

The Quest 69

Chapter 69: The Six Paths

At Chen's Artifact Crafting Shop.

Master Chen, along with a group of apprentices, swung their hammers vigorously, pounding the artifacts before quenching them in the smelting furnace. Once the artifacts glowed red-hot, they were removed for further pounding.

Typically instructive when teaching apprentices how to craft, Master Chen seemed a bit distracted today because Mo Hua, a curious young observer, was intensely watching them.

Early in the morning, Mo Hua had strolled in, expressing a desire to observe the crafting process.

Master Chen couldn't refuse, having owed Mo Hua a favor previously, which also included a significant transaction. Therefore, he agreed.

Mo Hua watched them intently, especially the smelting furnace, his eager eyes seemingly wanting to dismantle it to see what was inside.

What's in a smelting furnace? Of course, it involves array patterns.

Unsure of what Mo Hua was thinking, Master Chen felt somewhat uneasy. During a break, he couldn't help but ask, "Ahem, Mo Hua, is there something you need?"

Mo Hua quietly said, "Master Chen, don't you think the fire in this smelting furnace is a bit small?"

Master Chen glanced at the furnace. "This... it does seem smaller than before..."

"Do you know why?"

"Perhaps... because of the array patterns..."

"Exactly, Master Chen, you really have a keen eye!" Mo Hua flattered without any technical jargon, then whispered, "Don't you want the fire to be a bit bigger?"

“Bigger?”

“Yes, bigger!”

Master Chen’s brow furrowed. “You wouldn’t be thinking of dismantling my furnace to redraw the array, would you?”

Mo Hua gave a thumbs up, “Exactly, Master Chen, right on the mark!”

Master Chen shook his head like a rattle-drum, “That won’t do, this is my livelihood, how can we just dismantle it? If it’s not drawn correctly afterward, all my apprentices will have to face hardship.”

Then, worried about hurting Mo Hua’s pride, he added, “It’s not that I doubt your skills in array patterns, to be honest, I’ve never seen such a talented youngster. But this smelting furnace really shouldn’t be dismantled lightly; it would be a disaster if something went wrong, and I don’t have the spirit stones to buy another.”

Mo Hua waved his hand, “Don’t worry, I’m very familiar with this array; it won’t cause any problems.”

Master Chen, with a reluctant face, still disagreed.

Mo Hua then argued, “Think about it, if the furnace fire were a bit larger, wouldn’t your crafting process be faster? That would mean Da Zhu and the others could learn quicker and become masters sooner, and you could earn more spirit stones. To do a good job, one must first sharpen his tools!”

Master Chen thought it over and found some sense in it, but still hesitated.

Mo Hua played his trump card, “I won’t charge you any spirit stones; I’ll draw it for free!”

Master Chen found it hard to refuse then.

Seeking another array master to repair the smelting furnace's array would cost a lot of spirit stones, not to mention redrawing it entirely. The risk seemed worth taking.

“What about the spirit ink...” Master Chen looked at Mo Hua.

Mo Hua also looked silently at Master Chen, clearly indicating:

I'm already helping you for free, and you want me to supply the spirit ink too?

Master Chen chuckled awkwardly, gritted his teeth, and shouted, “Da Zhu, go find Old Sun, and tell him to bring some top-quality spirit ink, fire-type, no dilution!”

Da Zhu scratched his head, “Master, what about the spirit stones?”

“Put it on the tab!”

Da Zhu looked troubled, “Old Sun is quite stingy.”

“Just tell him the smelting furnace is broken, and if he doesn't provide the spirit ink, he won't get his batch of spirit artifacts until next year.”

“Ah!”

Da Zhu agreed and dashed off.

Master Chen was decisive, immediately waving his hand and ordering his disciples, “Stop crafting, dismantle the furnace!”

The apprentices looked at each other, but since Master Chen was firm in his decisions, they didn't delay. They extinguished the furnace fire, poured some cold water to cool it down, and then dismantled the smelting furnace, revealing the array patterns inside.

The array was a Magma Array containing five array patterns, previously drawn by Mo Hua. Now, it looked somewhat familiar.

Mo Hua took out a spirit-dissolving liquid, instructing Master Chen's apprentices to apply it to the smelting furnace, which would erase the previously drawn array patterns.

The earlier Magma Array had a small fire because it only included five array patterns, which limited its power

. Additionally, Mo Hua had hastily copied the array patterns using inferior spirit ink, which poorly conducted spiritual energy.

The spirit-dissolving liquid, capable of erasing spirit ink, was a recipe Mo Hua learned from Bai Zixi. In the world of cultivation, array drawing usually involved either new creations or repairs; erasing and redrawing were rare, so spirit-dissolving liquid was seldom used.

It was available in Tongxian City, but quite expensive. Mo Hua, reluctant to spend, had asked Bai Zixi for the recipe. The Bai family, a clan of scholars, had dozens of recipes for spirit-dissolving liquid, ranging from first to fifth grade.

Bai Zixi chose a recipe suitable for arrays below first grade for Mo Hua, which was also inexpensive, with some ingredients available in the mountains. Mo Hua was grateful, offering a crabapple cake made by his mother as a token of appreciation.

Once the array inside the smelting furnace was wiped with the spirit-dissolving liquid, it gradually faded away.

Master Chen had never seen something that could cleanly erase an array before and felt that Mo Hua truly seemed professional in array drawing, which reassured him somewhat.

Before long, Da Zhu returned with several bottles of spirit ink.

"Is it undiluted?" Master Chen asked.

"Don't worry, Master, I watched him closely. He had no chance to dilute it. Old Sun was in so much pain, it was as if I was asking for his blood, not ink." Da Zhu chuckled.

“His blood might not even be more expensive than this spirit ink.” Master Chen handed the spirit ink to Mo Hua, somewhat reluctantly, “Young friend, does this spirit ink look suitable?”

Mo Hua shook the bottle in his hand. The spirit ink flowed evenly, with just the right consistency. Opening the cap, there was a faint scent of pine, the blood’s stench was very faint, and it was glossily red.

This was the first time Mo Hua had seen such high-quality spirit ink. Usually, to save money, he would just make do. Now, looking at the crystal-clear ink in the bottle, he couldn’t help but acknowledge that you get what you pay for.

Of course, to not lose face as an apprentice named under Mr. Zhuang, Mo Hua acted nonchalantly and said in a casual and composed manner, “It’s okay, usable.”

Master Chen was amazed, thinking, “Is the standard for learning array drawing so high now that even such high-quality spirit ink is just ‘okay’?”

Mo Hua spread the array diagram on the ground, with the apprentices gathering around to watch.

Master Chen didn’t understand much, but still joined in the excitement.

As he watched, he felt something was off. He might not understand array patterns, but he could count.

One, two, three, four, five... six!

Six array patterns!

He remembered the furnace’s Magma Array having five array patterns. How come there’s now an extra one?