhat guilty.

Mo Hua then advised him, "I'm going to find Zhang Quan and keep an eye on him so he can't escape..."

"You get Instructor Yan to safety, then come back to find me. We'll join forces and capture Zhang Quan."

Upon hearing this, Bai Zisheng's eyes lit up. "Okay!"

Bai Zixi then gave Mo Hua a concerned look and softly admonished:

"Be careful."

"Yeah, yeah." Mo Hua nodded.

Instructor Yan also looked at Mo Hua with a worried expression. He wanted to say something, but Bai Zisheng was already pulling him away.

The sooner they left, the sooner they could return.

He was eager to come back and take down that bastard Zhang Quan.

After Instructor Yan had left, Mo Hua looked around for a moment, his thoughts stirring. He then reinforced some formations within the room.

That way, even if the corpse cultivators noticed something amiss and tried to break in, they'd be in for a bit more trouble.

After finishing with the formations, Mo Hua cast his Concealment Technique and slipped into Zhang Quan's secret chamber.

For Mo Hua, Zhang Quan's secret chamber was as useless as a free inn—come and go as he pleased, easy access and exit.

And Zhang Quan was still unaware of it.

He was in deep concentration, discussing something with a few leading corpse cultivators in hushed tones:

"... How could there be enemies?"

"... How did they find our stronghold?"

"How many people are there?"

"It's too dark to see clearly."

"At least a hundred or two, perhaps as many as four or five hundred..."

"Which power are they from? The Taoist Court?"

"It doesn't look like it... They're dressed in black, their identities unclear."

"Probably some other force."

"Damn it, they're attacking us for no good reason! This is too much!"

"Are there any Foundation Establishment cultivators?"

"Seems like there are one or two..."

"Householder, what shall we do?"

...

After contemplating for a moment, Zhang Quan sneered coldly, "Do they really think our Corpse Walking Stronghold is such an easy target?"

In his eyes flashed a hint of grim darkness:

"Send the order down, awaken all the walking corpses and Iron Corpses. Since they've come, let's not let them leave. It's been a long time since our Corpse Walking Stronghold had to 'stock up,' and now's the time to bring in a batch of 'goods.'"

One of the corpse cultivators hesitated:

"Householder, the few of us... controlling the Iron Corpses may be somewhat strenuous. I'm afraid..."

Zhang Quan fell silent, seemingly hesitating about something.

After a moment, he gritted his teeth and said resolutely:

"No matter, I will start the ritual now, burn incense, and pay respects to the Ancestral Master's portrait, and perform the rites with the Corpse-controlling Blood Bell!"

"Let these petty invaders become food in the bellies of the Iron Corpses!"

The few corpse cultivators were overjoyed, their expressions invigorated as they exclaimed, "Householder is wise!"

But Mo Hua was taken aback by their words.

Start the ritual? Pay respects to the Ancestral Master's portrait?

Could it be that he was going to bring out the bell?

If he brought it out, could that not be his chance to steal it?

After all, in a direct confrontation with these corpse cultivators and the fearless zombies, their side would surely suffer heavy casualties.

If he could snatch the bell, they could reduce many losses.

There was also another point that concerned Mo Hua greatly.

Pay respects to the Ancestral Master's portrait?

Who was this Ancestral Master?

And what was this portrait?

Could it be...

Chapter 454: Screen (1)

Mo Hua's heart stirred, his gaze sharp as he stared at Zhang Quan.

He wanted to see how Zhang Quan would start the ritual, how he would offer the bell, and which Ancestral Master Image he would be worshipping.

Moreover, where exactly was the altar that Zhang Quan intended to open?

Mo Hua had scoured Corpse Walking Stronghold without finding any trace of an altar.

Zhang Quan instructed a corpse cultivator:

"Prepare the offering."

The corpse cultivator took the order and left. In a short while, he brought in a bandit who was holding a pottery jar filled with blood-stained water.

Zhang Quan nodded, then closed the door to the secret chamber.

After checking around and confirming the absence of "outsiders," his expression turned solemn, and he walked over to a screen.

The screen was old and placed against the wall, painted with withered landscapes in ink.

Zhang Quan formed several hand gestures and muttered something.

Mists of ink gathered at the top of the screen, rippling wave after wave until they dissipated into nothingness, revealing a hole.

Mo Hua was slightly astonished.

There was another secret chamber within this secret room?

And he had not discovered it himself.

It seemed he had underestimated Zhang Quan.

This Zhang Quan, the secrets he kept were indeed not few...

Mo Hua thought to himself.

There was yet another secret chamber behind the screen.

From his position on the roof beam, Mo Hua had a poor vantage point and could only glimpse a corner of the room, unable to see its entirety.

But even from this one corner, one could see the lavish decoration, the sinister candlelight, various bizarre furnishings, and a table draped with a golden cloth.

Mo Hua switched to another roof beam, clinging to the timber, his small head dangling as he peeked inside.

Now he could see more clearly.

There was indeed an altar inside.

An image was enshrined on the altar.

It was too far away to see clearly, and Mo Hua dared not focus his gaze on it. With just a hurried glance, he moved his eyes away.

The offering was placed on the stage.

But they were not proper offerings.

Three dishes, one holding hand bones, one foot bones, and the middle one containing a skull.

It was uncertain whether these were the bones of an innocent cultivator or those of Zhang Quan's Ancestral Master.

Candles were also lit on the altar.

The candles were white, but the flame they produced was an eerie green, and as the candlewax dripped, it resembled human tears, hardening at the base of the table.

Mo Hua guessed that this must be corpse oil.

Besides, there were various strangely shaped objects.

Mo Hua was not a corpse cultivator and did not understand them.

And below the altar, a coffin was displayed.

This coffin was snow white in color.

Its material was neither wood nor stone, neither copper nor iron.

Mo Hua observed for a long time before realizing that it must be a bone coffin.

Immediately, he felt a slight surprise.

Could this bone coffin also be used for Corpse Refinement?

But what kind of corpse would a bone coffin refine?

He had only heard of Walking Corpses, Iron Corpses, Copper Corpses, Silver Corpses, Golden Corpses; he had never heard of a... Bone Corpse.

What use could there be for a zombie that was only bones?

Mo Hua inwardly scoffed.

It was at this moment that he saw Zhang Quan and several corpse cultivators prostrate before the altar, then chanting something:

"With minor threats approaching, may the Ancestral Master demonstrate power..."

"Lend me your Divine Thought, to refine the Copper Bell..."

"...the Copper Bell drinks blood, leaving no bones behind..."

"Use the white bones to worship the Ancestral Master, and offer human consciousness for the feast."

"Ancestors of the Zhang Family above, I, the junior disciple Zhang Quan, kowtow to you!"

...

Mo Hua frowned upon hearing this.

The ancestors of the Zhang Family?

Then this painting must be dedicated to the forebears of the Zhang Family.

If they were forebears, they were also Ancestral Masters.

That would mean, from their ancestors, the Zhang Family had possessed the Corpse Refinement method and established their coffin shop, passing it down through generations.

Following the "borrow Divine Thought, refine the Copper Bell, offer human consciousness for the feast."

Mo Hua listened, feeling somewhat confused.

At this moment, Zhang Quan opened the bone coffin, grabbed the blood-offering bandit with a pale hand, and threw him into the coffin.

Although the bandit struggled, he was no match for Zhang Quan, a Foundation Building Cultivator. Unable to break free, he was forcefully shut inside the bone coffin.

Inside the coffin, he pleaded, begging for mercy, his fingers tearing at the coffin walls, letting out a wretched cry.

A moment later, the cries ceased, and there was no more movement inside the bone coffin.

When Zhang Quan opened the coffin lid again, the bandit was bereft of life, his eyes wide open in terror, but motionless.

His fingers, from scratching, were devoid of nails, covered in blood.

Yet, apart from that, there was not a single injury on his body.

Just like that, he became lifeless and still.

As if someone had directly consumed his Divine Soul.

A chill ran through Mo Hua's heart, followed by a sudden realization.

The so-called "borrow Divine Thought, refine the Copper Bell."

It must refer to using the Divine Thought of the Zhang Family's Ancestral Master to refine the Copper Bell and enhance its Corpse Control capabilities.

Among these corpse cultivators, Zhang Quan was a Foundation Building Cultivator, who naturally found controlling an Iron Corpse to be a trivial matter.

The other corpse cultivators, however, were only at the peak of the Ninth Level of Qi Refining.

For them to control Iron Corpses, which were close to Foundation Establishment strength, was indeed somewhat forced.

The only option was to employ this method to borrow Divine Sense, allowing the Divine Thought of the Zhang Family's ancestors, through refinement, to attach to the Copper Bell and assist them in controlling corpses.

"Offer human consciousness for the feast."

It meant to feed the Zhang Family's Ancestral Master with human consciousness.

On the surface, the high altar served as the sacrificial platform, with white bones as the offering.

In reality, however, the bone coffin was the true platform, and the living person's consciousness served as the true sacrifice.

"So to speak, is this Ancestral Master Picture of the Zhang Family in fact a... Contemplation Map?"

Mo Hua's thoughts flickered, and he blinked his eyes.

The bandit was used as a sacrifice, his Divine Soul consumed, dying in horror.

Zhang Quan pulled the bandit out of the bone coffin and tossed him aside, instructing:

"Take him later to feed the corpses."

Afterward, he mumbled something under his breath, and then from his Storage Bag, he took out a Copper Bell adorned with blood-colored, exotic Patterns.

It was the very Corpse Controlling Bell that Mo Hua had been longing for!

Mo Hua's eyes shone brightly.

If his guess was correct, inside the Corpse Controlling Bell, there lay the Spiritual Pivot Formation with a first-grade twelve-Pattern design.

I must think of a way to snatch that Copper Bell!

And also that Contemplation Map—I must find a way to snatch that too!

But how to snatch them?

It probably won't be easy with Zhang Quan right underneath one's eyelids.

Mo Hua frowned and pondered.

Meanwhile, Zhang Quan continued to offer the bell in front of the altar.

He took out three iron cups, placed them on the platform, then put the Copper Bell into one of the cups, and poured blood water into it.

Blood slowly seeped into the copper bell.

It was as if the copper bell was drinking the blood.

Mo Hua lay on the roof beam, his thoughts racing.

"Should I create some disturbance outside to lure Zhang Quan out..."

