

THE QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY

Chapter 1: Mo Hua

In the year 20,022 of the Dao Calendar, on the tenth day of September.

In Tongxian City, outside the gates of Tongxian Sect, on a mountain.

Ten-year-old Mo Hua, wearing the plain robe of an outer sect disciple, squatted uninterestedly behind a huge rock at the base of the mountain, holding a piece of grass root and intently drawing complex patterns on the ground.

By the hour of Mao, disciples from the sect who came to learn gradually made their way up the mountain, in groups of twos and threes, chatting and laughing.

A chubby boy dressed in the standard outer sect robe, adorned with precious jade ornaments and with a round, small-eyed face, accompanied by two or three attendants, found Mo Hua behind the rock, contentedly drawing something.

The chubby boy looked around left and right, and seeing no mentors from the sect around, he cautiously called out:

"Mo Hua!"

Mo Hua looked up, his handsome face as picturesque as a painting, his eyes clear as if scooping up a pond of crystal water.

The chubby boy lowered his voice and asked, "Is it done?"

The ten-year-old Mo Hua, behaving beyond his years, patted his chest, "I handle things, you just relax," and then took out several arrays from the storage bag behind him—white paper and red ink—and handed them to the chubby boy.

"Check if there's anything amiss."

The chubby boy solemnly took them, opened the copy, glanced at it, and then said with a pained expression:

"I can't understand..."

Mo Hua patiently explained:

"The homework assigned by the mentor was the basic patterns of the Five Elements Array. I've drawn it for you and purposely made six mistakes to prevent the mentor from realizing that these weren't drawn by you..."

"Six mistakes... isn't that a bit too many?"

Mo Hua silently looked at him.

The chubby boy soon realized his mistake and reflected:

"One shouldn't be too greedy. It's already good that I can hand in the homework assigned by the mentor. Doing too well would only arouse suspicion. Once discovered by the mentor, if my father finds out, he'll surely beat me severely, which would not be worth the loss..."

Mo Hua nodded, "You're wise, Young Master An, to figure it out so quickly!"

The chubby boy stuffed two spirit stones into Mo Hua's hand, "Brother Mo, you have good insight, knowing how clever I am! Here are the spirit stones, I'll still come to you next time the mentor assigns array homework!"

After saying that, he tucked the arrays into his robe and sprinted up the mountain.

Mo Hua carefully put away the two spirit stones and picked up a new piece of grass root to continue drawing on the ground.

Shortly after, a thin young master, shaking a gold-sprinkled paper fan, with a sharp and distinguished face and more jade ornaments on his body, approached.

Mo Hua also handed him an array chart. The thin young master glanced at the chart and then signaled to a servant. The servant came forward, took the chart, and handed Mo Hua two spirit stones.

The thin young master took the array chart but did not leave. Suddenly, he closed his fan arrogantly and said, "This young master is also very skilled in array formation, it's just that I don't have the time to do these basic formations, so I had you write them for me." R&NÔBES

Mo Hua, uninterested in engaging further, picked up the grass root and continued drawing on the ground.

The thin young master, slightly annoyed, then sneered, "It's said among the early-stage Qi-cultivating disciples of Tongxian Gate, you draw the best arrays. I wonder how you compare to this young master. Maybe we should compete sometime?"

Mo Hua thought to himself, You're already having me do your array homework, what do you think of your own level?

However, adhering to the principle of harmony brings wealth, Mo Hua still lifted his head and picked flattering words:

"Of course, the young master's mastery of array formation is far superior. The Qian family is the leading clan in Tongxian City, and your lineage in array formation is unmatched by other cultivators."

The thin young master's expression slightly brightened, then he asked, "Then tell me, among the early-stage Qi-cultivating disciples of Tongxian Gate, is there anyone whose skill in array formation surpasses mine?"

"There are indeed a few..."

The thin young master displeased, "Who are they?"

"Like me..." Of course, Mo Hua wouldn't foolishly say that out loud.

"There are quite a few, too many to count right now."

The thin young master clearly got angry.

"This is a good thing!" Mo Hua lied blatantly.

The thin young master sneered, "People whose family status isn't as good as mine, who don't have as many spirit stones as I do, but whose array skills surpass mine, there are a lot of them, you mean to say I'm stupid and can't compare to others? How is this a good thing?"

