

## **Walker 1131**

### **Chapter 1131 Heading To The Wu Lim County And An Empty Camp**

Lin Mu and Jing Luo had finished talking a while later.

Jing Luo went back to work on the armor as he now needed to fix it and also modify it according to himself. Meanwhile, Lin Mu decided to take a little visit.

"Little Shrubby let's head to the Northern Town." Lin Mu said as he left the mansion.

He had not been to the northern town since the day he had left it and wanted to see what it was like now. After the Red tide, the Wu Lim city and most of its people had been killed by Gu Yao, thus the city was depopulated for a while.

But the four satellite towns had survived this entire time. Though the condition of the people in them wasn't really as good. Thankfully in the recent years, Wu Hei had helped them out and the lives of the people were returning back to normal there.

~SHUA~

Little Shrubby transformed back into his full form, and Lin Mu jumped onto his back. The two of them quickly flew to the north where Wu Lim county was. It took them about an hour to reach it during which Lin Mu saw the empty roads.

'These roads are seldom this empty... I should have seen at least a couple of caravans on it, if not the soldiers patrolling it at least.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

After entering the Wu Lim county, the next location that appeared was none other than the southern town.

"The army camp is also half empty... strange." Lin Mu muttered, seeing the scene below.

The southern town was well known for housing a camp of the Shuang Qian Kingdom's royal army. It was meant to serve to functions, first to provide rapid support to the frontier just in case the invaders arrived, and second to keep Wu Xun in check.

All this was all in the past though, and the army camp had lost its true meaning after the Gu Legion took control of the region. But even then, the area shouldn't have been this empty.

'Did Wu Hei give some orders to them?' Lin Mu wondered.

He hadn't talked about this part, so didn't know about it. Just to be sure, Lin Mu quickly messaged the man and inquired about it.

"Wu Hei, have you ordered the soldiers in the southern town to move somewhere?" Lin Mu questioned.

"The Southern Town? No, the only orders I gave them last were to stay put and be alert." Wu Hei quickly responded. "Why? Is there an issue?" he questioned.

"Yeah... I'm above the town right now and half of it is empty." Lin Mu answered.

Wu Hei furrowed his brows, and a bad thought appeared in his mind.

"try to see if you can find the Commanding captain posted there. If he's not there, then there is definitely something going on." Wu Hei replied.

"Didn't you send a messenger to the frontier? To the Vermillion legion, did they not see this?" Lin Mu asked.

"They couldn't have since the messenger would have left from a small outpost located to the northwest of Wu Lim city. He wouldn't go the opposite way to encounter this." Wu Hei replied.

"I see... I'll check up and find what's going on." Lin Mu said before putting away the jade slip.

"Shrink down, little Shrubby. We'll see what's going on down there." Lin Mu said.

"Okay~" little Shrubby immediately turned into a small cat and jumped onto Lin Mu's shoulder.

~shua~

Lin Mu flew down and landed near the gate of the southern town.

'Now that I think of it... this is only my second time coming here.' Lin Mu recalled the first time he had visited the southern town.

Back then, he had come with his father to help him out. His father had gotten some work at the southern town for a week. His father would normally hunt, but since this was a relatively high paying and low effort job, his father had taken it. Even if it was just temporary.

The work was actually at a small tavern, and Lin Mu's father would work as a guard there. Lin Mu on the other hand, helped out as a cleaner and washed the dishes. That way, they could get some extra money.

'How time passes...' Lin Mu reminisced for a moment.

He focused his attention back at the task at hand and walked towards the army camp. Along the way, he certainly caught the eye of many people that lived in the town. They all discussed in hushed voices and whispered to each other.

Lin Mu was eye-catching no matter where he went and it was the same here. Though none of these people were brave enough to talk to him directly. In the past few years, there had been too many conflicts and thus the commoners stayed away from strangers.

Especially when a stranger was obviously a cultivator. It was mostly cultivators that were the danger to them, after all.

"Is he going towards the camp?" the commoners wondered.

"He really is!" They confirmed after seeing that Lin Mu had taken the last turn that led to the camp.

The Army camp was nearly half of the southern town, and the other half were all the commoners of it. In the half where the commoners lived, there were blacksmiths, taverns, restaurants, tea houses, and even brothels.

All that was needed to make the soldiers spend money was located here.

"Sure enough, even the guards posted around the city aren't doing their work." Lin Mu observed.

After walking for a couple of minutes, Lin Mu arrived at the main tent of the army camp. It was the largest tent here and was nearly a hundred meters wide. There was also the crest of the Shuang Qian kingdom hanging above it, showing that it belonged to their army.

"Who are you?" The two guards standing outside the tent stopped Lin Mu and questioned him.

Even if their common sense could tell them that Lin Mu was a cultivator, they couldn't help but stop him, as it was their duty.

### **Chapter 1132 A Runaway Prince And Revisiting The Northern Town**

"Where is your commanding captain?" Lin Mu questioned right away.

"What business do you have with the commander?" the guards asked.

"Yeah, without an appointment, no one can enter." The other guard said.

Lin Mu looked at the two guards with a calm expression.

'They're certainly nervous... but what might be the reason behind it?' Lin Mu wondered before he spread his spirit sense.

It quickly scanned the tent behind them and revealed all that was hidden in it.

"Oh, so your commanding captain is not here at all." Lin Mu said.

"H-how do you know that?!" the guards were stunned.

"Why don't you tell me where your commanding captain went and why is the camp half empty?" Lin Mu questioned.

"W-we have no obligation to do that." The guards said.

"Oh, but you do. I'm here under the authority of minister Wu, and if you do not comply sufficient punishment shall be dealt." Lin Mu replied.

He didn't want to use force with these guards, who weren't even cultivators and were simply doing their duty.

'They are afraid of something, that's for sure.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

Lin Mu even took out the command token and showed it to the guards, startling them.

"It really is minister Wu!" The guards were scared now.

"Now then, tell me everything." Lin Mu ordered.

~THUD~

The two guards immediately fell to their knees.

"PLEASE FORGIVE US LORD!" The guards pleaded. "The commander forced us to stay here and turn everyone away."

"Oh? And where did he go?" Lin Mu asked.

"He... didn't tell us. But before he left, a man and a few people had come to visit him. He left after meeting them just a few minutes after that. He told us to stay here, while he took a part of the soldiers with him." The guards quickly replied.