"Or should I call Junior Brother and Junior Sister to directly take it by force?"

Before Mo Hua could decide, there was a commotion outside, and someone anxiously shouted:

"Householder!"

Zhang Quan was somewhat impatient.

The person outside then said loudly, "Householder, something big has happened!"

Zhang Quan was performing the ritual on the bell and cursed under his breath, instructing a nearby corpse cultivator:

"Go see what's happened."

The corpse cultivator followed the order and went out, returning with a look of panic:

"Householder, it's terrible!"

Zhang Quan frowned, "What's wrong?"

The corpse cultivator said tremulously, "The formations... they're all broken!"

Zhang Quan's eyes bulged, "What the hell do you mean they're all broken??"

"It's just... they're all broken, and not a single one can be used..."

Zhang Quan felt his blood rise and a piercing pain.

He said in disbelief:

"How can not a single one be operable?"

"It seems... someone has sabotaged them..."

A chill settled in Zhang Quan's heart.

He had originally thought that with the formations, the Corpse Walking Stronghold would be easy to defend and hard to attack, strong enough to keep enemies at bay.

After completing the bell ritual and reviving the Iron Corpse, he thought he could go out and slaughter his enemies.

At worst, relying on the formations, it should be no problem to defend the stronghold.

But he never imagined that the formations he had put so much effort into were all destroyed?

Without the formations, the Corpse Walking Stronghold would be without its external barriers.

It would be much easier for others to attack and break in.

But how could this be possible?

Zhang Quan suppressed the shock and anger in his heart and said, "I'll go take a look."

But after he took a few steps, he furrowed his brows again.

The bell altar ritual still needed some time to complete.

This altar needed supervision, but he did not trust anyone else to guard it.

Those who refine corpses are cold-hearted.

Not just him, all corpse cultivators are.

He couldn't trust anyone inside this stronghold.

Zhang Quan's gaze swept around the room and looked over the few corpse cultivators present, one by one.

The other corpse cultivators, when they met his gaze, silently lowered their heads, not daring to meet his eyes.

Zhang Quan snorted coldly and said slowly:

"You all follow me; let's go out and have a look."

One corpse cultivator's eyes flickered slightly, and he asked in a low voice:

"Householder, shouldn't someone stay to guard the altar..."

Zhang Quan's gaze turned cold, "Do you want to stay behind?"

The corpse cultivator immediately said in fright, "I dare not."

Zhang Quan let out a sneer, "All of you go out. I'll close the door and seal the formation. Not even a mosquito will get in, so don't worry."

"Yes."

The corpse cultivator bowed and agreed with a somewhat disappointed look.

Several corpse cultivators took the body of the robber and left the secret room.

Zhang Quan was the last one to leave.

When he left, he sealed the screen.

He performed a gesture and chanted a spell, and the brushed ink on the screen shifted and then transformed back into a dry ink landscape painting.

Zhang Quan still felt uneasy. He checked the area several times before he was reassured and cautiously left the room.

Before he left, he also locked the main door.

Mo Hua remained motionless on the roof beam.

Sure enough, after a while, Zhang Quan came back.

He checked inside the room again and, finding no trace of any outsiders, finally relaxed, locked the main door again, and his footsteps faded away in the distance.

Mo Hua sneered in his heart:

"Do you think these little tricks can fool me?"

Every move Zhang Quan made was within his divine sense.

Once Mo Hua was certain through his divine sense that Zhang Quan was indeed far away, he gracefully dropped down from the roof beam.

The room was silent, and the screen bore no hint of any special aura.

It appeared to be just a regular screen.

Mo Hua examined the screen closely and had a sudden realization.

This screen unexpectedly turned out to be a high-quality spiritual artifact, and its refinement method was very special, no wonder it had eluded his perception.

It probably was worth quite a lot of spirit stones...

"How did Zhang Quan get it?"

Mo Hua was somewhat curious.

Was it stolen, robbed, gifted, or passed down from his ancestors?

But now was not the time to dwell on this.

He had to find a way to open the screen, enter the altar, and steal the copper bell.

Mo Hua remembered that before Zhang Quan entered the screen, he chanted some spells and performed some gestures, and then the ink on the screen opened up, revealing an entrance.

Mo Hua also tried to mimic the spell, performing gestures and stomping his feet, mumbling gibberish.

He himself did not know what he was chanting, just taking a blind chance.

But obviously, this was not a matter of luck.

The screen didn't budge.

Mo Hua scratched his head.

Was that incorrect...

But he couldn't go and ask Zhang Quan to demonstrate the gestures and incantations again.

Mo Hua pondered for a moment.

He remembered Mr. Zhuang once mentioned that everything has its appearance and its essence.

Performing gestures and chanting spells was just the appearance.

The essence was the circulation of internal spiritual power.

So it seemed, the screen had its own essence of spiritual power circulation.

And on a spiritual artifact, what controls the circulation of spiritual power is the formation...

Mo Hua looked closely once more and finally found subtle formation patterns at the corners and edges of the screen.

These patterns were very tiny and discreet.

What made it more troublesome was that Mo Hua didn't recognize them.

Even with divine sense, after deducing and calculating the complete patterns, Mo Hua still didn't know what formation it was.

He could only roughly guess based on his knowledge of formations.

The screen's formation seemed to be related to sound and visualization.

Chanting spells represented sound, while performing gestures symbolized visualization.

Only by getting both the spell and the gesture right, with correct sound and motion, could the formation be activated.

But as for the specific principles of the formation used, whether it involved the Five Elements or other formation method rules, Mo Hua was unsure.

"Formations are profound and intricate; it seems there's still much I need to learn..."

Mo Hua took out paper and pen, noting down the patterns for later study and contemplation when he had time.

Chapter 455: Robbed (1)

The subsequent question was, how to break through this screen?

Mo Hua silently pondered.

Generally speaking, the screen is a Spiritual Artifact, and there are Formations on Spiritual Artifacts.

If one could decipher the Formation, they could neutralize the Spiritual Artifact, rendering this screen inoperative.

However, Mo Hua had no idea what Formation was depicted on this screen, nor did he know what the lifelike and inhibiting Formation Patterns were, so naturally, he had no means to break the Formation.

If it couldn't be deciphered, should he just destroy it?

Using a Reversed Spirit Formation to disrupt the Formation's structure, damage the Formation eye, and cause the Formation to self-destruct?

Mo Hua contemplated this.

At this point, he no longer needed to worry about being discovered. Whether he kept the screen was moot, and it didn't matter if his method was rough.

Once the Formation self-destructed, the screen would be ruined.

The opening in the screen might be revealed.

It could also potentially seal the chamber permanently, barring anyone's entry.

The best outcome would be, after destroying the Formation, that the bolstering effect of the Formation was no more, deactivating the screen and opening the chamber.

He would then be able to slip inside, and pack up everything to take away.

The worst outcome would be the screen self-destructing, disallowing anyone's entry.

If he couldn't get in, neither could Zhang Quan.

That way, both the Corpse Controlling Bell and the Contemplation Map would be sealed inside.

It didn't matter if he couldn't enter.

But if Zhang Quan couldn't get in, without the Corpse Controlling Bell, he wouldn't be able to control the Iron Corpse, significantly reducing his strength.

Without the Iron Corpse, the Corpse Walking Stronghold would have no Foundation Establishment combat power and would naturally crumble easily.

However he considered it, there was no disadvantage for Mo Hua.

Decisive, Mo Hua ceased his hesitation and began to work on the Formation on the screen.

As the first Reversed Spirit Formation was drawn, the Formation on the screen flashed with blue light, Spiritual Power began to distort, emitting a piercing sound, and the Formation soon ceased to function, causing the screen to dim slightly.

Mo Hua's eyes brightened, and he continued to draw Reversed Spirit Formations.

With each Reversed Spirit Formation drawn, a Formation was destroyed.

The ink on the screen gradually faded.

By the time Mo Hua had destroyed all the Formations, all the ink on the entire screen had faded, leaving only a grey smudge.

Mo Hua furrowed his brows.

Was it deciphered, or was it broken?

Mo Hua swept his Divine Sense over it and found that the screen was indeed deactivated, and the barrier at the doorway had disappeared.

It's just that the obstructing ink was still there.

Mo Hua decisively took out his Thousand Jun Stick and started to wildly hammer the screen.

He battered the already old screen to tatters.

The screen made a 'creaking' sound as if lamenting, then completely lost its form and substance, erasing the ink images and revealing the opening to the chamber, and the altar within.

Mo Hua sighed in relief, his heart leaping with joy as he stepped inside.

Within the chamber, the atmosphere was even more sinister.

The altar, laid out with golden silk, flickered with a green, grim candlelight.

The Blood Bell, white bones, coffins, not one was missing.

And on the altar, there was the worshiped Ancestral Master Image of the Zhang Family.

Mo Hua lowered his gaze, avoiding the Ancestral Master Image. Instead, he quickly picked the copper bells refined with fresh blood from within the iron cup one by one, tossing them into his Storage Bag.

He then rummaged through the chamber once more.

Spirit Stones, offerings, and things like Spiritual Artifacts, as long as they looked valuable, or were engraved with Formations, or had some origins, or appeared odd or incomprehensible to him, all were swept away by Mo Hua like shearing a sheep.

At last, it was time for the Ancestral Master Image.

Mo Hua squinted his eyes, trying his best not to look at it, intending to carefully take down the image and then throw it into his Storage Bag.

However, at the moment his fingers touched the image,

An icy Divine Thought abruptly invaded Mo Hua's Sea of Consciousness.

A seemingly old but resonant voice whispered in his ear,

"Young man... your bones are remarkably unique..."

"You possess exceptional talent..."

"I offer you an opportunity... to help you ascend to immortality..."

"Look here..."

"You..."

This voice, seemingly real and illusory, tempted Mo Hua to look at the image.

At the same time, something or someone within the image seemed to undergo a change, the skin starting to decay, on the verge of breaking out of the picture.

Mo Hua, sensing a slight stagnation in his Divine Sense, quickly entered a state of Mental Concentration, meditated with a tranquil heart, and within a mere moment, he discarded all distractions, his spirit clear and bright.

Regaining his senses, Mo Hua waved his left hand, toppling the altar.

Then, with a casual pull, he tore down Zhang Quan's Ancestral Master Image and threw it to the ground.

