

TRANSMIGRATED INTO A GRANDPA, EMBRACING THE LAID-BACK LIFE

Chapter 306: The Spirit Sealing Box

"Disciple, we absolutely cannot get involved in this matter," Lin Yu warned. "This thing involves high-level curse techniques of the Demon Tribe. If you, a mere Qi Refining stage cultivator, could actually see through it, you'd immediately be labeled a spy. Play dumb. You must play dumb."

Su Ming calmly withdrew his gaze.

He slowly raised his right hand, a mass of dark blue water mist coalescing in his palm.

The water mist did not directly touch the bone. Instead, it drifted like a thin veil, slowly enveloping the three-foot space around the bone.

"Sizzle—"

The moment the water mist drew near, it was as if cold water had been splashed into boiling oil, churning violently.

The piece of white bone seemed to sense the approach of foreign spiritual energy, and the frequency of its vibrations suddenly increased.

"Ah—!"

A Foundation Establishment stage Formation Master standing behind Su Ming suddenly clutched his ears, let out a scream, two streams of black blood flowing from his nostrils as he swayed unsteadily.

"Fall back!" Elder Mo's expression drastically changed. With a sweep of his large sleeve, a barrier of spiritual energy shielded the group.

Su Ming also took the opportunity to stumble back several steps, dispersing the water mist in his hand. A look of shaken terror appeared on his face, cold sweat beading on his forehead.

"How was it?" Elder Mo asked urgently.

Su Ming gasped for breath heavily, his eyes filled with "confusion" and "apprehension."

"Elder Mo, this disciple... this disciple is incompetent."

Su Ming's voice trembled slightly, his words rapid. "The moment my water spiritual energy got close, I felt an extremely chaotic suction force. The feeling... it was like facing a bottomless whirlpool. All the spiritual energy fluctuations were being swallowed, impossible to probe to the bottom."

He paused, then used a more common analogy fitting his status: "This thing is like a leather pouch filled with air, full of chaotic, swirling currents inside. The Vessel Hall's fire refinement earlier was like heating up this pouch, causing the air inside to expand, ready to explode at any moment. If we apply external pressure again, I'm afraid it will shatter directly."

Su Ming did not mention "Curse Bone," much less a Demon Tribe priest.

He only described the phenomenon and gave a conclusion of "cannot use brute force."

Hearing this, Elder Mo's brows furrowed even tighter.

"Whirlpool... suction..." Elder Mo muttered to himself, his gaze towards the white bone growing increasingly grave. "If even water spiritual energy cannot penetrate and pacify it, then the internal structure of this thing is probably already completely disordered."

"What do we do then?" The plump steward panicked. "This thing keeps screaming, the vibrations are getting stronger. If this continues, the sealing formation won't hold!"

Just as everyone was at a loss, a cold, sharp voice suddenly came from mid-air.

"A bunch of useless fools."

The voice wasn't loud, yet it instantly drowned out the bone's piercing shriek.

Everyone looked up.

They saw a streak of escape light pierce through the air, instantly landing in the center of the ruins.

The newcomer wore brocade robes, his expression indifferent. It was none other than the Formation Hub steward of Iron Wall Pass, Wu Miao.

Wu Miao didn't even glance at the people around him. His gaze fell directly on the trembling white bone.

"A mere Demon Tribe 'Ghost Wailing Stake,' and it has you all in such a panic, even requiring my personal attention?"

Wu Miao snorted coldly and waved his large sleeve.

A jade box, crystal clear throughout and emanating a shocking chill, materialized out of thin air.

The moment the jade box opened, a bone-chilling coldness that seemed capable of freezing souls swept across the area. Su Ming felt his entire body tense up, even the circulation of spiritual energy within him slowing down noticeably.

"Is this... a Spirit-Sealing Box made from a thousand-year Water Jade Heart?" In the Consciousness Sea, Lin Yu whistled. "Tsk tsk, the rich sure are rich. This equipment is luxurious enough."

Wu Miao formed a hand seal with his right hand and pointed towards the piece of white bone from a distance.

"Seal!"

With his low shout, a thick, mercury-like silver liquid surged from the Water Jade Box, instantly enveloping the white bone.

The bone, which had been madly vibrating, under the wrapping of this silver liquid, became like an insect trapped in amber. Its struggling movements instantly froze solid.

Those invisible "Wraith Corridors" were forcibly frozen by this extreme cold force. All sound abruptly ceased.

The entire storage area instantly returned to a deathly silence.

Wu Miao flipped his palm. The liquid enveloping the bone rapidly flowed back into the jade box. With a *click*, the lid closed.

A golden talisman automatically appeared, adhering to the lid. As spiritual light flowed across it, it completely isolated all aura.

"Done."

Wu Miao held the jade box in one hand, turned around, and swept his cold gaze over the people present, finally pausing briefly on Su Ming.