'There's no doubt these guards were left behind as sacrifices. There's no way the commanding captain wouldn't have known that someone would come to check up eventually.' Lin Mu reckoned.

"And which direction did the captain's head towards?" Lin Mu asked.

"He left from the eastern gate." The guards replied.

"Alright," Lin Mu let the guards go.

He scanned the entire town with his spirit sense one last time, checking to see if there was anything suspicious here, but found nothing.

Lin Mu took out the jade slip and contacted Wu Hei to tell him what he had learned.

"Figures... it should have been one of the princes. They probably didn't have any guards and might have bribed the commanding captain to protect them while they escaped." Wu Hei said.

"I see... do I need to do anything?" Lin Mu asked.

"No need. They'll be declared as deserters later and the prince who took them will also be punished." Wu Hei replied.

"Okay, I'll leave then." Lin Mu stated.

"Mmhm, farewell. I'll be having a meeting with the alliance soon enough." Wu Hei said at the end.

Done with this, Lin Mu flew up and headed north. The two of them traveled fast and soon reached Wu Lim city.

'The destruction is still here.' Lin Mu observed the destroyed area of the city. Around forty percents of the city's buildings were in ruins while the rest were becoming destitute. The current population of Wu Lim city was barely a quarter of the original.

Scanning the entire place with his spirit sense, Lin Mu checked to see if there was anything suspicious left here. After all, this was the original hideout of the Gu Legion and where Gu Yao had hid.

But after checking the area, he saw that the underground caves had already collapsed and there was nothing left.

"Even with the destruction as a cost, at least there are no traces of an invader here." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Flying past it, Lin Mu soon arrived at the Northern town. His hometown had become a lot more quaint. The hustle and bustle that was usually present at this time was not present either.

It was nearly the end of autumn and it was harvest season for the spirit apples. Lin Mu's spirit sense reached the orchards and saw the workers harvesting the spirit apples.

A slightly sorrowful expression appeared on Lin Mu's face before he thought of something. He directly flew to the orchards and landed at the place where the supervision usually sat.

His arrival was met with great surprise as the supervisor could clearly tell that Lin Mu was at least a Nascent soul realm cultivator, as he could fly on his own.

"W-what brings you here Senior!?" The Supervisor who was unknown to Lin Mu, asked after hurriedly cupping his hands.

The other servants and guards standing around quickly bowed their heads as well. They could obviously see that even their supervisor was greatly respectful to Lin Mu.

"I just came for a little visit." Lin Mu casually said as he looked at the trees.

The faint fragrance of the spirit apples was lingering in the air and provided a calming feeling to Lin Mu.

But a few seconds later, his brows furrowed.

"Why are there so few spirit apples this time?" Lin Mu asked.

His spirit sense had checked the storage warehouse and found it to be nearly empty.

"Um... A Young Lord from the capital came by two days ago with many soldiers. They forced us to give our harvested stock and left soon after. Even after protesting that our yield this time was low, they didn't relent and took it all." The supervisor honestly said.

Lin Mu's brows furrowed even more after hearing this as a few links formed in his mind.

"My lord, by any chance were you sent by the capital? I sent a complaint soon after the Young lord had left." The supervisor asked.

'It shouldn't be this quick though, right?' the supervisor wondered.

"Hmm... you could say that." Lin Mu said before turning to the supervisor.

"Little Shrubby, get all the apples down from the trees." Lin Mu spoke, much to the supervisors confusion which soon turned into shock.

### **Chapter 1133 An Old Uncle**

The supervisor didn't even see when the small cat on Lin Mu's shoulder disappeared and multiple metal hands appeared out of nowhere. The hands flew around the orchard, startling the workers.

"AAAH!" several workers screamed.

"What was that?!" they cried out.

~SHUA~

The metal hands were too fast for their eyes to accurately grasp. But what they did see was the trees shaking and leaves falling off.

"Look! The apples! The spirit apples are disappearing!" someone pointed.

The others looked and truly saw the trees getting bare. One by one, they started to lose their apples. Till a few moments ago, at least half of the trees were still filled with apples, but now only a quarter were left.

"What in the..." The supervisor was left stunned as a pile of spirit apples started forming nearby.

In less than two minutes, all the spirit apples had been plucked, and the trees were now bare.

~thud~thud~thud~

The servants watching it all, fell to the ground in shock. This was the fastest they had ever seen the harvest being completed. They were sure that it would take them at least another twenty days to finish harvesting all the spirit apples, but it was completed in barely two minutes.

"There we go." Lin Mu said, feeling satisfied.

"All done!" Little Shrubby said upon appearing on his shoulder again.

The supervisor looked at Lin Mu and was at a loss for words. "M-my... My lord... this..."

The workers of the orchard also approached the supervisor's post, intending to inform of the disappearance of the spirit apples, but then saw the large pile of spirit apples there.

"Sir Supervisor! The spirit apples all disappeared!" The voice of another man was heard from behind.

Since there were a lot of workers surrounding the post, the pile of spirit apples couldn't be seen by him.

"Let me through!" The man said while pushing the others and made his way to the front.

"Sir Supervision! The spirit app—" But before the man could repeat himself he saw the large pile.

"W-what? H-how?" The man was now the same as the supervisor.

But what he didn't realize that there was a person looking at him now.

Lin Mu's eyes locked onto the face of the man, identifying him. He looked a bit older than the last time he had seen him, and had several more grey hairs on his head. His skin had also developed a lot more wrinkles and age spots.

"Uncle Yuan Tu..." Lin Mu muttered.

His voice was low, but could be heard by those nearby Yuan Tu being one of them.

"Huh?" The man's eyes widened in confusion.

There was a hint of familiarity in the voice he had just heard, but at the same time, it was different. Yuan Tu looked up and saw Lin Mu standing there.

"He... Lin Gao?" A name escaped Yuan Tu's lips. "No... that can't be..." he said, seeing the differences in the build of the man in front of him.

Lin Mu who heard Yuan Tu speak the name, felt a spike of anger rising in his heart. But then he glanced at the man who had now entered his later ages and let out a sigh.

'No meaning in being angry over it... he's no longer worthy of being thought of.' Lin Mu reckoned.

"So you do remember him after all these years?" Lin Mu spoke.

