

The Quest 571

Chapter 571: Farewell (2)

"Every event, every instance, is part of the cycle of cause and effect,"

"Without your initial adherence to principles, the transmission of Formation knowledge, and planting good causes, none of this would have happened. The Corpse Mine incident wouldn't have the outcome it has today..."

Instructor Yan looked somewhat dazed, lost in contemplation for a long time.

Good causes, good effects...

After a while, he couldn't help but laugh and say,

"You, child, have always had a way with words."

And the thing was, his words made sense, leaving him unable to refute.

When he thought about it, it was indeed because he had valued Mo Hua as a child, taught him about Formations, and given him an opportunity that Mo was able to help him so much today, settling the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect's longstanding grievances.

Thinking about it that way, did he not also accomplish something worthwhile?

Instructor Yan felt a sense of poignancy, his eyes filled with satisfaction as he looked at the earnest Mo Hua.

Perhaps not letting Mo Hua's talents go to waste was the most correct thing he had done in his life...

Instructor Yan felt the knot in his heart slowly start to unravel.

His brow unfurled.

But what followed was an empty sense of loss.

Lu Chengyun was dead, the vendetta was avenged, and his wishes fulfilled.

Suddenly, he didn't know what to do anymore.

Revenge had been his obsession, the driving force behind his will to live all these years, and with the great vendetta settled, he suddenly felt adrift.

Mo Hua seemed to understand, his eyes shimmering slightly, he asked in a low voice,

"Instructor, how would you like to handle the ashes of the predecessors from the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect?"

Instructor Yan was taken aback, then after a moment of contemplation, he sighed,

"The Minor Hidden Spirit Sect is no more, and the gates have been sold off; we can't go back... I plan to find a place to build a mausoleum, to lay the predecessors to rest properly, and sweep their graves during festivals..."

And for himself, to live out the rest of his life in peace and quiet.

Mo Hua then asked,

"Where will the burial be?"

"That..."

Instructor Yan hesitated, not having decided on a specific location for the burial.

These days, finding a good piece of land wasn't easy, and it would cost quite a few Spirit Stones.

"Why not bury them in Tongxian City?" Mo Hua suggested.

"Tongxian City?" Instructor Yan was a bit astonished.

"Yes." Mo Hua nodded, patted his chest confidently, and said,

"I'm very familiar with Tongxian City. Court Leader Zhou, Elder Yu, Old Master An, and Master Luo... I have some connection with all the notable Cultivators there..."

"I'll write a letter for you to bring back. Explain the situation, and they will help you."

"When the time comes, you can bury the predecessors of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect wherever you wish."

Instructor Yan was stunned.

A single letter could help him?

Your connections aren't just 'some', they're ironclad...but that's not right.

If he remembered correctly, Cultivators like Court Leader Zhou, Elder Yu, and Old Master An weren't just Foundation Building Cultivators, they also held high statuses in Tongxian City.

And Master Luo was an even more senior first-grade Formation Master...

How did Mo Hua get so close to them?

Even if he was a young and promising first-grade Formation Master, his network shouldn't be this extensive...

Instructor Yan was somewhat dazed.

What exactly had happened in Tongxian City during the two or three years he was gone?

Had Mo Hua's influence grown so powerful?

"Instructor?" Mo Hua called out.

Instructor Yan snapped back to the present.

"What do you think?" Mo Hua asked.

Instructor Yan hesitated for a moment, then slowly said, "Tongxian City's mountaintops aren't that affluent, this..."

Mo Hua played coy,

"Don't worry, Tongxian City has changed a lot since then, you'll see when you get back."

Instructor Yan was puzzled, but didn't press for details.

Under the current circumstances, burying the predecessors of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect in Tongxian City was the best option.

"Alright," Instructor Yan nodded.

Mo Hua's expression brightened, then he continued to ask, "Instructor, do you want to rebuild the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect?"

Rebuild... the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect?

Instructor Yan's heart quivered; he turned, looking incredulously at Mo Hua.

Mo Hua said, "Of course, this isn't something that can be rushed, but can be done step by step..."

"You can start by teaching Loose Cultivator about Formations in Tongxian City, and when there are more Disciples learning Formations, then gradually start rebuilding the Sect..."

"Elder Yu would definitely be willing to help you with this."

"Taoist Court will be no problem either."

"As for Formation Masters, Master Luo and Elder Qian will also support you..."

"It will take time, of course - rebuilding a Sect is not something that can be achieved overnight. It requires long-term perseverance, perhaps even the effort of several generations..."

"..."

Mo Hua laid it all out plainly.

For a while, Instructor Yan felt a wave of emotion, yet he was still somewhat indecisive, clearly burdened with many concerns and uncertain about his decision.

Mo Hua spoke earnestly,

"By rebuilding the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect and carrying forward the legacy of Formation knowledge, more and more disciples will come to pay homage to these predecessors from the Sect..."

Carrying forward the legacy of Formation knowledge and having more disciples pay homage...

Instructor Yan's heart throbbed intensely.

In his eyes, the uncertainty dissipated, giving way to hope and yearning.

Mo Hua said no more.

He knew that Instructor Yan had made his decision; there was nothing more for him to say.

Instructor Yan, who held teacher-disciple relationships and the transmission of Formation knowledge in high regard, had never given up pursuing the traitor Lu Chengyun for all these years. Now that the chance to revive the Sect and pass on the Formation knowledge lay before him, he wouldn't let it slip by.

No matter how difficult the endeavour might be, he would find a way to overcome it.

Chapter 572: Farewell (3)

Several days later, Instructor Yan embarked on his journey.

He was returning to Tongxian City to find a picturesque spot to bury the ancestors of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect.

At the same time, the idea of rebuilding the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect and passing on its Formation legacy was also taking root in his heart.

Mo Hua had given him many Formation Books and some personal insights into Formations.

The Spiritual Pivot Formation diagrams had been meticulously deconstructed by Mo Hua from the simplest to the most complex, with clear and detailed annotations.

They were convenient for both learning and teaching.

This set of Formation Diagrams was also entrusted to Instructor Yan.

Instructor Yan received them solemnly, his hands trembling slightly.

In addition, Mo Hua had given him some local specialties from South Yue City, as well as travel rations, and some Pills for emergency, such as Poison Repelling Pills, Miasma Repelling Pills, and Demon-Expelling Pills.

Mo Hua saw Instructor Yan off all the way to the outskirts of the city.

Along the way, Mo Hua chattered nonstop, incessantly relaying advice:

"You should go for an assessment first..."

"After the assessment, things will be much more convenient."

"Tongxian City has many connections, so the assessment will go smoothly, and the Taoist Court even provides a dedicated car service..."

"Once you've gone through the assessment, try to establish your Foundation no matter what, even if you have to borrow some Spirit Stones... You can seek out... no, not Elder Yu, he's rather poor. Look for Old Master An, the An Family is very wealthy, and their young master is even called An Xiaofu; I know him pretty well..."

"Once you become a Foundation Building Cultivator and your Divine Sense reaches twelve Patterns, you can start learning the Spiritual Pivot Formation."

"Learn it bit by bit, don't rush, start with the simplest and progress step by step..."

...

Instructor Yan didn't know whether to laugh or cry, yet he felt a warm affection.

The words of Mo Hua were highly beneficial to him.

As an instructor, he was now about to learn Formations from his own disciple...

Instructor Yan was filled with both reflection and satisfaction.

After finishing the discussion on Formations, Mo Hua began to talk about other matters:

"When you get back, please send my regards to my parents..."