"Can't even handle such a minor matter, forcing me to personally intervene."

Wu Miao looked at Elder Mo. Although his tone was somewhat more polite, it still carried a hint of a reprimand. "Elder Mo, the Formation Hub cannot be left unattended. The screening work in this logistics camp needs to be expedited. If something like this gets mixed in again and the higher-ups hold us accountable, we will face punishment together."

Elder Mo's face stiffened slightly, but he still cupped his hands respectfully. "Steward Wu speaks the truth."

Wu Miao said nothing more. Transforming into a streak of escape light, he shot into the sky with the jade box, disappearing in the direction of the Formation Hub Tower in the blink of an eye.

Only after the Golden Core stage pressure completely dissipated did everyone present collectively let out a sigh of relief.

The two Vessel Hall stewards even plopped down onto the ground, looking as if they'd been fished out of water.

"That was close..." The plump steward wiped his sweat. "Fortunately Steward Wu arrived in time, otherwise this disaster would have been huge."

Elder Mo looked in the direction Wu Miao had left, fell silent for a moment, then turned to look at Su Ming.

"Su Ming, just now you said that thing was like an air-filled leather pouch, that it couldn't be pressed hard?" Elder Mo asked.

Su Ming hurriedly bowed. "It was just this disciple's foolish opinion, spoken carelessly."

"No, you were right."

Elder Mo shook his head, a flash of appreciation in his eyes. "Although Steward Wu's method just now seemed like forceful sealing, the Water Jade

Box he used contained 'Heavy Water of the Supreme Yin.' That is the ultimate substance for overcoming hardness with softness. It wasn't brute force suppression, but freezing. Although your cultivation is insufficient, your discernment is far better than those fire-playing brutes in the Vessel Hall."

Hearing this, the two Vessel Hall stewards nearby flushed and paled alternately, not daring to refute.

"Alright, everyone disperse."

Elder Mo waved his hand, looking weary. "Take those injured to recuperate. Su Ming, come with me."

Chapter 307: The Exquisite Chess Game

Elder Mo led Su Ming through two stone doors covered in restrictive arrays, arriving at a meditation room located at the very top of the Spiritual Hub Hall.

There was no underfloor heating here, making the temperature much lower than outside. The walls were all made of bluish-grey basalt, and aside from a star chart and a Go board placed on a low table, there was nothing else.

"Sit."

Elder Mo wasted no words, sitting directly on one side of the Go board. With a wave of his large sleeve, the scattered black and white stones on the board seemed to come alive, returning to their positions on their own.

Su Ming sat down as instructed, his gaze falling on the board. This was not ordinary Go. The board had nineteen intersecting lines in each direction, each line faintly glowing with spiritual light. The intersections were not solid points but slightly depressed holes, like miniature formation cores.

"This is the 'Ingenious Go' board." Elder Mo picked up a black stone. "It does not test combat, only demonstrates formation principles. For this game, I will set up the 'Trapped Dragon Formation.' You break it."

Click.

The black stone landed, and a murderous aura instantly rose from the board.

Su Ming felt his vision blur. The board seemed to transform into a towering cage, countless black chains materializing out of thin air, twisting and tightening toward his position.

"Master?" Su Ming called out in his Consciousness Sea.

"Don't look at me, that old man is testing your fundamentals." Lin Yu's voice sounded lazily. "The black stones on this board are nodes of murderous aura, the white stones are spiritual energy hubs. What you need to do is not capture his stones, but let your own energy survive within his encirclement."

Su Ming took a deep breath and picked up a white stone.

The moment his fingertip touched the stone, the cool sensation instantly calmed his heated mind.

Click.

The white stone landed, driving a wedge into the gap where the black chains were about to close.

Elder Mo's expression remained unchanged as he immediately placed a second stone.

The two of them placed stones rapidly. At first, Su Ming could barely keep up, relying on the rigid patterns from the *True Meaning of Basic Rune Deconstruction*, meeting each move with a counter, using white stones to build defensive lines, stubbornly resisting the erosion of the black stones.

But by the thirtieth move, fine beads of sweat had appeared on Su Ming's forehead.

Elder Mo's playing style was too bizarre.

That black murderous aura did not just attack head-on, but flowed like quicksilver, seeping into every crack.

The moment Su Ming built up a defensive line, one of Elder Mo's black stones would land on the weakest connection point of that line. With a gentle pry, the entire line would collapse.

"You can't block it."

Su Ming's finger hovered in mid-air, unable to land for a long time.

On the board, the black stones had already formed an encircling formation. The white stones were cut into scattered fragments, like the shattered remnants of a dike washed away by a flood.

"What are you thinking about?" Elder Mo did not urge him, only asked calmly.
"Still thinking about how to repair that wall?"

