

TRANSMIGRATED INTO A GRANDPA, EMBRACING THE LAID-BACK LIFE

Chapter 316: Formations for Strengthening the Defense Zone

Leaving the Ghost Market was even smoother than entering it.

Su Ming hurried along his way, deliberately sticking to the shadows.

It wasn't until he had completely left the area of the Supply Camp and returned to the familiar patrol route of Bing Battalion that the prickling sensation of being watched on his back finally dissipated.

Returning to Stone Hut Number Seven, the first thing Su Ming did was activate all the defensive formations.

"Minor Heavenly Cycle Water Rhythm Formation, rise."

"Spirit Response Spider Web, activate."

As streaks of spiritual light lit up one after another, the small stone hut was tightly wrapped in layer upon layer of restrictive spells.

Only then did Su Ming let out a long sigh of relief, plopping down on the stone bed, feeling the cold sweat on his back had already soaked through his clothes.

"Master, what did that Old Blind Man's last sentence mean?" Su Ming took out that grayish-white stone from his storage pouch and carefully placed it on the stone table.

"Exactly what it sounds like."

Lin Yu's figure materialized in the Consciousness Sea, his tone unusually serious. "This stone indeed carries a very faint trace of murderous aura. It's not demonic energy, nor ghostly energy, but a kind of... more ancient, more chaotic aura."

"You mean... the bugs?" Su Ming frowned.

"Very likely." Lin Yu nodded. "Void Stones are usually found accompanying spatial rifts or extremely deep earth vein faults. And such places are often also the nesting grounds where ancient aberrant species slumber. There are a few extremely fine scratch marks on the surface of this ore. They don't look like they were left by mining tools, more like marks from being gnawed by some kind of sharp teeth."

Su Ming leaned in for a closer look.

Sure enough, on the grayish-white stone skin, there were several extremely shallow scrape marks.

If you didn't look carefully, you wouldn't notice them at all.

But if you probed with divine sense, you would discover a trace of a heart-palpitating, violent aura lingering at the site of the scratches.

"Even Void Stone gets gnawed..." Su Ming felt a toothache coming on. "Just how good are the teeth of the bugs down there?"

"So, your premonition was correct." Lin Yu said gravely. "Those things underground might be more active than we imagined. The fact that this stone could end up in the Ghost Market indicates that someone—or some force—has already disturbed their nest."

Su Ming fell silent for a moment, then stood up and scooped a basin of clear water from the water jar in the corner.

"Regardless, we have the stone now."

Su Ming tossed that priceless "broken stone" into the water basin.

Plop.

The stone sank to the bottom, sending ripples across the water's surface.

Su Ming formed hand seals, circulated the Like Water Art, and shot a wisp of dark blue spiritual energy from his fingertip into the water.

"Cleanse!"

With his low shout, the clear water in the basin began to slowly rotate, forming a small vortex.

Wisps of grayish-black mist were forcibly extracted from within the stone, dissipating into the air.

"Master, how should we handle this stone?" Su Ming asked while maintaining his spiritual energy output.

"Soak it first, to get rid of the murderous aura." Lin Yu stretched lazily, returning to his usual indolent demeanor. "Tomorrow night, we can use the 'water grinding' method to slowly grind out the Void Stone powder inside. It's a bit slow, but the advantage is safety—it won't explode."

Su Ming gave a bitter smile. "Master, you're practically turning my Like Water Art into an 'all-purpose menial post technique.'"

"More skills never weigh you down." Lin Yu chuckled. "Besides, after you finish processing this stone, your divine sense control will definitely level up."

Hearing this, Su Ming's eyes lit up.

"Alright, I'll listen to Master."

Su Ming looked at the continuously swirling water in the basin, his gaze gradually turning resolute.

In this perilous Iron Wall Pass, every bit of increased strength was a bargaining chip for survival.

...

Early the next morning, as the sky was just beginning to brighten.

The training ground of Bing Battalion was already echoing with the sounds of drilling.

Su Ming, sporting dark circles under his eyes, pushed open the door of the stone hut.

He had guarded that water basin all night, fearing that stone might pull some trick, and only dared to rest a little after that grayish-black murderous aura had completely dissipated.

"Brother Su! Up so early?"

Zhao Tiji was just returning from outside, carrying his giant hammer, drenched in sweat, clearly having just completed a patrol on the city wall.

"How are things, Brother Zhao?" Su Ming yawned and asked casually.

"Same as usual."

Zhao Tiji wiped the sweat from his face.

Su Ming's heart stirred.

The words of the Old Blind Man last night, and that Void Stone with gnawing marks...

"Brother Zhao, I want to further reinforce the formation in our defense zone."
Su Ming suddenly said.