"Tell them I'm perfectly safe, eating well, drinking well, sleeping well, and that I'm well-nourished, chunky and white, that I've learned Formations well, and haven't encountered any danger, so they don't need to worry..."

"And Elder Yu, Grandpa Feng, Master Chen, all the uncles and brothers from the Monster Hunters..."

"And Da'hu, Dazhu, and the rest..."

"Please send them my regards too..."

Mo Hua mentioned a whole slew of names in one breath.

"Okay, okay, slow down..."

Instructor Yan's mind was almost overwhelmed; he sighed internally, this child, is she really so well-liked...

Before they knew it, the two had arrived at the city gate.

Parting ways after accompanying a traveler for a thousand miles, Mo Hua had to say goodbye to Instructor Yan.

When the time came to really say goodbye, she found herself at a loss for words, and the atmosphere turned a bit silent for a moment.

Mo Hua's gaze flickered with reluctance.

Instructor Yan looked deeply at Mo Hua, as if trying to imprint her image in his heart.

After a moment, he patted Mo Hua on the shoulder and said with expectation:

"Study hard!"

"Mhm!" Mo Hua nodded.

Instructor Yan then waved his hand and said warmly:

"Alright, go back now, I'm leaving."

He shouldered his bag and walked up the mountain path, leaving South Yue City, occasionally looking back to see Mo Hua still standing at the city gate, then waving his hand, signaling her to return; he walked a few steps, looked back again, and waved...

The wilderness was vast and endless.

Instructor Yan's figure grew smaller and smaller, disappearing into the rugged mountains.

Mo Hua watched seriously, bowing deeply to the distant mountains, just as she had done years ago when she parted with Instructor Yan at the foot of Tongxian City.

...

Instructor Yan said goodbye to Mo Hua and left South Yue City, walking alone along the mountain path towards the northwest. He passed by several peaks and eventually came upon a series of connected mines.

In the mines, there was a vast mining shaft.

At the moment, the Mining Cultivators were mining with loud and bustling noises in the background which contained a sense of liveliness.

Despite their hard work, the faces of the Mining Cultivators in the shaft bore no signs of discomfort, oppression, or pain.

Instead, there was a touch of hope.

The hope that by working hard, one could live a little better.

This was a completely different scene from what he had witnessed upon his arrival.

Instructor Yan was reminded again of Mo Hua's words: "Sow the seeds of goodness, and reap the fruits of goodness."

Could the mine be considered one of these fruits of goodness?

If he hadn't sown seeds of goodness in his youth, would the mine still be as it had been before, with people living like zombies during the day and the zombies themselves toiling away at night, just as human beings do?

Perhaps then, he wouldn't have been able to witness the scene before him...

Instructor Yan felt somewhat relieved.

"Yes, I haven't achieved nothing after all..."

His abilities were indeed limited; he couldn't help many people.

Without understanding Taoist Skill, he couldn't kill the wicked.

His formation ability was average, not knowing any profound formations, nor could he construct large-scale ones.

All he could do was to pass down the legacy of formations.

He allowed those with a natural talent for formations not to waste their time.

He allowed those capable of benefiting others not to be buried in obscurity.

As long as one could sow more seeds of goodness, naturally, more fruits of goodness would grow...

With this thought, Instructor Yan's gaze became bright and clear.

His lifespan was limited, but there was still so much he could do!

He looked back once more toward the direction of South Yue City.

The mountains concealed his view; he could no longer see Mo Hua in front of the city gates.

But Mo Hua's figure was still etched in his mind.

This was the first, and only, cultivator who had managed to learn the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect's Sect Protecting Grade-One Twelve-Pattern Spiritual Pivot Formation in the Qi-refining Realm.

He wondered what accomplishments this child would achieve in the future...

Instructor Yan's eyes were full of hope.

...

Several days later, in South Yue City.

Instructor Yan had left, and now it was time for Mo Hua to depart as well.

He had already bid farewell to Elder Su, Situ Fang, Qinglan, and Yang Jishan, among others.

Elder Su was quite reluctant to let him go.

He really liked Mo Hua, and so he gave him a bunch of fine tea.

Mo Hua was somewhat puzzled, "Are you giving me so much?"

"Yes," replied Elder Su with a wistful expression: "Take it all. After you leave, it's no fun for me to drink alone. These fine teas will lose their taste without company."

Mo Hua nodded and said, "Drinking less tea is also good. You should spend more time thinking about your son."

Elder Su's face turned red, "What son?"

Mo Hua silently looked at him.

Elder Su then chuckled awkwardly and sighed:

"The past is unbearable to look back on; it's all about debts that come due."

Yet, his eyes still revealed a hint of affection.

Situ Fang and Qinglan also gave Mo Hua some gifts and invited him:

"Make sure to visit the Situ Family when you have the time, so I can show you some hospitality as the host."

Mo Hua responded, "Definitely, definitely."

Yang Jishan looked on with regret.

Such a fine talent.

How wonderful it would be if he could join the Taoist Soldiers Court!

The people of the Yang Family all had similar thoughts and mindsets.

He even said something very similar to what Yang Jiyong had said:

"If you ever want to join the Taoist Soldiers Court, just mention the Yang Family's name; we've got you covered!"

Mo Hua smiled and thanked him, "Thank you, Uncle Yang!"

Everything was ready, and Mo Hua, along with his junior brother and sister, Old Kui, and Mr. Zhuang, sat in the cart pulled by Big White, embarking on a new journey with the steady sound of horse hooves tapping away.

The road was rugged, yet the interior of the cart was steady and secure.

Mo Hua asked, "Master, where are we headed next?"

"Keep heading south."

"South?"

"Yes," Mr. Zhuang nodded and said, "It's about time."

He looked at Mo Hua, his eyes distant:

"You are ready for Foundation Establishment..."

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"Foundation Establishment!"

Mo Hua's eyes shone brightly.

He had waited for this day, waited for so long!

Just the thought of being close to Foundation Establishment made Mo Hua smile with his eyes squinted, his little face showing a simple and honest expression, like a carefree cat basking in the sun.

Watching him, Bai Zixi's gaze was gentle, and a faint smile appeared on her lips.

Bai Zisheng then curled his lips and said,

"How unambitious, getting so excited over mere Foundation Establishment..."

"As my junior brother, you should set your sights farther, aiming for at least the Golden Core, or even Feather Transformation..."

Mo Hua couldn't be bothered with him.

He was in a good mood now, so he decided not to quibble with his junior brother.

Mr. Zhuang looked at Mo Hua warmly, his smile gentle, then he slowly said,

"Don't get too excited too soon; your Foundation Establishment is not like others', and it probably won't be that easy..."

Mo Hua was startled and whispered,

"Is it because of the bottleneck in my Divine Sense?"

Mr. Zhuang nodded slightly.

Mo Hua frowned and pondered deeply.

According to Mr. Zhuang's previous explanation, his path of cultivation should start with advancing his Divine Sense to around fourteen Formation Patterns of the Qi Foundation Middle Stage.

Then he should use the breakthrough in his cultivation to double his Divine Sense, leaping a major phase in one fell swoop to drastically increase it to the realm of Foundation Establishment Late Stage.

Whether it would be Seventeen Patterns, Eighteen Patterns, or Nineteen Patterns was uncertain.

However, even Seventeen Patterns would be quite astonishing.

To have Late Stage Foundation Establishment Divine Sense in the Initial Stage of Foundation Establishment.

This meant that, right upon entering the Second Grade of the Formation path, Mo Hua would have sufficient Divine Sense to study High-Grade Second Rank Formations!

And Mo Hua's abilities relied on his Divine Sense.