Su Ming's heart jolted.

Earlier in the scrap warehouse, facing that piece of Curse Bone, Elder Mo had said: "Blocking is not as good as guiding."

"Master, if a dike is destined to collapse, where does the water flow?" Su Ming asked in his heart.

"Nonsense, water of course flows to lower ground." Lin Yu snorted with laughter. "Since you can't block it, then dig a ditch for it, let it flow to where you want it to go."

The confusion in Su Ming's eyes faded, replaced by a trace of deep blue in the depths of his pupils.

He did not place the white stone on that obvious defensive gap. Instead, his wrist turned, and he placed the stone on an empty spot outside the black stone encirclement that seemed completely unrelated.

Elder Mo raised an eyebrow, his pace of placing stones slowing slightly.

Su Ming no longer defended.

The placement of the white stones in his hand became increasingly scattered, seemingly without any pattern, hitting here and there. But under the "observation micro state" vision, extremely faint threads of water-attribute spiritual energy were quietly connecting these scattered white stones.

He no longer tried to build a solid city wall, but laid out a porous net.

The black murderous aura charged over, passing through the mesh of the net, but did not break the net's ropes. On the contrary, as that murderous aura passed through the mesh, it was split, guided, and ultimately flowed along the trajectory Su Ming had preset, toward the edge of the board, dissipating into nothingness.

"Interesting."

Elder Mo leaned forward slightly in his seat, the force behind his placed stones growing heavier.

The situation on the board changed.

The originally ferocious black dragon seemed to be stuck in a quagmire. No matter how it charged left and right, that seemingly weak white stone defensive line could always deform with its attacks, yet never break.

Water has no constant form.

Su Ming played more and more smoothly, the *Like Water Art* within him circulating on its own. He felt he was no longer playing Go, but dredging a silted-up river.

When the hundredth stone was placed.

The interwoven black and white on the board actually formed a balanced pattern resembling the Taiji symbol.

Though the black stones were numerous, they could not devour the white stones; though the white stones were few, they were tenacious, firmly occupying half the board.

"A draw."

Elder Mo tossed the stone in his hand back into the stone box, producing a crisp sound.

Only then did Su Ming snap back to reality, feeling his back soaked with cold sweat, the fatigue from extreme mental tension washing over him like a tide.

"This disciple... took a shortcut." Su Ming stood up and bowed.

Elder Mo did not look at him, but stared at the board for a long time before slowly speaking. "Those skilled at defense hide beneath the deepest earth; those skilled at attack move above the highest heavens. Your earlier playing style was rigid defense, the mark of a craftsman. Your later playing style finally touched the threshold of the path of formations."

Elder Mo reached into his sleeve and took out a jade slip glowing with an ancient yellow hue, placing it on the low table.

"Most formation masters within the pass come from the Vessel Hall or are battle cultivators. Their actions are overly rigid and forceful, lacking in spiritual flexibility. When facing beast tide impacts, they only know to reinforce the light barrier, meeting force with force."

Elder Mo raised his head, a flash of sharp light passing through his somewhat cloudy old eyes. "But formations are, by nature, about borrowing the power of heaven and earth. Since you are borrowing power, you must follow the momentum. Blocking is not as good as guiding, and guiding is not as good as channeling. Since you cultivate a water-attribute method, you should understand this principle."

Su Ming received the jade slip with both hands. A sweep with his divine sense revealed four ancient seal script characters carved on it — *Thesis on Formation Hub Management*.

"This is not some profound secret manual, just some insights I've gained over the years repairing formations at Iron Wall Pass." Elder Mo waved his hand. "Take it back and study it."

"Yes, this disciple takes his leave."

Su Ming carefully stored the jade slip close to his body and respectfully withdrew from the meditation room.

Only after walking out of the Spiritual Hub Hall and being hit by the cold wind outside did he finally let out a long sigh.

"Master, did that old man see through something?" Su Ming rubbed his nose.

"He saw that you're a slippery character." Lin Yu turned over in the Consciousness Sea. "But this jade slip is a good thing. What it talks about isn't how to set up formations, but how to 'modify' them. For someone like you who started halfway with an unstable foundation, it perfectly patches up your weak points."

Su Ming glanced back at that towering stone pagoda, then turned and disappeared into the wind and snow.

Chapter 308: Formation Like a Net

Three days later, deep into the night.

The alarm bell of Iron Wall Pass tore through the night sky without warning.

"Enemy attack! Sector C, all personnel, prepare for battle!"

A piercing roar erupted alongside the blare of war horns.

Su Ming practically leapt up fully clothed, snatched the formation plate by his pillow, and charged out of Stone Hut Number Seven.

The world outside was already in chaos.

Under the black curtain of night, countless greenish glowing dots drifted outside the pass like will-o'-the-wisps, accompanied by the grating sound of claws scraping and low, rumbling growls.