"Reinforce it again?" Zhao Tiji was taken aback. "Didn't we just lay down that spider web thing last time?"

"It's not enough."

Su Ming shook his head, his gaze falling to the hard frozen ground beneath his feet, as if seeing through the thick soil layer to that surging dark golden river moving in the darkness.

"I plan to bury another layer of 'Vibration Sensing Stakes' three zhang underground." Su Ming's voice was soft, yet carried an undeniable firmness. "I'll cover the materials myself. I just need you, Brother Zhao, to put in a word with the logistics department for me, so no one thinks I'm sabotaging things."

Zhao Tiji stared at Su Ming for a good while, then suddenly grinned, reaching out to give Su Ming's shoulder a heavy pat.

"Alright! When you handle things, I'm at ease! Even though I don't know what you're worried about, following your lead is definitely the right move!"

Zhao Tiji turned and left. "I'll go find Old Wang right now!"

Watching Zhao Tiji's hurried, energetic back, the corner of Su Ming's mouth lifted in a faint smile.

...

The frozen soil in the C-Seven defense zone was harder than wrought iron.

The cold wind swept up snowflakes, cutting into collars like blades.

Zhao Tiji, bare-chested, had steam rising from his bronze-colored muscles. Every time his fine iron pickaxe struck down, it sent out a shower of sparks.

"Brother Su, how much deeper does this pit need to be?" Zhao Tiji wiped the ice crystals from his face, his booming voice causing the surrounding accumulated snow to rustle and fall.

Su Ming squatted by the pit's edge, holding a formation stake carved from wolf bone. Dark blue spiritual energy flickered at his fingertips as he carved the final rune pattern onto it.

"Three chi and three cun. One fen less and it won't connect to the earth's energy; one fen more and it might be disrupted by the murderous aura in the frozen soil." Su Ming didn't even look up, his fingertip movements as steady as a rock.

"Got it!" Zhao Tiji chuckled, swinging his pickaxe with even more enthusiasm. "Listening to Brother Su is definitely the right move."

Behind him, Chen Chuan, Old Liu, and a few other veterans from Squad C-Seven were scattered in various corners of the defense zone. At each of their feet was a pile of seemingly insignificant "junk"—these were the formation nodes Su Ming had cobbled together from discarded formation plate fragments, low-level demon beast bones, and cheap ore scavenged from the Ghost Market.

"Master, will this 'Seven Stars in a Row' layout really work?" Su Ming handed the carved wolf bone formation stake to Zhao Tiji and asked within his Consciousness Sea.

Chapter 317: Weaving this place into an ironclad fortress

"What's this 'Seven Stars in a Row'? Don't make it sound so mysterious." Lin Yu's voice sounded lazily. "This is called a 'distributed local area network'. Before, you had a single-player version, one formation plate managing one area; if one broke, that area went blind. Now we're going to link them together."

Lin Yu paused, then added, "But in the cultivation world, this is called 'Qi Resonance'. Bury the seven main nodes on the 'acupoints' of the spiritual vein, and use the twenty-one secondary nodes as the 'meridians'. Once this net is woven, unless someone rips up this entire patch of land, no one will be able to sneak in without a sound."

Su Ming gave a slight nod, his gaze sweeping across the entire defense zone.

Under the "Observation Micro" state, the nodes already buried were emitting faint spiritual energy fluctuations. These fluctuations did not exist in isolation; they had a peculiar rhythm, like breathing. When a node in the east brightened, a node in the west would dim in response, as if an invisible thread tightly bound them together.

This was what Su Ming wanted to construct—the Spiderweb Interconnected Defense System.

"Bury it!"

With Su Ming's command, Zhao Tiji thrust the wolf bone formation stake hard into the bottom of the pit.

Hum.

An extremely faint tremor sounded.

The snow on the ground gave a slight jump.

Immediately after, as if a domino had been pushed over, starting from the main node, streams of ghostly light imperceptible to the naked eye darted rapidly beneath the snow layer, instantly lighting up the other twenty secondary nodes.

The previously scattered spiritual energy fluctuations suddenly became uniform and orderly.

An indescribable sense of heaviness enveloped the entire Bing-7 Defense Zone.

"It's done."

Su Ming straightened his back, patted the dirt off his hands, and let out a long, deep breath.

"That's it?" Old Liu came over, his single eye scanning the surroundings.

"Looks no different from before to me? No light barrier rose up either."

"Light barriers consume too many spirit stones; they're for withstanding demonic arts head-on. Our 'Iron Bucket Formation' emphasizes the principle of 'stickiness'." A faint curve appeared at the corner of Su Ming's mouth as he turned to look at Chen Chuan, who was wiping his sword. "Brother Chen, care to give it a try?"