With a strong Divine Sense, not only Formations but also movement techniques and spells would benefit.

But this was only Mo Hua's speculation.

Whether this was truly the case was yet to be seen.

As Mr. Zhuang said, there are few cultivators who Prove the Dao with Divine Sense, lacking sufficient precedents to reference, making it unclear what changes and challenges lie ahead on this path.

Moreover, the bottleneck from Thirteen Stripes to Fourteen Patterns was much more difficult than Mo Hua had anticipated.

The gap from Thirteen to Fourteen Patterns seems minimal.

But it is the bottleneck from the Foundation Establishment Initial Stage to the Qi Foundation Middle Stage.

And Mo Hua was still at the stage of Qi Refinement.

Now he was practicing Formation Patterns daily, and his Divine Sense was gradually strengthening, but no matter what, it remained at the pinnacle of Thirteen Stripes.

The divide from Thirteen to Fourteen Patterns seemed as vast as the heavens.

No matter how much the Divine Sense strengthened, it seemed like a drop in the bucket.

He couldn't break through the bottleneck to reach the realm of Fourteen Patterns.

Mo Hua wondered how long he would have to wait before he could advance to Fourteen Patterns, and even though he had learned the Ultimate Formation of Thirteen Stripes, the progress was expected to be very slow...

Mo Hua couldn't help but sigh.

Seeing this, Mr. Zhuang looked at him with a gentle smile and serenely said,

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

"Don't let the rough and distant road ahead make you waver."

"If this is the path you choose, there's no need to hesitate. What you need to do is focus solely on taking each step, moving forward one step at a time..."

"Many things will become clear to you as you go along."

"And many opportunities and turning points can only be discovered on the journey."

Mo Hua's eyes brightened slightly, and he nodded.

Mr. Zhuang then turned to look at Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi, his voice warm as he said,

"The situation with the Bai Family is complicated, and I shouldn't say too much, but these words apply to you both just the same."

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi both bowed and said, "Yes, Master."

But while Bai Zixi seemed thoughtful, Bai Zisheng still seemed somewhat puzzled.

...

In the days that followed, Mo Hua continued Drawing Formations.

Tedious, mechanical, repetitive.

It seemed monotonous.

But with every iteration, his understanding of the Formation Patterns improved, growing more familiar and more profound.

Opportunities come naturally and shouldn't be forced.

But practicing Formations was within his control.

Mo Hua gradually settled his mind.

All the days and nights before, he had spent painting this way.

For the long time ahead, Mo Hua would continue to paint in the same way...

He remembered Mr. Zhuang's words.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

He just needed to focus and keep walking step by step, keep painting time after time...

...

After Mo Hua left, South Yue City gradually calmed down.

The assorted cultivators from the Taoist Court who had been ordered to suppress the Corpse Mine had also gradually dispersed.

Only a group of cultivators, including a gaunt old man, a middle-aged cultivator, and Young Master Yun, remained gathered.

They were not there for the Corpse Mine in the first place.

The gaunt old man sighed and said,

"Now it can be confirmed that we did not calculate his whereabouts, but that person intentionally revealed his causality, luring us here."

"To say he lured us, it's more like he summoned us..."

One of the cultivators said discontentedly, "Does he think we are spirit pets to be summoned at will?"

"I'm stating the truth."

"What truth? I think it's nonsense."

"The key issue is, he summoned us and it turned out to be a wild goose chase..."

"How can you call it a wild goose chase? The Corpse King, the Taoist Demon, how great was that causality? If not resolved, how much disaster would it have brought?"

"Indeed, I see it as a good thing..."

"That's easy for you to say, but are you really content being played like this?"

"What else can you do? What's your plan?"

...

Amidst the noise in the hall, the venerable elder with white hair signaled for everyone to calm down, then spoke in his hoarse voice,

"Regardless, that person brought us here to suppress the Corpse Mine and resolve the chaos caused by the Taoist Demon, preventing disaster to the living beings across the state boundary, thereby following the will of heaven and practicing virtue."

"In this battle, everyone contributed."

"As for that individual, even if he appears superior and arrogant, looking down on other beings, he still seems to be a person with a sense of justice."

Chapter 574: Can't Figure it Out (2)

Among the crowd, some agreed and others were scornful.

It was Young Master Yun who earnestly nodded in agreement.

The white-haired elder continued, "The real question now is, where on earth did that person go?"

Everyone looked at each other, their brows furrowed in deep thought.

Someone asked, "Is there any trace of that person in South Yue City?"

"No... at least, I haven't found anything."

"We haven't found any clues either..."

"Not a single trace..."

"It's as if no cultivator in the entire South Yue City has ever seen that person's face or knows his whereabouts..."

"So, has he really been here or not?"

"It seems like he hasn't."

"If he hasn't come, how did he know about the Corpse Mine?"

"You wouldn't think that he can only know about these things by coming here in person, by seeing with his own eyes, do you? You're seriously underestimating him..."

Quite a few cultivators nodded silently.

A cultivator said, "I'm just wondering, could all this be within that person's calculations?"

"Including the mutation of the Corpse King, the battle to suppress the Corpse Mine, Lu Chengyun's scheme, and that Junior Formation Master who made the Corpse King submit; could his every move be within that person's calculations?"

"If that's really the case, it's terrifying..."

"If so, we might never see that person in our entire lives."

"Be content, even Heaven Shu Pavilion has been searching for hundreds of years without finding a trace of that person. Now that we're gathered here, experiencing all of this, it's already the closest we've ever been to him."

"His schemes are too deep..."

"Indeed..."

"Speaking of which, that Junior Formation Master is no ordinary person either."

"Yes..."

"Such a powerful Junior Formation Master, I wonder where he comes from..."

The crowd marveled in amazement.

"Speaking of the Junior Formation Master..." someone pondered with a frown, "... isn't there also a Junior Formation Master in Tongxian City who set up a Large Formation and executed the Big Demon Feng Xi?"

The crowd fell silent for a while.

Someone said seriously, "Would you rather believe that story instead of believing that I am the reincarnation of a Taoist master?"

"Reincarnate my ass, do you think you're worthy?"

"You dare curse me?"

"So, about the Junior Formation Master setting up a Large Formation, what do you think a Large Formation is?"

"Indeed, a Large Formation is no trifling matter."

A cultivator frowned and said, "But... I've heard an elder from Heaven Shu Pavilion say that in Tongxian City, within the domain of Black Mountain State at Second Grade, indeed a Big Demon emerged, and indeed someone set up a Large Formation, which subdued the Big Demon..."

"Isn't it obvious? The cause and effect of that person surfaced in Tongxian City. So, it's not just about a Junior Formation Master setting up a Large Formation to kill the Big Demon, it's that person working behind the scenes..."

He suddenly stopped talking midway.

Everyone present also realized something was off; after pondering for a moment, their faces turned pale.

In Tongxian City, that person was behind everything...

The happenings in South Yue City were also instigated by that person...

There is a Junior Formation Master in Tongxian City, as well as in South Yue City...

An astonishing suspicion emerged in everyone's mind:

Could this Junior Formation Master be... that Junior Formation Master...

If that's the case, then the person behind this Junior Formation Master... could it be the person they were looking for?!

What is their relationship?

A middle-aged cultivator swallowed hard and said tentatively:

"Could it be... that this Junior Formation Master has a teacher?"

Everyone's hearts skipped a beat.

A teacher?!

Is this Junior Formation Master, the disciple of that person?!

What do you mean no clues?

What do you mean no traces?

That person's disciple brazenly appeared in front of them all, joined them in suppressing the Corpse King, quelled the corpse calamity, and even chatted and dined with them.