"It's Crimson-Eyed Wolf Demons! Over a thousand! And there are Wind Jackals behind them stirring up the wind!"

Zhao Tiji, holding that massive formation clamp, stood at the very front of the defense line and bellowed, "Old Liu, take some men and hold the left flank! Chen Chuan, don't let any that slip through get inside! Su Ming, keep an eye on the formation nodes! The light barrier must not break!"

"Understood!"

Su Ming crouched low and quickly ducked into a semi-underground bunker located behind the defense line.

This was the formation control position for the Third Squad of Bing Battalion.

Through the observation slit, Su Ming saw the snowfield outside the pass swarming with dense masses of Crimson-Eyed Wolf Demons surging forward like a tide. These wolf demons were the size of oxen, with crimson eyes, and as they ran, they spewed foul, poisonous smoke from their mouths. Behind

the wolf pack, several scrawny but winged "Wind Jackals" were crouched on the backs of the alpha wolves, emitting sharp shrieks that whipped up blades of wind, slashing viciously against the defensive light barrier.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The light barrier trembled violently, rippling in layers.

"Damn it, why are there so many this time!" Zhao Tiji smashed the head of a wolf demon that had squeezed through a gap in the barrier with a hammer, splattering himself with blood and brains. "Brother Su, can the formation hold?"

"It can hold, but we can't just take the beating!"

Su Ming's voice, transmitted via a sound transmission talisman, sounded in the ears of the squad members, unnervingly calm.

He sat cross-legged inside the bunker, both hands spread open, his fingertips connected to over a dozen faintly glowing blue spiritual energy threads.

These threads passed through the ground, connecting to the twenty-four formation plate nodes buried at the forefront of their defensive sector.

Over the past few days, Su Ming had studied the *Thesis on Formation Hub Management* and combined it with Lin Yu's "programming mindset," weaving the originally independent formation plates together with spiritual energy threads into a dynamic "formation net."

"Let them in a little," Su Ming commanded in a low voice.

"What?" Zhao Tiji was taken aback.

"The first three light barriers are overloading with spiritual pressure. Taking the hits head-on will cause them to blow. Let them into the buffer zone. I'll handle it."

Su Ming didn't explain further, his fingers giving a slight hook.

The originally impenetrable first light barrier suddenly split open a gap.

Dozens of Crimson-Eyed Wolf Demons, already blood-crazed, roared and charged through the opening, heading straight for Chen Chuan and the others behind the line.

"Looking for death!" Chen Chuan snorted coldly, his longsword leaving its sheath.

But before he could strike, Su Ming moved.

"Trap."

Su Ming's left-hand fingers pressed down violently.

The ground beneath those wolf demons suddenly became soft as mud, the originally frozen, hard earth instantly turning into quicksand.

The dozen or so wolf demons at the front, caught completely off guard, sank their front legs into it. Their massive momentum sent their bodies pitching forward, tumbling over each other like dumplings dropped into a pot.

"Frost Mist."

Su Ming brought two fingers of his right hand together and flicked them upward.

The formation plates buried on both sides instantly spewed forth massive amounts of white, frigid mist.

This wasn't ordinary fog, but a heavy mist mixed with viscous water-attribute spiritual energy.

The wolf demons, coated in this mist, instantly slowed down. Their originally fierce pounces turned into slow-motion replays.

"Kill!"

Though astonished, Zhao Tiji reacted with lightning speed. He would never pass up an opportunity to beat a drowning dog.

His giant hammer swung, stirring up a bloody whirlwind.

The wolf demons, trapped in the quicksand and coated in frost, had no way to dodge. They could only let out miserable howls as they were smashed into pulp.

Chen Chuan's sword was even faster, a flash of lightning specifically aimed at the throats of the still-struggling wolf demons.

This wave of assault ended without a single injury in Squad C-Seven.

"Damn satisfying!" Zhao Tiji wiped the blood from his face and laughed heartily. "Brother Su, your formation is incredible! Those beasts practically stuck their necks out asking to be slaughtered!"

Inside the bunker, Su Ming wasn't smiling.

Sweat beaded on his forehead. The movements of his hands grew faster and faster, his ten fingers dancing as if playing a fierce, impassioned symphony.

This "formation net," while flexible, consumed an immense amount of divine sense and spiritual energy. The slightest tremor of each spiritual energy thread required his precise control.

"Watch out, the Wind Jackals are about to launch wind blades! Position Qian-three, evade!"

Su Ming suddenly warned.

Zhao Tiji and Chen Chuan instinctively rolled to either side.

The instant they left their original spots, three crescent-shaped wind blades shrieked past, slamming into the ground and carving three bottomless trenches.

"There!"

A cold glint flashed in Su Ming's eyes.