"Who... Who are you?" Yuan Tu asked.

"You fool! Be respectful!" The voice of the supervisor was heard, anger and anxiety in his voice.

Yuan Tu was startled by the voice and was about to instinctively apologize, but was interrupted.

"This is a Great Lord from the capital! Not only is he here to help us with the complaint, but has also helped us finish our harvest quickly. All of you should be thankful!" The supervisor stated sternly.

The workers, including Yuan Tu who heard it were stunned.

"THANK YOU O' GREAT LORD!" The workers all said loudly.

Lin Mu could see the true gratitude in their eyes. It was pure and unaffected. There was no trace of greed or malice in it either, completely unlike the last he remembered them to be.

'Time and power truly change people... if I was the same as before, they would never be like this...' Lin Mu felt enlightened.

The change in the attitude of these commoners was far more impressionable on Lin Mu than those of the great experts of the sect. It just felt a lot more heavy to Lin Mu.

"As I've always said, power will bring you respect." Xukong's voice was heard in Lin Mu's mind.

"Indeed senior... indeed." Lin Mu replied, a few melancholic thoughts passing through his mind.

"Great Lord, may I have the honor of knowing your name?" The supervisor requested.

The workers all seemed interested too, especially Yuan Tu.

'How does he look so much like Lin Gao when he was younger?' Yuan Tu wondered. 'Is he related to him? Though Lin Gao never told me about having any family in the capital... not to mention someone as high ranking as a great lord...' he thought.

He couldn't help but have these thoughts. Yuan Tu knew very well that Lin Gao became an orphan after his parents had died. It was merely an occupational threat since both his parents were hunters and had perished to beasts.

It was one of the main reasons why Yuan Tu himself had left the job, but Lin Gao had kept at it.

"I am Lin Mu." He answered, looking at the supervisor.

As soon as this name was heard by Yuan Tu, he felt like there was thunder roaring in his head.

"IMPOSSIBLE!" He exclaimed, almost screaming out.

All the memories came rushing back, and the faces started matching for him. He recalled the orphan boy who had been left behind by Lin Gao. The same boy who called him Uncle Yuan Tu and the same boy who he had wronged in the past.

## Chapter 1134 Severing Old Karma

Yuan Tu's loud exclamation was enough to surprise the workers all around him.

"You can't be Lin Mu!?" Yuan Tu shouted.

"It's been a while, Uncle Yuan Tu." Lin Mu said in response. "But it really is me. You remember my father, but forgot me?"

"How... how can this be?" Yuan Tu felt his world flipping.

'It's not possible... the boy should be dead...' Yuan Tu recalled the many soldiers that had come asking about Lin Mu in the past.

He had been questioned along with many others. They were then told that Lin Mu had done some great crime and was wanted dead or alive. It had stunned the peasants, but Yuan Tu was pleased.

And over the years, there was no news or information about Lin Mu either. The wanted notice also disappeared after a while and couldn't be seen in the town either, making Yuan Tu think that Lin Mu must have either been caught or killed by now.

But seeing him alive and not just well, but thriving, left him utterly astounded.

Lin Mu could roughly guess the man's thoughts, but couldn't care for them anymore.

Instead, he just ignored him for now and turned to the supervisor, who had not expected Yuan Tu to know a powerful lord like this. After all, he could tell that Lin Mu was at least a Nascent soul realm cultivator.

Experts with such a high cultivation base were often patriarchs of large clans, or in high positions such as that of a minister in the royal court.

"How much is the harvest in deficit this time? What of the peasants' wages?" Lin Mu questioned the supervisor.

"My lord, the deficit is nearly 50% this time. The yield turned out to be greatly lower, as we couldn't procure the right fertilizers. The supply of fertilizer has fallen greatly in the past two years and the number of merchants bringing it to the town had also reduced.

We tried asking Wu Lim City official too, but they didn't do much. And with the great tragedy there, I don't think they could do much, anyway. I sent a request to the royal capital but received no response.

We made do with manure, but the effect wasn't as good." The Supervisor answered.

"As for the peasants' wages, it is one silver a month." He added.

"Oh? Isn't that half of before? And what of the bonuses?" Lin Mu asked next.

"We... can't afford either, my lord. The Wu Lim city officials have all but given up on us and are involved in issues unknown to me. They haven't supplied any funds like they used to in the past.

Even the wages for the peasants now will be coming from the amount left over after the sale of the spirit apples." The supervision honestly said.



Lin Mu's brows furrowed and he took another look at the peasants.

'They're certainly thinner than from how I remember them...' Lin Mu thought to himself as he tried matching those he knew here.

Their bodies turned skinner, and their robes were loose. Many among them weren't wearing the usual warm clothes either, which was strange as it was already cold to warrant their use.

'They sold off their thick clothes, didn't they?' Lin Mu understood when he looked at the faces of the children that seemed malnourished.

The children were all new to him, and he was sure that they had probably been born after he had left the town.

~Sigh~

"Time to sever my old karma..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

"Pardon me, my lord. But did you say something?" The supervisor asked, hearing something.

Lin Mu looked at the man, this time his expression firm. It unnerved the supervisor, making him wonder if he had irked the man or something to earn a gaze like this.

"The peasants shall be paid four times their normal wage and will also be supplied grain, warm clothes and supplies for the winter." Lin Mu ordered.

"M-my lord!" The Supervisor was lost.

He knew that doing this was impossible even if he gave his entire year's salary for this. The others didn't know this, but even his own salary had been cut by half over the past years.

But before the supervisor could say anything, he saw Lin Mu waving his hand.

~THUD~ THUD~ THUD~ THUD~

In the next second, tens of barrels appeared. The barrels were large enough to fit three men inside them with ease.

"This should be enough to cover for the spirit apple deficit." Lin Mu stated.

One of the servants standing near the barrels saw its contents.

"ITS SPIRIT APPLES!" He exclaimed.

"What?" the Supervisor questioned.

"Sir Supervisor! All the barrels are filled with spirit apples." The servants answered.

One of them walked forward to check and picked up one of the spirit apples from the barrels.

"Not just that! The spirit apples are bigger than ours and of a greater quality too!" the servant said, his eyes left wide.

The supervisor looked at Lin Mu, not knowing what to say.

"I reckon it should be enough?" Lin Mu asked.