Chen Chuan raised his eyelids at the words, his longsword emitting a clear, crisp hum.

"How?"

"Attack with full force to get in here." Su Ming pointed to the outer perimeter of the defense zone. "Hold nothing back; treat us as the wolf pack."

Chen Chuan wasted no words. Sword in hand, he turned and walked about fifty zhang outside the defense zone.

He took a deep breath, and the spiritual energy of his Qi Refining Perfection realm erupted abruptly. His entire body transformed into a blur, the longsword wrapped in a biting, cold light, thrusting straight towards Su Ming at the center of the defense zone.

Fast.

Swift as a startled swan.

Chen Chuan came from a wandering cultivator background; his swordsmanship had no flashy moves, only killing techniques.

If this thrust landed solidly, even a Foundation Establishment early-stage cultivator would have to temporarily retreat.

Zhao Tiji and Old Liu both involuntarily held their breath.

The moment Chen Chuan stepped within thirty zhang of the defense zone.

The seemingly ordinary jade pendant hanging at Su Ming's waist suddenly glowed with a flicker of red light.

"Three breaths." Su Ming whispered the count.

This was the warning.

There was no need to constantly extend divine sense. As long as any foreign spiritual energy fluctuation intruded into the "spiderweb's" coverage area, the resonance between nodes would be disrupted, triggering the alarm.

Chen Chuan's speed was extreme; in the blink of an eye, he had already advanced to within ten zhang.

"Rise."

Su Ming's left hand formed a seal, pressing lightly against the void.

The previously calm air suddenly became viscous.

It wasn't a substantial wall-like obstruction, but a sluggish sensation as if one had sunk into a swamp.

Chen Chuan felt the sword tip in his hand plunge into a thick wad of cotton batting; his originally sharp and fierce sword momentum instantly faltered.

The flowing spiritual energy around him was no longer an aid but had turned into countless invisible little hands, stubbornly dragging at his wrists and ankles.

His speed visibly slowed down.

By at least forty percent.

"This..." Zhao Tiji's eyes widened.

On the battlefield, being a fraction slower meant death.

Slower by forty percent? That was washing your own neck clean and waiting to be slaughtered.

Chen Chuan frowned tightly, let out a low shout, and stirred the spiritual energy within his body, attempting to forcefully break through this restraint.

The sword tip trembled, accelerating once more.

"Turn."

Su Ming's right hand formed a sword finger and lightly flicked it.

The flow of spiritual energy that had been stubbornly dragging at Chen Chuan suddenly changed.

It was no longer blocking, but pushing sideways.

It was like a raging river suddenly taking a turn.

Chen Chuan's sure-kill thrust, when it was still three chi away from Su Ming, bizarrely slid to the right.

Sssshh!

The sword qi grazed the corner of Su Ming's clothes, viciously slashing into the frozen ground beside him, sending a spray of gravel flying.

Chen Chuan sheathed his sword and stood still, looking at his slightly trembling wrist, his eyes filled with disbelief.

In that instant just now, he felt he wasn't thrusting at a person, but wrestling with the entire heaven and earth. That stifling feeling of being unable to exert his strength made him want to vomit blood in frustration.

"What kind of ghostly formation is this?" Chen Chuan couldn't help but ask, his voice carrying a trace of awe.

"Spiderweb." Su Ming smiled, dispersing the hand seal in his hand. "Once you're in the web, the more you struggle, the tighter it entangles you. Unless your power can instantly tear apart the combined spiritual energy of these twenty-one nodes, the flow of spiritual energy is under my control."

"Incredible! Truly goddamn incredible!"

Zhao Tiji slapped his thigh, his face flushed red with excitement, "With this thing, next time the wolf pack comes again, I won't have to chase their tails; standing still, I can chop down three more wolves!"

Old Liu also wore a look of joy, stroking the stubble on his chin: "And it's quiet, perfect for ambushing. If those beasts charge in, slip under their feet, and we go up for a slash, heh heh..."

Looking at the excited group, the smile on Su Ming's face did not reach his eyes.

The reason he went to such lengths to set up this "Spiderweb Interconnected Defense" was not merely to deal with the wolf pack.

More importantly, this system was equally sensitive to vibrations underground.

In a life-or-death moment, this was the distance between life and death.

Twilight enveloped everything.

The cheers in the Bing-7 Defense Zone gradually subsided. The veteran soldiers gathered in twos and threes around the campfires, roasting tough jerky and discussing that miraculous "Iron Bucket Formation."

Su Ming sat alone on a large rock at the edge of the defense zone, holding a jade slip recording data, reviewing the earlier drill.

Suddenly, the fingers holding the jade slip tightened slightly.

Someone was here.