He had pinpointed the location of those Wind Jackals.

"Rise!"

Su Ming's hands suddenly clapped together.

Several discarded formation plate fragments, seemingly useless and scattered at the edges of the battlefield, suddenly glowed with a faint light.

Several sharp icicles erupted without warning from the snow, their angles extremely tricky, piercing precisely into the abdomens of those Wind Jackals preparing to cast their spells again.

"Awooo—!"

The Wind Jackals let out shrill screams, tumbling from the backs of the alpha wolves.

With the Wind Jackals' support gone, the wolf pack's offensive power instantly weakened by thirty percent.

"Nicely done!"

A squad leader from a nearby sector, witnessing this, couldn't help but roar in approval.

For a full hour.

On the defense line of Bing Battalion, the sounds of battle cries shook the heavens.

While other squads were struggling desperately to hold on, the defensive sector of Squad C-Seven, though appearing precarious with its light barrier flickering open and closed, saw any demon beasts that broke through being controlled, divided, and efficiently slaughtered almost immediately.

Su Ming was like an invisible commander, weaving a net of death with those unseen spiritual energy threads.

When the dawn's light finally pierced the darkness, the wolf pack retreated like the ebbing tide, leaving behind a field littered with corpses.

Zhao Tiji plopped down on a pile of dead bodies, gasping for breath, the giant hammer in his hand slightly deformed.

"It's over..."

He looked around and realized that while every member of his squad was wounded and spiritually exhausted, not a single one had fallen in battle.

In a medium-scale demon assault, this was practically a miracle.

Su Ming crawled out of the bunker, his face as pale as paper, his steps somewhat unsteady.

"Brother Su."

Zhao Tiji struggled to his feet and walked over to Su Ming.

This usually loud and boisterous man now looked at Su Ming with an unprecedented gravity in his eyes.

"I used to think formation masters were just guys hiding in the back, patching things up."

Zhao Tiji extended a large, blood-stained hand and gave Su Ming's shoulder a heavy pat. "Today, I'm convinced."

Not far away, Chen Chuan, who was wiping his longsword, also looked up.

That usually silent, ice-like swordsman fixed his gaze on Su Ming and gave a rare, slight nod.

"Thank you."

Chen Chuan's voice was still cold and hard, but only those who knew him well understood the weight of those two words.

Su Ming waved a hand dismissively, trying to force a smile, only to find the muscles of his face somewhat stiff.

"We're all just trying to survive," Su Ming said softly.

Beep.

The token at his waist vibrated.

Su Ming looked down. The Military Merit value ticked upward.

In addition to the basic defense merit, a small line of text appeared below:

"Outstanding tactical coordination, inflicted heavy enemy casualties with minimal losses. Additional reward: Three hundred points."

Chapter 309: You call this garbage?

The victory celebration wine at Bing Battalion hadn't even finished being drunk when trouble came knocking.

Su Ming hadn't even had time to take a sip of hot tea when the tent flap was viciously kicked open by a foot clad in deerskin boots.

Three young men dressed in dark red short jackets walked in.

The leader was a tall fellow, carrying a heavy animal skin bag in his hand.

These were apprentices from the Vessel Hall.

At Iron Wall Pass, the Vessel Hall was in charge of the repair and distribution of all magical implements, their status always a notch higher than these wandering cultivators.

Zhao Tiji was gnawing on a lamb chop, his brows furrowing at the sight. He slapped the bone in his hand onto the table. "From the Vessel Hall? If you have business, state it. What's the rule about kicking doors?"

The tall apprentice glanced at Zhao Tiji, ignoring this blood-stained brute. His gaze swept around the tent, finally settling on Su Ming, who was wiping his fingers in the corner.

"You're that Su Ming?"

The tall fellow threw the animal skin bag in his hand onto the table in front of Su Ming.

With a clatter.

The mouth of the bag opened, and a pile of colorful, incomplete fragments spilled out, nearly knocking over the teacup by Su Ming's hand.

Su Ming reached out to steady the teacup, lifting his eyelids, his gaze calm. "What guidance do you have, Senior Brothers?"

"Guidance isn't the word." The tall apprentice crossed his arms, chin slightly raised. "We heard from Steward Zheng that you showed off some 'water grinding skill' at the Ancient Formation Repair Workshop, making us look utterly worthless. Saying we're not even as good as an outer sect self-taught formation cultivator."

He pointed at the pile of fragments on the table. "Since you're so capable, we'd like you to take a look. This is a set of 'Yin-Yang Mother-Child Formation Plates,' sent back from the front lines, severely damaged. We few dullards can't fix it. Since Junior Brother Su's methods are so brilliant, why not give us a live demonstration right here?"

Su Ming swept a glance over the fragments on the table.

This wasn't severe damage.

