

TRANSMIGRATED INTO A GRANDPA, EMBRACING THE LAID-BACK LIFE

Chapter 301: Night Watch at the Mystic Ice Platform

The next morning, at the supply camp's management office.

The fat manager in charge of registration didn't even lift his eyelids, casually swiping Su Ming's token.

"Warehouse Bing cleanup completed. Fifty Military Merit points have been credited. Next."

Su Ming received the token with both hands, a humble smile hanging on his face. "Thank you, Manager."

He turned and walked out, his steps light and brisk.

"Is this kid an idiot?" The fat manager glanced at Su Ming's retreating back, muttering to the attendant beside him. "Picking through trash for seven days, only got fifty Military Merit points, and he's as happy as if he found treasure."

Su Ming walked out the door, hearing the discussion behind him, the smile at the corner of his mouth growing even wider.

Sunlight spilled onto the mottled city wall of Iron Wall Pass, somewhat glaring.

He squinted, looking at the towering formation pagoda piercing the clouds in the distance.

Only he himself knew that the youth who had been picking through the garbage heap had, last night, already grasped in his hand a thread capable of prying open the fate of this mighty fortress.

...

At midnight, Iron Wall Pass lay prostrate in the darkness of the Northern Border.

This was the "Celestial Pivot Position - Mystic Ice Platform," the formation core farthest from the heavens and with the most intense cold energy within the entire mountain-protecting grand formation.

Underfoot, the Mystic Iron floor tiles were inscribed with formation patterns that were no longer the common crimson or golden yellow, but shimmered with a ghostly blue glow, almost sickly pale.

That glow was not static, but pulsed like breathing, contracting and expanding in sync with the twinkling of the stars in the sky.

Su Ming tightened the fur at his collar, exhaling a white breath.

The white breath had just left his mouth by three inches before transforming into fine ice crystals, falling onto the formation plate with a "shasha" sound.

"This damn place, you'd need to bring a stick to knock it free even to take a piss."

In his Consciousness Sea, Lin Yu huddled his neck, grumbling.

Su Ming didn't respond, his gaze fixed intently on a secondary node beneath his feet.

It was the diversion channel of the "Ice Condensation Formation."

In theory, this place should maintain a constant flow of liquid spiritual energy year-round, channeling excess cold, baleful energy out of the formation. But at this moment, a thick layer of white frost had formed at the bend of that diversion channel. The originally smooth flow of spiritual energy, reaching this point, had no choice but to become sluggish and slow, emitting a faint "crack crack" sound.

If left unattended, within three hours, this node would overload due to blockage, triggering a chain reaction.

"Blocking is inferior to guiding."

Su Ming crouched down, not pulling out a fire talisman to forcefully roast it like a conventional Formation Master would. Using fire in such an extreme cold place was asking for death—under the drastic temperature change, the embrittled formation foundation would instantly shatter.

He extended the index finger of his right hand, its tip not touching the layer of frost, but hovering half an inch above it.

Within the Qihai of his Dantian, that pool of dark blue heavy water spiritual liquid slowly rotated.

An extremely fine, extremely resilient strand of water-attributed spiritual energy flowed out along his fingertip.

That strand of energy was like a nimble little snake, silently burrowing into the cracks of the white frost.

Not to melt it, but to "assimilate."

Su Ming closed his eyes, sensing the internal texture of the hard ice layer.

Under the permeation of the "Like Water Art," the originally rigid ice crystal structure began to loosen, enveloped and disassembled by that highly resilient water spiritual energy, ultimately transforming into a semi-fluid mixture of ice and water that slid down along the diversion channel.

"Splash—"

An extremely faint sound of flowing water rang out. The previously sluggish formation node instantly cleared, the ghostly blue light becoming stable and bright once more.

"Interesting."

A hoarse voice came from behind, sounding like two pieces of coarse sandpaper rubbing together.

Su Ming turned his head and saw an old soldier wrapped in a thick bear-skin coat leaning against a wind-sheltering stone pillar, holding a chipped wine pot in his hand.

This old soldier's face was covered with purplish-red scars left by frostbite. His left eye was ash-white, clearly lost on the battlefield. He was the veteran night watchman on duty with Su Ming tonight, surnamed Liu. Everyone called him Old Liu.

"Most people, when they come up and see this ice lump, their first reaction is to roast it with fire or chip at it with a chisel." Old Liu took a swig of strong liquor, his one good right eye squinting slightly as he examined Su Ming's finger. "Using water to dissolve ice, that kind of skill, only you youngsters from the sects can think of it. Though troublesome, it doesn't damage the formation foundation."

"You flatter me, Senior." Su Ming stood up, brushing the ice fragments from his clothes. "This junior's spiritual root leans towards water, and this is the only clumsy method I know."

