

The Quest 73

Chapter 73: Fourth Level of Qi Refinement

In the days that followed, as Mr. Zhuang had suggested, Mo Hua diligently practiced the art of array formation.

Master Chen's artifact furnace and Elder Feng's pill furnace had both endured Mo Hua's vigorous experiments.

In the neighborhood, there was hardly anything left that could withstand Mo Hua's "flourish."

Finding no other avenues, Mo Hua resorted to practicing on simpler arrays such as the dual lock array on the door, the earthen stone array on the wall, and the bright fire array on the lamp.

In the world of cultivation, arrays were extensively used, from spirit tools designed for combat to defensive armor and in all aspects of daily life including clothing, food, shelter, and travel.

However, among the lower-tier independent cultivators, the use of arrays was quite crude and superficial, sometimes involving only one or two array patterns—hardly qualifying as proper arrays.

Compared to these, Master Chen's artifact furnace and Elder Feng's pill furnace were considered "high-end" goods.

Especially Elder Feng's pill furnace, which employed a composite array of three formations to harmonize wood and fire spiritual powers. In the entire city of Tongxian, there weren't many array masters capable of crafting such composite arrays.

Mo Hua spent about a month mending arrays for several neighbors, fixing doors, walls, and lamps. These tasks hardly showcased any profound mastery of arrays, but the local cultivators were immensely grateful.

They weren't wealthy, so they offered Mo Hua home-grown fruits and spiritual vegetables as thanks. The gifts were modest, but the sentiment was substantial.

Mo Hua's family was not wealthy, and among the independent cultivators in Tongxian City, many were even poorer. Typically, these cultivators were frugal, continuing to use their belongings even when damaged, and never hiring an array master to repair worn-out arrays.

Sometimes, the cost of repairing an array with spirit stones was more expensive than buying a new one.

Array masters were scarce, and most who mastered the art would serve only families, sects, or significant cultivation forces, not only for the wealth of spirit stones but also to advance further in array crafting.

"Having mastered skills, one can serve the imperial house." This was a phrase from Mo Hua's memories of another life.

Stepping into the threshold of a superior clan or sect meant no longer associating with the impoverished classes.

This was both a common human sentiment and a reflection of the fickleness of human nature.

With this thought, Elder Feng, who still made pills and treated diseases for the impoverished cultivators even after becoming a top-tier pill master, was all the more respectable.

Mo Hua continued to mend arrays for others, revisiting and reinforcing his knowledge of arrays, making his understanding much deeper than before.

Previously, while drawing arrays on paper—paper being the medium—the real application of arrays involved using any item as a medium, whether it was brick, stone, or wood.

The arrays drawn on paper could function, but they often felt like mere theoretical exercises. Moreover, paper arrays were usually discarded after one use and couldn't be used long-term.

Only by drawing arrays onto all things in the world—wood, bricks, and various spirit tools—and allowing them to operate over time, could one truly comprehend the Dao of Heaven and follow its principles.

Drawing arrays on various mediums consumed more spiritual awareness and power, demanded higher precision, and was inherently more challenging.

However, with persistent practice, Mo Hua's understanding of arrays became even more profound.

Over time, when Mo Hua looked at arrays again, they no longer seemed like obscure and abstract patterns but appeared as vivid and dynamic lines, tracing the paths of spiritual power in nature.

When Mo Hua submerged his spiritual awareness into the sea of consciousness to observe the spirit power woven array patterns, the previous confusion vanished.

The array patterns flowed with spirit power, becoming much clearer.

One day, following Mr. Zhuang's teachings on the generation and inhibition of spirit power, Mo Hua began to dismantle the array.

As Mo Hua's pale, slender hands traced the patterns, new array lines formed while others dissipated, unraveling like silkworm threads, stretching out slowly and then fading away into the sea of consciousness.

Mo Hua faintly realized that with each unraveling of an array pattern, the connection between his spiritual awareness and power grew tighter.