It wasn't an enemy attack, because the "Spiderweb" hadn't sounded an alarm.

The newcomer hadn't triggered any spiritual energy fluctuations, just like a gust of wind, naturally blending into the surrounding world.

Su Ming slowly turned around and respectfully bowed towards an empty patch of shadow outside the defense zone.

"Disciple Su Ming pays his respects to Elder Mo."

The shadow twisted slightly, and a gaunt old man wearing a gray cloth robe slowly materialized.

It was indeed Elder Mo from the Spiritual Hub Hall.

He stood with his hands clasped behind his back. His somewhat turbid old eyes swept over the nodes Su Ming had set up, finally landing on Su Ming himself.

"Quite interesting."

Elder Mo's voice was hoarse, revealing neither joy nor anger. "Using points to drive surfaces, spiritual energy resonance. You've applied the listening

method from the 'Spiritual Resonance Resonance Fragment' to a defensive formation?"

Su Ming was inwardly surprised. So similar formations already existed?

"Elder Mo has discerning eyes," Su Ming said, bowing his head. "This disciple merely felt that pure defense is too passive. If the formation could be like a spiderweb, capable of both sensing and trapping prey, it might be more suitable for our small, understaffed squad."

Elder Mo didn't speak, simply stepping into the defense zone.

With each step he took, the snow underfoot emitted a faint crunching sound.

But in Su Ming's "observation micro state" vision, each of Elder Mo's steps landed precisely on the nodes of spiritual energy flow. He didn't disrupt the formation; instead, he walked along the formation's "momentum."

Like a drop of water merging into a river.

Elder Mo walked to the wolf bone formation stake, stretched out a withered finger, and gently tapped it.

Thump.

A dull reverberation spread throughout the entire defense zone.

All the nodes lit up simultaneously for an instant before quickly fading away.

"The idea is good, but the scope is too small."

Elder Mo turned around, looking at Su Ming. "Your web only covers this small patch of land that is Bing-7. If the neighboring Bing-6 or Bing-8 zones are breached, and demon beasts flank you from the sides, your iron bucket will just be a leaky sieve."

Su Ming's heart skipped a beat, and he sharply looked up.

Elder Mo's words...

"This disciple is foolish. It's just that materials are limited, I dare not be too ambitious," Su Ming cautiously replied.

"Materials?"

Elder Mo snorted lightly and casually tossed a token, which landed squarely in Su Ming's arms.

"The warehouse, Grade-C waste material area. You are permitted to go pick materials three more times this month."

Su Ming gripped the cold token, his breathing involuntarily quickening slightly.

Three times!

With these materials, he could not only reinforce Bing-7 but could even expand this system to the entire forward defense line of the Bing Battalion!

"Thank you, Elder Mo!" Su Ming bowed deeply.

Elder Mo waved his hand dismissively, his figure growing indistinct again, as if he might dissipate into the wind and snow at any moment.

"If you've woven a web, weave it bigger."

"The wind at Iron Wall Pass is growing stronger. If the web isn't sturdy, it won't be able to hold anything."

Before his words had even faded, Elder Mo's figure had completely vanished.

Only Su Ming remained, standing in the wind and snow, tightly clutching the token.

Su Ming took a deep breath and stored the token in his storage pouch.

Elder Mo's support was like a protective talisman.

With this connection, his actions within Iron Wall Pass could finally be slightly less restrained.

"Brother Zhao!"

Su Ming turned and walked towards the camp, his voice shedding some of its caution and gaining more decisiveness.

Zhao Tiji, who was gnawing on a bone, looked up. "What's up, Brother Su?"

"Starting tomorrow, have the brothers go check out the neighboring Bing-6 and Bing-8 defense zones."

Su Ming walked to the campfire. The firelight illuminated his young yet steady face.

"We should share this good stuff with our neighbors. After all, our backs still need them to watch over."

Zhao Tiji was stunned for a moment, then grinned broadly, revealing a mouthful of white teeth.

"Got it! Leave this to me! Old Zhang and his crew have been eyeing our shields with envy for a while now. This time, I'll make sure they pay through the nose!"

Su Ming smiled, sat down, picked up a dry branch, and poked at the campfire.

Sparks flew, tracing bright arcs in the night sky.

In this perilous Iron Wall Pass, he had finally woven his first web.

But he knew it wasn't enough.

Deep underground, that dark golden river was approaching. He had to weave this web denser, thicker, and more resilient before the disaster erupted.

...

The night in the Bing-7 Defense Zone was chewed up and swallowed by the wind and snow.

Inside Stone Hut Number Seven, the door cracks and window frames were already pasted with soundproofing talismans. The ghostly howling of the wind outside, when it seeped in, was reduced to a muffled, low panting.