"Clumsy methods are good." Old Liu grinned, revealing a mouthful of broken, yellow teeth. "Here at Iron Wall Pass, clever methods often get you killed quickly. It's the clumsy ones that let a man live a few more days."

Having said that, he paid Su Ming no further mind, shrinking back into the shadow behind the stone pillar, continuing to drink his wine intermittently.

Su Ming also didn't say more, turning and walking back to his main control position.

He sat down cross-legged. Just as he was about to take advantage of this rare high-level formation core environment to contemplate the "Star Attraction Lines" he had obtained from the bronze fragment, the modified "warning plate" tucked at his waist suddenly vibrated faintly.

The vibration was extremely slight. If Su Ming hadn't been maintaining the "observation micro state," he wouldn't have noticed it at all.

"Hmm?"

Su Ming's pupils contracted slightly.

The water ripple patterns on the warning plate were rippling towards the northwest direction.

No spiritual energy fluctuations?

In an instant, hundreds of types of demon beast data from the Iron Wall Pass compendium flashed through Su Ming's mind, finally settling on one creature.

Frostwing Demon Bat.

This type of demon beast was born in the extreme cold ice caves of the Northern Border. Its wings were made of translucent cartilage and ice membranes, allowing for completely silent flight and perfect camouflage within the night and cold winds. They loved to ambush formation cores at midnight, and the ice spikes they spewed could instantly pierce through three layers of leather armor.

"Old Liu!"

Su Ming called out in a low voice. The sound wasn't loud, but it carried an undeniable chill.

The old soldier in the shadows snapped his eyes open. The original dullness in his single eye instantly vanished, replaced by a wolf-like alertness.

He didn't ask why, immediately throwing away the wine pot, drawing the standard-issue long knife stuck in the snow with a backhanded motion. With a rolling motion, he hid behind a piece of cover.

Just as he concealed himself.

"Whoosh— whoosh— whoosh—"

Sharp, piercing sounds of something cutting through the air suddenly tore through the silence of the night.

Dozens of ice spikes, thick as a child's arm, poured down from the pitch-black night sky like a torrential rain, smashing violently onto the Mystic Ice Platform.

"Clang clang dang dang!"

The ice spikes struck the Mystic Iron ground, exploding into countless shards. Two of them landed precisely where Su Ming had been standing moments before, embedding three inches into the stone, their tail feathers still trembling violently.

"Squeak—!"

Immediately after, a grating, teeth-aching shriek sounded.

Over twenty grayish-white shadows dove down from the night sky. Using the Starlight as cover, they plunged directly towards the operating formation core.

Chapter 302: You call this array repair?

"Trying to tear down my platform?"

Su Ming remained seated cross-legged on the spot, not moving an inch.

His hands had long been pressed against the two auxiliary formation plates in front of him.

"Rise!"

With his low shout, his ten fingers flew across the edges of the formation plates like playing a piano.

The "Ice Condensation Formation" originally laid flat on the ground did not raise a shield like a conventional defense. Shields consumed too much spiritual energy and were easily punctured.

Instead, the dense, long-accumulated cold air around the Mysterious Ice Platform, guided by Su Ming, instantly condensed in mid-air.

Not into an ice wall, but into ice mirrors.

Seven smooth, hexagonal ice shields appeared abruptly in the air, each positioned at an extremely tricky, slanted angle.

The first wave of ice spikes spat by the demon bats slammed fiercely into these ice mirrors.

They did not shatter as expected.

The moment those ice spikes touched the smooth ice surface, the bizarre slanted angle deflected most of their force with a sharp "screech," sending them sliding to the side. A few were even directly reflected back, shooting towards the demon bat swarm behind.

"Thud! Thud!"

Two bats leading the charge were caught off guard, their wings pierced by their companions' ice spikes. They shrieked and plummeted to the ground.

The remaining bats clearly had never encountered such a tactic.

In their understanding, human formations were either rigid turtle shells or fiery, blazing killing arrays.

What was this slippery thing that could even bounce back attacks?

In that split second of their confusion.

Su Ming's fingers changed again.

"Gather Light."

The originally dim starlight and moonlight in the sky projected onto those seven ice mirrors.

Through Su Ming's precise angle calculations, the light from the seven mirrors converged instantly into a single point, forming a blinding white beam that shot straight into the center of the demon bat swarm.

For bats accustomed to darkness, intense light was akin to the most potent poison.

"Squeak, squeak, squeak—!"

The bat swarm instantly erupted into chaos, covering their eyes and crashing wildly in the air, their formation thrown into complete disarray.

"Now!"

Without needing Su Ming's reminder, Old Liu, who had been hiding in the shadows, moved.