Before leaving, they even bid him farewell??

The cultivators on site struggled to accept this reality.

After a while, someone finally said:

"Could it be that Mr. Zhuang has been in the city all the time?"

"You should call him 'that person,' not Mr. Zhuang, otherwise he'll know."

"By calling him that way, he won't know?"

The crowd fell silent, and then they all sighed.

Let it be, Mr. Zhuang it is.

Them calling "that person" is just like deceiving themselves by covering their ears while stealing bells...

"Do you remember when the young gentleman left South Yue City in a carriage pulled by that big white horse, was Mr. Zhuang... could he have been in the carriage..."

These words were better left unsaid.

Once spoken, everyone's hearts were filled with bitterness and profound regret.

The person they were looking for was right before their eyes, who left in front of them in a carriage.

And they bid him farewell without knowing anything.

One cultivator was incredulous, "Impossible, it can't be such a coincidence."

Yet the gaunt elder shook his head, "With Qi Refinement cultivation, able to draw a First Grade Ultimate Formation, aside from Mr. Zhuang, no one else can teach such a disciple."

Young Master Yun's expression also carried a touch of emotion.

"Besides," the gaunt elder continued, "this young gentleman also has a pair of siblings with the surname Bai as fellow disciples."

"These two young cultivators have astonishing talent, yet they are inscrutable."

"The girl is fierce and dignified, unassuming, but certainly not simple. As for the young boy..."

The gaunt elder's gaze filled with deep wariness, "The Taoist Skill he uses is the Returning Dragon Spear!"

"The method of the dragon, the Bai Family from Qian State, I suppose I don't need to say much, you all should understand what that implies..."

The hearts of everyone present trembled.

The Bai Family from Qian State, that's truly a behemoth...

"But what does the Bai Family have to do with that person?" a cultivator asked.

The gaunt elder sighed, "Indeed, there are some connections between the Bai Family and Mr. Zhuang, but we'd best not inquire about it. The Bai Family is not something we can afford to provoke."

Chapter 575: Can't Figure It Out (3)

"So you're saying that this young gentleman is indeed Mr. Zhuang's disciple?"

The emaciated elder was somewhat shocked and had some difficulty believing it, sighing as he said:

"It must be so..."

The atmosphere turned even more silent for a moment.

They had a mission to find Mr. Zhuang and somehow uncover the secrets he possessed.

But after what they had experienced in the Corpse Mine, deep down, they did not wish to be enemies with this young gentleman.

Suddenly someone asked:

"What exactly is the background of this young gentleman? Where does he come from? Does he have a family or a Sect? Why did Mr. Zhuang take him as a disciple? If I remember correctly, Mr.

Zhuang hasn't taken any disciples for a long time, right...?"

Everyone frowned.

"This young gentleman..."

Someone had just begun to speak when they suddenly paused, "...what is this young gentleman's name again?"

"Have you gone mad? This young gentleman's surname is..."

Another person also suddenly got stuck.

What was his surname again?

"Bai?"

"That's the surname of his senior brothers and sisters."

"Strange, I remember his senior brothers and sisters, so why can't I remember him?"

"I can't recall his name, and his appearance is also unclear to me..."

Someone suddenly looked stunned, "What exactly did this young gentleman do?"

This question completely baffled everyone.

An image emerged in their Sea of Consciousness:

Under a sky dyed with blood, hordes of corpses danced chaotically, and the Corpse King confronted this young gentleman.

They still remembered the feelings of heart palpitations, shock, and disbelief, but as for what this young gentleman had actually done, and what happened afterward, everything had become hazy.

The white-haired elder thought for a moment and sighed:

"Mr. Zhuang has woven a mist into the fabric of cause and effect, and our Divine Senses are insufficient to pierce through it..."

Hearing this, everyone's expression turned to one of great alarm.

"There is such a method?"

"Does this mean we have no clues at all?"

"Senior, is there no way?"

The white-haired elder, with a thoughtful frown, then said slowly: "Heavenly Secret Calculation might be possible, to glimpse a leopard through a tube, to see one spot..."

"Could you possibly..."

The white-haired elder shook his head, looking helpless:

"I am old, my Divine Sense has declined, I can't do the calculations..."

People exchanged glances.

Someone looked at the emaciated elder, "Senior Wen, perhaps you could try a calculation?"

The emaciated elder was startled, "Me, calculate?"

That person nodded, "Currently, you are the one most proficient in Calculation here."

"But..." The emaciated elder looked troubled.

That person continued, "You also have the Three Talents Divination Copper Coins to aid you, it might be impossible to calculate Mr. Zhuang, but calculating his young disciple shouldn't be a problem, right?"

Others also chimed in, "Senior Wen, we'd be indebted to you."

The emaciated elder internally lamented.

The harbinger of a complaint should be the first to voice it.

How did this unfortunate task fall upon him?

The emaciated elder wanted to decline, but with so many Cultivators present, all with respectable status, hailing from Noble Clans or Sects, to offend them could invite petty grudges.

"Fine, I'll do the calculation."

Moreover, he himself wanted to know the origins of this young gentleman.

Who could have impressed the exceedingly selective Mr. Zhuang to take as a disciple?

And to make Mr. Zhuang cast a mist to hide his causality.

The emaciated elder took out a Copper Coin and poured out his Divine Sense, chanting firmly as he flipped the coin randomly until it finally came to a stop.

The emaciated elder held the Copper Coin to his forehead and closed his eyes to sense it.

However, in the realm of his Divine Sense, there was only a fog.

After a long while, he still knew nothing.

The emaciated elder opened his eyes, sighed, and said helplessly, "The Heavenly secrets have indeed been obscured, concealed by a fog, I can't calculate anything, it must be Mr. Zhuang's handiwork..."

Hearing this, everyone felt a tinge of disappointment.

This young gentleman might be harboring a clue to Mr. Zhuang.

And it could be crucial.

But if it was impossible to calculate, then there was nothing to be done.

A middle-aged Cultivator frowned, "I can understand not being able to calculate Mr. Zhuang, but why couldn't even his disciple be the least bit discernible..."

"Senior Wen, could you try calculating from a different angle?"

"Right, not him, but try to calculate his parents, friends, and others close to him, or else his past, where he lived, where he has been?"

"Any trace would do."

The emaciated elder cursed them all in his heart.

He was being made to take on all this unpleasant work alone.

He was not without temper.

The emaciated elder spoke up: "My abilities are limited, if you want me to continue calculating, I will need to borrow your Heavenly Circulation spiritual artifacts."

At this request, some began to hesitate.

Spiritual Artifacts that held the principles of the Circulation and could aid in Calculation were valuable, and not things one would easily lend to others.

Seeing their expressions, the emaciated elder scoffed inwardly.

It was easy to ask for help from others, but they were unwilling to pay a price.

Just then, the white-haired elder spoke:

"I am willing to lend my Zen Dhyana Mat to Brother Wen..."

The emaciated elder was surprised.

The white-haired elder then addressed the others: "The secrets on Mr. Zhuang are tremendous and of great importance; surely none of you would be so stingy with a mere object and neglect the bigger picture."

Everyone fell silent and, after pondering for a moment, made up their minds as one by one they began to offer:

"I have a Second Grade Heavenly secret disk..."

"I can contribute a stick of Nourishing Spirit Incense..."

"This hairpin is a Dry Wood Hairpin, it can accelerate mental calculations..."

...

Soon, a collection of Spiritual Artifacts had piled up in front of the emaciated elder.

The emaciated elder looked at these Spiritual Artifacts with some surprise but then also a bit of excitement.