Afterward, he grabbed the incense burner, iron cup, candlestick, and a pile of other items, flinging them at the image. After smashing them, he even stepped on the image a couple of times.

The image promptly became compliant...

Mo Hua snorted coldly in his heart.

"Still trying to deceive me?"

"I wouldn't fall for the same trick twice!"

Seeing that the image was no longer stirring, Mo Hua folded it up, crumpled it haphazardly, and stuffed it into his Storage Bag.

In just a dozen or so breaths, both the Corpse Controlling Bell and the image were in his possession.

Mo Hua's Storage Bag was full to the brim.

There was no time to lose, time to make a swift exit!

Without any hesitation, Mo Hua quickly left the altar, flipped up to the beam, dismantled the Formation, and effortlessly escaped from Zhang Quan's chamber...

And at that moment, Zhang Quan was still utterly unaware.

He stood atop the outer wall of the Corpse Walking Stronghold, staring incredulously at the Formation before his eyes.

The Formation is really completely destroyed!

Some have failed, some have been destroyed, and some have self-destructed due to a short circuit of Spiritual Power when the Formation was activated.

Why? Why did they break?

They were all fine when he checked them two days ago.

But in less than two days, all the Formations in the Corpse Walking Stronghold were destroyed, as if an entire layer of skin had been peeled off?

Who did this?

Who could have such great ability to destroy all the Formations in his Corpse Walking Stronghold in such a short time?

A Formation Master?

But in South Yue City, which Formation Master could have such high-level skills?

Zhang Quan was both shocked and furious as he said in a harsh voice:

"Go and call Mr. Yan over!"

A Corpse Cultivator hesitantly said:

"Mr. Yan... we can't bring him over..."

Zhang Quan glared fiercely, and said in a cold voice, "Where is he?"

"Mr. Yan's room has been sealed off, we... we cannot open it..." the Corpse Cultivator stammered.

Zhang Quan's gaze turned cold, "Take me there."

Soon, Zhang Quan arrived at Instructor Yan's room.

There were mottled marks all around the room, showing signs of being struck, but the door remained tightly closed.

It seemed that someone had reinforced the Formation from inside the room, making the walls sturdy and impervious to attack from the outside.

Zhang Quan's eyes turned cold as he struck out boldly, slamming his palm onto the door.

The door cracked, but Zhang Quan's palm also tingled from the impact.

Zhang Quan's expression became grave.

Who had set up this Formation?

A mere first-grade Formation was so tough?

Zhang Quan exhausted all his strength, channeling Spiritual Power, the wind from his palm fierce, and his strength continuous. It took him a good half cup of tea's time to finally break the door.

As the door shattered, Zhang Quan looked intently inside.

There wasn't a single person in the room.

Not only that, but all the belongings had also been tidied up and taken away.

This Mr. Yan had actually run away?

"No Formation Master is a good thing!"

Zhang Quan was so angry that he gritted his teeth, feeling his thoughts in disarray and chaos.

How exactly did this Mr. Yan escape?

Did he run away on his own, or did someone come to save him?

And who would that be? How did they save him?

Were the Formations at Corpse Walking Stronghold tampered with by this Mr. Yan?

Did he collude with outsiders, intending to destroy the Corpse Walking Stronghold?

And now, fearing the consequences of his crimes, he had fled.

Or is it that someone in the shadows...

Zhang Quan suddenly stopped in his thoughts.

In the shadows...

A Concealment Technique?

To be able to sneak into the Corpse Walking Stronghold undetected even by Foundation Establishment Divine Sense, as far as he knew, there was only one person capable of that.

That kid who knew the Concealment Technique?!

Zhang Quan's brow furrowed tightly, but then he felt something wasn't right.

Corpse Walking Stronghold was protected by the Expose Dust Formation; that kid shouldn't have been able to sneak in...

"No," Zhang Quan suddenly shook his head, his thoughts racing:

"If Mr. Yan had ulterior motives, the Expose Dust Formation he set up definitely had issues, and it certainly wouldn't keep that kid out!"

It was even possible that those two were in cahoots!

Zhang Quan was uncontrollably furious and then felt his heart lurch.

Concealment... Concealment...

His expression dramatically changed, "The altar!"

Zhang Quan remembered that if Mo Hua had really sneaked in with concealment, then everything he did might have been seen clearly.

Even including, the ritual he had just conducted with the bell!

Zhang Quan pushed his movement technique to the extreme, and in just a moment, he was back in his own room.

The door lock was intact, and the Formation was undamaged.

Zhang Quan breathed a sigh of relief, but as soon as he unlocked the door and entered the room, he saw the screen that had been smashed to tatters.

Zhang Quan's legs went weak, and he nearly failed to keep his balance.

It was over!

He stumbled into the secret chamber and looked intently, his scalp tingling.

The secret chamber was in disarray.

The altar was overturned, and incense ashes scattered all over the floor.

The candles were extinguished, and the iron dishes upset.

Zhang Quan trembled as he searched the ground frantically, but no matter how he searched, it was nowhere to be found.

The copper bell he used for the ritual was gone...

Zhang Quan looked up again.

The Ancestral Master portrait was also gone...

Zhang Quan was so furious that his blood rushed to his head, and he roared:

"Where's my Corpse Controlling Bell?"

"Where's my ancestor?!!"

Chapter 456: Fury (1) [Prev](#)

Zhang Quan was so furious he spat blood.

By then, Mo Hua had already pocketed his Corpse Controlling Bell and his ancestors' treasures and was far away.

In the pitch-black night, amid the chaos of cultivators clashing.

Mo Hua used his Concealment Technique to hide his figure and the Water Passing Step to move fluidly like flowing water, shuttling through the Corpse Walking Stronghold, avoiding all attacks and spells, moving unhurt through a thousand flowers.

Only upon reaching a rooftop did Mo Hua stop, release his Divine Sense, and locate Situ Fang.

Situ Fang was engaging in combat with a few zombies controlled by corpse cultivators, alongside two Elders from the Situ Family.

After repelling the enemies, they took a moment to catch their breath, only to hear a crisp voice shout:

"Sister Situ."

Situ Fang looked towards the empty space, and not long after, Mo Hua revealed his shape, smiling as he said:

"I've snatched the Corpse Bell."

Situ Fang was stunned, "You really managed to snatch it?"

Mo Hua shook his little hand, holding three copper bells in his grasp.

These bells were even more exquisitely made, tied with blood ropes, with even more complex patterns on them, clearly indicating that the zombies they controlled were also more powerful.

Not only Situ Fang, but even Situ Jin and the other stern-faced Elder Situ were visibly shaken.

They had snatched the enemy's trump card in the midst of battle?

Initially shocked, Situ Fang then felt a surge of joy, her expression lifted as she said:

"Elders, let us make quick work of this fight and take down the Corpse Walking Stronghold!"

"Good!"

The two Elders of the Situ Family nodded in agreement.

Without the Iron Corpse, their reservations vanished, and they attacked without restraint.

With two Foundation Establishment cultivators taking the lead, the Situ Family's cultivators were unstoppable, overpowering the enemy in an instant.

There were corpse cultivators who had taken Corpse Blood Pills to drastically increase their cultivation, transforming them into the dead.

But these corpse cultivators originally had only Qi Refinement cultivation, and their cultivation techniques and Taoist skills were mediocre; no matter how many pills they popped, they were no match for Foundation Establishment cultivators.

They only lasted a little bit longer, that's all.

Mo Hua then found Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi, "Let's capture Zhang Quan, don't let him get away!"

Bai Zisheng was overjoyed, "Good!"

Zhang Quan indeed wanted to run.

Corpse Walking Stronghold could not withstand anymore.

The Formation was broken, and without the Corpse Controlling Bell to control the Iron Corpse, the fall of Corpse Walking Stronghold was just a matter of time.

If something is beyond one's ability, there's no point in forcing it.

As long as the green mountains remain, there will always be wood to burn.

Zhang Quan collected some key items, then changed into the clothes of an ordinary bandit, blending into the crowd, trying to slip away quietly.

The Corpse Walking Stronghold was in chaos, filled with cultivators chasing each other and others trying to escape.

For the time being, no one noticed Zhang Quan.

But while he could deceive others, he couldn't deceive Mo Hua.

When Mo Hua realized Zhang Quan was missing, he gently stepped forward, sticking to the wall, and ascended to a tall pavilion within the Corpse Walking Stronghold, pushing his Divine Sense to the utmost.

In the chaotic battle, the Spiritual Power of cultivators was distinctly visible.

Strong or weak, their colors, and their attributes were all crystal clear.

Mo Hua looked around and spotted a rich aura of Spiritual Power in a corner.

The aura was the color of muddy earth, gloomy with Filthy Qi, being severely suppressed as if fearful of being detected.

With a flick of his little hand, Mo Hua pointed, "Over there!"

Bai Zisheng followed the direction of his pointing.

Indeed, in a corner against a stone wall, a cultivator dressed like a bandit was crouching, pretending to be scared while casting ominous glances around, looking for a chance to flee.

"You son of a bitch, where do you think you're running?"

Bai Zisheng shouted, swinging his right hand to draw out a long spear, its might powerful as he lunged towards Zhang Quan like a dragon.

At the same time, Bai Zixi flicked her hand to form an incantation, and three golden Sword Qi converged, shining with a white fire, streaking through the air towards Zhang Quan.

Zhang Quan's scalp tingled as he hastily got up to flee; but as he turned awkwardly, his right shoulder was still nicked by the tip of Bai Zisheng's spear, leaving a bloody mark.

At the same time, Bai Zixi's Sword Qi arrived.

Zhang Quan dodged two strikes but was pierced by the third through his shoulder. Sword Qi twisted in the wound, white Spiritual Fire searing, causing unbearable pain.

"You motherfuckers!"

Zhang Quan was furious but also utterly helpless.

He could only run; now that all his moves had been seen through and his trump card stolen, he was no match for these two young cultivators, a boy and a girl.

Furthermore, with the enemy surrounding him, dragging this out meant certain death.

Zhang Quan used his Earth Escape again.

The Corpse Walking Stronghold was built against a mountain. With abundant earth and rocks on the ground and many houses and caves, combined with the pitch-black night and the extremely chaotic battle situation,

His Earth Escape was even more secretive and difficult to detect.