He pulled a signal flare from his robe and crushed it fiercely.

Simultaneously, several sharp streaks of sword light shot up from the patrol battalion below.

Three Foundation Establishment patrol sword cultivators arrived flying on their swords.

Facing this swarm of low-level demon bats, now blinded and in disarray, it was practically a one-sided slaughter.

In just over a dozen breaths, the battle was over.

Apart from a dozen or so mutilated corpses and a scattering of ice shards on the ground, not even a single tile on the Mysterious Ice Platform was broken.

The lead sword cultivator sheathed his sword and landed. He glanced at the completely intact formation core, then at the several ice mirrors still hovering in mid-air, a flicker of surprise in his eyes.

The sword cultivator looked at Su Ming. "Which battalion are you from?"

"Reporting, Su Ming from the Formation Maintenance Battalion," Su Ming stood up and saluted, his expression calm. "I merely leveraged the terrain and slightly adjusted the elevation angle of the formation plates."

The sword cultivator nodded, asking no further questions. On the battlefield, solving problems with the smallest cost was a skill in itself.

"Clean this up and continue your watch. We'll note your merit."

The sword cultivator left with his men, carrying the demon bat corpses.

The Mysterious Ice Platform returned to its deathly silence.

Old Liu crawled out from behind the cover, patting the snow off his clothes. He walked up to Su Ming, staring at the slowly dissipating ice mirrors with a strange look in his eyes.

"Using their own force against them, reflecting light to blind them," Old Liu spat a bloody mouthful of saliva. "Kid, this isn't repairing a formation. You're using the formation as a hidden weapon."

Su Ming smiled slightly and sat back down on the meditation cushion. "Senior, formations are dead, but people are alive. As long as it kills demons, it's a good formation."

Old Liu fell silent for a moment, then suddenly pulled out a piece of somewhat dry and hard jerky from his robe and tossed it to Su Ming.

"Take it. Chew it to warm yourself up."

It was the old soldier's recognition.

Su Ming took the jerky, tore off a strip, and put it in his mouth. The meat was tough and very salty, but it became fragrant after chewing for a while.

Su Ming didn't close his eyes. He began circulating the Like Water Art again to restore his energy.

It was now the Chou hour, the darkest part of the night, when the cold was at its peak.

If it were before, Su Ming would definitely feel a stinging pain in his meridians at this moment.

But now, after that bout of precise formation manipulation, he suddenly realized the biting cold air around him seemed to have become somewhat more... familiar.

"Star Attraction Lines..."

The patterns on that bronze fragment surfaced in Su Ming's mind.

This Mysterious Ice Platform towered into the clouds, connecting with starlight above and drawing upon earth veins below. It was the perfect place to practice this rune.

He attempted to slightly adjust the circulation path of the Like Water Art, following the rhythm of the "Star Attraction Lines."

The originally smoothly flowing spiritual energy suddenly began to rotate and accelerate within his Dantian.

A strange suction force emanated from all the pores on his body.

The violent, previously difficult-to-refine icy spiritual energy around him actually became docile under the pull of this suction, transforming into strands of pure, cool energy that drilled into his meridians.

Hiss—

Su Ming couldn't help but shudder.

It was painful, but exhilarating.

That cold energy felt like countless tiny files, repeatedly scraping and tempering the inner walls of his meridians.

His originally somewhat ethereal spiritual energy was forced by this cold energy to compress to a higher density.

"Good lad," Lin Yu praised within the Consciousness Sea. "Using the astral killing energy from this high place to temper the resilience of your spiritual energy. This method is a bit masochistic, but the effect is truly excellent. One night's hard work here equals three days of cultivation down below."

Su Ming gritted his teeth, enduring the cyclical agony of his meridians freezing stiff and then being blasted open by spiritual energy.

He could clearly feel his spiritual energy undergoing a qualitative change. If his previous spiritual energy was like flowing water, then now, this flow was beginning to mix with fine shards of "ice."

Heavier, colder, and sharper.

When the first hint of pale light appeared on the eastern horizon.

Su Ming slowly opened his eyes.

A thick layer of white frost had formed on his eyelashes, but his pupils shone brighter than the cold stars in the sky.

"Hoo—"

He exhaled a turbid breath. The airflow didn't dissipate but shot out like a sharp arrow for three feet before slowly turning into white mist.

His token vibrated.

Su Ming looked down. The Military Merit value had jumped.

Fifty points for the basic night watch duty, plus five hundred for repelling the harassment.

Five hundred and fifty points of Military Merit.

"This deal was worth it," Su Ming's lips curved slightly upward. He stood up, stretching his somewhat stiff joints, which emitted a series of cracking sounds like popping beans.

