

The Quest 77

Chapter 77: The Demon Hunting Festival

Mo Hua originally thought Zhang Lan's remark about "finding time to hang out" was just a polite expression, but it turned out he was serious.

Since that day, Zhang Lan would often visit the eatery, ordering a pot of wine and a plate of meat, watching the bustling streets as he whiled away the morning. Occasionally seeing Mo Hua, he would chide him, saying, "You're just a kid, where do you go every day? I've come several times and haven't seen you."

Mo Hua, with a serious expression, retorted, "I'm not like you; I'm very busy."

"What could you possibly be busy with?" Zhang Lan asked incredulously.

Counting on his fingers, Mo Hua listed his activities: "Daily routine cultivation, drawing array patterns when I have time, reading array books when tired, occasionally bringing some food to my teacher and asking him questions, and even helping the local uncles and aunties fix their arrays..."

Zhang Lan, overwhelmed, replied, "Alright, alright, I concede; you're busier than me."

Mo Hua, a young cultivator of merely eleven or twelve years old, kept himself so busy, in contrast to Zhang Lan, a cultivator from the Dao Court, who spent his days drinking leisurely. This made Zhang Lan feel somewhat guilty, especially considering he remained unfazed even when his father berated him harshly.

"By the way, is there anywhere fun in Tongxian City?" Zhang Lan inquired.

"I'm a good kid; I don't play around. How would I know?" Mo Hua declined to answer, wondering what Zhang Lan considered fun. Being still a child, he couldn't involve himself in inappropriate activities.

"Then, any lively places?" Zhang Lan asked, shifting his expectations.

"The east side of South Street is somewhat lively."

"I've been there; not many cultivators around, and the market isn't much, not interesting," Zhang Lan expressed his disinterest.

"It's bound to be quiet if you go during the day; not everyone idles about like you, people have to make a living," Mo Hua pointed out.

Unable to refute, Zhang Lan conceded, "Then when does it get lively?"

Thinking it over, Mo Hua replied, "The day after tomorrow, it's the Demon Hunting Festival, the liveliest time of the year."

"What's the Demon Hunting Festival?"

Mo Hua explained, "It's a celebration for demon hunters to mark a successful season. October is the peak month for hunting; after which, demonic activities decrease, and the hunters' earnings drop. They usually hunt more demonic beasts in October and sell them during the festival, then rest a while. At that time, the market will have everything; it's really lively."

Surprised, Zhang Lan remarked, "You sure know a lot."

"Of course," Mo Hua patted his chest, "I'm somewhat of a local authority here."

Amused yet intrigued by the Demon Hunting Festival, Zhang Lan decided, "Alright, I'll check it out the day after tomorrow," and prepared to leave, brushing off his sleeves.

Watching him, Mo Hua curiously asked, "Haven't you settled the bill yet?"

"I've left some spirit stones at the counter; they'll deduct it directly," Zhang Lan replied nonchalantly, displaying a somewhat foolish generosity.

Then, Mo Hua continued studying his array books, planning to learn a few more array patterns in the next couple of days, then take a break during the Demon Hunting Festival, and have fun with Da Hu and the others.

When Bai Zisheng heard Mo Hua was going to the festival, he was nearly drooling with envy.

The Bai family's rules were strict. Even away from the family, Aunt Xue required them to cultivate daily, along with alchemy, array formation, and artifact crafting studies, clearly organized.

Perhaps because they were away from the family, Aunt Xue feared they would fall behind other family disciples, so she imposed even stricter demands. Many of the books on alchemy, artifact crafting, or cultivation that Mo Hua glanced at seemed profoundly obscure, utterly beyond his understanding.

Fortunately, he could comprehend the array books, which didn't seem too difficult.

However, Mo Hua had a lingering question: why were the Bai siblings registered disciples of Mr. Zhuang? What were they really learning?

So far, Mr. Zhuang didn't seem to teach them anything special.

They could learn the same things Mo Hua was learning; they could ask about the same things he heard when he was present. Some topics, though obscure, were not so profound that they required Mr. Zhuang's guidance.

And even without Mr. Zhuang's involvement, their cultivation was meticulously arranged by the family, leaving no need for his interference.

Only Mo Hua regularly visited Mr. Zhuang's study, bringing some food and asking

questions.

The Bai siblings simply practiced in a small pavilion, learning on their own. In Mo Hua's experience, apart from routine greetings and queries, they never sought Mr. Zhuang's advice alone.

This puzzled Mo Hua.

Or perhaps, there were things Mr. Zhuang would not teach to registered disciples, reserving them only for direct disciples?

They were so persistent; did they hope Mr. Zhuang would accept them as disciples to learn more profound arts?

The difference between registered and direct disciples was significant; registered disciples could only address him as "teacher," while direct disciples could call him "master."

The cultivator community placed great importance on the mentor-disciple relationship, treating a day's teacher as a lifetime's father. Da Zhu was taken as a disciple by Master Chen, who treated Da Zhu almost like a son, expecting him to care for him in his old age.

Because of the deep bond between master and disciple, betraying one's sect was considered one of the gravest sins in the cultivation world.

Touching his chin, Mo Hua wondered, "Would Mr. Zhuang accept me as a direct disciple?"

Comparing his own cultivation, spiritual roots, talents, and family background with the Bai siblings, Mo Hua quickly sobered up.

It's best not to aim too high.

Dismissing this unrealistic thought, Mo Hua continued reading.

Two days later, it would be the Demon Hunting Festival.

The Demon Hunting Festival was one of the biggest festivals in Tongxian City, even larger than the Lotus Festival.

Every cultivator in Tongxian City, whether a poor wandering cultivator or a wealthy family cultivator, had been preparing for the festival early. From morning, the festive atmosphere permeated the city, and by evening, it was brightly lit.

During the festival, the streets were crowded, and the eateries were busy, so Liu Ruhua would stay home, managing the business with Aunt Jiang and a few temporarily hired aunties.

Mo Shan was busy contacting buyers to sell the demon beasts' hides, bones, or inner cores that the hunting team had gathered over the past month, as the upcoming months would see a decrease in hunting activities and, consequently, lower earnings. Many cultivators relied on these spirit stones to last until the next year.

Mo Hua would just stroll through the streets with Da Hu and the others.

But Da Hu and his brothers had another event to attend: the Demon Hunting Ceremony.

Every year, the Demon Hunting Ceremony was held to celebrate young cultivators above the sixth level of Qi refining becoming demon hunters.

The sixth level of Qi refining represented a watershed for wandering cultivators in Tongxian City, marking the peak of the mid-phase of Qi refining and offering a chance to advance to the later phase.

Mid-phase Qi refiners could learn some simple spells or martial arts, possessing sufficient spiritual power and physical strength to fend off demonic beasts.

Advancing from mid to late Qi refining was a crucial step in a city dominated by Qi refining cultivators, representing the aspirations of many.

However, this step involved many variables, and due to reasons such as spirit stones, spiritual roots, or cultivation methods, many cultivators never made the leap.

Thus, reaching the sixth level of Qi refining allowed wandering cultivators to become true demon hunters, relying on hunting demonic beasts for their livelihood.