Only a single bean-sized spirit lamp was lit inside the hut. The dim yellow circle of light huddled in the corner, casting elongated shadows onto the rough

stone walls. As the lamplight flickered, the shadows seemed to struggle silently.

In the center of the stone table, a crude ceramic basin held half a basin of clear water.

At the bottom of the basin, the grayish-white raw ore Su Ming had spent a fortune acquiring from the Ghost Market lay quietly.

Su Ming sat cross-legged on a stone stool, his eyes slightly closed, his hands suspended three inches above the water's surface.

Within his Consciousness Sea, Lin Yu's voice was unusually devoid of its usual teasing, carrying a tone of seriousness. "Void Stone is brittle. Although this raw ore is riddled with impurities like a honeycomb briquette, the core powder with spatial properties is the most delicate. You need to peel away the gray rock like you're peeling the shell off a raw egg, without breaking the membrane inside."

Su Ming didn't reply, but a fine layer of sweat had already beaded on his forehead.

This work was more exhausting than killing wolf demons on the battlefield.

Killing enemies relied on ferocity and explosive power, but this "water grinding" refinement tested the resilience of one's divine sense and the extreme control over spiritual energy micro-manipulation.

In his "observation micro state" vision, the grayish-white raw ore was no longer just a rock but a complex three-dimensional maze. The gray-black rocky impurities were like layers of heavy armor, tightly encasing the scattered specks of silvery light dust within.

Su Ming controlled the water needles. He didn't chisel forcefully. Instead, he used the water's penetrating power to gently "moisten" the junction between the rock and the silver powder. Then, utilizing the slight expansion force when water vaporized, he pried the impurities apart bit by bit.

Sss—

A wisp of black-gray, flocculent substance drifted out from the raw ore, like dissolving ink, slowly sinking to the bottom of the basin.

"First layer separation successful," Su Ming silently noted, not daring to pause his finger movements in the slightest.

Time passed to the sound of lamp wicks crackling.

One hour, two hours...

Until the sound of wind and snow outside seemed to grow weary, and the air inside the stone hut grew cold enough to freeze one's breath, Su Ming finally let out a long, slow exhalation of turbid air.

"Retrieve."

His hands suddenly lifted upwards.

A soft *splash* sounded.

The originally clear heavy water was now turbid. But in the center of the water's surface, a clump of powder roughly the size of a thumb, shimmering with a silvery-gray light, was enveloped by a sphere of pure water and floated upwards.

Su Ming carefully took out a specially made jade bottle, channeled spiritual energy, and guided the clump of powder into the bottle.

"Four *qian*."

Su Ming weighed the jade bottle in his hand. A tired smile appeared on his somewhat pale face. "Half a *qian* more than expected."

"The quality is decent," Lin Yu's voice held a note of approval. "This amount is enough to activate the 'Minor Void Spirit Attraction Formation' three times."

Su Ming sealed the jade bottle and affixed a spirit-sealing talisman to it. However, he didn't immediately proceed to set up the formation. Instead, he solemnly stored it in the deepest part of his storage pouch.

"No rush for now."

Su Ming stood up, stretching his somewhat stiff joints. His bones emitted a series of crisp cracks. "The 'Minor Void Spirit Attraction Formation' has a small footprint, but its spatial fluctuations won't escape the notice of those who are paying attention. This is a military camp, after all; walls have ears. I'll wait until the next full moon and go to that abandoned mine tunnel in the back mountains. The chaotic earth veins there should mask the formation's fluctuations nicely."

"Hmm, prudent," Lin Yu praised. "Disciple, your mastery of the 'Way of Survival' is becoming increasingly refined."

Su Ming smiled, walked to the corner, washed his face with cold water, clearing his muddled mind a little.

It was already late at night, but he felt no sleepiness.

Returning from the Ghost Market had not only brought back the Void Stone but also a sense of urgency.

To survive, to reinforce the defense zone, to repair his Dao foundation—in the end, it all came down to needing a massive amount of resources.

Chapter 319: The Path to Longevity in the Ledger

Su Ming returned to the stone table, took out his identity token from his robe, and retrieved a green jade slip recording his private accounts.

Under the lamplight, the young man's gaze became exceptionally focused. His fingers lightly traced over the jade slip, causing lines of data to surface.

"Basic Military Merit, three thousand five hundred points."

This was his blood and sweat money earned through grueling months at Iron Wall Pass.

Daily patrols, formation maintenance, rewards for repelling several Beast Tides, and the submitted wolf demon materials.

For an ordinary late-stage Qi Refining cultivator, this was already a huge sum.

But in Su Ming's plan, this was merely a small fraction.

The income from repairing and optimizing magical implements for his comrades in the Bing-7 Defense Zone.