Old Liu had already packed up his things and was preparing to hand over the watch.

As he passed by Su Ming, his steps paused briefly.

"Kid, that trick with the ice mirrors reflecting light... teach it to the brothers in the battalion later?" Old Liu didn't look at Su Ming, his gaze fixed on the distant, undulating black mountain range.

"No problem," Su Ming agreed readily. "But you'll have to buy me a drink."

"Deal," Old Liu waved his hand and strode down the mountain. "As long as we survive, drinks are on me."

Chapter 303: A slow and steady wins the race

For three consecutive days, the wind and snow had wrapped Iron Wall Pass into a colossal silver beast. Only the "Ancient Formation Repair Workshop" under the jurisdiction of the Vessel Hall remained a seething cauldron of heat.

Located above an underground lava cave in the southeast corner of the pass, it drew earth fire year-round for forging.

As the heavy Mystic Iron door was pushed open just a crack, a wave of heat, laced with the smell of scorching and the clang of metal on stone, rushed out. It instantly licked the ice crystals clinging to Su Ming's hair into wisps of steam.

Su Ming had just finished handing over his watch duty at the Mysterious Ice Platform when an urgent order transferred him here.

"That new formation master? Come here."

The speaker was a middle-aged cultivator dressed in dark red work clothes. His ruddy face looked perpetually seared by furnace flames, his hands were covered in thick calluses, and a purple-gold hammer of unknown material hung at his waist.

This man was precisely the Vessel Hall steward in charge of the ancient formation repairs here, Zheng Tieshou.

For Zheng Tieshou, the only standard was whether you could do the work; all other empty titles were bullshit.

He pointed to a stone table piled with scrap in a corner of the workshop.

"There's a tricky job over there. A damaged part of the 'Minor Dutian Thunder Roar Formation' sent over from Bing Battalion. Normally, this job wouldn't fall to you, but these past few days, the demon beast attacks have been intense. All the old hands in the hall have been pulled away to repair the main nodes of the mountain-protecting formation. First, go clean off the charred layer on the outside. Don't damage the patterns inside."

Su Ming looked in the direction he pointed.

Lying horizontally on that stone table was a half-section of charred-black wooden pillar, roughly the thickness of a bucket. Its surface was covered in cracked fissures, through which faint purple lightning could be seen flickering, emitting crackling bursts of sound.

This was the core formation base of the "Minor Dutian Thunder Roar Formation."

Su Ming took a few steps closer, his nose twitching as he caught an extremely pungent smell of sulfur mixed with rotten wood.

"Tsk, can this thing still be called a formation?" Lin Yu's voice sounded lazily in the Consciousness Sea. "It's practically burnt to charcoal. The 'Thunderstruck Wood' inside has been completely devoured by backlash from the thunder-fire energy."

Su Ming didn't speak, merely circling the charred wood twice, his brow slightly furrowed.

He extended a finger, not touching the wooden pillar, but hovering it in the air to sense the violent yet feeble fluctuations of spiritual energy.

Just as Master had said, the interior of this formation base was severely carbonized.

The conventional repair method was to excise the necrotic parts and replace them with new spiritual materials. But this was an ancient formation from hundreds of years ago. Its formation lines were archaic and unadorned, emphasizing natural unity. If new wood were forcibly inserted, the spiritual energy conduction would inevitably suffer gaps. Not only would its power be

greatly reduced, but the risk of the formation exploding would be extremely high.

"What? Think it's dirty?" Seeing Su Ming hesitate to start, Zheng Tieshou walked over, a boning knife in hand, his tone somewhat impatient. "If you can't do it, go help the apprentices pump the bellows over there."

"Steward misunderstands."

Su Ming withdrew his hand, his expression calm as he spoke. "The interior of this Thunderstruck Wood is nearly carbonized, and the ancient patterns have long since fused with the wood grain. Using a knife to excise it would certainly damage the foundation. This disciple is considering whether there might be another method."

Zheng Tieshou snorted coldly, thrusting the boning knife into the chopping block with a thud, sinking it three inches deep.

"Another method? Kid, this 'Minor Dutian Thunder Roar Formation' has dual thunder-fire attributes, the most violent kind. Besides excising the necrotic

parts and re-inlaying new material, what other method could there be? Do you plan to conjure wood out of thin air?"

"No need to conjure." Su Ming took out that set of self-made bottles and jars from his storage pouch, along with several pieces of ore glowing with a cyan light. "Since hard excision won't work, then we'll use soft grinding. Since we can't replace, then we'll mend."

"Mend?" Zheng Tieshou's brow furrowed into deep lines.

