

The Quest 31

Chapter 31: The Artificer

Master Chen, a Qi cultivation practitioner of the eighth layer, was over a hundred years old. His hair was partially grey, and his physique was robust. His face, perpetually smoked by the furnace flames, was darkened, yet his spirit was lively and his voice robust.

Master Chen was overseeing several disciples forging iron. Perhaps due to some mistakes made by the disciples, he glared at them and scolded loudly. The sturdy disciples obediently endured the scolding, not daring to raise their heads.

After a thorough scolding, Master Chen himself demonstrated with a large hammer, swinging it vigorously. The red-hot refined iron sparked as it gradually took the shape of a blade under his hammering.

Once he finished, Master Chen merely wiped off his sweat, his breathing even, seemingly having exerted little effort.

Mo Hua, naturally frail, watched enviously, wishing he too could possess such strength someday...

"Watch closely, this is how you forge iron. What was that earlier? Weak and listless, even a young lady's embroidery has more spirit than that!"

Master Chen scolded the disciples again, then turned to see a child with rosy lips and bright eyes, looking at him with a face full of envy.

Hesitating for a moment, he asked, "Little one, do you also want to learn artifice?"

Life as an independent cultivator is tough, and once outside a sect, one must fend for oneself. Some learn practical skills on their own if they can't learn much within their sect.

It was common for cultivators to send their children to Master Chen to learn artifice, enabling them to be self-sufficient in the future.

Master Chen usually charged a few spirit stones, or accepted spirit grains as tuition if they had no stones.

Mo Hua looked at the tall, muscular disciples, then at his own skinny arms and legs, and helplessly shook his head, then directly asked:

"Master, do you also make stoves here?"

"A stove?" Master Chen looked at Mo Hua. "What does a child like you need a stove for?"

"I'm asking for my mother."

"Of course, I can craft stoves, but making one requires a lot of refined iron, which would not be a small amount when converted into spirit stones."

"What if it were smaller? Would it be cheaper then?"

"Indeed, a smaller stove would require less refined iron and labor, making it cheaper. However, in Tongxian City, it's rare for anyone to make small stoves since the arrays need to be individually designed and inscribed, which also costs a considerable number of spirit stones."

"How much would the smallest stove cost in spirit stones?"

Master Chen, not one to dismiss a child's query, seriously took out a piece of paper, listed the prices of various materials, and then calculated the cost for stoves of different sizes and scales.

Handing the paper to Mo Hua, he added:

"Of course, that's just the cost of materials. We artificers must also charge for labor by the day, based on how many days it takes to make the stove."

"Oh," Mo Hua noted everything down, then said his goodbyes:

"I've written it down. I'll discuss with my parents how big a stove we should make and then come back to you."

Master Chen nodded, waving his hand, "Go on home, little one, and be careful on the road!"

He didn't really take Mo Hua's words to heart; many cultivators inquire about prices only to never follow up.

Especially since it was just a child asking about crafting a stove—a labor-intensive spiritual artifact—it was unlikely there would be any follow-up.

Back home, Mo Hua consulted the price list given by Master Chen and chose a stove that was the right size and within his budget. Just the material costs were about one hundred and fifty spirit stones.

There was also the cost of labor, which was still to be negotiated.

Mo Hua didn't know how long Master Chen would take to make the stove. However, it would probably take at least ten to fifteen days, which would mean an additional fifty to seventy-five spirit stones.

That was slightly over Mo Hua's budget; he might have to ask his parents for some spirit stones or borrow some.

Next, the most crucial part was the array.

Mo Hua spread out the Magma Array diagram on the table and began to study it carefully.

The Magma Array diagram included five fire-related array patterns, with most strokes located at the fire positions. Just looking at the complex array patterns, they were significantly more complicated than the Gold Stone Array and Earth Solidification Array.

Mo Hua sighed softly, put aside all distractions, and focused on noting down the array patterns and the order of strokes.

Mo Hua was absorbed in his studies, and before he knew it, it had gotten dark.

Even during dinner, Mo Hua was still thinking about the patterns of the

Magma Array; he chewed a few bites of steamed bun absent-mindedly, holding the bun and daydreaming.

Liu Ruhua watched him, both amused and annoyed, pinching his cheek, "You need to eat properly. Think about things after you've eaten."

Mo Hua snapped back to reality, chuckled, then focused on his meal, and after eating, he ran back to his room.

Mo Hua had almost memorized the Magma Array's patterns, then spent another hour practicing with ink that contained no spiritual energy on rough paper. Later, at midnight, he entered the Sea of Consciousness and began practicing the array on a stone stele.

Although the array patterns were complex, their basic construction logic was no different from other arrays, and memorizing them wasn't difficult. The challenge was likely the spiritual sense.

Mo Hua's spiritual sense might not be strong enough to produce a complete Magma Array diagram.

Mo Hua began to draw the Magma Array on the damaged stele.

The first three patterns went smoothly, but by the fourth, he clearly struggled, his spiritual sense becoming sluggish, feeling increasingly parched.

Mo Hua's brow furrowed slightly.

When he completed the fourth pattern, pains shot through his Sea of Consciousness, as if a riverbed drying at low tide was starting to crack.

Mo Hua quickly stopped, erased the patterns on the stele, and the pain in his spiritual sense eased.

He collapsed on the quasi-physical ground of his Sea of Consciousness, breathing heavily.

"That's it, my spiritual sense is significantly lacking..."

Mo Hua's spiritual sense was only sufficient to draw four patterns; after the fourth, he had no strength left to draw the fifth.

It seemed just one pattern short, but without a way to quickly enhance his spiritual sense, this single pattern could be a lengthy hurdle.

"What to do?"

Mo Hua pondered internally.

There's no shortcut to growing spiritual sense, a fact widely acknowledged in the cultivation world.

At least for Qi cultivation practitioners in Tongxian City, this was commonly accepted.

Mo Hua had consulted Yan Jiaoxi, who had said that growth in spiritual sense mainly depended on the increase in cultivation level. The higher the cultivation realm, the stronger the spiritual sense naturally becomes.

Another way was to strengthen the spiritual sense through its frequent use. Array masters, who often need to engage their spiritual sense to draw arrays, naturally have a stronger spiritual sense than average cultivators.

Mo Hua had also asked if there were any specific techniques to cultivate spiritual sense, and Yan Jiaoxi had bluntly stated there were none.

Whether in ancient texts or records of various family techniques, there were no safe and reliable methods to cultivate spiritual sense. Some methods that did exist were often demonic or heretical, and practitioners were at high risk of deviating from their path, becoming demon cultivators to be universally shunned and eliminated.

Whether truly none existed or they were secretly kept by powerful families was unknown.

But even if there were such methods, Mo Hua was unlikely to obtain them, and even if he did, he wouldn't dare to risk deviating from the path to practice them.

Currently at the third level of Qi cultivation, Mo Hua couldn't quickly break through to the fourth level, so enhancing his spiritual sense through cultivation growth was not feasible.

The only method before him was:

To keep drawing arrays.

The method without shortcuts was, perhaps, the best shortcut.