But before he could get far, a howling sound came, and a fireball appeared in an instant, striking the ground.

Fire-series Spiritual Power passed through the ground to his body, causing a slight scorching sensation, but not very powerful.

However, the Fireball Technique was merely a guide.

Following it came a sharp long spear and a golden Sword Qi.

Zhang Quan was stabbed by the spear again, and his back was struck by Sword Qi.

He hastily exited his Earth Escape Technique, looked around, and, indeed, saw on a tall pavilion not too far away, a familiar, petite figure sitting cross-legged, condensing a fireball at the fingertips, smilingly watching him.

Upon seeing this smiling face, Zhang Quan's head buzzed, and his scalp trembled.

He felt all his Blood Qi rush to his head, so furious that he was lost for words.

After a long while, he trembled as he pointed at Mo Hua, and angrily said:

"My... my things... did you steal them?"

Mo Hua wore an innocent face, "What things?"

Zhang Quan angrily said, "My Corpse Controlling Bell!"

"Oh," Mo Hua seemed to "recall" something, rummaging through his storage bag, and fished out several bells, confusedly saying:

"These things are yours? I saw them lying there as if unwanted, so I just 'took care' of them for a while."

Having said that, Mo Hua stuffed the bronze bell back into his storage bag.

Zhang Quan watched with his own eyes as Mo Hua took out his Corpse Controlling Bell, and with his own eyes, saw him put his Corpse Controlling Bell into his own bag, his eyes becoming bloodshot in that instant.

Zhang Quan gritted his teeth and said:

"Then my... ancestor..."

"Ancestor?"

Mo Hua rummaged through his storage bag again and after a while, pulled out a big clump of something resembling crumpled paper:

"Is this your ancestor?"

Zhang Quan spat out a mouthful of blood.

"Good! Good! Good!"

He repeated three "goods," his eyes bloodshot and veiny, his voice hoarse as he spoke:

"You've taken my Corpse Controlling Bell, insulted Zhang Family's ancestor; today, even if it kills me, I will pulverize you to ashes!"

After finishing his words, he flipped his right hand, taking out a bright red pill.

This pill was even redder than the Corpse Blood Pill he had taken earlier, seemingly about to drip blood.

The moment he took out the pill, Bai Zisheng sensed something, the spear in his hand moved to knock the pill away.

Bai Zixi also condensed a Sword Qi, intent on slicing off his wrist to interrupt his pill consumption.

Zhang Quan, clenching his teeth, used his left arm to block, taking the brunt of Bai Zisheng's spear technique.

Then, slightly tilting his body, he also took the full force of Bai Zixi's Sword Qi.

After that, he was ready to risk his life to swallow the Blood Abnormality Pill in his hand.

But before he could consume it, a swift fireball roared towards him, hitting Zhang Quan's right hand with precision, charring his palm and turning the pill in his hand to ashes.

Zhang Quan was beside himself with rage, completely losing his senses.

Another Fireball Technique?! Again, it's this brat!

Zhang Quan was almost numb with anger.

Yet, Mo Hua was still mocking him:

"A small trick, and you dare to show off in my face?"

"If all you have are these pathetic little schemes, then your Corpse Controlling Bell is mine, and your esteemed ancestor... will be gone too..."

Esteemed ancestor, will be gone...

Upon hearing these words, Zhang Quan's eyes nearly burst from their sockets, he wanted to say something more, but before he could speak, his eyes rolled back, blood trickled from the corners of his mouth, and he collapsed stiffly.

Bai Zisheng walked forward, kicked Zhang Quan.

Zhang Quan gave no response whatsoever.

Bai Zisheng frowned and looked up, "Mo Hua, you've angered him to death."

"No way..."

Mo Hua was startled.

He was, after all, a Householder, a corpse cultivator at that; his temperament shouldn't be so fragile.

"Aren't those who refine corpses supposed to be cold-hearted? How could he die so easily of anger?" Mo Hua muttered to himself.

"No matter how cold-hearted, he couldn't stand you angering him like that..." Bai Zisheng said helplessly.

Mo Hua scratched his head, "I didn't really anger him, did I? I was just speaking the truth..."

Was that your version of "speaking the truth"?

Bai Zisheng was somewhat speechless.

"Wait a minute..."

Mo Hua jumped down from the pavilion, extended his Divine Sense to check Zhang Quan's Spiritual Power aura, and breathed a sigh of relief:

"He just fainted from anger, he's not dead."

"Find Sister Situ, have her seal his meridians with silver needles, then use the Taoist Court's iron locks to lock him up," said Mo Hua after some thought.

"Also, feed him some pills to keep him barely alive; otherwise, he really might die from rage..."

Bai Zisheng nodded, "Alright."

With Zhang Quan, barely alive and captured, the Corpse Walking Stronghold was as good as conquered.

What followed were the tasks of pursuing corpse cultivators, clearing the stragglers, tallying the loot, and dealing with the wounded and dead.

These wrap-up tasks were mainly handled by Situ Fang and the cultivators from the Situ Family.

Bai Zisheng volunteered to help, as he hadn't had his fill of fighting yet.

Mo Hua took advantage of this time, along with Bai Zixi, to turn Corpse Walking Stronghold upside down again.

Previously unentered caves, unopened doors, and unturned coffins were all carefully searched through once more by Mo Hua.

Chapter 457: Deep Water (1)

Mo Hua thoroughly searched the Corpse Walking Stronghold again, from top to bottom.

All Formations were dismantled, not one was left;

All storerooms were opened, not one was missed;

All secret chambers were exposed, not one was overlooked...

Mo Hua turned up quite a few things.

Most of the Spirit Stones, Spiritual Artifacts, and Pills, Mo Hua did not take.

These were considered war spoils, to be distributed among everyone.

Moreover, some of the Spiritual Artifacts and Pills were filled with a sinister energy, unclean; they were of no use to Mo Hua.

The war spoils from the clearing of the Corpse Walking Stronghold would be tallied by the Situ Family, then reported to the Taoist Court, and after that, the Taoist Court would distribute merit and rewards.

In the end, there would certainly be a share that fell into Mo Hua's hands.

Although there would be deductions at every level, the Spirit Stones he received wouldn't be many, but at least it was an aboveboard transaction.

Moreover, it would also increase his Merit Points.

Merit Points from the Taoist Court were more important than Spirit Stones.

Aside from Spirit Stones and Pills, Mo Hua had no qualms about taking peculiar items, especially those related to Formations.

Better to err on the side of caution, Mo Hua took everything.

There were Ultimate Formations in the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

Mo Hua conjectured that the Ultimate Formation was inscribed on the Corpse Controlling Bell.

Now that the Corpse Controlling Bell was in hand, Mo Hua had not yet had the chance to examine it closely.

It was uncertain whether the bell really contained the Ultimate Formation.

But just in case, it was better to make extra preparations.

The Ultimate Formation, if not in the bell, would still be in the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

Mo Hua collected all items inscribed with Formations from the stronghold, to prevent any oversight when he came to calculate the Ultimate Formation later.

Besides that, there were other Formations in the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

For example, that Dry Ink Screen, on which was inscribed a Formation that diverged from the Five Elements, delving into a field of Formations unfamiliar to Mo Hua.

Such items like the screen were plentiful in the stronghold.

The Formations on these items also varied widely in style.

Clearly they were not drawn by Instructor Yan, but it was also unclear who they originated from.

So, in order to broaden his horizons on Formations, enhance his experience with them, and strengthen his knowledge, Mo Hua decided to take these items back to dismantle and study them carefully.

Mo Hua continued to search and collect items.

However, his Storage Bag was too small, and after a while, it could not fit anything more.

Mo Hua was somewhat worried.

Bai Zixi then produced a brand-new Storage Bag, embroidered with auspicious cloud and phoenix patterns, and crisply said,

"This bag is big."

Mo Hua's eyes lit up, and he said with a smile,

"Thank you, Junior Sister!"

Thus, Mo Hua no longer had any worries and released his Divine Sense, continuing to search and select Formation-embedded items within the stronghold.

The items he picked were placed into Bai Zixi's Storage Bag.

In this manner, Mo Hua selected, while Bai Zixi packed with the bag.

The two made a round, thoroughly scouring the Corpse Walking Stronghold again.

Only when the sky began to brighten did the two return, fully laden, stuffing a top-grade Storage Bag full to the brim.

Meanwhile, Situ Fang led the cultivators of the Situ Family in nearly clearing out the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

The Spirit Stones and such, Mo Hua had left to them.

This time, the Situ Family had mobilized on a large scale.

Mobilizing manpower required spending a considerable amount of Spirit Stones.

Although the battle went smoothly, there were inevitably some cultivator casualties, who would also need Spirit Stones as consolation.

Afterwards, everyone gathered together.

Situ Fang, along with the two Elders of the Situ Family, expressed their gratitude to Mo Hua and the other two.

Without the help of Mo Hua and his companions, the casualties in this battle would likely have been higher, and whether they could have successfully taken down the Corpse Walking Stronghold was still uncertain.

After all, the stronghold's Formations were strong, and the Iron Corpses were impervious to sword and spear, making a direct confrontation very difficult.

Mo Hua waved his hand and said, "No need to be polite."

Then he asked, "What's next?"

Situ Jin stroked his beard, pondering for a moment, and did not hide anything from Mo Hua, instead speaking frankly,

"After we tally up everything, we won't go through the South Yue City Taoist Court but will use the Situ Family's connections and influence to report to the Taoist Court in the name of the neighboring South Mountain City."

"South Mountain City's Taoist Court?"

Situ Jin nodded, "The Court Leader of South Mountain City, his wife's surname is Situ."

Mo Hua then understood.

Situ Jin continued, "This merit will bypass the South Yue City's Taoist Court and be credited to Miss Fang."

"Of course," Situ Jin looked at Mo Hua and added, "Gentleman, it will also be credited to you, including not only Spirit Stones but also Merit Points distributed by the Court."

"As to how many Merit Points, that depends on the operations on the Court's side."

After all, where there are people, there are divisions of interest.

In a place like the Taoist Court, even if clear water flows through, they scrape off three layers of oil.

Situ Jin went on, "Besides this, the Situ Family also has some modest gifts for the Gentleman..."

In the end, it was thanks to Mo Hua that they had this opportunity to earn this merit.