Su Ming didn't offer excessive explanation. He simply moved a stone mortar from the corner and tossed those pieces of "Azure Thunder Sand" into it.

He didn't use a pestle. Instead, his right hand pressed down emptily, a cluster of dark blue water spiritual energy surging from his palm.

That water spiritual energy didn't directly impact the ore. Instead, it transformed into countless fine vortices, enveloping the Azure Thunder Sand within. The water flow spun at high speed, the ore pieces colliding and grinding against each other within the whirlpools, emitting a fine, rustling sound.

In less time than it took to drink a cup of tea, the hard Azure Thunder Sand had turned into a pool of cyan slurry, fine and smooth as mud.

Zheng Tieshou had initially wanted to scold Su Ming for messing around—using a water method to handle thunder-attribute materials was a major taboo in artifact forging, extremely prone to causing spiritual energy conflict.

But just as he opened his mouth, the words stuck in his throat.

He saw that Su Ming didn't stop. With a point of his left index finger, an extremely thin thread of water snaked out like a spirit serpent, gently touching that charred-black section of Thunderstruck Wood.

Sizzle—!

Water and fire met, but instead of the expected violent explosion, only a faint white mist rose.

Su Ming's gaze became intensely focused at this moment, the depths of his pupils seemingly reflecting a microscopic world.

Under his control, that strand of water spiritual energy wasn't trying to "douse" the thunder-fire. Instead, it was like a water droplet seeping into a sponge, drilling into the already carbonized pores of the Thunderstruck Wood.

Water moistens all things.

The originally brittle, crumbling carbonized layer, under the infiltration of water spiritual energy, became soft, glutinous, and moist.

Immediately after, Su Ming waved his right hand. That cluster of cyan thunder-sand slurry, guided by the water flow, slowly poured into those softened pores.

The water spiritual energy acted as a perfect lubricant and adhesive, carrying the new thunder-attribute material, bit by bit displacing the useless dead ash, while simultaneously reconnecting the broken ancient patterns.

"This..."

Zheng Tieshou's arms, originally crossed over his chest, had unknowingly dropped to his sides. His eyes, perpetually hazy from years of smoke and fire, were now wide open.

He had never seen this kind of repair technique.

No fire forging, no knife carving. It completely defied the Vessel Hall's traditional craftsmanship, yet inexplicably carried an air of undeniable logic.

"Is this... 'water grinding effort'?" Several old artificers busy nearby were also drawn by the commotion, stopping their work and gathering around.

Su Ming paid no heed to the surrounding gazes.

By now, a layer of fine sweat had beaded on his forehead.

This job looked delicate, but in reality, it was more exhausting than his watch on the Mysterious Ice Platform.

He had to constantly maintain the "flexibility" and "resilience" of the water spiritual energy. He needed to soften the carbonized layer, suppress the backlash of the thunder-fire, and guide the thunder-sand slurry to precisely fill every minute crack.

The slightest mistake, and this piece of wood would explode into fireworks in his hands.

Time passed in dull, meticulous operation.

One hour, two hours...

Until the sky outside darkened and lightened, lightened and darkened.

A full three days.

Su Ming was like a statue. Aside from occasionally swallowing a fasting pill and a Qi Recovery Pill, he hardly moved half a step.

Zheng Tieshou's initial curiosity gradually turned to shock, and finally settled into silent awe.

He even personally waved away several apprentices who tried to come and disturb them. He moved a small stool and sat not far away, acting as Su Ming's protector.

Chapter 304: Thunder Yuan Liquid

On the evening of the third day.

As the last trace of Azure Thunder Sand slurry seeped into the depths of the wood grain, Su Ming's fingers finally stilled.

At this moment, that section of Thunderstruck Wood was no longer its original charcoal-black appearance.

Although its surface still appeared ancient and weathered, within the network of cracked patterns, a layer of crystal-clear azure crystal had filled the gaps.

With the injection of spiritual energy, those crystals seemed to come alive, shimmering and reflecting with the original purple thunder patterns, forming a peculiar dual-colored halo of azure and purple.

Hum—

A low humming sound rang out.

It was not a precursor to an explosion, but the joyous hum of a formation core regaining its rhythm.

Su Ming let out a long breath, withdrew his spiritual energy, swayed on his feet, and nearly toppled over.

A rough, large hand steadily supported his arm.

"Get up slowly. Squatting for too long can make your vision go dark." Zheng Tieshou's voice no longer held its previous stiffness, instead carrying a trace of warmth usually reserved for fellow practitioners.

Su Ming steadied himself and cupped his hands respectfully. "The mission is accomplished, though the repair method employed some clever shortcuts. I must ask Steward Zheng to inspect it."

Zheng Tieshou didn't speak, striding over to the stone platform instead.