"M-more than enough! It will be more than enough, great lord! This is nearly three years of harvest worth." The supervisor couldn't believe his eyes.

"Oh, and also..." Lin Mu waved his hand once more, and a bag appeared. "Take this."

The supervisor carefully extended his hand and took the brown bag from Lin Mu's hand. It seemed unassuming at first, but was rather heavy.

Taking a look inside, the supervisor could see a golden glint!

"My lord, this..." The supervisor instantly recognized the many gold coins inside it.

"Use that to move the townsmen to Wu Lin city. A war is coming and it won't be safe here." Lin Mu explained.

"A War?! So the rumors are true?" the supervisor gasped.

"Mmhmm... do it as soon as possible." Lin Mu ordered. "Oh, and... if I hear anything about the misuse of the funds, then... I don't think I need to warn you more." He said in a cold tone.

"UNDERSTOOD!" The supervisor immediately replied, feeling his heart tremble.

## **Chapter 1135 Home**

Lin Mu's appearance and abilities along had shown the supervisor that he was not someone to mess with. Not to mention, the way he had just taken out the spirit apples and the gold was enough for him to realize the man didn't even consider them significant.

'There were at least five thousand coins in the bag...' The supervisor guessed using the weight of the bag.

The look on Lin Mu's face also sent chills down his spine, and no thought of failing the given task would ever arise in his heart.

Lin Mu gazed at the man for a coupled of seconds before looking away.

"Good, do it well and you might just be rewarded." Lin Mu said before turning to a certain man.

Yuan Tu was still in shock and couldn't understand how all this was possible. Lin Mu's capabilities had come one after the other, like a downbeat. He felt a shadow over him and looked up to see that it was Lin Mu standing in front of him. His tall figure was like a great tower, unscalable and unyielding.

"The past shall remain in past and the future shall be unrelated. I've decided to let go of the karma of my old life and we shall have nothing to do from now on." Lin Mu stated plainly.

"What..." Yuan Tu could understand Lin Mu's words but didn't grasp the meaning behind them.

In any case, the words Lin Mu had spoken weren't truly for Yuan Tu but rather for himself. He had learned about the karma that would accompany a cultivator throughout their life and knew how big of a weight it could be.

Whether it be good karma or bad karma, both of them had effects that could lead one on either path. It was up to the cultivator to decide how they would go along with it. And here Lin Mu had chosen to neither take revenge nor be benevolent to the man.

He had simply chosen to sever the karma and let bygones be bygones.

'Now that I think of it... if he never forced me to carry that barrow of spirit apples, I might not have been forced out and neither would I have found the ring. Without the ring, perhaps I would have still been in the same position.

So, in a way, karma with Yuan Tu was what started it all for me. It was what sent me on this path and many more that are yet to be revealed.' Lin Mu pondered in his mind.

Having understood this, Lin Mu felt like his mind had been widened and a fog was lifted.

"Let's go, little Shrubby." Lin Mu said before disappearing from the sights of all.

The people could only watch on for a while, speechless.

Unknown to them, Lin Mu had actually not left the town. But rather he had gone to a specific palace close to his heart.

~Sigh~

A long sigh escaped his lips as Lin Mu watched the empty plot of land.

"When did this happen?" Lin Mu wondered as his eyes wandered over the place where his house used to be.

Now, instead of his house, there was just an empty plot of land, with some rubble lying around and weeds growing. Lin Mu looked around and narrowed his brows.

"It's not just this house either..." Lin Mu saw that the houses next to his were also gone.

Doing something like this was unusual, as even if a house was confiscated, one wouldn't just destroy them. Rather, they would just sell it off or rent it to others. There would always be someone to buy them, after all.

"Are you looking for someone?" Lin Mu heard a voice from behind him.

"Oh?" Turning around, Lin Mu saw a man standing there.

"Are you lost, sir?" the man's tone changed upon seeing Lin Mu's face and he became nervous.

While Lin Mu was wearing relatively simple robes, his face and demeanor would easily unnerve commoners.

"Yes... do you know what happened to the houses that used to be here?" Lin Mu questioned.

The man furrowed his brows and saw what Lin Mu was gesturing towards.

"They were destroyed by the officials years ago." The man replied. "But why are you asking that?"

"Someone I know used to live here." Lin Mu plainly spoke. "Why were these houses destroyed? Do you know?" he asked while taking out a gold coin.

The man's eyes glinted at the sight of gold, and a flattering smile appeared on his face.

"Yes, yes! Of course, I do! I've been living here for four years now! I even saw everything happen personally!" The man hurriedly said, the greed for the coin motivating him.

"Go on, tell me." Lin Mu said, flipping the coin between his fingers. "All that you know."

The man nodded his head and began speaking.

"I live right there!" The man pointed to a certain house.

Lin Mu gazed at the house and recognized it.

'Isn't that Old Granny Tuo's house?' Lin Mu identified.

She was one of his neighbors and had helped out his mother a few times when she was still alive. But what Lin Mu didn't understand was why this man was here. He was sure that this man never lived there before, as old Granny Tuo lived there alone.

And when Lin Mu had left the town, the old woman was still alive and well.

But upon hearing the next words of the man, Lin Mu understood why.

"I had just moved to the house after my aunt Tuo left it to me in her will. She had gotten sick and passed away in her sleep. I used to live in the Eastern town before that. My wife and I moved here since it was good for us and had a place for children.

Anyways... a month after I moved in, I heard a loud noise in the morning. Coming out, I saw none other than the town guards along with a lot of soldiers in the street." The man said, intriguing Lin Mu.

### **Chapter 1136 Broken Home**

"And why were the soldiers here, exactly?" Lin Mu asked.

"They were looking for some clues. Apparently, a wanted person used to live in the house and had a lot of things hidden there. They upturned the entire house but didn't find anything.

Not feeling satisfied by the lack of the evidence, they went ahead and ransacked the other two houses too. Of course, the people living there opposed them, but they were beaten up and taken away by the guards.

We never saw them again and didn't dare to ask around either. A few months after that, the place was pretty much dug out and they supposedly found something hidden underground. There was even a cave inside." The man answered.

Hearing it all, Lin Mu knew for sure that it was the work of Gu Yao. Or was done under his command.

'Seems about right. He wouldn't care for a few commoners. Shame that they had to die for it though...' Lin Mu thought to himself.