Since they were all his own brothers, Su Ming charged extremely low rates, often even accepting materials as payment. Calculated out, it amounted to roughly eight hundred points.

"This part cannot be raised in price," Su Ming calculated in his heart. "This is a debt of gratitude, the adhesive that binds Bing-7 Camp into a solid, unbreakable unit."

Ever since he added the "Flexible Water Force-Dispersing Formation" to Zhao Tiji's shield and performed a "Gravity Balance Calibration" on Old Liu's war

blade, news of the equipment upgrades in the Bing-7 Defense Zone had spread like wildfire to several neighboring zones.

Especially Zhang Meng, the captain of the Bing-6 Defense Zone, that famously hot-tempered and stingy man, after personally witnessing Zhao Tiji casually chatting and laughing while withstanding a wolf demon's claws.

When dealing with outsiders, Su Ming naturally wouldn't be polite.

"Material cost plus thirty percent, technical premium plus fifty percent. If it's urgent, double it again."

This was the pricing strategy Lin Yu had taught him.

For a standard "Black Tortoise Shield," repairing and installing a "Flexible Water Force-Dispersing Formation" cost eighty to one hundred Military Merit points.

For a magical implement longsword, adjusting its balance and inscribing a "Micro Vibration Pattern" cost fifty to seventy points.

"Twelve thousand three hundred points."

Still over thirty thousand points short of the fifty thousand needed to exchange for "Earth Vein Spirit Milk"!

Su Ming's fingers lightly tapped the tabletop, producing a series of firm, rhythmic sounds. "Tomorrow, I need to go to the Bing-6 Defense Zone to lay down the 'Spiderweb.' That Zhang Meng, although crude, is willing to spend money to save his life. As long as the 'Spiderweb's' effectiveness satisfies him, the subsequent maintenance and upgrade fees will become a steady, long-term source of income."

"Not only that," Lin Yu added within the Consciousness Sea. "Once Bing-6 and Bing-8 are both covered, these three defense zones will form an interconnected network. At that point, tell them that for a small fee, they can get real-time shared early warning information from the surrounding zones!"

Su Ming's eyes lit up, but then he shook his head, a self-mocking smile curling at the corner of his mouth. "Master, I understand the principle. It's about making them dependent on me. When my formations become a necessity for their survival, the Military Merit will naturally flow in continuously."

"That's right," Lin Yu laughed. "Sustain your cultivation with your skills, and hone your skills through battle. In the world of cultivation, killing and plundering is the lowest tier—that's trading your life for money. Doing business is the middle tier—that's trading goods for money. Only this monopolized technology is the highest tier—that's making people beg to give you money."

Su Ming put away the jade slip and token. His mind, which had been tense from refining the Void Stone, finally relaxed completely.

Twelve thousand three hundred points.

This was his hope for repairing his Dao foundation.

"Sleep!"

Su Ming blew out the spirit lamp and lay down on the stone bed, still fully clothed.

The wind and snow still howled outside the window, but to Su Ming's ears, the sound didn't seem so grating anymore.

...

The next morning, the sky was a depressing leaden gray.

Su Ming rose early, performed a set of fist forms within the stone hut to loosen his muscles and bones, then slung the beast-skin pouch filled with Formation Flags and formation plates over his shoulder and pushed the door open.

Su Ming tightened the Formation Master robe around him. The moment he stepped past the boundary marker of the Bing-6 Defense Zone, a sense of oppression, like that of a primordial giant beast, assaulted him.

"Hahahaha! Brother Su! I've been waiting for you!"

Accompanied by thunderous laughter, an iron-tower-like figure rushed before him, bringing with him a gust of wind reeking of blood. The newcomer was none other than Zhang Meng, captain of the Bing-6 Defense Zone. The man was built like a bear, with a face full of bristling sideburns, looking exactly like a violent bear that had just woken from hibernation.

He extended a palm-sized hand and brought it down hard on Su Ming's shoulder. If this slap landed solidly, forget a Qi Refining stage cultivator, even a piece of granite would crack.

Su Ming's expression didn't change. His footwork shifted subtly, and the *Like Water Art* within him quietly circulated. The muscles in his shoulder rippled like waves. At the instant the giant palm descended, a flexible force rippled out from the point of contact, dispersing most of the brute force that could have shattered bone.

Even so, the frozen ground beneath Su Ming's feet emitted a crisp *crack* and sank down half an inch.

"Captain Zhang, your enthusiasm is a bit too much for my slight frame to bear," Su Ming said with a cupped fist salute, his tone neither servile nor overbearing, a professional smile on his face.

This Zhang Meng lived up to his name. He had the build of a bear, a face full of explosive sideburns, and held a spiked club, looking like a black bear walking upright.