He extended his calloused palm, gently stroking the now-repaired section of Thunderstruck Wood. The sensation transmitted to his palm was warm, smooth, and resilient; spiritual energy flowed through it smoothly and unimpeded. Due to the addition of the Azure Thunder Sand, it even possessed a sharpness it originally lacked.

"Clever shortcuts?" Zheng Tieshou shook his head, turned to look at Su Ming, his expression complex. "If this counts as clever shortcuts, then my decades of swinging a hammer were for nothing."

The few old artificers gathered around also came closer, clicking their tongues in admiration.

"Using water-based methods for gentle nourishment to subdue the violent nature of thunder-fire, and even fusing two spiritual materials so perfectly." A white-bearded old man stroked his beard, looking at Su Ming as if gazing upon an uncut jade. "Young friend, your talent in harmonizing spiritual materials is extraordinary."

"This technique is as delicate as embroidery. We who swing heavy hammers truly can't manage it," another chimed in.

Zheng Tieshou fished out a small azure vial made of some unknown material from his robes and shoved it into Su Ming's hand.

"Take it."

Su Ming was taken aback. "This is?"

"During the repair of this formation base, the thunder-fire essence you forced out using water-based methods—I collected and refined it on a whim." Zheng Tieshou scratched his head somewhat awkwardly. "This is called 'Thunder Origin Liquid.' Though the quantity is small, it has miraculous effects for tempering the body and refining spiritual energy purity. Consider it a bonus."

Su Ming's heart stirred. Thunder Origin Liquid! This was a precious commodity with a price but no market availability.

"Thank you, Steward." Su Ming didn't refuse, accepting it openly and generously.

"Also, these one hundred and twenty Military Merit points will be recorded under your name." Zheng Tieshou patted Su Ming's shoulder with considerable force. "In the future, if you encounter any difficulties with formation materials, or want to tinker with some strange and unusual contraptions, you can come directly to me here. Although my formation skills aren't as refined as yours, when it comes to materials, few in this Iron Wall Pass can surpass me."

This was the greatest gain.

Su Ming felt a secret joy. With Zheng Tieshou's words, his future "little inventions" in the Repair Hall would have a reliable source for both materials and technical support.

"Alright, don't just stand here. Go back and rest." Zheng Tieshou waved his hand. "Look at your pale face, like a ghost."

Su Ming bowed again and turned to leave.

Stepping out of the sweltering workshop, the biting cold wind outside assaulted him again, yet it made him feel exceptionally clear-headed.

"Master, this round, we not only earned Military Merit but also connected with the Vessel Hall." Su Ming touched the warm little vial inside his robes, a slight smile curling his lips.

"That's because your skills are solid." Lin Yu yawned within the Consciousness Sea. "But, disciple, have you noticed your 'water-grinding' technique is becoming increasingly proficient? If cultivating immortality doesn't work out in the future, we could open a blacksmith shop and definitely make a fortune."

Su Ming stumbled, nearly slipping and falling on the snow-covered ground.

By the time he returned to Bing Battalion, the sky was completely dark.

Just as he reached the entrance of Stone Hut Number Seven, Su Ming saw Zhao Tiji squatting by the door, drawing something in the snow with a twig, with Old Liu and Chen Chuan gathered around him.

Seeing Su Ming return, Zhao Tiji abruptly stood up and approached with a mysterious expression.

"Brother Su, you're finally back." Zhao Tiji lowered his voice, glancing left and right. "Something's happened."

Su Ming's heart jumped, his hand instinctively moving toward the formation plate at his waist. "Monster beast attack on the camp?"

"No." Zhao Tiji shook his head, his expression strange—a mix of excitement and worry. "It's the logistics camp. Heard that this afternoon, a batch of damaged magical implements shipped back from the front lines... seems something extraordinary got mixed in. It injured two stewards responsible for inventory. That area is now sealed off, and they're searching everywhere for someone knowledgeable about ancient formations to take a look."

Su Ming's heart sank with a thud.

Shipped from the front lines? Injured stewards?

Could it be...

"Our battalion commander just issued an order for you to go there first thing tomorrow morning." Zhao Tiji patted Su Ming's shoulder. "Said they specifically requested you by name. Seems your reputation from repairing that Thunder Wood Formation last time has spread."

Su Ming narrowed his eyes slightly.

Reputation—sometimes it's a protective talisman, and sometimes, it's a death warrant.

"Understood." Su Ming nodded, his expression unchanged. "Brother Zhao, I'd like to rest early tonight."

"Alright, you've been busy for three days and must be exhausted. Get some sleep." Zhao Tiji didn't overthink it, dispersing with the others.

Su Ming pushed open the stone door and sealed it with a restriction.