"Here you go." Lin Mu tossed the gold coin to the man and rose up into the sky.

"Huh? He can fly?" the man was left stunned, the gold coin falling from his hands.

~CLANG~

A crisp sound was heard as the coin struck the ground.

Lin Mu flew to the north, intending to finish up a couple more things.

This time, he didn't use Little Shrubby to travel through. Instead he flew on his own while Little Shrubby sat on his shoulder. He did this because he didn't want to alert a certain group of people.

"They shouldn't have gotten that far even if it has been two days... with the supplies they took, they should be a bit slow." Lin Mu reckoned.

The people he was looking for were none other than the deserter prince of the Shuang Qian Kingdom and the soldiers he had taken with him. Lin Mu could have just let him go and let others handle it, but since he was going to the frontier anyway, he reckoned he might as well check it out.

'Perhaps I might find something else too...' Lin Mu wondered.

Lin Mu flew for about three hours and continued to use his spirit sense to track the whereabouts of the caravan. There were clear tracks on the path, which let him know that they weren't even bothering to hide.

'They are definitely in a hurry... or they would have at least attempted something. Just the fact that the took so many soldiers along seems strange. If he is running away, he should have kept his party as small as possible.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

After a few more minutes, Lin Mu finally spotted something in the range of his spirit sense.

"There they are... why is their numbers this low though?" Lin Mu questioned, seeing only ten men.

While Lin Mu was in the north, the alliance was working on the war plan in the east.

Two days had passed since Lin Mu had met up with Jing Luo and Wu Hei. Right now meeting was currently ongoing in the Light Harmony sect. This was the place selected for the meeting since they were the closest to the Shuang Qian kingdom from here and could head to the border quickly.

In attendance were the patriarchs of the alliance, as well as all their high elders and other important members such as the clan heads of the Fenlong kingdom. There were even some independent figures that didn't belong to any power, the best example being none other than Jiao Fang.

He had officially joined up with the alliance shortly after meeting Lin Mu.

But in among all these, the most important person was currently missing, it being none other than the leader, Lin Mu himself.

"Elder Jing Luo, where is Lin Mu? I thought he was with you before?" Patriarch Hua asked.

"With the war close ahead, Lin Mu has decided to do his own preparation. He said he is going to tie up some old ends and also getting some more allies." Jing Luo replied.

"More allies? I thought we already had everyone possibly covered." Mu Tao the current head of the Mu clan, asked.

He had safely entered the Nascent soul realm and was the strongest member of the Mu clan currently. Not only that, but his mastery over the Mu clan's puppets was next to none and could easily go against a Dao Shell realm cultivator just on his own.

The others looked on in interest as well, wondering who else Lin Mu was going to contact.

'More allies? Just how does he get them?' Jiao Fang thought to himself.

"I don't know either." Jing Luo shook his head.

"Do you know where he is, though? We can probably guess from that." Patriarch Yi You asked.

"He's probably in the Kong plane." Jing Luo answered.

"The Kong plane?" Wu Hei was surprised. "There are no new allies there, though? Only we can access it after all." He said in confusion.

Everyone now had the same question as to who Lin Mu had gone to look for but there were no answers.

"I don't know about that either. He'll be back soon anyway. We just need to focus on our work." Jing Luo said after a bit.

"He's right. We have far more important matters at hand. If Lin Mu gets more allies, it's all the more good for us." Patriarch Mingliang stated.

Many of the people nodded their heads in agreement and went back to the discussion. There were far too many fronts they would need to handle and many situations that could arise.

Wu Hei and Jiao Fang were the ones that were contributing the most about the Northern Tribes since they had the most contact with them.

The first meeting between Wu Hei and Jiao Fang was also rather stunning to them. Wu Hei realized he had been kept in the blind by Gu Yao about Jiao Fang's identity the whole time. It only made him hate the man even more, but was also thankful that Jiao Fang was ultimately on his side.

## **Chapter 1137 The Deserter Prince**

While the meeting continued on in the Light Harmony Sect, Lin Mu continued his investigation.

'With the number of people to fall from nearly a hundred to merely ten... something must have happened. And all that to happen in merely two days is a bit too much as well.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

"Little Shrubby, do you smell any other scents than these ones? Did they split up, perhaps?" Lin Mu questioned.

~SNIFF~

Little Shrubby's small nose twitched as he quickly analyzed the scents.

"They don't just have their own scents. There is the scent of more people on them." Little Shrubby answered. "And also blood... but very little. Doesn't seem like it came from an injury or fight, though." He added.

Hearing this Lin Mu narrows his brows. He would understand if the scent of blood was high, as it would mean that these people had fought a battle and gotten injured. But there was still the scent of others on them.

It was also possible that they might have had an inner conflict among themselves, but there were no signs of them splitting off either.

"Did they kill their own members?" Lin Mu wondered.

Lin Mu approached them while hiding on the ground. He intended to listen to them, and learn what they might be up to.

For a few minutes, the people didn't talk at all. But one of them finally spoke after twenty minutes of silence.

"Prince, we should be close by now." One of the men spoke.

~HAAA~

"We came all this way betting that they were saying the true. It's good that it is, or we would have had to take a bad route." The prince spoke. "There is no way, I'd live like commoners to hide." He added.

"You've paid the right price, so I doubt they would not keep their word. It was after all, a deal your mother made for you." The man replied, to which the prince just nodded.

"I hope the payment will be as the prince stated?" another man who was dressed in armor asked.

"Of course you will, commander. I've given you my word." The prince replied, but the displeasure in his eyes could still be seen.

"As long as the prince complies. After all... my men have had to pay the price for your safe passage." The commander stated, a slight smile on his face.

The expression of the prince wavered for a moment, but he composed himself in the next. Turning his head away from the commander, he continued walking.

Unknown to them, Lin Mu was following them and listened to all that they had talked.

'The prince found a backer?' Lin Mu understood from their words.

It was certainly intriguing who would dare to harbor a deserter prince.

"No... even if someone was willing to do that, no one is in this direction other than one party... The Northern Tribes." Lin Mu's expression turned serious.

The prince and his party continued walking for about three more hours before they finally reached the peaks that formed the great border between the two continents. Of course, the frontier was beyond these peaks, but the paths to reach it were only two.

And this path was certainly not one of them. Or rather, it wasn't a path at all, being a dead end instead.