Merit, at times, is something that cannot even be bought with Spirit Stones.

With this merit, Miss Fang will also be valued by her Clan.

In their branch, there are not many promising youngsters; Situ Fang is diligent in her Cultivation and serious in her affairs, standing out among them.

Therefore, Situ Jin was truly grateful to Mo Hua.

"Where, where, Elder is too courteous..."

Although Mo Hua modestly demurred with his words, he couldn't resist asking curiously,

"What kind of modest gift is it..."

Situ Jin was caught off guard, and he couldn't help but chuckle.

This young Gentleman was straightforward and truly candid.

Situ Jin smiled and said, "Spirit Stones and such common things, the Gentleman may not care for, so the Situ Family will prepare some of the Family's Formation Books to give to the Gentleman, to build a good relationship..."

Mo Hua wanted to say that he too was fond of mundane things like Spirit Stones.

But saying that would seem like he was losing face.

So Mo Hua felt too embarrassed to speak up.

However, he was pleased with the prospect of studying Formations.

He wondered what sort of Formation Books the Situ Family would send him.

Mo Hua expressed his thanks:

"Thank you, Elder, and thank you, Sister Situ!"

Situ Fang smiled upon seeing Mo Hua accept their Situ Family's goodwill and nodded slightly.

Afterward, Zhang Quan was taken into custody by Situ Jin and sent to the Taoist Court.

The zombies and coffins were all accounted for and handled by the Taoist Court.

The Corpse Refining Coffins, being artifacts of the Demon Path, were to be destroyed.

Zombies pose a great danger; if they lose control, they will rampage, wandering around and devouring the flesh and blood of the living.

Corpse Poison can also easily cause cultivators to turn into zombies.

So typically, zombies would be incinerated by the Taoist Court to prevent further calamity.

But all of this had little to do with Mo Hua now.

Situ Fang still had some loose ends to tie up, and she also had to wait for a handover of certain matters with the Taoist Court of South Mountain City, so she was going to be quite busy.

Instructor Yan had already been escorted back to South Yue City ahead of time by the cultivators of the Situ Family.

With matters at the Corpse Walking Stronghold resolved, Mo Hua took his leave, returning with Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi.

By this time, the day had already brightened, and the morning glow filled the sky, spreading on the path.

Mo Hua and his companions walked shoulder to shoulder on the mountain stones, draped in the glow of dawn, looking at the desolate yet somewhat wild scenery of the mountains, slowly making their way back.

On the way, Bai Zisheng lamented,

"We didn't manage to slaughter Zhang Quan..."

He had wanted to finish Zhang Quan off with a spear thrust while he was passed out from anger, but Mo Hua hadn't allowed it.

"Zhang Quan has someone backing him; we need to keep him alive to try to find out who that is," Mo Hua said.

"Zhang Quan won't talk, though."

"It's not up to him anymore."

Bai Zisheng asked, "You're not thinking of interrogating Zhang Quan yourself, are you?"

Mo Hua nodded.

Bai Zisheng hesitantly said, "You'd better not go... "

Mo Hua was somewhat puzzled. "Why not?"

Bai Zisheng replied, "With how angry you made Zhang Quan, he'd rather die a thousand deaths than tell you anything."

Mo Hua was stunned. "Surely he's not that narrow-minded."

Bai Zisheng couldn't help but feel speechless. "I say his tolerance is already quite great. If it were any less, you would have already angered him to death... "

Mo Hua frowned and murmured in doubt,

"Am I really that infuriating?"

He hadn't noticed it himself.

Bai Zisheng sighed, "It's that innocent face you make when you anger people that's the most infuriating."

Mo Hua didn't believe it and turned to ask Bai Zixi,

"Little Senior Sister, do I anger people?"

Bai Zixi's beautiful eyes shifted slightly as she spoke softly,

"Not really."

Mo Hua nodded, feeling that his Little Senior Sister was right.

Bai Zisheng could only look at his sister and helplessly shake his head.

...

After walking alongside each other for a while, Bai Zisheng suddenly remembered something and asked,

"Just how many zombies were there in the Corpse Walking Stronghold?"

Mo Hua replied without a second thought, "Five Iron Corpses, six hundred and thirty-seven Walking Corpses."

"Did you actually count them?"

"Of course," Mo Hua nodded. In the Corpse Walking Stronghold, he probably knew the number of zombies better than Zhang Quan, the Householder.

Bai Zisheng clicked his tongue, "That's a lot..."

But Mo Hua shook his head, "No, it's not enough..."

Bai Zisheng was taken aback, "Still not enough?"

Mo Hua affirmed, "Not enough!"

Bai Zisheng was puzzled.

Mo Hua then explained, "Zhang Quan's method of refining corpses is passed down from his ancestors. He's been purchasing bodies and refining zombies for decades, if not over a hundred years. Given all these years, the number of zombies he's refined can't just be this amount..."

"And it's not just him refining; he established the Corpse Walking Stronghold, where bandits kill people and Mining Cultivators buy corpses. A couple of hundred Corpse Cultivators are also refining corpses. Over time, the number of zombies they've refined is definitely not small."

Bai Zisheng frowned, "Does he have other places to hide the zombies?"

"Not hiding, perhaps selling."

Mo Hua remembered Zhang Quan mentioning something about "sending corpses."

He wouldn't be refining corpses to "give" them to others; there must be some sort of transaction involved.

It was still all a mystery for now, with no clear leads to follow.

Bai Zisheng exclaimed, "The waters are deep indeed..."

Mo Hua nodded and looked toward the other side.

By now, they had reached South Yue City, and the opposite side of the road was a mine.

It was late morning, and the dawn light had dissipated, leaving the sunlight searing.

The mine was baking in the heat.

The Mining Cultivators began their work under the scorching sun.

Their heads bared to the fierce sunshine, feet on sizzling stones, bodies marked with lashings turned dark, hands cracked, backs bent, they toiled in hardship and numbness under the overseers' abuse.

For them, every breath was an immense struggle.

Like a person drowning in deep waters, gasping for air but unable to breathe.

Mo Hua's gaze shifted slightly as he murmured,

"The waters of South Yue City are very deep..."

"That's why these Mining Cultivators live amidst such treacherous conditions..."

Chapter 458: = 450 Opening the Coffin (1)

...

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi listened to Mo Hua's words and witnessed the arduous life of Mining Cultivators, both frowning in silence.

The atmosphere became somewhat somber for a while.

After some thought, Mo Hua suddenly pointed to the north and said,

"Let's first take a trip to the forest over there."

Bai Zisheng, puzzled, asked, "What are we doing in the forest?"

Mo Hua replied, "You wanted to eat wild boar, didn't you? There's one there; we'll catch it and I'll cook it for you."

Bai Zisheng was momentarily taken aback, then overjoyed, and couldn't help but pat Mo Hua on the shoulder,

"You truly are a good junior brother of mine!"

Bai Zixi also smiled faintly.

The three of them went into the forest and captured a wild boar.

A Late First Grade wild boar stood no chance against the three of them.

After capturing the boar, Mo Hua brought it back, and using the cooking method his mother had taught him, he removed the gamey taste, cleansed the bloodstains, added spicy seasoning, and began to stew it in the pot.

The pork was tough and chewy, and it took a long time to stew.

It took a full day for the aroma to finally waft through the air.

After Mo Hua sliced it, he plated it and brought it as food to accompany the drinks for Instructor Yan and Mr. Zhuang.

Instructor Yan was temporarily living in the cave dwelling as well.

Whenever he had time, he would visit Mr. Zhuang.

The two sat in the courtyard, enjoying the breeze, drinking wine, eating meat, and chatting about the past of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect as well as the rise and fall of the Great Hidden Spirit Sect.

Instructor Yan couldn't stop praising the wild boar meat.

He never would have expected that Mo Hua, a student so proficient in formations, could also prepare meals that were quite up to standard.

After Mr. Zhuang took a bite, he nodded slightly.

Although the taste was somewhat inferior to what he had eaten in Tongxian City, eating it made his heart feel much warmer.

After all, it was made by his own junior disciple.

Under the courtyard's large tree, Mo Hua and the two others sat side by side.

Bai Zisheng relished the meal, wishing he could eat up the entire pig.

Bai Zixi, on the other hand, ate gracefully, her demeanor refined and her gestures delicate and elegant.

After eating a few bites, Mo Hua also nodded in satisfaction.

The weather was hot, but the shade under the tree was cool.

A gentle breeze rustled through the leaves, casting mottled shadows.

Suddenly, Mo Hua felt that such days were quite nice...

There was his master, senior brother, and senior sister.

And old acquaintances like Instructor Yan would pay visits.

He just didn't know how long such days could last...

...

After eating their fill, Mo Hua started to focus on the serious matters at hand.

He needed to deduce the Spirit Pivot Formation Patterns, comprehend the Spiritual Pivot Formation, and use the First Grade Twelve Stripes formation to temper his Divine Sense, so as to advance it further and step into the realm of the Thirteen Stripes.

The Thirteen Stripes represented the limit of a Foundation Establishment Initial Stage Cultivator's Divine Sense.

Mo Hua would also be taking a crucial step towards Foundation Establishment.

The Spiritual Pivot Formation required deduction.

The first thing to research was Zhang Quan's Corpse Controlling Bell.

The Corpse Controlling Bell was an Evil Artifact of the Demon Path, unassuming on the outside with the formation hidden inside.

Mo Hua not being very knowledgeable about Artifact Refining, had no idea where to start or how to dismantle it.

Eventually, it was Bai Zixi who, after consulting a number of Tao Cultivation Canons, figured out the method of disassembly.

Dismantling the Corpse Controlling Bell was a troublesome process that required profound knowledge in Artifact Refining and some special refining methods.

Bai Zixi patiently explained to Mo Hua who, however, was utterly confused.

Apart from formations, Mo Hua was not very skilled in other Tao Cultivation arts, surely not as accomplished as Bai Zixi.

Therefore, dismantling the Corpse Controlling Bell could only be done by Bai Zixi.

Bai Zixi retrieved a small and exquisitely styled Artifact Furnace from nowhere, crafted from expensive materials, with the furnace fire as concentrated as mercury.

She then took out a series of Artifact Refining tools from her storage bag.

There were golden scissors, silver tweezers, jade needles, and so on.

Mo Hua had never seen these Artifact Refining tools before.