He didn't rest immediately. Instead, he sat cross-legged and took out that vial of "Thunder Origin Liquid."

"Master, it seems we can't keep a low profile even if we want to," Su Ming said softly, looking at the purple liquid in the vial.

"What's there to fear?" Lin Yu's voice carried a hint of roguishness. "When soldiers come, we block them with generals; when water comes, we contain it with earth. As long as we aren't greedy and don't touch those deadly core secrets, even if the sky falls, taller people will hold it up. Hurry up and refine this stuff. Your physical body is too weak. If we ever truly need to flee one day, don't get winded after just a couple of steps."

Su Ming took a deep breath, pulled out the stopper, tilted his head back, and swallowed that drop of Thunder Origin Liquid.

Boom!

A violent surge of heat instantly exploded in his abdomen, transforming into countless tiny thunder serpents that burrowed into his limbs and bones.

Su Ming grunted, clenched his teeth, and began circulating the *Like Water Art*, guiding that violent force, bit by bit, to temper his meridians and bones.

And deep within the soil beneath him, that Wood Demon Core Fragment engraved with the "Spiritual Resonance Resonance" rune was, in sync with his breathing, emitting an extremely faint, rhythmic pulse that only he could perceive.

That pulse penetrated the rock layers, extending deeper, further into the dark underground.

Down there, that "river" seemed to sense something. The speed of its flow quickened slightly.

Chapter 305: Curse Bone

When Su Ming rushed to the logistics camp, he found it completely sealed off by a dark red formation light barrier.

This was not the Fortress Wall formation for defending against external enemies, but a "Spirit Locking Barrier" meant to prevent internal energy from leaking out.

The air was filled with a nauseating smell of rust, not the rust of weapons, but closer to the scent of old, dried blood, yet mixed with an indescribably cloying, sweet, and fishy stench.

"Do not approach that red line!"

A black-armored Enforcement Team cultivator sharply stopped a menial post disciple who was trying to crane his neck for a look.

Su Ming stopped walking, his gaze sweeping over the edge of the sealed area.

On the snowy ground there, several low-level menial post disciples wearing gray numbered uniforms lay scattered in disarray.

They had no visible external injuries, but each of their bodies was twitching at an extremely unnatural frequency.

Su Ming narrowed his eyes slightly.

Even from over a dozen zhang away, he could clearly see that the disciples' eyeballs had rolled upwards, the whites of their eyes covered in spiderweb-like blood vessels, and white foam continuously spilled from the corners of their mouths. More terrifying were their hands, which were digging desperately into the frozen earth, fingernails torn and bloody, yet they seemed to feel no pain. They only made strange "heh heh" sounds in their throats, like drowning people desperately trying to breathe.

"This is a sign of their souls being impacted."

Within his Consciousness Sea, Lin Yu's voice carried a rare trace of gravity.

Su Ming's fingers curled slightly within his sleeves as he activated the Aura Concealment Art, suppressing his own energy fluctuations to the minimum. Only then did he walk quickly towards the entrance of the sealed area.

The cultivator on guard recognized the Formation Hub token at Su Ming's waist. After verifying it, his face pale, he let him pass, whispering a final warning, "Formation Cultivator Su, be careful. The thing inside... is very sinister."

Su Ming nodded and stepped over the red line.

The moment he entered the barrier, that oppressive feeling suddenly multiplied.

In the center of the ruins of Warehouse C, several figures stood in a circle, the atmosphere so heavy it felt like water could drip from it.

Leading them was none other than Spiritual Hub Hall's Golden Core Formation Master, Elder Mo.

This old man, who usually always smiled amiably like a wealthy merchant, now had his brows tightly furrowed. He paced back and forth among the piles of charred magical implement fragments, the formation plate in his hand spinning wildly, unable to settle on a fixed position.

Beside him stood two red-robed Vessel Hall stewards, as well as several Foundation Establishment stage formation masters whose faces were ashen.

And at the focal point of everyone's gaze was a section of... bone, mixed among a pile of shattered formation plates and broken flying swords.

It was a section of pale white thigh bone.

It didn't look very long, roughly only two chi, its entire body white as jade. Its surface even shimmered with a fine, glaze-like luster, appearing completely out of place amidst this pile of charred, filthy ruins, so clean it was eerie.

But the moment Su Ming laid eyes on it, a sharp pain stabbed between his eyebrows.

"Bzzz—"

No sound actually entered his ears, but a sharp, piercing shriek instantly echoed in Su Ming's mind.

The sound was like countless steel needles simultaneously stabbing into his brain marrow, or like the screech of fingernails scraping across glass, causing an inexplicable surge of irritation and nausea.

"Do not probe it directly with your divine sense!"