"Are you sure this is the right location, prince?" The commander asked.

"It should be..." the prince replied, a little uncertainty in his voice.

"Let me check the map, prince." The prince's personal steward said before taking out a scroll.

Upon unrolling it, a map could be seen. The map was relatively simple and was of a very small range of area. On the map were drawn several trees, and other topographical features.

But the most eye-catching was the character written near some trees. The character was written in the tribal language and was unreadable by others.

"Hang on. Doesn't this group of trees look similar to the one on the map?" One of the soldiers said after glancing for a moment.

The steward follow the soldier's hand and truly saw a group of trees that looked to be in the same exact arrangement as that of the map.

"Seems like it. We should check it out." The steward said.

The prince's party went to the group of trees and tried to find any clues.

"I found something!" A soldier said after a few minutes.

"What is it?" the commander asked.

"Seems like a letter." The soldier said, before handing it to the commander.

The prince approached the commander and asked him to open it. The letter was small, and inside it only a few words were written.

'Wait till midnight, then ignite a fire for 2 minutes exactly.' The instructions on the letter read.

"Is this it?" The commander said, finding the letter to be a lacking.

"Only one way to find out..." The prince stated. "We'll wait till night."

Lin Mu though, didn't just wait around with them.

'If they've been instructed to light a fire, then the other party must be close enough to see it even in night.' Lin Mu reckoned.

His spirit sense searched the hundred kilometer area in detail, even going deep in the ground to avoid missing anything.

"Hmm... nothing on the surface, at least. Other than beasts..." Lin Mu continued to check.

After a couple of minutes, though, he finally found something.

"Oh?" Keeping up the 'tradition' of the Gu Legion, Lin Mu found a few people hidden at the foot of a mountain.



There were a lot of bare trees there, and even more had been put there. The trick was that these trees were actually moved there to cover the entrance of the hideout.

"Let's see what they are up to." Lin Mu muttered before flying to the hideout.

In just five minutes, he was there and observed there to be five people belonging to the northern Tribes hidden.

Lin Mu didn't alert them though nor did he attack them. His first goal was to find out why they were here exactly.

### **Chapter 1138 A Passageway Into The Empire**

"How long do you think that guy will take to come here?" In the hideout of the northern tribes, one of the men spoke.

"We don't even know if he's going to come or not." The second man said.

"We'll wait for two days more. If he doesn't come by then, we'll tell the elders. No use in wasting time on him. We have other assets to make use of anyway." The man who seemed to be the leader, stated.

"Yeah! Besides, our deal was with his mother, not him. We are already doing a favor to him by staying here this long. The council is going to act soon. We need to prepare for their smooth passage." A female tribe member spoke this time.

"The passage should be fine. We only need to do a final check, which we'll do by default if that prince keeps up. Once he's paid the cost and crossed over, our duty here will be done, too. Soon, our people will have the debt repaid." Another man spoke.

"Kaja, go and watch out for the signal. It will be night time soon. Who knows if that prince will even follow instructions or not. He might light it early." The leader of the group spoke.

"Alright." The man named Kaja said and left through a small opening at the edge of their hideout.

The top of it was covered with snow, making it impossible to see the opening with naked eyes.

~shua~

Unknown to them, a man was currently listening to all that was being spoke about. Lin Mu appeared some distance away from there and continued observing. The man named Kaja climbed up on top of a tree and kept his gaze locked towards the direction where the prince was supposed to be.

While it was still autumn, the temperature this far north was always like that of winter. The snow here was every present and the northern tribesmen easily hid taking advantage of it.

They wore thick beast furs that were either naturally white, or were dyed white. This made it simply to hide within the snow. Kaja couldn't even be seen on top of the tree. He laid on a branch such that, there seemed to only be a pile of snow accumulated on it.

"Are we going to kill them?" Little Shrubby asked.

"No... why would we do that, when we have a bigger target." Lin Mu said.

"What do you mean?" Little Shrubby asked.

"If their words are true, then there must be a secret passage the northern tribes would be using to cross over. If we kill them now, the tribes would find out and change their plans.

Instead of that, if we let them go for now, the tribes will follow through with their plans, allowing us to ambush them." Lin Mu explained for the beast.

"Oh! I understand!" Little Shrubby replied, finding the plan to be good.

If it was good for his master, then it was good for him too.

"Oh yeah, when you were hunting the northern tribe people before, where did you go? Was it in this area?" Lin Mu asked.

"No, I took a different path. Jing Luo told me which one to take and I just followed that. It is far to the west from here." Little Shrubby replied.

'Far to the west?' Lin Mu thought over it and guessed that it must be the second route that went to the frontier.

"But I just went over the mountains directly. There were a few beasts at the Dao Shell realm, but they ran away after a fight." Little Shrubby replied.

"Oh?" Lin Mu knew that there were Dao Shell realm beasts in these mountains who actually served as another barrier for intruders.

"Yeah, I only managed to kill two. The rest were able to run away or hide. I could have found them, but the enemies would also find out about it from the noise. The mountain snow falls down if I fight too much." Little Shrubby confirmed.

"I see..." Lin Mu nodded his head, finding it impressive that little shrubby actually did the mission well, avoiding avalanches.

It was the correct choice as well, since a battle between Dao Shell realm creatures was almost always loud and would attract attention with ease.

Lin Mu moved his mind back to the task at hand and asked Little Shrubby for something else.

"See if you can find the location of the passage. They probably hid it with formations, but there might still be some scent left. " Lin Mu asked.

"Okay!" Little Shrubby replied, and returned to his full form.

He went in one direction to search, while Lin Mu went in the other. His spirit sense was used at its full potential, scanning for any spirit Qi fluctuations that might be present in the area.

But after two hours of no results, Lin Mu took a pause.

"Hmm... this might be harder than I thought." Lin Mu muttered.

"If they are going to use this passage as their main entry point, then they are definitely using their best formations to hide it." Xukong spoke up.

"You might be right, senior." Lin Mu nodded his head.

"You should just head back. It will be midnight soon. Save your energy and let the others show it to you themselves." Xukong suggested.

"Yeah, it's close to midnight anyway." Lin Mu agreed and called back Little Shrubby.

The two of them returned to the hideout of the northern tribe members and waited till midnight before the smoke signal could be seen in the distance. It was dark, but the sharp eyes of Kaja accurately spotted them.