These were all fine Spiritual Artifacts used for calculations.

Many of them were secret artifacts of Noble Clans or Sects, not usually given to outsiders.

Chapter 576: Can't Figure It Out (4)

The gaunt elder suddenly became spirited.

In his life, he had never undertaken such a "wealthy" Heavenly Secret Calculation.

With the aid of these calculating tools, he might indeed stand a slight chance against Mr. Zhuang.

To part the fog laid out by Mr. Zhuang and glimpse that trace of the hidden Heavenly Secret.

The gaunt elder's spirit was boosted.

After resting for a moment and waiting for his Divine Sense to replenish, he solemnly lit the Nourishing Spirit Incense, donned the Dry Wood Hairpin, seated himself on the Zen Viewing Mat, and on the heavenly secret disk, he arranged the Copper Coins of the Three Talents Divination...

With the support of so many Spiritual Artifacts, his Divine Sense was exceptionally full, his train of thought extraordinarily clear, his eyes as if glowing, seemed to peer through the past and infer the future.

The gaunt elder sat up straight and began the Calculation.

Despite being "fully equipped," he still took no chances.

He wasn't greedy, not trying to calculate too much at once, only a little bit at a time, wishing to see the past of that Junior Formation Master shrouded in fog—to look at some momentary experiences, to find some clues, and to peer into the causes and consequences.

Even if the fog laid by Mr. Zhuang was profound, it still wouldn't be without blind spots.

The gaunt elder sat patiently and calculated meticulously.

After an unknown period, he finally penetrated a layer of mist from within a sea of confusion and the unknown!

The gaunt elder was overjoyed and just as he was about to look, a sudden intense thump in his heart, a warning emerged.

As if beneath the fog lay something extremely horrifying.

Merely touching it made his heart pound with fright, cold sweat drenched him.

Even within the fog, there was a thread carrying a bloodlike, ferocious, chilling aura.

This aura, though obscure, exuded a hair-raising presence of death.

Like a bucket of cold water, poured over his head.

The gaunt elder snapped to a realization:

What am I doing?

Who gave me the courage to peer into the fog laid by Mr. Zhuang?

Am I worthy?

What is my ability?

And what level is Mr. Zhuang at?

The gaunt elder's hands shook, and his heart trembled.

"Damn that was close!"

"I almost let these Spiritual Artifacts deceive me, became overconfident, overestimated myself, and lost sight of my place."

One must know one's place as a person, and also in Calculation.

To calculate as much cause and effect as one's abilities allow.

If you cannot calculate it, it simply means your abilities are not yet sufficient.

If you are not skilled enough and forcibly calculate, you will face retribution from causes and consequences beyond your abilities, and it wouldn't be surprising if even death or obliteration ensued.

The gaunt elder took a deep breath.

However, his heart still fluttered wildly, seemingly not yet recovered from the shock of the warning.

The gaunt elder was filled with retrospective fear and a sense of relief as if he had narrowly escaped disaster.

Thankfully he knew his limitations, understood how "inexperienced" he was; otherwise, he would have almost brought about a catastrophe.

Upon seeing a look of enlightenment on the gaunt elder's face, other Cultivators approached and asked:

"Senior Wen, how did it go?"

"Did you figure it out?"

I figured out your mother's big ghost head!!

The gaunt elder cursed inwardly.

Figured out nothing; I almost lost my life in the process.

But he couldn't say that outright, as it would not only offend everyone, but also make him lose face.

So the gaunt elder sighed and said, "Indeed, Mr. Zhuang is a prodigy; his methods... are beyond my comprehension..."

The crowd sighed in disappointment.

The lead had gone cold again.

Some questioned, "With so many calculating tools to aid you, it's impossible that you couldn't figure it out, Senior Wen. You aren't trying to keep this secret to yourself, are you?"

The gaunt elder looked coldly at him, "How about I give you all the calculating tools, and you try?"

The man quieted down and shut his mouth.

It was just talk; if he were actually put to the test, he wouldn't know how to do anything.

The gaunt elder returned the calculating tools, expressing his gratitude:

"I am insufficient in my abilities and have let down everyone's kindness."

An elder with white hair knew the difficulty and danger of the task and showed understanding, saying:

"Brother Wen has worked hard."

The other Cultivators nearby also showed pity and said:

"We are grateful for Senior Wen's effort."

"Senior Wen, you've worked hard."

...

They, too, were just trying their luck; if they couldn't figure it out, it was expected, for there were few Cultivators in this world more skilled in Heavenly Secret Calculation than Mr. Zhuang.

This matter would need further long-term consideration.

Everyone went back to rest.

The gaunt elder also put away his Three Talents Divination Copper Coins.

But as he picked up the coins, he discovered that the edge of one Copper Coin... now had a tiny crack.

The gaunt elder was startled, then reflected quietly.

Suddenly, he was engulfed by immense fear.

He now realized, it wasn't that he had the sense of his own limits.

It was the Copper Coin that had, at a critical moment, blocked a deadly threat, saving his life!

That's why the warning arose!

That's why he thought to retreat, that's how he escaped the calamity!

His had truly been a close call!

The gaunt elder felt weak in his limbs, slumped onto the chair, his heart, which had just calmed down, was again pounding with terror, and his back soaked with cold sweat.

Fear lingered in his eyes.

What exactly lay beneath the fog?

How terrifying was this junior gentleman's fate?

He had only tried to see a corner, no, not even managed to take a look, and was nearly obliterated?!

What exactly resides within his life's destiny...

Chapter 577: I love you

"Do not pry, the unpryable."

The emaciated elder recalled what his master had said to him years ago.

The unpryable...

He thought of Mr. Zhuang again, thought of that layer of fog.

The fog laid down by Mr. Zhuang was perhaps not just about keeping a secret but also about protecting all those who rashly sought the cause and effect of the young gentleman.

For hidden within that cause and effect lay great peril.

But no matter how he struggled to comprehend, he could not understand why such a young Junior Formation Master would be tainted with such grave and ferocious karma.

What on earth had happened?

The emaciated elder furrowed his brow, deep in perplexed thought.

"Enough, enough, ignorance is bliss... Knowing such dangerous matters is not a good thing..."

The emaciated elder sighed with lingering fear in his heart.

All things related to Mo Hua were becoming vague in his mind.

He only remembered, beneath the blood-red sky and amidst the Corpse Tide, a small, unyielding figure standing faintly in the distance.

Young Master Yun couldn't remember clearly either.

He remembered the Spiritual Pivot Formation, remembered that he had made friends with a Junior Formation Master.

But who this person was, he had only a hazy recollection, and no matter how hard he tried, he just couldn't remember.

Only a clear, smiling face remained in his memory...

...

Elsewhere, the leader of the Taoist Soldiers, Yang Jishan, was writing a report to the Taoist Court.

He wanted to commend Mo Hua for his service.

In the battle of the Corpse Mine, suppressing the Corpse Tide, subduing the Corpse King, executing Lu Chengyun, quelling the undead menace, and improving the lives of the cultivators and citizens of South Yue City, this young gentleman, Mo Hua, contributed immensely.

But as he wrote, everything suddenly became hazy again.

Yang Jishan tried to write the two characters "Mo Hua," but as soon as he started, he froze.

The name Mo Hua was obscured by fog.

He could not remember the young gentleman's family or given name.

"What's going on?"

Yang Jishan was deeply shocked.

How could I have forgotten his name?

Soon he realized, it was not just the name, even the face, and voice of the young gentleman were becoming indistinct and unreal.

The matters of the Corpse Mine were also discontinuous and incomplete.

Within the Corpse Mine, atop the graves, what exactly had happened?