Elder Mo suddenly turned his head and barked at Su Ming, who had just entered, "That thing will 'bite' onto your divine sense!"

Su Ming immediately reined in his focus, performing an act of staggering back in fright, his face appropriately turning a few shades paler. He cupped his hands and said, "Elder Mo, what is this..."

"A 'trophy' transported back from the front lines."

Elder Mo snorted coldly, his gaze sweeping towards the two Vessel Hall stewards beside him, his tone carrying undisguised anger. "The people from the Vessel Hall said it was excellent artifact forging material, suspected to be the life-bound bone of some high-level demon beast. They wanted to strike while the iron was hot and use the 'Earth Fire Mingyi Formation' to refine the murderous aura within it. The result..."

The slightly plump Vessel Hall steward next to him wiped cold sweat from his forehead and awkwardly defended, "Elder Mo, we were just following procedure. Who knew this bone would react so violently when exposed to fire? That tremor just now nearly shattered the entire warehouse district's defensive formations..."

"Following procedure?" Elder Mo laughed in extreme anger. "Your procedure is to indiscriminately set a fire first? Well done. Not only did you fail to force out the murderous aura, you activated the vicious nature within it instead. Now who dares to touch it? You go?"

The plump steward shrank his neck, not daring to respond.

The several menial post disciples lying on the ground earlier were a cautionary tale. They were merely responsible for moving waste materials, got a little too close, and had their souls scattered by the leaking energy.

"Su Ming, you've come just in time."

Elder Mo took a deep breath, suppressing his anger, and beckoned Su Ming over. "Your 'water grinding' technique is delicate, and water-attribute spiritual energy is best at containment. Stand three zhang away and try using a gentle force to probe the energy field flow around this thing. See if you can find a point of entry for sealing it. Remember, do not force a confrontation!"

"Yes."

Su Ming responded and carefully moved forward a few steps, stopping at a spot three zhang away from that section of white bone.

He did not act immediately, but first adjusted his breathing.

"Master, activate 'observation micro state'," Su Ming silently recited in his heart.

"Activated. Be careful, this thing smells wrong." Lin Yu's voice carried a hint of disgust. "Wrap your divine sense in water spiritual energy, don't let it go bare."

Su Ming closed his eyes slightly. When he opened them again, the depths of his pupils had turned a deep blue.

The originally pale white bone instantly transformed in his vision.

That was no white jade-like beast bone.

Under the microscopic view, that fine, glaze-like surface was actually densely covered with minute, invisible patterns.

Those patterns were not naturally formed, but man-made carvings.

They twisted and coiled, like countless tiny venomous snakes entangled together, forming ferocious, agonized human face patterns.

What made Su Ming's scalp tingle even more was that the interior of this bone section was not solid, but filled with honeycomb-like pores.

Black murderous aura flowed rapidly within these pores. Every impact against the pore walls would trigger a vibration. These vibrations, amplified through those eerie human face patterns, formed that soul-targeting shriek.

"This is... a curse bone... This is an evil object 'refined' by the Demon Tribe!" Lin Yu's voice carried a mix of sudden realization and disgust. "I remember now! A similar thing was mentioned in the fragmented scroll 'Records of Southern Border Wonders: Evil Entities Chapter' in the sect's Transmission Pavilion! Among the Demon Tribe, there is a 'Soul Sacrifice' lineage specializing in soul curses. They sometimes select specific living creatures' bones, process them with secret methods, carve malevolent curse patterns into them, and refine them into 'curse bones' or 'grudge bones'. This thing is usually used for casting curses or setting traps!"

Su Ming remembered that after becoming an outer sect disciple, to broaden his knowledge, he had indeed borrowed many jade slips and ancient texts on geographical records, strange tales, and exotic objects from the Transmission Pavilion. Lin Yu had also eagerly read along at the time, and with his far superior soul and insight, had memorized many obscure pieces of knowledge.

"Curse bone?" Su Ming's heart tightened.

"Yes. This is not some artifact forging material at all; it's a 'trap' specifically designed to harm people." Lin Yu quickly analyzed. "See those pores? If any cultivator tries to probe it with divine sense, or refine it with spiritual fire, their divine sense will be sucked into these pores. Inside, it will be infinitely stretched, torn apart, and finally become nourishment for this bone."

"The fools from the Vessel Hall refining it with fire was like feeding it a meal, directly activating the self-destruct restriction inside."

Su Ming was inwardly horrified.

This thing being mixed in with the wreckage and transported to the rear was a conspiracy in itself.

If the Vessel Hall people had added more fire earlier, probably everyone in the entire Warehouse C district would have suffered severe soul trauma, possibly even affecting the nearby Formation Hub Tower.