Usually, Zhang Meng, relying on his seniority, looked down his nose at everyone. But the moment he saw Su Ming, that dark face instantly bloomed into a chrysanthemum-like smile.

Su Ming cupped his fists. "It's all for killing demons and preserving lives. Since Brother Zhao spoke up, I, your younger brother, naturally must do my best. However, laying this 'Spirit Response Spider Web' is quite intricate, and the materials..."

"Materials are nothing!"

Zhang Meng waved his hand grandly, full of heroic spirit. "Brother Su, just name it! Whatever you're missing, I'll have someone go fetch it from the storehouse right now! If the storehouse doesn't have it, I'll go rob another camp! As long as you can get that whatever-web laid down for me, forget materials, even if you wanted this meat on my bones... uh, let's forget that part."

The surrounding soldiers burst into a roar of laughter.

Su Ming also smiled. "Captain Zhang, you jest. I've brought all the necessary materials. It's just that the positioning and nodes for setting up the formation need to be finely adjusted according to the terrain of our Bing-6 Defense Zone. Also, once this formation is activated, the monthly spirit stone consumption..."

"That's a given!" Zhang Meng thumped his chest. "I know the rules! Old Zhao told me all about it. Brother Su, I'm not short on that. As long as the thing works well, the price can still be negotiated!"

"Captain Zhang is straightforward."

"Heh! Old Zhao praised your so-called 'Iron Bucket Formation' to the heavens, saying even a fly flying in would sprain its foot. Today, I want to see for myself if it's really that miraculous!" Zhang Meng withdrew his hand, his booming voice causing the surrounding snow to rustle down.

Chapter 320: Monetizing Technology

Behind Zhang Meng followed an old man dressed in gray robes, with hair and beard as white as snow.

The old man held a compass in his hand. His gaze was somewhat gloomy, and when he looked at Su Ming, there was a hint of scrutiny and a barely perceptible sense of rejection.

"This is Old Han, Formation Master Han, an old comrade who's been with me for ten years," Zhang Meng introduced casually. "He's also a formidable hand at the eighth layer of Qi Refining."

Su Ming gave a slight nod. "Greetings, Senior Han."

Formation Master Han snorted through his nostrils and said with a lukewarm tone, "The younger generation is to be feared. I've heard Fellow Daoist Su created a 'Spiderweb' in Bing-7? This old man would like to ask for some advice. What is so remarkable about this formation that it could make that uncouth brute Zhao Tiji sing your praises to the skies?"

Within the Consciousness Sea, Lin Yu's voice sounded lazily, tinged with a bit of schadenfreude. "Disciple, this old man is unhappy. He feels you're stealing his rice bowl. Don't waste words with him now. Just use technical superiority to crush him. This is the so-called 'Dimensional Reduction Strike'."

Su Ming understood in his heart, but his expression remained respectful. "Remarkable is hardly the word. It was merely adapting to local conditions. Captain Zhang, Senior Han, perhaps we should first take a look at the situation in the defense zone."

Without waiting for their response, he directly strode towards the core of the defense zone.

Zhang Meng and Formation Master Han exchanged a glance and followed.

Su Ming didn't walk fast, but each step was extremely methodical. Deep within his eyes, a faint azure-blue light flickered as his "observation micro state"

vision fully activated.

In the eyes of ordinary people, this was a sturdy camp. But in Su Ming's eyes, lines of flowing spiritual energy were everywhere. It's just that these lines...

"Tsk tsk tsk, this wiring is simply a tangled mess," Lin Yu launched into outburst mode. "Look at that Spirit Gathering node. It's clearly a water-attributed spiritual material, yet it's forcibly connected to a fire-attributed earth vein branch. Isn't that like using gasoline to put out a fire? And that warning array, its range overlaps by at least thirty percent, a pure waste of computational power. Did this old man set this up by rote memorization from a textbook?"

While listening to his master's "scathing commentary," Su Ming rapidly constructed an optimization model in his mind.

A quarter of an hour later, Su Ming stopped before a seemingly ordinary mound of earth.

"What is it? Has Fellow Daoist Su noticed something?" Formation Master Han asked with his hands behind his back, his tone carrying a hint of testing. "This

'Earth Fiend Pile' was personally selected by this old man. It suppresses a Yin Vein branch below, as steady as Mount Tai."

Su Ming didn't directly refute. Instead, he extended a finger, condensing a ball of pure water-attributed spiritual energy at its tip.

"Senior Han's positioning is precise, that is beyond doubt," Su Ming first offered a sweet date, then immediately shifted his tone. "It's just that the flow of spiritual energy underground seems to have undergone some changes recently. Please observe, Senior."