This was clearly dismantled into pieces, then deliberately mixing fragments from several formation plates of different attributes.

The break surfaces were fresh, some places even still had traces of being snapped by hand.

This was looking for trouble.

The air in the tent instantly solidified.

Zhao Tiji shot to his feet, his large palm like a cattail leaf fan pressing down on the giant hammer at his waist. Chen Chuan also placed his hand on his sword hilt.

"Looking for a fight?" Zhao Tiji gave a fierce grin. "Take a good look at whose territory this is."

Su Ming extended a finger, gently nudging the pile of fragments.

In his Consciousness Sea, Lin Yu's voice rang out with a hint of mockery. "Well now, disciple, this is a 'Yin-Yang Mother-Child Formation.' Even though they've messed it up, the core circuits are still there. If this thing gets fixed, it can be traded for quite a few good things."

"Zheng Tieshou has been trying to recruit me these past few days. These guys probably can't swallow their pride," Su Ming replied mentally.

"Can't swallow their pride? Good," Lin Yu chuckled. "Then let's make them even more furious."

A slight curve lifted the corner of Su Ming's mouth.

He stood up, ignoring the three aggressive apprentices, and instead picked up a fragment, holding it up to examine it.

"This formation plate is indeed 'trash' enough," Su Ming said lightly.

The tall apprentice sneered. "If you can't fix it, just say so. Don't make excuses. If you admit defeat, go kneel before Steward Zheng, admit you were just a blind cat stumbling upon a dead mouse, and stop loitering around the Vessel Hall entrance from now on."

"I mean, the original design was too trash."

Su Ming put down the fragment, extending both hands flat.

"Watch closely."

Before his words even finished, the spiritual energy within the Qihai of Su Ming's Dantian suddenly surged.

From the tips of his ten fingers, ten dark blue threads of spiritual energy instantly streamed out. These threads, as if alive, nimbly drilled into that chaotic pile of fragments.

Rise!

Su Ming's hands lifted slightly.

The hundreds of tiny broken pieces on the table actually all floated up simultaneously, slowly rotating in mid-air.

The tall apprentice's pupils contracted sharply, the sneer on his face freezing.

What kind of spiritual energy control technique was this?

Before he could even react, Su Ming's fingers began to move.

Fast.

So fast only afterimages remained.

Su Ming was like someone playing an invisible ancient zither, his ten fingers flying, so fast it dazzled the eyes.

Those floating fragments, guided by the spiritual energy threads, rapidly sought their own positions.

Click.

The first fragment returned to place.

Followed by the second, the third...

Dense metallic clinking sounds linked together, crisp and pleasant, like large and small pearls falling onto a jade plate.

"This piece isn't needed."

Su Ming flicked a finger. A red fragment that looked perfectly intact was flicked away by him, landing on the ground with a *ding*.

"What are you doing! That's the core flow-guiding piece of the child formation!" the tall apprentice shouted anxiously.

"That's deadweight."

Su Ming didn't even lift his head, his fingers continuing to dance. "Yin-Yang conversion, why go through a fire position relay? Using water directly as the bridge increases efficiency by at least ten percent."

As he spoke, a blue water bridge appeared out of thin air, directly connecting the originally severed Yin and Yang poles.

Hum—

As the final fragment fit perfectly into the main body, the entire formation plate emitted a low hum.

The originally dull, lusterless surface instantly lit up with two swirling halos, one black, one white. The halos, like a Taiji fish, head-to-tail, operated so smoothly it was even more fluid than a new one.

Su Ming withdrew his hands, dispersing the spiritual energy.

That "Yin-Yang Mother-Child Formation Plate," as large as a washbasin, landed steadily on the tabletop, spiritual light pulsing, without a hint of sluggishness.

Dead silence filled the tent.

The two followers gaped, their eyeballs nearly popping out. The tall apprentice looked as if he'd seen a ghost, pointing at the formation plate, his finger trembling, unable to speak for a long time.

From start to finish, it hadn't even taken half the time to finish a cup of tea.

The interference items they'd deliberately mixed in were precisely removed, the broken circuits perfectly repaired, and even... even the original design had been modified?

"This... this is impossible..." the tall apprentice muttered to himself, his face flushing to the color of pig liver.

"Nothing's impossible."

Su Ming picked up his teacup, blew on the floating tea leaves, his tone as flat as if discussing the weather. "Just used a bit more brain and a bit less useless talk than you."

"Excellent!"

A loud roar suddenly came from outside the tent flap.

The door curtain was lifted again, and Zheng Tieshou strode in. Behind him were a few old soldiers who had come to watch the commotion.

Zheng Tieshou's face was flushed red, clearly having just come from the drinking table, but his eyes were frighteningly bright.

He walked over to the table in a few steps, picked up the formation plate, turned it over and examined it twice, then channeled spiritual energy into it to test it.