When Mo Hua unraveled the last array pattern, the entire array in the sea of consciousness had dissipated, returning it to its original state as if nothing had happened, except for the Dao Stele, which still stood out but remained unchanged.

"Is this considered unraveling it?" Mo Hua scratched his head and then tried to mobilize his spirit power, only to find his sea of consciousness trembling as if a stomach, starved for days, suddenly felt a burning hunger.

Startled, Mo Hua quickly took out some spirit stones and absorbed the spirit energy.

After refining more than a dozen spirit stones, the sea of consciousness gradually stabilized.

Looking inward, Mo Hua noticed a substantial increase in his spirit power and a strengthening of his spiritual awareness.

"I've reached the fourth level of Qi refinement!"

Overjoyed, Mo Hua lay on his bed, too excited to sleep.

He got up, lit a lamp, laid out paper and ink, and drew a Tripartite Array.

The Tripartite Array included six first-grade array patterns.

Previously, Mo Hua's limited spiritual awareness made it challenging to draw such arrays, but now, with his breakthrough in cultivation and increased spiritual awareness, drawing the Tripartite Array had become much easier.

After finishing, Mo Hua realized it was past midnight, which was the time he could draw arrays on the Dao Stele in the sea of consciousness, thus wasting a sheet of paper and ink.

"Even a mosquito is still meat."

Slightly pained by the waste, Mo Hua once again submerged his spiritual awareness into the sea of consciousness and began to draw arrays on the Dao Stele without any concerns.

The arrays that previously seemed challenging due to the increase in cultivation level and spiritual awareness now became much easier. No wonder others often say that the cultivation level is the foundation of a cultivator.

Mo Hua continued to draw arrays until dawn and then eagerly shared the good news with his parents.

Mo Shan had just returned from the mountains after hunting several wild ox demons with his peers and was resting at home. His parents, after hearing the news, were so relieved that they organized a banquet for the nearby neighbors and familiar friends.

Moving from the third to the fourth level of Qi refinement, from the early to the middle stage, was considered a breakthrough of a mid-level boundary, and it was customary to host a banquet. The three brothers, Da Hu, had also hosted a banquet when they reached the fourth level of Qi refinement. However, the Meng family was not well-off, so the three brothers combined their resources and hosted just one banquet.

The restaurant was closed for the day, and Mo Shan had someone carry the recently hunted whole wild ox demon home. After skinning and butchering it, Liu Ruhua, renowned for her culinary skills, added spices and stewed it well, then directly held the feast at the restaurant.

Master Chen and Da Zhu, along with Master Chen's other disciples, all attended. The three brothers, needless to say, some not-so-close cultivators who had been helped by Mo Hua in the past also brought some modest gifts but did not stay for the meal. Liu Ruhua then wrapped some beef as a return gift for them.

Although it was a banquet, the food was just slightly better than usual. There was no spiritual meat, as it was too expensive, but there was enough wild ox meat. Coupled with Liu Ruhua's well-regarded cooking skills, the food, though simple, was delicious, and everyone enjoyed the meat and drinks, having a great time.

Mr. Zhuang disliked the noise, and the Bai siblings had a special status, so Mo Hua did not invite them. Instead, he prepared some extra delicious food and sent it to Mr. Zhuang the next day.

Bai Zixi expressed her thanks, enjoying the flaky pastries and the sweetly fermented rice wine, looking quite satisfied.

However, Bai Zisheng was quite regretful; he too wanted to join the lively scene, to drink and eat meat heartily with others. But he knew he could only wish, as Aunt Xue, although gentle, was strict with them and would definitely not agree.

Mo Hua originally felt a bit sympathetic towards him, but Bai Zisheng skeptically asked:

"Is reaching the fourth level of Qi refinement really worth celebrating like this?"

The slight sympathy Mo Hua felt instantly dissipated.

For the average independent cultivator, reaching the Qi refinement stage might be the endpoint of their cultivation journey, so each step forward was not easy.