Yang Jishan frowned.

His mind only remembered two images:

One was the Corpse King howling towards the heavens under a blood-red sky, with thousands of corpses bowing in worship.

The other was the Corpse King roaring unwillingly amidst blazing flames, turning to ashes.

What actually happened in the end?

Yang Jishan had completely forgotten.

How was such a powerful and fierce Corpse King subdued and turned to ash?

Yang Jishan could not recall at all.

In his Sea of Consciousness, he only vaguely remembered a small figure that changed the heavens and earth, commanding the submission of thousands of corpses...

"Who was that little cultivator?"

Yang Jishan frowned, murmuring to himself.

...

As things settled down,

All the cause and effect gradually wrapped themselves in fog.

The various factions of cultivators from South Yue City also gradually dispersed.

But half a month later, another group of uninvited guests arrived.

They were four odd-looking cultivators.

A young man, exquisitely handsome, but with a pale complexion as if wearing a deathly, finely crafted, flawless mask.

An old man carrying a Sword Box, expressionless, with only the whites of his eyes showing.

A big man, burly in stature, with sharp fingertips and bloodshot eyes.

And an old crone, antiquated and babbling.

They stood on a desolate hilltop, gazing distantly at South Yue City and the surrounding mines.

The Sword Box Elder spoke in a hoarse voice,

"Such a great gesture, what a pity!"

The pale youth sneered, "Nothing more than raising a first-grade Taoist Demon, and not even successfully at that..."

The big man with fangs bared a savage smile, his face resembling that of a fierce wolf, "Your father has always wanted to do it, yet he hasn't raised even one in half his lifetime."

The pale youth arrogantly said,

"Either raise something above third or fourth grade, a real Big Demon, Big Undead or Big Sin. Raising first or second-grade Taoist Demons is meaningless."

The hoarse and indifferent voice of the Sword Box Elder sounded like slowly flowing sand,

"With such words, you truly don't understand what a Taoist Demon is... A Taoist Demon is an anomaly, not measured by grade."

The pale youth scoffed, clearly dismissive.

The fanged big man looked around once more, sniffed the stench in the air, and said with emotion,

"Too bad we're late, otherwise we could have feasted."

He stuck out his tongue and licked his lips, which unsettlingly had barbs on them.

The Sword Box Elder nodded, "Yes, it's a pity, had this Taoist Demon not met an early demise, the entire state boundary could have become a breeding ground for the Demon Path."

"Whose doing was it?" the fanged big man asked.

"Who else could it be?" the Sword Box Elder retorted.

A hint of wariness flashed in the eyes of the fanged big man.

Clearly, even they were reluctant to mention that Taoist's name.

The pale youth laughed sardonically, "I wonder who it was that spoiled Gui Tao's people's good fortune..."

Disdain flickered across his bloodless face.

The Sword Box Elder said sternly,

"You best show some respect. Don't think that just because you have your father backing you, that Taoist won't dare to touch you."

The pale youth's gaze sharpened, "My father's cultivation is higher than his."

The Sword Box Elder shook his head, "You still don't understand what the title 'Taoist' implies..."

The pale youth remained somewhat unconvinced.

The Sword Box Elder's eyes, filled only with whites, coldly gazed at the youth, his voice chill,

"If that Taoist wanted you dead, not even your father could save you."

"Whether you live or die is trivial, but don't drag us down with you. If you do, we won't let you off either..."

The pale youth was indignant but did not speak out in rebuttal.

Chapter 578: I Love You

His teeth bit through his lips, but it seemed as though they had merely pierced a layer of skin, and not a single drop of blood flowed out.

The other three present paid him no heed.

The man with wolf-like teeth, like some wild beast, sniffed the air of the mountains once more, his gaze sinking slightly as he spoke,

"Many zombies, many cultivators, the scent of Taoist Demons is heavy, it was on the verge of completion, but then there was an unexpected turn..."

"It must have been that person who acted, right?"

The Sword Box Elder nodded, "Except for that one, nobody could have spoiled the Taoist's plan."

The man with wolf-like teeth frowned,

"What exactly is that person hiding? The Taoist Court, Heaven Shu Pavilion, all the Noble Clans, Sects, and even us from the Evil Sects and scattered cultivators, Demon Gate, Taoists, everyone is looking for him?"

The Sword Box Elder's smile hinted at mockery, "Now that you know, what next?"

The man with wolf-like teeth was taken aback.

The Sword Box Elder said, "Without a Golden Core, without Feather Transformation, even if given this opportunity, what can you do with it?"

"Can you withstand the repression of the Taoist Court or the pursuit of the Demon Sect?"

"If you're a pawn, then do what a pawn must do."

"With our level of cultivation, we're far from considering whether to control the black or white pieces..."

The Sword Box Elder's words were cutting.

The man with wolf-like teeth was not offended; instead, he extended his blood-red tongue, licked his upper lip, and sneered,

"I cultivate the demonic arts; if I see flesh, wanting a couple of bites is only natural, isn't it?"

The Sword Box Elder looked distant, his voice insinuating,

"The flesh of immortality, once eaten, there goes your life."

The flesh of immortality...

A glint passed in the eyes of the man with wolf-like teeth.

The pale-faced youth also showed an abnormal flush.

At that moment, all three harbored their own devious thoughts.

The old crone, who had been silent all along, suddenly opened her eyes wide, her gaze manic as she screamed,

"My child, my child!"

The man with wolf-like teeth frowned, "What madness is she spouting now?"

The old crone, ignoring everything else, laughed strangely,

"I have found it... my own flesh and blood, my child is not dead..."

With a flicker, she swiftly moved toward a mountain peak to the south.

The group of three, including the Sword Box Elder, had no choice but to follow her.

The four eventually stopped atop a small hill.

The hill, secluded and desolate, was nevertheless serene, and as the sunset descended, it bathed the area in a glow of twilight.

Atop the hill, there was a small grave mound.

The old crone, focused, dug through the soil and stone with hands like iron, uncovering a coffin buried within the grave.

With a gentle scratch of her fingers, she broke off a corner of the coffin and then forcefully lifted the lid, which instantly shattered into pieces.

Inside the coffin lay a small zombie.

The old crone, trembling, cradled the small zombie into her arms as if comforting her own child.

"My child, my child..."

The pale-faced youth frowned, "Is this a zombie? Weren't all the zombies nearby burned by the Corpse Burning Formation? How could there be one that escaped?"

The man with wolf-like teeth looked around and raised an eyebrow, "It seems someone intentionally left this zombie behind, burying it here..."

"Was it the zombie's kin?"

"Why bury it here, and for what purpose?"

"Who knows..."

"It can't be for the purpose of Corpse Refinement, can it?"

"This zombie is too small, with weak strength; what use would refining it have? To serve tea and water?"

...

However, the Sword Box Elder looked grave, "This small zombie is a good specimen for Corpse Refinement. It has only Corpse Qi, no Blood Qi, clean and untainted."

"What makes it a good specimen?"

"A Jade Corpse..."

"What?"

The Sword Box Elder did not continue, "You don't refine corpses; even if I told you, you wouldn't understand."

The pale-faced youth looked displeased.

But the man with wolf-like teeth had some realization, "Now that you mention it, could this old crone be a Corpse Cultivator?"

Amongst them, he knew the origins of the Sword Box Elder and the pale-faced youth, but he was not familiar with this old crone.

The Sword Box Elder nodded slightly, "Her son died early. To resurrect her son, she learned Corpse Refinement and turned her own son into a zombie."

"But she refined it wrongly, creating a special kind of Blood Zombie."