"Marvelous!"

Zheng Tieshou slapped his thigh hard. "Removing the fire position flow-guiding piece, why didn't I think of that? With this modification, spiritual energy consumption is reduced by at least twenty percent!"

He suddenly turned around and kicked the tall apprentice in the backside.

"See that clearly? Huh?"

"Of course! Of course!"

Zheng Tieshou laughed heartily, dragging those three dejected apprentices out with him. "Come tomorrow! I'll save the best furnace for you!"

Only after that noisy group had walked far away did Zhao Tiji sidle over, looking at the still-glowing formation plate on the table with clicks of admiration.

"Brother Su, your skill is truly miraculous." Zhao Tiji gave a thumbs-up. "Did you see the looks on those brats' faces? Like they'd swallowed flies."

Su Ming smiled slightly, saying nothing.

Zhao Tiji pointed at the standard-issue black iron shield facing him.

"This damn thing is a real burden."

Zhao Tiji said, "Heavy as carrying a tombstone on your back. Last time when that Wind Jackal pounced, I could have dodged sideways and given it a hammer blow, but this shield dragged me down, nearly wrenching my lower back. This isn't protective gear; it's clearly a stumbling block helping the demon beasts."

Old Liu, who was nearby wrapping a cloth strip around his old, rheumatism-plagued leg that had caught a chill, snorted with a laugh upon hearing this. "You should be grateful. This 'Black Tortoise Shield' might be clumsy and heavy, but the 'Solid Armor Formation' on it is the real deal. If you'd had a lighter leather shield, that last claw swipe wouldn't have just wrenched your back; it would have gutted you."

"I get the principle, but this dead weight feel seriously messes with my performance." Zhao Tiji rubbed his sore wrist, his face full of displeasure. "If it were thirty percent lighter, I could pound the shit out of those wolf whelps."

Su Ming instantly understood that Zhao Tiji was too embarrassed to ask directly.

"Brother Zhao, can I take a look?"

Zhao Tiji promptly handed it over. "Look, it's just a lump of iron. Those bastards at the Vessel Hall only know how to pile on materials, they don't give a damn about whether it's comfortable for us to use."

Su Ming reached out and took the shield. It felt slightly heavy in his hand, roughly sixty *jin*. For a Foundation Establishment cultivator, it wasn't much, but in high-intensity combat, every ounce of excess weight would consume stamina exponentially.

"Master, activate 'Observation Micro State'."

A faint, dark blue light flickered deep within Su Ming's pupils.

In his vision, the spiritual energy circuits on the shield's surface became clearly visible. It was a standard "Solid Armor Formation." The spiritual energy lines were bold, thick, and heavy. All the nodes were like rigid, dead stones, tightly stacked together.

"Typical 'brute force' approach." Lin Yu's voice in the Consciousness Sea carried a hint of disdain, like someone critiquing a terrible movie. "Pursuing ultimate defensive power while completely sacrificing flexibility. It's like

strapping a security door to your arm; all the impact force has to be absorbed by the shield-bearer's bones. The defense holds, but the concussive force can numb a person's arm."

"Can it be modified?" Su Ming asked in his mind.

"Modifying the formation lines is too troublesome, and it easily gives those Vessel Hall guys an excuse to accuse you of damaging public property." Lin Yu yawned. "Change your approach. Since this shield is too 'dead,' then add something 'alive' to it. Remember the non-Newtonian fluid principle I taught you before? Or perhaps... Tai Chi?"

Su Ming's eyes lit up.

He set the shield down, not touching the formation lines on it. Instead, he fished out a blank talisman paper from his storage pouch, along with that bottle of "Azure Thunder Sand" slurry that wasn't fully used yet.

"Brother Su, this thing is hopeless, right?" Seeing Su Ming silent for a long time, Zhao Tiji thought he also looked down on this crude, clumsy object.

"The shield itself is fine; it's hard enough." Su Ming picked up the spirit brush, dipping its tip into the dark blue water-attribute spiritual energy. "The problem is it's too 'direct.' The force comes and goes straight, so naturally it feels heavy."

"Direct?" Zhao Tiji scratched his head, not understanding.

Su Ming didn't explain, raising the brush and setting it to paper.

This time, he wasn't drawing those angular, sharp defensive talismans, but rather a series of undulating curves like ripples on water.

Spiritual energy flowed from the brush tip, not solidifying into hard lines but maintaining a semi-fluid state. This was a little something Su Ming had recently devised by combining the *Like Water Art* with "force-dispersing" techniques.

In the time it takes to drink a cup of tea, a talisman emitting a faint blue light was completed.

The patterns on the talisman's surface resembled a pond of spring water gently ruffled by a breeze, looking soft and gentle.

"What's this?" Old Liu also leaned over, his single eye full of curiosity. "Looks soft and flimsy, like embroidery done by a woman."