He had only seen a big hammer...

It was the large iron hammer that Master Chen swung when refining artifacts.

Bai Zixi explained to Mo Hua,

"Different grades of Spiritual Artifacts require different refining tools. Swords and halberds are usually forged with hammers; rings, bells, and pendants require more delicate tools."

"Mhm, mhm."

Mo Hua looked on admiringly, nodding his head repeatedly.

Then Bai Zixi began to demonstrate to Mo Hua how to dismantle the Corpse Controlling Bell.

She first placed the bell in the furnace to heat it up to a certain point before taking it down, and with her fair hands, she alternated between golden scissors, silver tweezers, and jade needles, gradually separating the inner and outer layers of the bell.

Bai Zixi worked with ease.

Mo Hua watched, still somewhat puzzled.

As he raised his head, about to ask a question, he saw Bai Zixi with her eyes as clear as autumn waters, focused intently, occasionally blinking, her long eyelashes fluttering slightly.

Mo Hua found himself mesmerized, forgetting what he was about to say.

After a while, Bai Zixi managed to dismantle the Corpse Controlling Bell and looked up at Mo Hua, asking in a melodious voice,

"Did you understand it clearly?"

Feeling a bit guilty, Mo Hua averted his gaze,

"I understood..."

Bai Zixi nodded in satisfaction.

The Corpse Controlling Bell was dismantled by Bai Zixi.

Mo Hua then composed himself, focused, and began studying the formation on the bell.

But soon, Mo Hua furrowed his brow.

The formation on the Corpse Controlling Bell was not an Ultimate Formation...

It was based on the Five Elements Water Series Formation, transforming water into blood, and was a formation created from human blood that used a Blood Formation to control and manipulate an Iron Corpse.

...

But it was not the Soul Pivot Ultimate Formation that emphasized the control of Spiritual Power, as Mo Hua had previously speculated.

Mo Hua was very disappointed.

"Is it wrong?" Bai Zixi asked.

"Hmm." Mo Hua nodded.

Bai Zixi suggested, "Do you want to look at the other formations in the Corpse Walking Stronghold?"

"Sure."

Thus, Bai Zixi opened the Storage Bag and, with Bai Zisheng's help, laid out all the formation-related items of various sizes that they had previously scavenged from the Corpse Walking Stronghold in the courtyard.

Mo Hua breathed a sigh of relief.

Fortunately, he had prepared a strategy in advance.

If the complete Spiritual Pivot Ultimate Formation was not in the Corpse Controlling Bell, then it must be within the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

Now that he had brought all the formation secrets of the Corpse Walking Stronghold to himself, he refused to believe that he could not find it.

So, Mo Hua started searching one by one.

Formation Patterns that were obvious at a glance, he simply discarded back into the Storage Bag.

For obscure formations, Mo Hua took note of the formation patterns.

Some items had formations deeply hidden and abstruse, so he marked them separately to dismantle and study in detail later.

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi also helped.

They lacked enough Divine Sense to learn the Ultimate Formation, but they could still discern.

Like this, they kept searching all day.

Still, they found nothing.

Mo Hua obtained some rare and obscure formations, but these were not the Ultimate Formation.

"Very strange..."

Mo Hua frowned.

"Could this formation not be in the Corpse Walking Stronghold?" Bai Zisheng asked.

Mo Hua thought for a moment, then shook his head, "It's unlikely..."

Formations are always needed.

The Spiritual Pivot Formation on the corpses was fragmentary; it was not possible that there were formations on the corpses corresponding to the corpse control methods without being augmented by the same formations.

"Did we miss something?"

Mo Hua muttered.

"Everything even slightly related to formations in the Corpse Walking Stronghold has been taken by you, hasn't it?" Bai Zisheng said doubtfully, "What could have been missed?"

What could have been missed?

Mo Hua replayed the encounter with Zhang Quan in his mind again.

Hundred Flower Tower, Earth Escape Techniques, Corpse Blood Pill, Corpse Raising Coffin, Walking Corpse, Iron Corpse, Corpse Controlling Bell, Corpse Walking Stronghold, Ancestral Master of the Zhang Family...

After thinking several times, Mo Hua suddenly realized:

"The Iron Corpse!"

Bai Zisheng asked, puzzled, "Iron Corpse?"

"Hmm." Mo Hua nodded and quickly said:

"If there is a Spiritual Pivot Formation on the walking corpses, then naturally, there should be one on the Iron Corpse as well..."

"I previously thought the walking corpses and the Iron Corpse were both controlled by the Corpse Controlling Bell."

"Then their body patterns should be the same, with perhaps only a bit of difference in the strength of the formations."

"But now, since there's no Spiritual Pivot Formation on top of the Corpse Controlling Bell, then the formation controlling the corpses is very likely inscribed on the Iron Corpse!"

"Zhang Quan controls the Iron Corpse with the Corpse Controlling Bell, and then through the Spiritual Pivot Formation on the Iron Corpse's body, he radiates control over more walking corpses!"

Bai Zixi's eyes showed surprise.

Bai Zisheng's mouth fell open in shock, "How did you think of that?"

Mo Hua said, "The principle of formations is interconnected; once you learn many, it's natural to make such deductions."

Bai Zisheng pondered and said, "It's very possible."

"Where is the Iron Corpse?" Mo Hua asked.

"At the Taoist Court," Bai Zisheng replied.

Mo Hua immediately got up and said, "There's no time to delay, let's go to Sister Situ and ask for an Iron Corpse."

The three of them went to find Situ Fang.

Situ Fang was surprised, "What do you need an Iron Corpse for?"

Mo Hua said, "To study it."

Situ Fang was a bit bewildered.

Was this something that could be studied...

What was there to research?

It's not as if they planned to study Corpse Refinement.

Mo Hua promptly said, "It's related to formations."

Situ Fang was slightly shocked, her mind cleared up a bit, but she still frowned and said, "It's very dangerous."

"It's alright," Mo Hua assured, "I am a Formation Master, just draw a few more formations, and ensure that even if it loses control, it won't cause a stir."

After speaking, Mo Hua added, "Once the study is done, I'll return it."

Situ Fang hesitated for a moment, then nodded and said:

"Alright, but you guys need to keep a low profile, don't let anyone find out."

Mo Hua smiled and said, "Thank you, Sister Situ!"

His smile was clear and sincere.

Situ Fang couldn't help but shake her head, she really had no way to deal with Mo Hua.

There were a total of five Iron Corpses in the Corpse Walking Stronghold.

Situ Fang gave Mo Hua one.

The Iron Corpse was hidden in a coffin, which needed a horse-drawn carriage to transport.

Mo Hua spent a long time sweet-talking Big White before they were able to secretly pull the coffin containing the Iron Corpse out from the Taoist Court and send it back to their dwelling.

It was still in the same chamber.

Mo Hua reinforced the formations once again.

Because they had to imprison an Iron Corpse, Mo Hua was even more cautious, using at least first-grade Compound Formations this time.

The formations, like spiderwebs, spread to every corner of the room.

Once ready, Mo Hua moved to open the coffin.

Chapter 459: Spirit Pivot (1)

Inside the iron coffin, an Iron Corpse was sealed.

Iron Corpse was one level higher than Walking Corpses.

Walking Corpses had pale and rotting flesh and contained Corpse Poison. Although fierce and fearless of death, their strength was quite ordinary. They primarily relied on their numbers and Corpse Poison to gain an advantage.

The skin of an Iron Corpse was an iron blue, much like cast iron, and their strength was greater, comparable to that of a cultivator in the initial stage of Foundation Establishment.

Crafting an Iron Corpse was more costly, and it took more time.

Similarly, controlling an Iron Corpse was also more difficult.

Only a Foundation Building Cultivator, relying on the Divine Sense of Foundation Establishment and using the Corpse Controlling Bell as a medium, could control an Iron Corpse with relative stability.

For Corpse cultivators in the Qi Refinement Realm, whose Divine Sense was insufficient, controlling an Iron Corpse for an extended period could easily lead to its loss of control and result in a backlash.

That's why Zhang Quan intended to consecrate the bell, to enhance the stability of corpse control by borrowing Divine Thought.

Mo Hua opened the iron coffin.

An Iron Corpse with blackish-green skin and ferocious iron features lay inside with its eyes closed.

There was a rich Corpse Qi emanating from it, and within its flesh flowed a greenish Corpse Poison.

Bai Zisheng, gripping a long spear, placed the tip on the Iron Corpse's forehead to prevent it from losing control and lashing out, potentially injuring Mo Hua.

Bai Zixi was also holding a golden longsword, standing by Mo Hua's side.

Using a dagger, Mo Hua cut open the Iron Corpse's shirt to reveal its iron-blue, sinister chest.

There was nothing on the surface of the chest.

However, Mo Hua's eyes lit up.

He had indeed sensed the aura of the Ultimate Formation.

With the dagger, Mo Hua made several cuts on the Iron Corpse's chest, but the skin was so tough that not even a scratch was left.

Mo Hua sighed and could only hand the dagger to Bai Zisheng, saying,

"Senior brother, it's up to you now."

Bai Zisheng took the dagger and said,

"Step back a bit."

Mo Hua obediently retreated several feet.

Bai Zisheng then activated his cultivation technique, wrapping the dagger in golden Spiritual Power, and carefully started cutting into the chest of the Iron Corpse, peeling off the skin.

Underneath the skin, the flesh was dark green, and the Corpse Poison was dense.

And on top of the flesh was indeed a red Formation, complex and profound!

"Mo Hua, come take a look!"

Bai Zisheng called out.

Mo Hua hurried over and leaned in to take a closer look.

After inspecting for a while, his eyes brightened.

Yes, it was indeed the Spiritual Pivot Formation related to Walking Corpses, but the Formation Patterns were slightly different.

He quickly took out paper and pen, and began to jot down the Formation Patterns.

But as he recorded, Mo Hua's expression turned a bit grim.

He glanced at the Iron Corpse and said in a serious tone,

"Senior brother, this Iron Corpse, it's about to lose control..."

Bai Zisheng was taken aback, "How do you know?"

Mo Hua's gaze was profound, "The Formation is operating, someone is controlling this Iron Corpse... 'Losing control'..."

Startled by the words, Bai Zisheng immediately took out his spear and pinned the Iron Corpse within the iron coffin.