"They're here..." he took out a jade slip and sent a message to his companions.

~SHUA~

The snow parted and the four northern tribe members popped out of the opening.

"Let's go pick our guests up." The leader said before taking the lead.

The prince and the people accompanying him were certainly shocked by the sudden appearance of the tribesmen. They weren't even allowed to speak and were gestured to follow them in silence.

### **Chapter 1139 A Gate With The Cost Of Blood**

"Are you sure they are the right people?" The commander whispered to the prince.

"Of course they are. Do you think just anyone else would appear at the right time mentioned on the note?" The prince replied.

"But... these guys... their clothes and appearance... aren't they from the..." The commander was certainly nervous after seeing the northern tribes' people.

"Shush!" The prince warned the commander.

"Do not speak that which you cannot bear to hold against. Times change and allies change with that." The prince said in a low voice. "Do you not want to survive this?" he asked.

The commander certainly felt a bit surprised at the sudden change in the prince's attitude but gritted his teeth and nodded his head.

'While this is unexpected... the tribals have not attacked us yet. Just what did the prince do to make this possible?' the commander wondered.

The remaining soldiers that had come with the commander were still in confusion, but kept their tongues in check. They knew that while their commander might have some freedom in speaking to the prince like this, they certainly didn't.

If they weren't prudent like this, they would have long since died. There was a reason why they were still here, while their former companions were chosen to be 'sacrifices'.

Lin Mu who was watching them all, was a bit surprised but also impressed by the tribesmen.

"Their demeanor is certainly different." Lin Mu muttered.

"They don't smell like the invader either." Little Shrubby added.

"Right... they are actually 'clean'." Lin Mu said, not sensing any muddled Qi of the pills of grace on them either.

Observing the discipline and methods that they operated on, Lin Mu could tell that these men were cut from a different piece of cloth. Their choice of maintaining silence with the prince and the soldiers was a wise one.

Lose lips and free conversations can often cost one's head in these kinds of situations. After all, knowledge was power and the less one let others know about them, the greater advantage they would hold over them.

'Considering what I heard from the northern tribesmen in their hideout, I can safely assume that they are from a higher division of the tribe's warriors.' Lin Mu reckoned.

Lin Mu could easily tell that these tribesmen weren't that strong either. The man who seemed to be their leader was at the Nascent soul realm, but the rest were only at the core condensation realm.

He could very well eliminate them at a mere thought, but the current situation demanded for something else.

The tribesmen took the prince and his followers about fifty kilometers away from where they originally were. Lin Mu also kept his senses alert, looking for anything that might be hiding here.

'I've already checked this place, and didn't discover anything. It's certainly hidden well.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

The leader of the northern tribesmen raised his hand, gesturing all to stop.

He turned around and looked at the prince.

"Where is the toll?" The man asked.

"Isn't that supposed to be given after a safe passage?" The prince asked.

"No... that was never specified." The leader stated.

The prince furrowed his brows and felt doubtful.

"I can't fully trust you to just give it to you right away. What if you do not keep the promise?" the prince said.

Lin Mu was a bit impressed by the prince's words.

'He might be a deserter, but he's certainly not weak.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

"This prince might have just made the best possible choice that was presented to him at his current situation. Everyone looks to survive, and he is simply doing that. Sometimes doing that might make one a coward, but it will allow one to live." Xukong stated.

Lin Mu thought upon the words for a bit, before internalizing it for later. He knew the words held great weight, and could be pondered on for a long time. But now was not the right place or time for it.

"HUMPH! Do you think we will break the promise officiated by the elders?" The female member of the group scoffed.

While she seemed a bit upset, the leader and the rest still had the straight faces as if they didn't care.

~Sigh~

"The toll isn't the price to let you escape, it is the price to enter the very passage itself. Without the toll, even we cannot enter it." The leader said.

Hearing this, the prince was surprised.

'Not like I'm in any position to debate here.'

He thought for a moment before nodding his head. "Alright." He said before turning to the commander.

"Take out all of them." The prince stated.

"You heard him!" The commander spoke to the rest of the soldiers.

"YES COMMANDER!" they all replied in unison before taking out small bags that were hidden in their armor.

The bags were made from some kind of beast hide and there were fine inscriptions written on it. As soon as they appeared, Lin Mu's eyes locked onto them.

"Oh? A sealed spatial storage tool? No wonder I didn't detect these bags on them." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

The sealed spatial treasures made it so that no spatial fluctuations were released from them. But it also quite literally 'sealed' them. Making them unable to be used.

The soldiers used their blades and slashed the bags open.

~THUD~ THUD~ THUD~ THUD~

In the next moment, several bodies fell out of the bags. There were exactly ninety five of them, just the exact number that were missing from the group. And that was not all. Lin Mu discovered something else surprising.

'They're actually alive? There's no way they would have stayed alive for this long in a spatial storage treasure like that. Not to mention the seals would have had to be broken if they were to be given air at any time.' Lin Mu thought in surprise.

"Kaja, check them if they're all 'fresh'. The dead ones won't be of any use." The leader spoke.

The man named Kaja quickly did as was told and checked on all the soldiers that were kept unconscious.

"They're all fine, leader. The dose of the Life Waning Frost Powder was just right." Kaja replied.

"Good. Get them prepared. We'll open the gate in exactly ten minutes." The leader said.

His companions then gathered the unconscious men and placed them around in a unique pattern. Lin Mu who saw this pattern, found it to be familiar.

"Hang on... isn't this a... Gate reversal formation?" Lin Mu identified.

This method of placement was used for the Gate Reversal Formation. It was nothing but a counterpart to a locking formation and could be used in many different variations. But the basics of it were the same and other layers would be put on top of it to make it complex.

Usually, the materials used for the base were spirit stones, formation flags, or even certain kinds of herbs. But Lin Mu had a guess about what was going to be used here and his expression darkened.

At the very least, Lin Mu could take solace in the fact that the soldiers would have been killed as deserters anyway. Thus, he could just sit back and watch them be killed.

Soon the unconscious soldiers were placed in the pattern and everything as ready.

"NOW!" the leader of the northern tribesmen ordered.

The four other members all took out a talisman and threw it out.

~SHUA~

The four talismans flew to four corners of the formation that had been outlined and glowed in a red light.