He flicked his finger lightly. That ball of water spiritual energy transformed into a thin thread, drilling into the formation line interface beneath the mound.

In the next instant, the originally calm formation node suddenly flickered. Immediately after, a turbid stream of spiritual energy gushed out from the interface, like a clogged sewer suddenly clearing, emitting muffled "puff puff" sounds.

Formation Master Han's old face instantly flushed red.

"This..."

"Poor connection between the spiritual energies of two formation cores leads to reflux congestion. It's not noticeable normally, but once operating under high load, this spot becomes a potential explosion point," Su Ming stated calmly, as if stating a simple fact. "Additionally, the warning array in the northeast corner overlaps with the main formation's range. Not only does it waste spirit stones, it also generates interference noise. If we encounter a beast adept at concealment, this kind of noise becomes their best cover."

As he spoke, Su Ming casually cast several spiritual incantations, using water spiritual energy to sketch a schematic of the spiritual energy congestion in the air. It was so intuitive that even an outsider like Zhang Meng could understand.

Formation Master Han's original arrogance rapidly dissipated before these precise lines of spiritual energy. He was an expert, so he naturally recognized the value of Su Ming's "probing the pulse and locating the point" technique.

"I have learned something," Formation Master Han took a deep breath, and the posture of his cupped hands finally became a bit more proper. "Then, according to Fellow Daoist Su's opinion, how should it be modified?"

"No major modifications needed," Su Ming turned to look at Zhang Meng, finally getting to the main point. "A full 'Spiderweb' installation, re-organizing the nodes, turning a dead formation into a living net."

Zhang Meng was impatient and immediately asked, "Just say it straight. How much Military Merit?"

Su Ming raised one finger, then added another.

"One thousand one hundred points."

Zhang Meng's dark face instantly twitched, his beard trembling three times. "How much? One thousand one? Brother Su, that's even harsher than robbery! I inquired about Bing-7. The material cost was only four to five hundred, right?"

"Captain Zhang, that's not how the accounting works."

Su Ming smiled slightly and began deploying the "commercial rhetoric" Lin Yu had taught him.

"The terrain of the Bing-6 Defense Zone is open, thirty percent larger than Bing-7. Naturally, the material cost increases, requiring approximately four hundred and fifty points," Su Ming counted on his fingers as he explained. "But that's just the dead materials. What's truly valuable is this 'Spiderweb' system."

He pointed at the ground beneath his feet. "Ordinary formations are dead. If they break, they need repair. But my 'Spiderweb' includes three free emergency repairs within the following three months. That is to say, for the next three months, as long as the formation isn't completely destroyed, even if something goes wrong in the middle of the night, I will come when called."

"This is the so-called—bundled quality assurance service," Lin Yu supplied a term within the Consciousness Sea.

Su Ming paused briefly, then continued, "Moreover, I've reserved a one-hundred-point risk fund in the quote. If there is material loss during the formation setup, or unexpected situations arise, Captain Zhang won't need to pay another single point. If the project finishes smoothly without using it, this one hundred points will be refunded."

Upon hearing this, Zhang Meng's words about haggling immediately got stuck in his throat.

On this battlefield where one's life hangs by a thread, who dares to promise "come when called"? Who dares to say "refund the difference"?

This was taking the risk upon oneself, giving the client peace of mind!

Zhang Meng stroked the steel-needle-like stubble on his chin, his eyes flickering. Although he was stingy, he feared death more. Eleven hundred was expensive, but if it could truly be as Su Ming said...

He turned to Formation Master Han. "Old Han, do you think it's worth it?"

Formation Master Han had by now completely put away his condescension. He pondered for a moment, his gaze sweeping over the spiritual energy diagram Su Ming had just sketched, and finally sighed. "If it can truly achieve the warning and delay effects like in Bing-7, especially filling the blind spots in our existing warning system... it's worth it. This craftsmanship is worth this price."

Even his own Formation Master said so. Zhang Meng no longer hesitated.

"Fine! One thousand one it is!"

Zhang Meng waved his hand grandly and made the decision decisively. "But Brother Su, let's be blunt upfront. If the effect isn't as good as you say, or if it collapses before the next beast tide, I'll have to have a serious talk with you about this Military Merit! Don't blame your big brother for not showing any mercy then!"

Su Ming's expression turned solemn. He cupped his hands and said, "That is only right. Take payment, solve disasters. If I cannot deliver, Su Ming will not accept a single point."

"Straightforward!" Zhang Meng laughed heartily and directly took out his identity token, ready to transfer the Military Merit.

"Wait, it's not too late to give it after completion and acceptance," Su Ming stopped him. Then, he took out a bundle of specially-made Formation Flags from his storage pouch, his gaze instantly becoming focused. "Now, let's get to work."