Simultaneously, the Iron Corpse abruptly opened its eyes.

Their red eyes were brimming with bloodthirst and ferocity.

Its arms stretched forward, its iron claws sharp and long, tipped with Corpse Poison, as it rigidly tried to stand up.

But its body was pinned down by Bai Zisheng's spear, making it unable to break free for the moment.

As it struggled, the Blood Formation on the Iron Corpse's chest also became increasingly vivid.

Between the Patterns, there seemed to be blood flowing, and as the blood moved, the sound grew louder, like a peculiar pulse.

The redder the Patterns, the heavier the Iron Corpse's savage aura, and the stronger its struggle became.

Bai Zisheng frowned and said,

"Step back, I can't suppress it any longer!"

Bai Zixi quickly moved back gracefully with light steps.

Mo Hua also stepped back a few paces.

In just a few moments, the Iron Corpse let out a roar, with Corpse Qi surging from its body. Intense strength transmitted forth, shaking off Bai Zisheng and freeing itself from the spear's restraints.

The Iron Corpse, freed from its bonds, had a fierce expression. It let out a deep growl similar to Monster Beasts, but it wasn't bloodthirsty or murderous.

It seemed to know that it couldn't kill any cultivator in this room.

With a leap, the Iron Corpse attempted to burst through the door.

Once it escaped outside, entering South Yue City, it could feast to its heart's content, devouring flesh and blood to restore its Blood Qi.

The Iron Corpse slammed against the door, intending to break out.

But the Formation Patterns all around, dense as a spider web, lit up, and several Spiritual Power shackles appeared, directly binding the Iron Corpse and preventing it from escaping.

Enraged, the Iron Corpse tore with its iron claws, damaging several Formations, attempting to break free.

Before it could escape, Bai Zisheng's spear was already thrusting toward it.

Bai Zixi's Sword Qi, too, was ignited with pure white flames, aiming straight for the Iron Corpse's head.

And Mo Hua's fireballs flew precisely towards the joints of the Iron Corpse's legs.

Inside the room, the Formation trembled, and Spiritual Power overflowed.

Despite the Sound Isolation Formation being in place, such a commotion and the fluctuations of Spiritual Power still managed to seep out.

In the courtyard, Instructor Yan was drinking tea with Mr. Zhuang.

Upon hearing the noise, Instructor Yan looked puzzled and said,

"Is something wrong?"

Mr. Zhuang smiled indifferently and responded,

"No harm done, just children playing."

Instructor Yan looked doubtful but nodded, half believing, half unsure.

Inside the room, the disturbance continued for the duration of a cup of tea before gradually calming down.

The Formation inside the room was laid out too densely by Mo Hua, layer upon layer, like the Silk Cave, leaving no escape for the Iron Corpse.

And the Taoist Skills of Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi were extremely strong.

Plus, Mo Hua was darting in opportunistically to attack.

Thus, the Iron Corpse was quickly subdued.

Bai Zisheng's long spear had pierced through the Iron Corpse's throat, pinning it to the ground.

But the Iron Corpse's limbs were still incessantly thrashing and clawing.

Bai Zisheng asked, "Junior brother, do you have a way to immobilize it?"

Mo Hua stared at the Formation on the Iron Corpse's chest, thought for a moment, and said,

"Destroy this Formation."

Bai Zixi asked, "Have you mastered it yet?"

"Not yet," Mo Hua shook his head, "But I've memorized the Formation Patterns. I'll slowly comprehend it later."

"Good," Bai Zixi said crisply.

Then, with a deft twist of her hand, several strands of golden Sword Qi coalesced and flew out simultaneously, piercing through the chest of the Iron Corpse and destroying the Blood Formation on it.

The Iron Corpse struggled with its limbs for a while before gradually ceasing to move.

All three of them breathed a sigh of relief.

"What should we do with this Iron Corpse?" Bai Zisheng asked.

Mo Hua pondered and said, "For now, we should seal it inside an iron coffin. I'll use a Formation to suppress it to prevent any further mishaps from it escaping."

"And the Ultimate Formation?"

"I've noted it down."

Bai Zisheng was somewhat incredulous, "You've remembered it in such a short time?"

"Mhm," Mo Hua nodded, his tone uncertain:

"This Ultimate Formation doesn't seem too hard..."

"Hard or not, who says Ultimate Formations are simple?" Bai Zisheng expressed concern, "Don't get it wrong and end up wasting our efforts."

"It's fine, even if I remembered it incorrectly, Sister Situ still has four more Iron Corpses."

"Okay then," Bai Zisheng said, then suddenly furrowed his brow:

"The four Iron Corpses at Sister Situ's place... could they have also lost control?"

"They won't," Mo Hua asserted, "Sister Situ and the others don't understand Formations. If they don't meddle with the Formations, the Iron Corpses won't lose control..."

"This Iron Corpse lost control because it was afraid something would be discovered."

"Someone doesn't want me to see the Formation on the heart meridian of the Iron Corpse..."

Mo Hua said thoughtfully, stroking his chin.

Bai Zisheng nodded and said, "Then study it well. I can't help with the Formation, but if you need to fight, you must call on me."

"Right," Mo Hua agreed.

In the following days, Mo Hua devoted his time to studying the Formation patterns on the zombies' bodies.

The Formation on the bodies of both the Walking Corpses and the Iron Corpse, combined, formed a rather complete and coherent system where Spiritual Power could circulate with a beginning and an end, and the Formation Patterns echoed each other – a first-grade, twelve-patterned Ultimate Formation.

This Formation was the Spiritual Pivot Formation.

Several days later, Mo Hua sat in the courtyard, staring at a Formation in front of him, somewhat dazed.

He had already mastered drawing this Ultimate Formation.

This was far beyond Mo Hua's expectations.

Mo Hua originally thought that mastering the Spiritual Pivot Formation would, at the very least, require time to understand the unique patterns of Spiritual Power circulation, not to mention any special Taoist meanings.

But the Spiritual Pivot Formation came to him surprisingly quickly.

After just a few days, he had mastered the Formation.

Mo Hua tried inscribing the Spiritual Pivot Formation onto a toy wooden tiger. This tiger was a gift from Old Kui.

Once the tiger had the Formation painted on it, Mo Hua inserted a Spirit Stone into it, activated it with Spiritual Power, and found that he could control the tiger's movements with his Divine Sense.

It could walk, sit, run, leap, crouch, and jump; it was as lifelike as could be.

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi, upon seeing it, found it quite novel.

Typically, toys in the Cultivation World could move on their own.

In Tongxian City, Mo Hua had bought many such toys – if you inserted Broken Spirit Stones into them, the dolls would clatter their way forward under the motivation of Spiritual Power.

But their movements were mechanical and fixed.

That was different from what Mo Hua had just created.

This wooden tiger could perform many subtle movements under the control of Divine Sense.

To an onlooker, the difference might not seem vast, but the involved Formations were worlds apart.

One required only a few Formation Patterns and was a simple Formation.

But the other needed a beyond-grade, first-grade, twelve-patterned Ultimate Formation.

Mo Hua studied the principle of the Spiritual Pivot Formation more closely.

He discovered that Instructor Yan was right. At its core, the Ultimate Formation was indeed about "control."

It transformed Spiritual Power into finer strands to perform detailed controls through these threads of power.

But was that all there was to it?

Had he only grasped the surface of the Formation?

Were there deeper elements to the Formation that he had not yet understood?

Mo Hua furrowed his brows.

Beyond understanding the rules of the Spiritual Pivot Formation, he also realized there was an issue with this Formation.

It seemed like the Formation was still not the complete Spiritual Pivot Formation, even though it was already effective.

Why did it seem incomplete?

Mo Hua thought for a long time but could not figure it out.

Not until he remembered the out-of-control Iron Corpse did he have a sudden epiphany.

The Iron Corpse's loss of control was a "loss of control" under the influence of the Formation.

In other words, the Iron Corpse controlled Walking Corpses while also being controlled by something else.

The Spiritual Pivot Formation on both Iron Corpses and Walking Corpses could essentially form a Spiritual Power cycle, achieving the effect of the Spiritual Pivot Formation.

However, atop the Iron Corpse, there was another tier of Spiritual Pivot Formations.

This tier of Spiritual Pivot Formation was a higher component of the overall structure.

In other words, what Mo Hua currently understood was merely the intermediate and lower levels of the Spiritual Pivot Formation.

This hierarchical structure of Formations exceeded Mo Hua's previous understanding.

"Formation mastery is indeed profound and vast," Mo Hua sighed once more.

If his conjecture was correct, the so-called Spiritual Pivot Formation was not simply a Single Formation.

It was a special type of Formation system that branched down from one Formation into a hierarchical structure that spanned from top to bottom, from high level to low level.

All Spiritual Pivot Formations belonged to the same category, yet controlled with distributed authority at different tiers.

The one on the Walking Corpses was the lowest level of Spiritual Pivot Formation, with the least authority, capable only of being controlled by others.

The one on the Iron Corpse was a level higher, with more authority able to control the Walking Corpses.

Considering this, there had to be something controlling the Iron Corpses!

Was it an Evil Artifact, a Cultivator, or another zombie that controlled the Iron Corpse?

And this unknown item, person, or corpse, within the hierarchy of the Soul Pivot Ultimate Formation, held the highest authority, capable of dominating all others, controlling every zombie that had the Spiritual Pivot Formation on its heart meridian.

It commanded all Walking Corpses and Iron Corpses!

The mere thought sent a chill through Mo Hua.

Chapter 460: Grudges and Resentments (1)

"The waters of South Yue City truly run deep..."

Mo Hua sighed again.

Behind the Corpse Walking Stronghold, what force was there, and behind Zhang Quan, who was there? Mo Hua had no clue yet.

He could only wait and see if the Taoist Court could get anything out of Zhang Quan's mouth.

Mo Hua didn't go to ask.

Because Zhang Quan certainly wouldn't tell him.

Zhang Quan hated Mo Hua to death.

And Mo Hua had almost angered him to death as well.

If Mo Hua went to ask him, it would be good enough if he didn't anger Zhang Quan into a cerebral hemorrhage, let alone getting any information out of him.

Now all the clues about the Spiritual Pivot Formation and Corpse Walking Stronghold were with Zhang Quan.

Only by extracting some information from Zhang Quan's mouth could they continue the investigation.