"It needed to eat human flesh and drink human blood every day."

"She killed people to feed her son. Eventually, the Taoist Court discovered this, and they executed her Blood Zombie son before her eyes. She completely lost her mind and fell into the darkness of Corpse Cultivation."

"For years, she specially hunts men who have been unfaithful, as well as cultivators from the Taoist Court."

"At the same time, she is also keen on turning children into zombies."

"All the zombies she refined are her children..."

"However..."

The Sword Box Elder's gaze became more focused, "This small zombie might be quite special..."

The old crone also held the small zombie dearly in her arms, as if coaxing her own flesh and bone.

The pale-faced youth clicked his tongue and suddenly made a surprised noise, "It seems like there is a Formation on this small zombie's chest?"

"A Formation?" the man with wolf-like teeth was slightly startled.

The pale-faced youth curiously said, "It's not just any ordinary Formation..."

He called out loudly, "Old crone, let me have a look at that small zombie."

The old crone acted as if she heard nothing.

The pale-faced youth repeated his request.

Still, the old crone remained indifferent.

The pale-faced youth grew angry, "Old hag, ungrateful for the kindness shown..."

He reached out to grab the small zombie from the old crone, but this action seemed to have touched a raw nerve in her.

The old crone's presence abruptly intensified, her features twisting ferociously, her pupils becoming vertical slits. Her withered yellow skin turned a bronze color as she underwent Corpse Transformation into a Copper Corpse.

Her right hand tore through the air, and with an eerie gust, she ripped open the pale-faced youth's arm.

Bright red blood flowed.

A sinister Corpse Poison seeped in.

The pale-faced youth's complexion became even paler, but due to shame and anger, his cheeks bore an eerie crimson hue.

Chapter 579: Immortal Child (3)

"Old thing, you're looking for death!"

The old woman clutched the zombie child tightly, shrieking at the pale youth, her long fangs bared.

The pale youth's expression darkened, and he was about to make a move, but the Sword Box Elder stopped him.

"Don't provoke her."

The pale youth seemed to have a tinge of wariness toward the Sword Box Elder, and with a cold snort, he reined in his aura.

The old crone shed her corpse transformation, returning to a normal old woman, holding the child in her bosom, her expression serene and calm.

The Sword Box Elder looked up at the sky and then said,

"It's getting late, it's time to set out."

He turned his head, looked at the other few people, his expression indifferent, but his tone was solemn as he said,

"We do what we must, mind not the rest."

The elder adjusted the sword box on his back.

The sword box trembled slightly, emitting a bloodthirsty yearning.

"Don't be hasty..."

The elder thought silently to himself.

"Once we find that person, the real storm will come..."

And it would be a terrifying one, a bloody tempest...

...

The four of them gradually departed.

The old crone also took the zombie child away.

In the following days, many Cultivators with gloomy auras, wearing strange attire, and acting unpredictably arrived at South Yue City,

They all came from the Demon Gate, shocked by the human-fueled Taoist Demon, and lamenting its untimely demise.

But they did not enter the city, nor did they kill or eat anyone, nor did they do anything out of the ordinary.

South Yue City had already entered the cycle of cause and effect.

If they got involved, there was a very good chance their secrets could be exposed, putting themselves at risk.

Undercurrents surged in secret.

Yet these dangerous currents all went around South Yue City, flowing into the distance.

The Cultivators of South Yue City, after several twists and turns, also welcomed a long-missed peace...

The Cultivators lived their day-to-day lives.

In Elder Su's cave.

Shuisheng was sprawled over a small stone table Drawing Formation; Elder Su beside him was nattering on as he taught him:

"Why do you use the brush like this? It's too wasteful of Divine Sense..."

"This Formation Pattern, taught so many times, yet you still don't get it..."

"Ah, don't draw it like that..."

...

Shuisheng paid no heed to him, absorbed in his own Drawing Formation.

If there was something he didn't understand, he would ask, and after receiving an answer, he let Elder Su's remaining chatter enter one ear and out the other, completely ignored.

All of his focus was on the Formation.

Even if he learned slowly, even if his drawing wasn't good, he kept on trying.

If one attempt failed, he would try twice.

If two attempts failed, he would try three times.

As he kept on drawing, slowly, he started to get it...

This was what that little Gentleman had taught him.

Shuisheng remembered it well.

Elder Su continued to grumble on the side but suddenly stopped speaking.

Shuisheng's appearance resembled Shuixian very much, and his present concentrated demeanor was very similar to his own in bygone years...

Elder Su fell silent for a moment, but then his expression became relieved and he smiled contentedly; looking at Shuisheng, his eyes brimmed with tenderness.

"I owe that little Gentleman a huge favor..."

Elder Su mused in his heart.

...

The life of the Mining Cultivator had also improved a lot.

They could feed themselves, support their families, and gradually, even have some Spirit Stones to spare for their own cultivation or their children's.

The Lu Family, which used to loom over them, had already crumbled and was no longer a threat.

They had also heard some rumors about the Corpse Mine.

"It's said that that bastard, Lu Chengyun, killed people and then used their bodies for Corpse Refinement, forcing them to mine for him. In the end, he got his comeuppance, eaten alive by the very zombie he created."

"And that zombie wasn't just any ordinary zombie—it was the old ancestor of the Lu Family, Capitalist Lu!"

"That goddamned Capitalist Lu, never letting go even in death, turning into a zombie just to bring disaster upon South Yue City..."

"So many zombies, it was horrifying."

"Even now, thinking about it makes my scalp tingle."

"On the day the zombies surrounded the city, I stood on the city wall and looked down to see a horde of zombies, snarling and swarming..."

Someone jumped with fear, "You don't think there are still zombies in the mine, do you...?"

"Maybe, with so many zombies, how could they have been completely wiped out all at once?"

"What do we do then?"

"I haven't even got married. What if I get bitten by a zombie? Wouldn't that be the end for me?"

"I have elderly and children depending on me..."

Some of the people became anxious.

"Why don't we," a cultivator suggested, "make an offering to that little Immortal child in the Corpse Mine..."

Someone didn't understand, "Little Immortal child? Who's that?"

"A reincarnation of a disciple of an Immortal."

"Who?"

"The one who suppressed the Corpse Tide, subdued the Corpse King, and helped us by drawing Formation Paintings and constructing the mine—that little Immortal child."

"Really?"

"True, I've seen it."

"You've seen it?"

"Mhm." The Mining Cultivator nodded, "This little Immortal child, with three heads and six arms, impervious to blades and spears, knocked down the Corpse King with a single punch..."

"What are you blabbering about?"

"Right, who ever looks like that?"

"Exactly, that little Immortal child was really good-looking, so fair and tender, with sparkling eyes and such an adorable smile..."

"You're talking nonsense too. How could such a young cultivator defeat the Corpse King?"

"Did you see it?"

"Of course, I saw that day on the city wall, amidst the Corpse Tide, this little Immortal child was nine feet tall, broad-shouldered and wide-waisted, with boundless strength. His punches created a gust of wind. Tens of thousands of zombies couldn't get close to him!"

"You're talking about a 'strongman', not an 'Immortal child'!"

"Exactly, make your tall tales believable at least."

...

The discussions were varied, but in the end, there was no consensus.

Finally, an older Mining Cultivator declared:

"Since it's an Immortal child, he can't be very old. Since we don't know what he looks like, we won't attempt a detailed representation. Let's just use ink to paint a silhouette."

"Since he suppressed the Corpse Tide, it shows the zombies must fear him. By hanging this portrait of the little Immortal child in the mine, we can suppress evil spirits. The zombies should not dare to cause trouble anymore..."