"This is called the 'Flexible Water Force-Dispersing Formation.'"

Su Ming attached the talisman to the inside of the shield's handle, the spot where the arm bears the most force.

"Activate."

Su Ming pointed a finger, and the talisman instantly vanished into the shield.

The originally pitch-black shield surface suddenly shimmered with an extremely faint layer of watery light. This light wasn't static; it pulsed with a strange rhythm, like breathing.

"Brother Zhao, give it a try." Su Ming handed the shield back.

Zhao Tiji reached out to take it, half-believing, half-doubting.

The moment his palm touched the handle, his eyebrows shot up sharply.

"Huh?"

He tried swinging it a couple of times.

Whoosh—Whoosh—

The heavy shield cut through the air, stirring up a gust of wind.

"That's bizarre!" Zhao Tiji's eyes widened. "The weight clearly hasn't changed, so why does it feel so much lighter to swing? It's like... like swinging the shield underwater, with a kind of buoyancy supporting it!"

"It's not actually lighter." Su Ming explained. "Rather, the talisman creates a flowing force field on the shield's surface. When you swing it or receive force, this force field disperses the concentrated impact across the entire shield face instantly, like water ripples. With the force dispersed, the burden on your wrist naturally lessens."

"I don't believe it. Here, Old Liu, give me a chop!" Zhao Tiji grew excited, holding the shield horizontally before his chest.

Old Liu was also a tough character. Without a word, he drew the saber from his waist, turned the blade's back downward, and with half his strength, chopped fiercely onto the shield's surface.

Clang!

A crisp sound rang out.

Chapter 310: The Veteran's Spine

Steward Zheng Tieshou sprayed a mouthful of spittle onto the faces of those three. "Coming here to pick a fight with a bunch of deliberately broken junk, only to get utterly humiliated on the spot! My face has been thoroughly shamed by you blockheads!"

The tall apprentice covered his buttocks, head hung low, wishing he could find a crack in the ground to crawl into.

After scolding his disciples, Zheng Tieshou turned his face towards Su Ming, his expression instantly turning amiable and pleasant.

"Brother Su, that was a brilliant move!"

Zheng Tieshou rubbed his large, calloused hands together. "I've asked you before to come to the Vessel Hall for an exchange, but you always refused. Today's incident is due to my lax discipline. Alright, as an apology, come to the Vessel Hall, and you can pick any materials you want!"

Within the Consciousness Sea, Lin Yu shouted, "Disciple! Agree! Agree quickly! Hopefully the Vessel Hall has some Void Stone!"

Su Ming's hand holding the teacup tightened slightly.

"Steward Zheng, you exaggerate."

Su Ming set down the teacup, a signature, simple and honest smile appearing on his face. "Since the steward extends such a warm invitation, it would be ungrateful for this disciple to refuse again. Coincidentally, I've recently become quite interested in spatial formations. I'll have to trouble the steward for guidance then."

"Of course! Of course!"

Zheng Tieshou laughed heartily, dragging those three dejected apprentices out with him. "Come tomorrow! I'll save the best furnace for you!"

Only after that noisy group had walked far away did Zhao Tiji sidle over, looking at the still-glowing formation plate on the table with clicks of admiration.

"Brother Su, your skill is truly miraculous." Zhao Tiji gave a thumbs-up. "Did you see the looks on those brats' faces? Like they'd swallowed flies."

Su Ming smiled slightly, saying nothing.

Zhao Tiji pointed at the standard-issue black iron shield facing him.

"This damn thing is a real burden."

Zhao Tiji said, "Heavy as carrying a tombstone on your back. Last time when that Wind Jackal pounced, I could have dodged sideways and given it a hammer blow, but this shield dragged me down, nearly wrenching my lower back. This isn't protective gear; it's clearly a stumbling block helping the demon beasts."

Old Liu, who was nearby wrapping a cloth strip around his old, rheumatism-plagued leg that had caught a chill, snorted with a laugh upon hearing this. "You should be grateful. This 'Black Tortoise Shield' might be clumsy and heavy, but the 'Solid Armor Formation' on it is the real deal. If you'd had a lighter leather shield, that last claw swipe wouldn't have just wrenched your back; it would have gutted you."

"I get the principle, but this dead weight feel seriously messes with my performance." Zhao Tiji rubbed his sore wrist, his face full of displeasure. "If it were thirty percent lighter, I could pound the shit out of those wolf whelps."

Su Ming instantly understood that Zhao Tiji was too embarrassed to ask directly.

"Brother Zhao, can I take a look?"

Zhao Tiji promptly handed it over. "Look, it's just a lump of iron. Those bastards at the Vessel Hall only know how to pile on materials, they don't give a damn about whether it's comfortable for us to use."

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