~WOOOO~

A strange wind started to blow and a black smoke came out of the talismans. The smoke formed a wall around the entire area and hid everything that was behind it. In the white snow, it looked glaringly abstract.

The smoke filled the area but avoided the prince and his companions. The same was said for the northern tribesmen too. The sacrificed soldiers though were drowned in the smoke and started to wither at a visible rate.

Soon they were turned into nothing more than dessicated corpses.

Lin Mu's brows furrowed, as he knew very well where this method had come from.

Once all the corpses were drained to the limit, the smoke started to condense. It turned into a black ink liquid that fell down to the ground. Wherever it went, the snow melted while the ground below it was stained.

The liquid flowed in a certain pattern and formed an array.

~SHUA~

Once the array was completed, it let out a humming sound and a rumbling sound was heard.

Lin Mu felt spirit Qi fluctuations coming from it at that moment and knew that the isolating formation was now deactivating.

~HONG~

A minute later, the formation array was fully activated and the isolating formation disappeared.

~FLICKER~

The air turned fuzzy and blurry. The hills that were situated in the front turned into mist and disappeared.

"What!?" the prince and the commander were left stunned.

Lin Mu was the same and had not expected it to be like this.

"The passage... it's not a tunnel and nor is it underground." Lin Mu muttered in disbelief.

"So the passage is nothing but another route into past the mountains?" The prince said in surprise.

"Indeed." The leader nodded his head.

"How... was this hidden? The experts used to do regular checks here if I recall it correctly? If it was made, they would have found out." The commander couldn't help but wonder.

Since he was in the royal army, he knew of the protocols that were followed at the frontier.

"What makes you think this was built recently? This has existed since the times of our ancestors."

#### **Chapter 1140 A Path Hidden For Ages**

"What makes you think this was built recently? This has existed since the times of our ancestors." The leaders of the northern tribe group revealed.

"WHAT!?" Hearing this, almost everyone in the prince's group along with the prince were stunned.

Even Lin Mu who heard it, was surprised.

"How is that possible? This should have been discovered by the experts, right?" The prince couldn't help but say.

"Yeah, and if there was such a path, why have the northern tribes never used it before?" the commander asked as well.

"That is something I do not know. It is beyond my authority and was not informed. I only know that this path existed for a long time and has a cost to be used." The leader of the northern tribes spoke.

Hearing this all, Lin Mu furrowed his brows and couldn't help but take a look at the surrounding mountains.

'There are certainly no signs of them being excavated or moved. And neither are there any traces of spirit Qi or similar things. The formation array runes are hard to examine and I can't tell how old it is either...' Lin Mu thought to himself.

"If you want to identify the age of a formation array, you need to examine the power source for it. This is easy in the case of fixed power sources like spirit stones and mines, but not so much in the case of the environmental spirit Qi." Xukong explained.

"Does this mean there is still a way? Even if it's hard?" Lin Mu asked.

"Indeed... a formation array that uses the environmental spirit Qi pulls it towards itself and absorbs it. This inadvertently creates a higher concentration of spirit Qi around it. And what do you think happens to that area?" Xukong replied.

Lin Mu thought over it and realized it in a few seconds.

"The soil, rocks, trees or anything that's around it would increase in spirit Qi!" Lin Mu answered.

"Exactly! This part is still easy. The tricky part is to differentiate how much spirit Qi would naturally be present in them and how much was added due to the effect of the arrays. The natural spirit Qi concentration can vary greatly in areas and even a small distance such as a meter can have a significant difference." Xukong explained further.

"Then how do I do this accurately?" Lin Mu asked.

"Unfortunately, there is no easy way for this. The only way you can get good at is with experience. Once you know the compositions of different kinds of areas and materials, you might get used to it and get better.

But don't worry if you don't get it accurate right now. It takes thousands of years to get good at it. This is a very high level analytical skill." Xukong answered.

"I see..." Lin Mu nodded his head.

Just having information about a skill like this was good for Lin Mu and now he would pay attention to her different kinds of areas whenever he traveled.

With this done, Lin Mu followed behind the northern tribesmen. They crossed the path that had opened up between the mountains and took about an hour to go past it.

'This is only because they have people that can't fly. Even core condensation realm experts will be able to cover this distance in a matter of minutes,' Lin Mu estimated.

He himself would be able to cross it in less than two minutes and with Little Shrubby even faster.

He needed to keep this travel time in mind, since it was important.

'If the army of the northern tribes is to come from here, it will take approximately the same time. And that is the time period we will have to act in and take advantage of.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

The high level experts of the northern tribes weren't something that Lin Mu was considering when he talked about this path. After all, those experts could very easily traverse the mountains.

It is the low leveled members that were the main users of this path. After all, they were in the majority and formed nearly 90% of the army. They needed a proper path to cover it and would not be able to traverse the mountains... at least not fast enough and with a guarantee of survival.

Lin Mu followed the prince for about ten more kilometers when Xukong suddenly spoke up.

"Lin Mu Stop!" Xukong hurriedly warned.

"What is it senior?" Lin Mu questioned.



"There is a sensory barrier here. And not just any... but one made by at least an immortal tool perhaps." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu's expression turned serious as he looked at the north. He knew what the immortal tool might be.

"Yeah, it is an immortal tool, I can feel its presence." Xukong confirmed.

"Hmm... it should be the Ancestral Bell that Wu Hei told us about." Lin Mu stated.

"Indeed." Xukong agreed.

"What does this barrier do, senior? Does it just inform the user of the immortal tool if someone passed through it?" Lin Mu questioned.

"That might just be one of the functions. We don't know what else it can do. It's best not to test your luck now. If there is an offensive function to it as well, it could very well target you from this range." Xukong answered.

"I see... they must have used the ancestral bell to set up the barrier since the time for war is so near. We just got another proof of it in this way." Lin Mu spoke.

"Yes, and now you can plan accordingly." Xukong replied.

"Exactly... no way we are going to let this opportunity go." Lin Mu said before returning back to the official territory of the Great Zhou Continent.

~Rumble~

Spirit Qi fluctuations were felt once again as the mountains and hills that had disappeared materialized again. A minute later, it was as if they were always here. And just to be sure, Lin Mu even went up to the mountain and physically touched them, examining if they are real.

"They really are real?" Lin Mu was surprised.