Mo Hua replied, "Think about it, you're just at the Qi-cultivation stage, yet you have Foundation-building cultivators working for you; you're just a first-grade array master, yet you have second-grade array masters at your beck and call. How prestigious is that! The stronger the abilities of the cultivators under you, the greater your own skills appear!"

The thin young master paused, then had a sudden realization, "That does make some sense!"

"See?" Mo Hua affirmed.

The thin young master nodded, looking down at the myriad of cultivators below, his neck held even higher:

"Exactly! No matter how talented you are, how hard you practice, in the end, aren't you still working for my Qian family?"

After duping the young master of the Qian family and seeing him off proudly, Mo Hua continued practicing array formation on the ground with his grass root.

Before long, several wealthy cultivators came by, exchanging money for goods, buying several array formations from Mo Hua with spirit stones. By the time Mo Hua's hand-copied array formations were sold, he had gathered twelve spirit stones.

Twelve spirit stones were quite a sum for a rogue cultivator, but for cultivation, they were far from enough.

Mo Hua sighed, a hint of helplessness on his youthful face.

For the low-level cultivators, the path of cultivation was bleak...

In the first year of the Dao Calendar, over twenty thousand years ago, the largest power in the cultivation world—the Dao Court—unified the nine provinces of cultivation, enfeoffed noble families and sects, and established a unified rank system to standardize the levels of cultivation professions.

The Dao Court also promulgated the "Dao Laws" to restrict cultivators from wanton killing, looting, and harvesting life essence.

Thanks to this, the cultivation world developed and prospered for over twenty thousand years, flourishing tremendously, its territory vast, its cultivators countless.

Yet while the Dao Court thrived gloriously, the noble families prospered, and the sects dominated regions.

Only the low-level rogue cultivators, with no affiliation, lived in hardship, with no hope for advancement in cultivation.

After twenty thousand years of proliferation in the cultivation world, humans without spiritual roots were naturally eliminated, leaving only those with

spiritual roots who could cultivate. But as more cultivators arose, the more spiritual energy they consumed, depleting the spiritual energy of the world.

Now, if cultivators wished to advance in cultivation, they needed not only legacy but also spirit stones.

However, with large families occupying the spirit mines and major sects monopolizing legacies, ordinary rogue cultivators found no path to cultivation.

In Tongxian City, the vast majority of rogue cultivators, lacking legacy and spirit stones, spent their lives merely at the Qi-cultivation stage.

The Qi-cultivation stage, merely the most humble ants under the vast heavenly path.

And Mo Hua was one of these countless ants.

And likely, he would be for life!

Mo Hua's youthful face bore a hint of bitterness.

The heavenly path might be fair, but cultivation, certainly is not...

Mo Hua, a second-level Qi-cultivating rogue cultivator, was born into a family of Qi-cultivators. His father, Mo Shan, hunted demons for a living, always battling with demonic beasts, his body covered in scars. His mother worked in a kitchen, her lungs frequently pained by the heat and smoke, often coughing painfully.

His parents scrimped and saved every spirit stone they could just to allow Mo Hua to join the outer sect of the Tongxian Gate for cultivation.

But no matter how Mo Hua cultivated, with his mediocre spiritual roots—slightly better than ordinary people but far from the genius rampant in the cultivation world—he was destined to be just an average member.

No matter how much he cultivated, he would likely remain just a Qi-cultivator.

With the family's dire conditions and lack of spirit stones, Mo Hua could only cultivate up to the sixth level of Qi-cultivation like the other disciples before leaving the sect to find a trade to make a living.

But Mo Hua was also naturally frail!

The crafting of tools and hunting of demons, usual professions for physically strong cultivators, were not suitable for the inherently weak Mo Hua, who might even struggle to find a job to feed himself.

Should he marry and have children in the future, the burden would increase, and all the spirit stones would be used to support his family.

Without spirit stones for cultivation, Mo Hua's cultivation level would forever stagnate, living his life merely as a Qi-cultivator.

Just like all the impoverished rogue cultivators in Tongxian City.

Just like the countless low-level cultivators in the cultivation world.

Forever just a Qi-cultivator!

The ten-year-old Mo Hua sighed, adjusted his mindset, and then entered the sect for classes. After a day of cultivation, Mo Hua returned to the disciples' residence, read some cultivation scriptures, and by the hour of Zi, he lay in bed.

As Mo Hua closed his eyes, a fragmented stele appeared in his sea of consciousness.

The stele bore no inscriptions, but from the first glance Mo Hua saw it, he knew the name of the stele:

Dao Stele!