He sighed before finishing, "This little gentleman has given us immense help. To us Mining Cultivators, he has been a savior. Even if he can't suppress the zombies, we should bow to him and wish him smooth sailing on his path of Tao Cultivation, a successful cultivation journey, to live as long as the heavens and the earth, and to benefit all living beings!"

"That's right!"

The Mining Cultivators nodded in agreement.

They commissioned someone to paint several ink paintings of the Immortal child, and hung them around the mines.

From then on, before entering the mine in South Yue City, the Mining Cultivators would bow to the painting of the Immortal child.

On the painting, there was a small ink silhouette.

With clear black and white contrast, the aura was mysterious and profound.

Worshiping the painting of the Immortal child could ward off evil spirits and settle the zombie troubles.

They prayed for their own safety and, in their hearts, they wished for Mo Hua's safety as well.

At a place that bred such Taoist demons, the cultivators offered incense, and their wishes, blending mysteriously into the karma of Mo Hua's fate, formed a counterbalance.

But Mo Hua knew nothing of this.

Several hundred miles away, on a mountain path.

Mo Hua rode on Big White, admiring the mountain landscape enveloped in misty clouds, embarking on the road to Foundation Establishment...

Chapter 580: Si Water (1)

South of South Yue City, at the Second Grade Si Water state boundary.

Si Water stretches from beginning to end, connecting the land's boundaries.

The winding river flows along its course, babbling towards the distance.

Mo Hua, tired from drawing Formation Paintings, flipped open the curtain and peered outside at the green mountains and clear waters, a vast and hazy vista stretching before him, feeling refreshed and elated.

After watching for a while, he retracted his gaze and settled back into the carriage.

Outside the carriage, Old Kui cracked pine nuts, listening to their crunch as he drove the carriage.

Inside, Bai Zisheng was meditating and cultivating, Bai Zixi was quietly reading.

Mr. Zhuang, leaning against a blanket, rested with eyes closed, bearing an elegant and leisurely posture.

However, his breath had grown even weaker.

Mo Hua furrowed his brows, filled with worry.

Ever since leaving South Yue City, Mr. Zhuang's health seemed to decline day by day. Although his gaze remained as gentle and carefree as ever, his complexion had visibly worsened, and the time he spent resting each day had increased.

Mo Hua had asked Mr. Zhuang if there was anything wrong.

Mr. Zhuang simply patted Mo Hua's head and, smiling, said he was fine and that there was no need to worry.

But his breath didn't seem fine at all.

Mo Hua could only sigh inwardly.

It was the hour of the sheep; noon had passed, and the bright sunlight induced a certain lethargy.

Mo Hua brewed a pot of tea.

The tea leaves were a gift from Elder Su, the brew fresh and tender with a rich taste. Mo Hua added some Spirit Grass, ginseng, and jade dates, which could regulate a cultivator's Blood Qi and nourish the meridians.

Though it might not greatly benefit Mr. Zhuang, it was a kind gesture.

Once the tea was ready, steam curled up and the fragrance filled the air.

Mo Hua first poured a cup for Mr. Zhuang, then for Junior Brother and Junior Sister each.

Only then did he pour himself a cup, sipping it bit by bit.

Bai Zisheng, feeling drowsy and thirsty after midday, downed his cup in one gulp, as if devouring a peony.

Bai Zixi, like Mo Hua, had a graceful demeanor, slightly parting her red lips, taking delicate sips and savoring the tea slowly.

Mr. Zhuang, lured by the scent of the tea, also slowly opened his eyes. With a gentle smile, he took the cup and drank it, his eyes brightening as he seemed to perk up a bit.

Mo Hua poured another cup for Mr. Zhuang, then turned to gaze at the scenery outside, and suddenly asked,

"Master, where exactly are we headed?"

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi, upon hearing this, paused their drinking and turned to look at Mr. Zhuang.

Seeing the three pairs of bright eyes, Mr. Zhuang felt at ease, took a moment to think, and then replied,

"Southward, to the Dali Mountain State boundary."

"Dali Mountain?"

Mo Hua murmured to himself, before asking further,

"If we go there, will I be able to achieve Foundation Establishment?"

Mr. Zhuang nodded slightly, "Once your Cultivation reaches the Nine layer perfection of Qi Refinement and your Divine Sense has Fourteen Stripes, you can undertake Foundation Establishment."

"Cultivation is like water flowing into a channel; proceed methodically, no need to rush excessively."

"But to get Divine Sense to Fourteen Stripes, that's not easy..."

Mr. Zhuang sighed softly in his heart.

It is not just difficult...

For a Qi Refining cultivator, it's agonizingly difficult.

Even the records of prodigious cultivators in the Tao Cultivation Canons hardly ever mention a Divine Sense of Fourteen Stripes during Qi Refining...

Mr. Zhuang looked at Mo Hua, his thoughts churning.

Still preoccupied with Foundation Establishment, Mo Hua asked,

"Then, Master, if we reach the Dali Mountain State Boundary, will my Divine Sense break through to Fourteen Stripes?"

"One can only say, there is that opportunity."

Mr. Zhuang was not very specific.

Mo Hua's eyes lit up, "So, does the Dali Mountain State Boundary have an Ultimate Formation of Second Grade Thirteen Stripes?"

According to what Mr. Zhuang had said before, one could strengthen Divine Sense by studying Ultimate Formations and practicing them.

The more complex the Formation, the stronger the Divine Sense required, and the deeper the training of the Sea of Consciousness, the faster the growth of the Divine Sense.

Now Mo Hua's Divine Sense had reached a peak of Thirteen Stripes.

Although he practiced the Thick Earth Formation and Spiritual Pivot Formation daily, as he became more proficient in these Formations, his Divine Sense grew increasingly slower...

It was time to find Thirteen Stripe Formations to study.

Mr. Zhuang nodded, "Correct."

It seemed the master had plans all along.

Mo Hua's eyes were bright with curiosity as he asked,

"Master, what kind of Ultimate Formation is it there at Dali Mountain?"

Mr. Zhuang shook his head, "Not just one..."

Mo Hua was taken aback.

Mr. Zhuang paused for a moment, a faint smile playing on his lips, "It's five of them."

Mo Hua's heart skipped a beat, exclaiming,

"Five of them!"

Mo Hua opened his mouth in surprise, then looked at Mr. Zhuang, puzzled,

"Five of them... doesn't that make them common as cabbages?"

Being Ultimate Formations, they should be rare.

How could there be five of them all of a sudden?

Mr. Zhuang smiled slightly, "Why don't you guess why?"

Mo Hua blinked, propped his chin in his hand, and after a moment of thought hesitantly said,

"Five... does it have something to do with the Five Elements?"

Mr. Zhuang nodded approvingly, "Exactly!"

His tone was a bit wistful, "This is a set of Five Element Ultimate Formations, Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, Earth; one for each Element, but the fundamental principles are the same. Therefore, all five are considered a single set."

Mo Hua listened, feeling an itch of curiosity like a kitten's scratch.

He was eager to know what these Formations were like, how their Formation Patterns looked, what the Formation Pivot's structure was, and the effects they would have once mastered.

But he still had one major doubt.

"Master..."

Mo Hua hesitated and asked, "Even if I master a Second Grade Thirteen Stripe Formation and practice every day, my Divine Sense might not break through the bottleneck to reach Fourteen Stripes and achieve the Middle Phase of Foundation Establishment, right?"

He had only recently realized this.

The further one progresses, the slower and harder the Divine Sense grows.

He was now at the peak of Thirteen Stripes, but the gap to Fourteen seemed just a sliver away.