Only by finding out which cultivator or power was behind Zhang Quan could they locate a higher tier of Spirit Pivot Formation Patterns.

Then Mo Hua could use this to restore the complete Spiritual Pivot Formation.

And truly master the twelve-pattern Spiritual Pivot Formation.

With the remaining time, Mo Hua still focused on comprehending the incomplete Spiritual Pivot Formation.

The Spiritual Pivot Formation was the key to this matter.

A cultivator who could command Iron Corpses with the Spiritual Pivot Formation was definitely not to be underestimated.

The conspiracy hidden within South Yue City must also be extraordinary.

Prepare in advance, use formations to break formations.

The more he understood about formations, the more solutions he would have when facing danger in the future.

...

After drawing formations for the day, Mo Hua steamed some pastries and brought them to Mr. Zhuang to accompany his tea time, chatted for a bit, bid farewell, and then brought some to Instructor Yan.

Instructor Yan was sitting in the courtyard, lost in thought, full of worries, his face showing signs of distress.

Mo Hua placed the pastries on the table and poured a cup of tea for Instructor Yan, then couldn't help asking,

"Instructor, do you have something on your mind?"

Instructor Yan hesitated, then shook his head, "It's nothing."

Mo Hua's eyes flickered slightly, "Is it about the traitor from Minor Hidden Spirit Sect?"

Instructor Yan stiffened, then responded bitterly,

"You know about it?"

"Mm-hmm." Mo Hua nodded, "Manager Mo already told me."

Instructor Yan, feeling helpless, sighed,

"My junior brother, really can't keep his mouth shut..."

Mo Hua asked, "Is that traitor in South Yue City now?"

Instructor Yan didn't really want to say.

Mo Hua then blinked his large eyes at him.

Instructor Yan hesitated, then reluctantly said,

"Sect grudges, I don't want to drag you into it..."

Mo Hua shook his head, "It's okay, maybe I'm already involved."

Instructor Yan was startled, then after some thought, he felt it was true.

Corpse Walking Stronghold was eradicated under Mo Hua's leadership; his involvement was probably not shallow.

But Instructor Yan was still hesitant.

Mo Hua then said in a low voice,

"Moreover, I'm quite familiar with South Yue City, the Lu Family, South Yue Sect, Taoist Court, Mining Cultivators, Hundred Flower Tower, I have some connections with all of them. I can help you gather information."

Upon hearing the key point, Instructor Yan's eyes widened,

"You're also familiar with Hundred Flower Tower?"

Even though he had never been there, from its name, he knew it was a brothel.

This kid, so young and not learning good things, why would he mingle in such places?

Mo Hua hurriedly waved his hand,

"I'm not familiar, but I know an Elder named Su who is very familiar..."

"Elder Su?"

"An Elder at the Foundation Establishment stage from South Yue Sect." Mo Hua said.

Instructor Yan was slightly taken aback.

Having been in South Yue City for a few years, he knew only a few cultivators.

Mo Hua had been here for only a few months, how did he come to know so many cultivators...

Instructor Yan also recalled that he had heard from an Elder of the Situ Family that Mo Hua was now a first-grade Formation Master.

A first-grade Formation Master...

He had never imagined that in just two or three years, the student who once needed to consult him for three or four formation patterns had surpassed him and officially become a first-grade Formation Master...

This talent was truly frightening...

In his heart, Instructor Yan felt both exhilarated and wistful.

Then he also realized that the current Mo Hua, albeit young, should not be treated as just any ordinary child.

During the incident with Corpse Walking Stronghold, Mo Hua's actions were brave and strategic, moving like a ghost.

All this was witnessed by Instructor Yan.

Even the Corpse cultivators at the Foundation Establishment stage were played in the palms of Mo Hua's hands.

And his own escape from Corpse Walking Stronghold was also thanks to Mo Hua.

With this in mind, Instructor Yan's attitude towards Mo Hua unconsciously became much more solemn.

After a moment of contemplation and a soft sigh, he opened up to Mo Hua,

"That traitor is indeed in South Yue City..."

"How do you know?"

"I have seen the formations he drew in the city."

Instructor Yan sighed again, then continued,

"Even though so many years have passed, his formation skills have improved, and his drawing style is completely different, but his subtle strokes, I recognized them at a glance!"

"It's just that I've been asking around everywhere, and no one knows who is behind these formations, or where they came from..."

Instructor Yan's expression showed disappointment.

"What's the name of that traitor?" Mo Hua asked.

Instructor Yan seemed to recall painful memories, hesitated for a long time before slowly speaking,

"His surname is Shen, given name Cai."

"Shen Cai?"

Mo Hua frowned, "I don't seem to know this person in South Yue City..."

A person skilled in formations, with a formation strength close to or even above a first grade, and entrenched in South Yue City for a long time, must not be an obscure nobody.

Mo Hua had seen or heard of nearly all the prominent Formation Masters in South Yue City.

But there was no one by the name of "Shen Cai."

Mo Hua asked, "Could he have changed his name and fled?"

Instructor Yan nodded slightly, "It's not just a change of name; he has likely disguised himself too..."

"Disguised himself..."

Instructor Yan said through clenched teeth,

"He betrayed his master, destroyed his legacy; he'll be spat upon by everyone. That face of his, he probably doesn't dare to keep it either."

"That complicates things..." muttered Mo Hua.

With a changed name and face, and an unknown identity, knowing only similar Formation Diagram techniques, indeed, he's not easy to find.

And if you inquire too much, you might startle the snake.

The Cultivation World is so vast—if he got away, finding him again would be like searching for a needle in a haystack.

"Are you looking for him to seek revenge?"

Mo Hua asked cautiously.

Pain flitted across Instructor Yan's eyes before it turned to deep bitterness:

"After so many years, the desire for revenge has faded. I just want to find him and ask him personally. Even if he stole the Spirit Pivot Formation, why did he have to kill our master? Our master treated him so well..."

Having said that, Instructor Yan sighed deeply:

"There's one more thing—the Spirit Pivot Formation Chart."

"I hope to retrieve this Formation in my lifetime, to comfort the spirit of my master in heaven."

"The Minor Hidden Spirit Sect is no more, but I hope that this Formation can be passed down and not be lost to time..."

Spirit Pivot Formation Chart...

Thinking for a moment, Mo Hua took out a Formation Chart and handed it to Instructor Yan:

"Instructor, is this the one?"

Instructor Yan was startled, glancing at the Formation in Mo Hua's hand; he became stupefied.

His hands trembling, he took the Chart from Mo Hua, his pupils shaking as he murmured:

"Yes... that's right..."

Instructor Yan looked at Mo Hua in disbelief, "This... how did you obtain this?"

Mo Hua simply explained:

"It's reconstructed through Divine Sense Calculation, based on the Formation Patterns on the bodies of Walking Corpses and Iron Corpses..."

Calculation... Reconstruction...

Instructor Yan was momentarily lost in thought.

He didn't understand...

Gradually realizing, Instructor Yan recognized that even though he held Mo Hua in high regard, he might still have underestimated Mo Hua's knowledge of Formation.

Divine Sense Calculation, this level of knowledge about Formation, not even mentioned in a single word within the legacy of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect...

Mo Hua added, "However, it's a pity that this is only a part of the Formation, not the complete one."

Upon hearing this, Instructor Yan looked down, noticing the incomplete Formation, his expression slightly disappointed.

Then he seemed to think of something and, with a glimmer of hope, tentatively asked,

"Can you, learn it?"

Mo Hua shook his head, "Not yet, I've only learned a little."

Instructor Yan was taken aback, "A little?"

"Yes." Mo Hua nodded, then took out a wooden tiger from his Storage Bag and placed it on the table.

Instructor Yan was somewhat baffled, "What is this...?"

"Inside this tiger, a part of the Spirit Pivot Formation is drawn."

Then, with his Divine Sense, Mo Hua controlled the wooden tiger.

The wooden tiger came to life on the table, running and pouncing, rolling over, then standing upright, holding a teacup in its hands and delivering it to Instructor Yan, subsequently giving a bow.

Instructor Yan, with his mouth agape, was at a loss for words.

As a Formation Master, he knew too well that the actions of the tiger under the influence of the Formation contained extremely profound and complex Formation principles.

Mo Hua gifted the wooden tiger to Instructor Yan.

Even after Mo Hua had left, Instructor Yan still sat staring at the tiger, lost in a daze.

After a long while, he finally came to his senses.

It was the Spirit Pivot Formation...

And it didn't contain any evil abnormalities, no shortcuts or cheating methods.

It was the first time in his life that he had seen someone use the Spirit Pivot Formation to such an exquisite degree of spirit control.

Instructor Yan was shocked in his heart.

At the same time, he felt a sense of relief.

It was as though the persistent, somber hardships of searching alone and holding onto vengeance for years had been alleviated.

The grey, oppressive days now had a beam of light.

He could finally see the path ahead, just a bit clearer.

Looking up at the sky, Instructor Yan's face was complex as he muttered to himself,

"Master, our Minor Hidden Spirit Sect's Ultimate Formation has finally been learned by someone..."

"And it has been learned properly, legitimately..."

...

After leaving, however, Mo Hua was thinking about what Instructor Yan had said.

The traitor of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect.

The vengeance for betraying the master.

Instructor Yan said that his heart for revenge had faded over the years, but his eyes still held deep dedication.

The hatred wasn't intense, but the dedication was heavy.

That meant he no longer hated, but the traitor had to die.

From the tone Instructor Yan used at that moment, it seemed that even if it meant dying with the traitor, he would be willing.

Mo Hua sighed.

Although he was reluctant to admit it, Instructor Yan's Taoist skills were, in fact, quite weak.

All his expertise was spent on Formation.

Even if he were to confront his enemy, it would likely be difficult for him to bring about mutual destruction.

If he truly went to take his revenge, in the end, the one in danger would still be Instructor Yan himself.

Mo Hua thought for a moment, then nodded to himself.

If Instructor Yan couldn't take his revenge, then Mo Hua would help him.

Repay kindness with kindness, repay enmity with vengeance.

Having received Instructor Yan's favor, helping him to take revenge was only right and proper.

Moreover, Mo Hua was also curious to know if the Cultivator who drew the Spirit Pivot Evil Formation for Zhang Quan was indeed the traitor from the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect.