

## Walker 21

### Chapter 21 - Hunting And Training

Lin Mu ate the roasted meat for his breakfast and became energised, ready to tackle the day's tasks. Lin Mu then went to check the traps as routine, but once again nothing was caught in the traps, neither were they triggered.

'Seems like the number of beasts in the outskirts has finally started to decrease, it means winter is close now. I got to hunt more beasts and save up some money.' Thought Lin Mu.

The merchants would be arriving in the town the day after tomorrow, so Lin Mu wanted to accumulate as many pelts as he could till then. Lin Mu entered the deeper part of the forest after walking for an hour.

He searched for beasts while keeping an eye out for danger. The first prey that Lin Mu found was a two-tailed wood lizard, which was sunbathing on a rock. Lin Mu was able to kill it with ease as it was a low tiered beast and was slower than Lin Mu.

Two-tailed lizards were dark green in colour and had two tails. While they were slow, their defense was good because of their tough scales. But Lin Mu had no problem penetrating its defense due to his excellent short sword. Lin Mu stabbed it behind its neck and the beast was dead in seconds.

Lin Mu stored the corpse in the ring and continued his hunt. Soon after he found a thorn tailed rat which nearly scratched him with its tail. He killed it and stored it in the ring.

It took him another hour to find the next prey. This time it was a Red-crowned heron. There was a flock of Red-crowned herons at the edge of a pond. In order to not alert the entire flock, Lin Mu baited one of the Red-crowned herons with the flesh from the thorn tailed rat. He hid on the top of a tree while the beast came to eat the bait. Lin Mu jumped down with his sword drawn, and slashed at the neck of the beast, severing its head in one stroke.

Storing the corpse in the ring, Lin Mu waited to see if he could get another Red-Crowned heron with the same method, but alas the flock was scared away by a beast's roar that came from deeper in the forest. The roar even surprised Lin Mu, as he had not heard such a loud roar before. He wondered what beast could roar like that.

The roar had more impact on the beasts than he thought. He could not find any more beast after that as they all hid or retreated further away, after being scared by the roar. Seeing that he was not going to have luck hunting, Lin Mu went back to the hunting shack. On the way back he heard the roar once again, this time it was fainter, but it had the same effect none the less. He could see birds flying away overhead.

'I hope the roar of that beast does not keep on scaring away the beasts or I would not be able to hunt.' Thought Lin Mu.

Lin Mu went to the stream to skin and prepare the beasts. He stored the feathers of the Red-crowned heron and the skin of the Two-tailed wood lizard. It took a little effort for him to skin the Two-tailed wood lizard because of the hard scales, but he was successful in the end.

Done with this task, Lin Mu was prepared to train. He followed his previous routine of training and then sat down to chant the calming heart sutra. He felt the vital energy that was still stored in his body being assimilated. Lin Mu could feel his skin tingle as the energy waves spread through it.

After all the energy was assimilated, Lin Mu looked up at the sun and estimated that it was probably 2 pm. He removed the carcass of the Two-tailed wood lizard to cook on the bigger stove he had made outside the shack. He then cooked a pot of rice on the other stove.

While his lunch was cooking Lin Mu took the booklet out of the ring and continued memorising it. Lin Mu wanted to memorise the physical training method of boulder collapsing fist first so that he could practice it today. He was able to memorise the stances and the fist routines by the time lunch was cooked.

Lin Mu ate his lunch with gusto while going over the contents of the booklet in his mind. After he was done eating lunch, Lin Mu stood up to practice the physical training method of the boulder collapsing fist.

The training method comprised various stances in which the practitioner had to perform the fist routines. Lin Mu practiced it all way until it was dark. He was sweaty and tired, so he went to the stream to take a bath and also wash the robes he was currently wearing.

The water of the stream was chilly, but it soothed Lin Mu's sore muscles. After taking a bath, he changed into a new set of clothes and went back to the hunting shack to cook dinner. He took out the carcass of the Red-snouted boar and cut a leg from it. He then spit-roasted it on the bigger stove outside.

Not to waste time, he continued reading and memorising the booklet. While he was engrossed in reading, Lin Mu heard a rustling sound coming from the bushes nearby. He turned to check and saw a small silhouette escaping into the forest as soon as he stood up. He could not find anything there, so just thought it could be a small animal.

Soon enough, the leg of the Red-snouted beast was completely cooked. He tore a piece of tender meat and dipped it in some soy sauce before eating. Lin Mu could not even imagine himself being able to eat an entire leg of a boar by himself, a few weeks ago; but now here he was with his ever-increasing appetite.

Lin Mu laid down on the bed and continued reading the booklet. By now he had memorised the physical training method and only needed to memorise the remaining half of the breathing technique.

By the time he fell asleep Lin Mu had memorised all the contents of the booklet. In the dark place in his sleep Lin Mu recalled the martial technique, improving his understanding of it. When Lin Mu woke up in the morning, he had memorised and understood the martial technique by heart.

"Now that I'm done with the booklet, I can finally start to learn it." Thought Lin Mu out loud with excitement in his voice.

Lin Mu withdrew the carcass of the Red-crowned heron from his ring and cut it into small pieces to make stew from it. He put the pieces of meat into the pot and added spices and condiments to flavour it. By the time it cooked, Lin Mu would try out what he had learned from the booklet until now.

Lin Mu first started using the breathing technique until he got the rhythm for it, then took the proper stance mentioned in the booklet. Then he started performing the fist routine. He made multiple mistakes while practicing the martial technique. He always mismatched the breathing pattern and the fist technique while he changed stances.

He could feel the vital energy within his body being agitated, but it could not find the proper path to flow. It got stuck whenever he messed up the technique. Eventually with time he started to make fewer and fewer mistakes.

It had been two hours since Lin Mu had started practicing the martial technique. He had lost track of time as he immersed himself in training. He only stopped when he smelled the delicious aroma rising from the pot of stew. He then sat down to eat the stew. The meat was extremely tender and separated from bones with ease. Glistening drops of fat covered the meat as he ate it and drank the stew.

The warmth spreading from his stomach comforted Lin Mu. After eating he sat down cross-legged to chant the calming heart sutra and obtain the most benefits from the training he did. He felt the effects of the calming heart sutra spreading and by the time all the vital energy was assimilated, Lin Mu felt like he was already near another breakthrough.

Practicing with the boulder collapsing fist martial technique seemed to have a greater effect than the method he was using before. Lin Mu decided to use this technique for training from now on. The next task on his list was to go hunting.

Lin Mu had not heard any roar ever since yesterday, so he should be able to hunt today with no problem. He took a different path this time and headed more towards the north-western part of the forest. After two hours of walking, he reached a small clearing from where he could hear the cries of two different beasts.

He approached silently, making sure not to alert the beasts. He climbed a tree and hid at the top to spy on the beasts. Once he got to the top of the tree, he could finally get a clear view of the beasts.

'They seem to be in a stare-down?' Thought Lin Mu upon seeing the behaviour of the two beasts.

The first beast was a black panther who had a small tuft of yellow fur on the top of its head, while the other beast was an ape who had light brown fur and arms which were abnormally long compared to its body.

Lin Mu did not know the names of these beasts, but they seemed to be very strong mid tiered beasts. He did not know why, but instead of escaping, Lin Mu's curiosity made him observe the beasts with interest. He wanted to know why these beasts were in conflict as they did not seem to be competing for territory.

Only when the ape beast moved a little did Lin Mu see what was hidden behind him. Upon seeing the object behind the ape, Lin Mu's eyes went wide.

## **Chapter 22 - First Battle**

What Lin Mu saw behind the ape beast was a plant that was 2 feet tall. It was dark green in colour and had 6 leaves on its stalk. There was a purple-coloured fruit the size of a grape hanging from it. Lin Mu thought he was hallucinating at first when he saw faint wisps of smoke arising from the fruit.

"Wait, that's not smoke, that's spirit qi!" spoke Lin Mu out loud, before slamming his mouth shut upon remembering what kind of situation he was in.

Thankfully, the beasts did not seem to notice when Lin Mu spoke out loud. The plant that the ape beast was guarding was a spirit herb and that too, one that had already borne fruit. The conflict between the two beasts seemed to be due to the spirit herb.

Beasts had their own innate cultivation talent and did not have the need for cultivation techniques to enter the qi refining realm like humans. But beasts could still consume spirit herbs to increase their speed of cultivation.

Because of this whenever a spirit herb or spirit fruit grew in the wild it was usually fought upon by multiple beasts and sometimes even humans if they discovered it.

Lin Mu had seen some spirit herbs and spirit fruits before, but none of such high quality. The spirit apples which grew in the orchards of Northern town were of the lowest quality of spirit fruit and still cost one gold coin each, Lin Mu could not even imagine how expensive a spirit herb of this quality was worth.

At this moment, wild thoughts were running in Lin Mu's mind. He was imagining all methods he could use to snatch the spirit herb and obtain it for his own use.

'If I can obtain that spirit herb, I'm sure I will enter the qi refining realm with the help of the calming heart sutra.' Thought Lin Mu.

Lin Mu kept on observing the beasts while formulating plans for obtaining the spirit herb. Currently, the two beasts were growling at each other, trying to intimidate each other. The ape beast seems to have been guarding the spirit herb for some time, while the panther beast seemed to have just discovered it and was coveting it.

After a couple of minutes, the panther beast could not take it anymore and made the first move. The panther beast pounced on the ape with its claws drawn. The ape beast howled loudly at the panther's approach and extended his arm to intercept the panther. The panther scratched the ape on the chest while the ape slammed the panther with its long arm on its side, which made the panther retreat.

The panther was then circling the ape, looking for the next opportunity to strike. The ape was scratched on its chest and was bleeding from the wound, while the panther seemed to be completely fine after the ape's retaliation. From this, one could assume that the panther was the stronger beast of the two, and the ape seemed to be at a disadvantage.

This time the ape lunged forward with its arms stretched up and smashed them together on the back of the panther. A pain-filled cry came out of the panther's mouth, yet it kept its poise and sank its fangs into the knee of the ape. A sickening crunch could be heard as the panther ripped out the kneecap of the ape.

The ape wailed in agony as its eyes turned bloodshot with rage. The beast lost all inhibitions and tangled together with the panther in a mindless fight.

By the end of the fight, the ape beast had lost an eye, with multiple chunks of flesh ripped from its body, and was unable to move due to its injured knee. The panther beast was also heavily injured, having broken multiple ribs and a foreleg, which it was dragging along now.

Both the beasts seemed to be at their last breaths, but the panther was still faring better. The panther was crouching and looking for an opportunity to deliver the final blow. Lin Mu had witnessed the entire battle and was also waiting for an opportunity to strike.

Observing that the ape would not be alive for much longer, Lin Mu approached from the blind spot of the panther. The ape was already blinded in one eye and had become weary due to blood loss. The panther saw the ape swaying and made its move. It tackled the ape to the ground and bit down on its throat.

It held on tight while the ape was blindly raining blows on the panther. Grasping this opportunity, Lin Mu sprinted forward and reached the panther in a couple of breaths. The panther finally heard Lin Mu approaching and had let go of the ape's throat to get ready for him, but the ape gripped the limbs of the panther like a vice.

The panther released a loud roar while trying to break free of the ape's grip. Lin Mu reached the side of the panther and slashed the short sword at its neck, but missed and cut its back instead, as the beast shifted.

The panther attacked Lin Mu with its hind limbs, which were free and nearly injured him, but Lin Mu could dodge it by sidestepping. The ape's grip on one forelimb of the panther weakened, and the panther pried it free.

Lin Mu slashed again and completely missed as the panther was able to twist and turn to dodge his attack. Noticing that the panther was about to break free, Lin Mu held the short sword with both his hands and jumped at it, ignoring the idea of getting injured. The beast clawed at Lin Mu in response which missed his torso and grazed his left arm leaving a shallow cut on it.

Lin Mu put all his weight in and stabbed the panther all the way through its chest. Lin Mu then rolled away, escaping another strike of the panther, leaving the short sword stuck in the panther. Seeing that he was successful in stabbing the panther beast, Lin Mu put distance between him and the panther.

The panther wailed in anguish but could not do much to remove the sword. Now that the ape was dead and had let go of the panther it tried dragging itself towards Lin Mu in a final attempt to attack him, but was too weak and collapsed after not even three steps.

Lin Mu waited for 5 minutes before approaching the panther. He carefully poked the panther with a stick and checked whether it was still alive. Confirming that it was dead, Lin Mu pulled out the short sword from the chest of the beast. A stream of blood then started flowing from the hole in the panther's chest.

Lin Mu put the corpse of the panther into the ring and did the same with the corpse of the ape as well. He then approached the spirit herb and plucked the fruit hanging from it. He was about to pull out the stalk from the ground as well when it withered in an instant and turned to dust. This surprised Lin Mu as he was not expecting this to happen.

Lin Mu examined the small grape-sized purple fruit in his hand. No wisps of spirit qi could be seen rising from the fruit anymore after it was plucked from the stalk. Lin Mu stored the fruit in the ring and prepared to leave the forest.

Lin Mu was lucky enough to not only acquire the fruit of the spirit herb today but was also able to obtain two corpses of possibly high tier beasts. He was lucky that the merchants would be arriving at the town tomorrow and he would be able to sell the corpses along with the box made of fragrant wood. He will definitely be making a lot of money tomorrow, which will hopefully last him the entire winter.

When Lin Mu reached the hunting shack 3 hours later, the first thing that came to his mind was to build a sled so that he would be able to carry the beast corpses to town. He could not let anyone see his usage of the ring, thus could only use this method.

He chopped down some suitable trees and tied them with some tough vines to form a flat sled. He then wove the vines together and attached them to the ends of a wooden pole he made from a sapling, to make a handle with which he could pull the sled.

By the time he was done with all this, it was nighttime. Lin Mu had already set up some meat and rice to cook, so could eat as soon as he finished building the sled.

After eating dinner, Lin Mu immersed himself in practicing the boulder collapsing fist. He practiced all the way until midnight when his concentration finally broke, and he sat down to chant the calming heart sutra.

With the practice that he did in the morning, Lin Mu already sensed that he was close to a breakthrough and thus was not surprised when he finally did, after assimilating all the vital energy from the meat. He felt his skin tingle and itch when he broke through to the 6th stage of the body tempering stage.

He was about to stand up when he felt the ring buzz and lost his balance as a spatial rift appeared right where he was sitting.

"Oh, F\*ck." Cursed Lin Mu as he shifted to the side to prevent himself from falling into the rift.

His arm was completely sucked into the spatial rift, leaving him stuck in an awkward position on the ground. If another person was to see Lin Mu in this position, they would probably burst out in laughter.

### **Chapter 23 - Shocking The Merchants**

Lin Mu searched around in the spatial rift, wanting to find whatever was in there so that he could stand up. It took him over 15 minutes, after which he was able to find the item. He pulled his hand out and withdrew the item from the ring. But upon seeing the item, Lin Mu became a little dumbfounded.

"Is this just dirt?" Said Lin Mu, on seeing the clump of dirt in his hand.

Lin Mu touched and smelled the clump of dirt and could not find anything special about it, but still stored it in the ring. He stood up and entered the hunting shack to sleep. As Lin Mu was already tired, he fell into a deep sleep within two minutes and entered the dark place.

Lin Mu appeared in the dark place and looked around. He felt like it was a little different this time. Somehow the darkness seemed to have reduced a minuscule amount. He still could not see anything, but the 'Darkness' did not seem as dark as before. It was hard to explain, but that's what he felt like.

'Since I appear here every time I sleep, I should probably give this place a name.'

'Hmm, I'll name this place the Sleepscape.' Thought Lin Mu, and felt a little proud of his naming sense.

Lin Mu then sat down to recall and practice the boulder collapsing fist. He found out that now that he had memorised the entire martial technique, he could practice it here. Even though he could not feel the vital energy within his body, he could still improve his coordination between the fist routine and breathing technique.

'If I practice here, I'll have twice the gains in half the time.' Thought Lin Mu as realisation dawned on him about the benefits of the Sleepscape.

Others could only sleep and dream while Lin Mu could enter the Sleepscape to practice and still wake up feeling refreshed. Thus Lin Mu continued practising the technique until he woke up.

Upon waking, Lin Mu set some meat on the stove to cook while he practiced the martial technique and see how much he had improved after practicing in the Sleepscape. He could see some improvement in his coordination, but his vital energy still had difficulty in finding the right path to flow.

As soon as the breakfast was ready Lin Mu stopped to eat it and then sat down to chant the calming heart sutra. Lin Mu noticed that the rate of assimilation had increased, as before it took him 30 minutes to completely assimilate the vital energy, but now it took him 25 minutes.

'Looks like my assimilation rate increased after the breakthrough, or it could be that I can assimilate more vital energy than before, perhaps. I'll have to test it out after coming back from the town.' Thought Lin Mu.

Lin Mu stored the sled he had made into the ring, as he would be walking most of the way to the town, and only when he is close enough will he use the sled to pull the corpses. He also withdrew the sack which he slung on his back and a coin pouch that he tied to his waist.

Ensuring that everything was ready, Lin Mu set out on the path to the town. It was around 8 am right now, and most of the merchants should be reaching the town by noon. Lin Mu had plenty of time to do all the tasks today. If he is able to get a substantial amount of money, Lin Mu should be able to book a room in an inn for at least a month.

Lin Mu was about one-quarter of the way away from the town when he finally saw some people on the path. He then waited for the people to go far enough for him to not be visible. Once there were no people nearby Lin Mu took out the sled and put the corpses on it.

He then started to pull it along, when he suddenly got the idea that he should probably not let the beast corpses be exposed and cover them. The only thing that he had that could somewhat cover the beast corpses was the large sack that he had. So he covered them with the sack, leaving some parts of the corpses exposed but not so much that it would invite the people's interest.

While walking he came in contact with some people, but they only paid him a momentary glance before turning away. Lin Mu reached the Northern town in 30 minutes, during which he saw some merchant carriages that were also entering the town.

The view of the town had completely changed due to the large number of merchants who had set up their stalls and shops everywhere. There were a ton of people browsing and buying the goods the merchants had brought. While some hunters could be seen selling some beast materials to the merchants.

Even the peasants working in the spirit apple orchards were given two days off, as this would be their only chance in buying whatever goods they needed from the merchants before winter comes. Once winter officially starts, the next time the merchants would be coming to the town would be at the start of spring, next year.

The trade route that the merchants followed was to enter the four towns and then head towards Wu Lim city where they would be selling off their most expensive goods and buying the shipments of spirit apples as well as some miscellaneous goods.

After completing their trades in the city they would all exit through the southern town and then head towards the various villages, towns, and cities towards the south. The things which attracted most merchants to Wu Lim city were the spirit apples and the occasional rare spirit beast materials.

Lin Mu took the road towards the town square where the bigger merchants set up their shops. He wanted to sell the beast corpses to a merchant who specialised in them. Also, if he wanted to sell the fragrant wood box, he will have to find a merchant who dabbled in luxury goods.

He reached the town square 20 minutes later as there were many people and carriages on the street which he had to carefully wade through. Lin Mu let his sight wander and saw a myriad of people and a cacophony of sounds.

There were merchants and shopkeepers shouting out their wares, people bargaining with the merchants, and some people arguing with each other on who spotted the item first and had the right to buy it.

One could see people from all walks of life in this square. Some were hunters with sinister appearances, some merchants who had cunning eyes, and of course some naïve commoners.

Lin Mu's sight eventually stopped on a group of merchants who were surrounded by a large crowd of people. Their carriages were parked behind them and on the side, one could spot some live beasts in cages as well as beast corpses which were currently being skinned by some men.

Lin Mu dragged the sled towards that group of merchants. He bumped into some people and had to also push some people aside so that he could pull the sled in order to reach the merchants.

Once he reached the merchants, one of the young men that were skinning the beast corpses spotted him and gestured him to bring his sled there. The young man looked to be in his early twenties and was wearing a tough traveler's robe.

"You're here to sell some beast corpses, I presume?" asked the young man to Lin Mu.

"Yes, I have two beast corpses that I'm looking to sell." Replied Lin Mu.

The young man gazed at the sled and said,



"We're currently only buying larger beasts, so if you have any other smaller beast corpses, I'm afraid you'll have to look elsewhere."

Lin Mu nodded to the young man and turned the sled around to show him the beast corpses. But when he lifted the sack and exposed the corpses, the young man's eyes went wide and his jaw fell.

"This... This is a long-armed Heimaos ape, and that's a Yellow-tufted panther." Shouted the young man in shock.

Hearing the young man's shout, the other merchants and the people standing around also turned their focus towards him and then towards the beast corpses. Surprise could be seen in the eyes of people who knew what those beasts were, and confusion in the eyes of those who didn't.

The older merchant who seemed to be the leader of the group approached the sled to check on the beast's corpses. His experienced eyes scanned the corpses and then turned towards Lin Mu.

"A long-armed Heimaos ape corpse at the peak of the mid-tier and a Yellow-tufted panther corpse at the High-tier; you've been very lucky, boy." Spoke the merchant.

Lin Mu was a little confused when the young man was shocked, but when he heard the words of the older merchant, he finally understood his reaction. If not for the scenario where the two beasts had already heavily injured each other, there was no chance that Lin Mu could hunt them; even escaping from them would be pushing his luck.

The other people who were watching were gossiping and muttering amongst themselves. The older merchant seeing the crowd's condition gestured towards a burly man that was skinning a beast corpse at the side. That burly man came close and dispersed the crowd. Some people in the crowd were unwilling at first, but then scattered under the threatening eyes of the burly man.

Once most of the people dispersed and only the people who were actually trading with the merchants were left, the older merchant spoke,

"Though the pelts of both the beasts are damaged, I can still pay you for their materials and the meat."

Lin Mu nodded as he knew that the pelts were beyond saving and the beast corpses were only worth their materials.

"Yes, I want to sell these beast corpses, so how much will you pay me for these?" asked Lin Mu.

"2 gold coins for the long-armed Heimaos ape and 4 gold coins for the Yellow-tufted panther." Stated the older merchant.

This time it was Lin Mu's turn to be shocked.

## **Chapter 24 - A Large Transaction**

It was true that Lin Mu did not know what those two beasts were, and neither did he know how strong they were, but he never expected to get 6 gold coins total for both the beast corpses. Another point Lin Mu understood was that he was in extreme danger the whole time he was in the presence of the beasts.

The one thing he did not have to worry about anymore was about affording a room at an inn. With the 6 gold coins he got, he would be able to easily spend the rest of the winter in the inn. A single gold coin is enough to rent a decent inn for an entire month.

'I was pinning my hopes on the fragrant wood box to get enough money to last the winter, but these two corpses are already more than enough.' Thought Lin Mu.

The older merchant was staring at the shocked Lin Mu. Seeing that he was not answering, the merchant questioned,

"So will you take the offer?"

"YES, yes I'll take it." Said Lin Mu hurriedly after he snapped out upon hearing the merchant's question.

The older merchant asked the young man standing at the side to take the beast corpses away while he took out 6 gold coins and passed them to Lin Mu, who took them with shaky hands. The older merchant smiled a little upon seeing Lin Mu's shaky hands.

Lin Mu pretended to put the coins in his pouch, but he actually stored them in the ring. Lin Mu had never handled such a large amount of money, so he wanted to keep it safe and the safest place would be the ring.

Lin Mu was also grateful to the older merchant as he had dispersed the crowd before offering him the money or an incident such as the one with the snow veiled hare would have happened again today.

Even though Lin Mu was stronger than before, being in the 6th stage of the body tempering realm, he still would not be able to defend himself against multiple people.

After completing the transaction, Lin Mu turned around to leave. Now he only needed to find a merchant that would buy the fragrant wood box. Lin Mu browsed around the square until he found a rich merchant who seemed like he would buy the box.

The rich merchant was a middle-aged man wearing a long yellow robe and had his hair tucked in a hat. There were many items that were set for sale in the makeshift shop. Though most people were only watching them, never actually buying them.

There were goods of different types- amulets, pendants, bracelets, earrings, bejeweled daggers and blades, vases, and pots of exquisite quality along with a multitude of luxuries.

Lin Mu approached the shop and looked around. Seeing all the items he felt like the merchant would probably accept the fragrant wood box.

Lin Mu turned his gaze to the merchant, who was sitting and drinking a cup of tea in silence.

"Sir Merchant, do you buy things here?" asked Lin Mu respectfully.

The merchant, who was engrossed in enjoying his cup of tea, opened his eyes and gazed at Lin Mu.

"Depending on the item, I may or may not buy it. But know this, that I only buy high-end or rare items." Answered the middle-aged merchant expressionlessly.

Lin Mu pulled out the fragrant wood box from the sack, which he had withdrawn from the ring beforehand. He then presented it to the middle-aged merchant.

The middle-aged merchant narrowed his eyes upon seeing the fragrant wood box.

"A fragrant Agarwood box and hmm, what's this?" The middle-aged merchant muttered as he saw the pattern engraved on the box.

The merchant seemed to have identified the pattern on the box, as his interest in the box rose.

"How did you get this pill storage box from the Tri-cauldron peony sect?" asked the merchant.

Lin Mu was a little surprised as the merchant was able to guess the use of the box with just one look. He also confirmed his suspicion that this box and the Four vessels restoration pills were indeed from the Tri-cauldron peony sect.

"A man pawned it off to my father in exchange for some money." Answered Lin Mu.

He had long thought of what excuse he was going to give, in case anyone asked.

The middle-aged merchant had a slightly confused look upon hearing Lin Mu, but then had a change of expression, as if he had some kind of realisation.

"Ah, you must've gotten it after last year's plague. Of course, the Tri-cauldron peony sect were the ones who supplied the cure for it." Said the merchant with an affirming tone.

This was news to Lin Mu. He did not know that the Tri-cauldron peony sect supplied the medicine for curing the plague.

The plague that spread last year was devastating for the Northern and the Eastern town. Around thirty percent of the population of both towns died due to it. It was not until a month later, after it started to spread, that the mayor of Wu Lim city requested the sect for help. The medicine arrived two days later, but it was already late for Lin Mu's parents as they had long succumbed to the disease.

Lin Mu pushed his thoughts aside for now and spoke,

"Will you buy this box then?"

"Let me test it first." Said the merchant as he took the box from Lin Mu's hands.

The merchant tapped his finger on top of the pattern, and suddenly it lit up. Various runes appeared floating on the engraved pattern. Lin Mu's eyes went wide as he saw the sight.

The merchant noticed Lin Mu's shock as he said,

"It seems you did not know that it had a preservation formation placed on it."

Lin Mu nodded in affirmation to the merchant's words.

"Of course you are not a cultivator, so there was no way you could know." Said the merchant to himself.

"Wait, that means you are a cultivator?" asked Lin Mu curiously.

"Yes, I am a cultivator indeed." The middle-aged merchant answered.

The merchant then switched his gaze towards the box and stayed silent as if in thought. He had his hand under his chin as he spoke,

"It's a fragrant agarwood pill storage box from the Tri-cauldron peony sect with a preservation formation placed on it. So for it, I'll give you a price of... hmm, a 100 gold coins."

Lin Mu was too shocked to even express it. He even secretly pinched himself to ensure that he was not in a dream, heaven knows that he has not had a dream for a few days now; he could have just started to daydream without even realising it.

Lin Mu was not the only person who was shocked upon hearing the price. While there was no one else at the shop, there were two men standing a little farther from him that also heard it. The two men were standing with their backs to Lin Mu. They did not turn around to look right away, instead they walked a little farther from the shop and then turned around to look.

The day had been going amazing for Lin Mu. He already felt lucky upon getting 6 gold coins for the two beast corpses, but now that he was getting a 100 gold coins in exchange for the fragrant wood box, he was on top of the world.

Understanding Lin Mu's acceptance, the middle-aged merchant turned his left palm up and a small pouch appeared on it out of thin air. Lin Mu looked closer at the merchant's hand, and indeed there was a ring on the middle finger of the merchant. The merchant was also wearing a spatial storage ring.

It was the first spatial storage ring he had seen, except for the one that he had. The ring that the merchant was wearing was vastly different from Lin Mu's. While Lin Mu's ring was a dull grey with five small protrusions on it, the merchant's was golden with a small blue gemstone embedded in it.

After the small pouch appeared in the merchant's palm, he opened it and counted 100 gold coins before putting them on the counter. Lin Mu hastily picked them up and stored them in his own coin pouch.

He could not store them in the ring right away as the amount was too much to hide and also the merchant in front of him was a cultivator, who could notice it.

While this all happened the two men were closely watching the entire transaction. Greed could be seen igniting in the eyes of both men. The men seemed to have said something to each other before they disappeared in the crowd of people.

While Lin Mu had wanted to prevent a similar situation as before, by hiding and being as secretive as he could be with the transactions, the thing that he feared still happened, and right now he did not even know that he was in danger.

Done with the transaction, Lin Mu walked away from the merchant and went towards the deserted alley where Jing Wei's Emporium was located, as he still had other items he wanted to sell. While he was walking, he was completely unaware that two men were following him from afar.

## **Chapter 25 - Finding An Inn**

Lin Mu was standing in front of Jing Wei's Emporium, staring at the shop.

Before entering, he withdrew all the materials he was going to sell, as well as withdrawing a sufficient amount of money to be kept in the coin pouch.

He currently had four materials he wanted to sell. They were the pelt and tusks of the Red-snouted boar, the pelt of the Two-tailed wood lizard, and the feathers of the Hook-winged swan.

The gains from these materials would not compare to the number of coins he received from today's previous trades, but it will net him some silvers at least. Because for Lin Mu every little copper counted.

Once Lin Mu ensured that everything was ready, he took a deep breath and pushed open the door of the shop. The door was still hard to push and creaked loudly when it swung open.

The shop was still the same as he had left it before, with the only exception being that the counter was clean from dust and the woman, Duan Ke, was already at the counter.

Duan Ke was sitting at the counter while reading a book. She was wearing a light green dress today and her hair was tied in a bun with the help of an ornate hairpin in the shape of a poplar leaf.

Duan Ke turned her sight away from the book and looked towards Lin Mu, who had just walked in. But as she looked at him closely, she felt that he looked different from before. Only when he came in front of her, could she perceive the reason.

'He broke through to the 6th stage of the body tempering already? It has not even been a week since he was in the 4th stage of the body tempering realm.' Thought Duan Ke with a little surprise on her face.

Lin Mu was thinking about what he was going to say to Duan Ke, so did not notice the slight surprise on her face. He stood in front of her and spoke in a friendly tone,

"I'm here to sell more materials."

"Show me what you've brought." Said Duan Ke curtly.

Lin Mu opened the sack and pulled out the materials one by one. He first placed the bundle of feathers from the Hook-winged swan on one side, along with the tusks of the Red-snouted boar. Then took out the rolled-up pelts of the Red-snouted boar and the Two-tailed wood lizard.

Duan Ke unrolled the pelts and inspected them. Finding nothing wrong with them, she placed them down and then inspected the tusks for cracks and counted the number of feathers.

After she was done inspecting all the materials, Duan Ke turned her eyes towards Lin Mu and spoke,

"I'll pay you 1 silver for the Two-tailed wood lizard's pelt, 5 silvers for the Red-snouted boar's pelt, 2 silvers and 50 coppers for the feathers of the Hook-winged swan and 2 silvers for the tusks of the Red-snouted boar."

"That's fine for me, I accept." Said Lin Mu.

"Do you want to buy something?" Asked Duan Ke with a questioning tone, as if she was displeased with Lin Mu for only selling and not buying anything.

"Nothing right now." Said Lin Mu, oblivious to her tone.

Seeing that Lin Mu was not looking to buy anything, Duan Ke took out a coin pouch from the counter and counted 10 silver and 50 copper coins before passing them to Lin Mu who took them.

Lin Mu was about to turn around when Duan Ke spoke,

"How's the sword treating you?"

Lin Mu stopped upon hearing her and spoke,

"The sword is excellent and has been a great help to me. It did not become even slightly dull after I chopped some trees with it." Said Lin Mu with an impressed tone.

The corner of Duan Ke's mouth could be seen twitching after hearing that Lin Mu used the short sword to chop wood.

'If grandfather was here, he would definitely teach him a lesson. Using his sword to chop wood, what disrespect.' Thought Duan Ke

"You should buy an actual axe to chop wood then. It's not right to use the sword for that." Suggested Duan Ke.

"Also, perhaps for skinning the pelts, you should also get a proper skinning knife. It would make the task much more efficient." Further spoke Duan Ke after seeing that Lin Mu was contemplating on her previous suggestion.

Lin Mu thought of Duan Ke's suggestions and indeed felt that he should get a chopping axe and a skinning knife. If not for their intended use as tools, they could be used as extra weapons in case of an emergency.

"You're right, I'll get them both. Can you show me some?" asked Lin Mu.

Duan Ke nodded and came out from behind the counter and went towards a shelf towards the right. She checked the top of the shelf and pulled out a short knife that was kept in a leather sheath. The knife was 10 centimeters long and had a curved blade.

After taking out the knife, she went towards the other corner of the shelf and picked up an axe that was hung on its side. The axe looked very common and unassuming.

She brought both items to the counter and showed them to Lin Mu, who checked them out. Finding them acceptable, he spoke,

"How much for them?"

"A total of 5 silver coins, 2 for the axe, and 3 for the skinning knife." Said Duan Ke.

Lin Mu was a little surprised that the knife cost more than the axe, but then understood that the knife was of a much higher quality than the axe.

Lin Mu took out 5 silver coins from his pouch and passed them to Duan Ke, who promptly stored them in the counter. Lin Mu took the two tools and stored them in the empty sack.

He then walked out of the shop and went towards the main street.

After Lin Mu was gone, Duan Ke was still staring at the door for a while, until the door behind her opened and the old man Jing Wei walked out.

"Was it the boy?" asked Jing Wei to Duan Ke.

"Yes, it was that boy Lin Mu. He came to sell more materials." Answered Duan Ke.

Jing Wei looked closely at his granddaughter's expression and asked,

"Was something different with the boy?"

"You were right before grandfather." Spoke Duan Ke.

Jing Wei raised his brows in question.

"The boy is in the 6th stage of the body tempering realm." Explained Duan Ke upon seeing her grandfather's questioning gaze.

Jing Wei too was a little surprised, like Duan Ke upon knowing this.

"The boy definitely has some secrets. There is no other way he could reach the 6th stage of the body tempering realm this fast. I'm even thinking someone may be backing him." Said Jing Wei, after thinking a little.

"Grandfather, if someone is backing him and is able to hide themselves from you, they must have a high level of cultivation. We need to find out and verify this, or it could be problematic for us." Said Duan Ke.

"No, wait for a while. We have been hiding here for all these years now. If we expose ourselves this early, all our plans could go to waste." Said Jing Wei with a firm tone.

Duan Ke was a little taken aback from her grandfather's reaction but did not question it.

Back on the main street, Lin Mu was looking for an inn. He wanted to see if he could get a room in one of the inns. He knew that it could be a little difficult as the other hunters who did not have houses in the town must have already booked the inns beforehand for the winter.

He reached the first inn and walked in through the door. There were already many people standing around in the lobby, most of them looked like they were merchants with some hunters and common folk mixed in.

Lin Mu went up to the person sitting at the front desk and asked,

"Do you have rooms available?"

"No, sorry we are already booked for three days from today and if you were asking to stay for the duration of the winter then you'll have to come back three days later to inquire." Said the person sitting at the desk in a practiced manner, as if he had already repeated the same sentence many times.

Upon hearing the man's answer, Lin Mu walked out of the inn and went ahead to check the other inns on the street.

He ended up checking all the inns in the street and got a similar answer. They either told him to come back in three days as the merchants had booked them all, or that they were completely booked for the winter.

'I guess I must come back three days later then. Worse that could happen is that I can't find a room and I'll have to rent a small house instead. At least I have plenty of money now.' Thought Lin Mu.

Failing in his search for an inn, Lin Mu went back to the main square where all the merchants had set up their stalls and shops. He had left behind the sled that he had made, with the merchant who had bought the two beast corpses from him.

He did not want to pull the sled around the town, so he thought to get it later on if he could not find a room today. He reached the square 10 minutes later and talked to the young man who had taken the beast corpses with him.

The young man pointed him towards the cages, at the side of which his handmade sled was kept. Lin Mu thanked the young man and started pulling the sled out of the town. Now that there was no weight on the sled, it was much easier for Lin Mu to pull it.

He exited the town after 15 minutes, unaware that two men had followed him the entire time. They stayed far from him, so he did not notice them at all.

He had to travel about halfway to the hunting shack before he could store the sled in the ring as there were more travelers and hunters who were going towards the town now than in the morning.

When he finally reached a remote enough place, he stored the sled in the ring. But this time there were two men who were hiding behind a knoll, who had seen the sled disappear.

The two men were shocked but then remembered what they had seen before in the morning and understood that Lin Mu had a spatial storage treasure as well.

The greed in their eyes was blazing now. They were already thinking about how rich they were going to be after they kill Lin Mu and take away his belongings.

The two men took out their weapons and held them in their hands before approaching Lin Mu.

"Stop right there brat." Spoke one of the men.

"Ah, not again." Was the only thought that Lin Mu had upon hearing the voice that came from behind him.

## **Chapter 26 - First Kill**

Lin Mu quickly turned around to face the people that called him from behind. He saw two men standing before him, one of them was muscular and the other was thin but tall. The muscular one was holding a club in his hand and was wearing some light leather armour, while the tall one was holding an axe in his hand and was wearing rough hunting clothes.

The one who had called Lin Mu was the muscular man. He was looking at Lin Mu with eyes that were dripping with greed. As soon as Lin Mu saw the man's look he understood that they were here to rob him.

Lin Mu sighed inwardly with relief as he had already stored everything valuable on him, into the ring. So even if the men searched him, they will not find anything. Though Lin Mu did not know whether these



men were some common thieves that targeted him randomly or if they knew he had a lot of money with him.

"What do you want?" Lin Mu asked with a neutral tone, not wanting to outright offend them.

"Give us all your money and belongings brat." Said the muscular man with a rough accent.

Lin Mu's eyes narrowed upon hearing the man's accent. He could not place where he had heard it before, but it definitely was not from this region. That means the men probably came here with the merchants. It also did not seem like they belonged to a mercenary group, they were far too ill-equipped.

Not wanting to argue with the men, Lin Mu took the coin pouch that only had a silver and few copper coins in it, and threw it to the men.

"There take it, that's all I have." Said Lin Mu.

The tall man picked it up and emptied it out. Both the men saw that the coin pouch had a meagre amount of money in it and knew that Lin Mu must have stored it all in a spatial treasure. The only thing they did not know was where Lin Mu had hidden the spatial treasure. They could not see him wearing any spatial treasure like a ring or bracelet.

"Don't try to fool us you worthless brat, give us everything you have." Said the muscular man with a threatening tone.

"We know you have a spatial treasure. So spill everything out, don't try to act smart." Added the tall man.

As soon as Lin Mu heard the tall man's sentence, a mix of emotions could be seen colliding in his eyes. It would have been fine if they pestered him for his sword or money, he could have just run away like before, but now that they knew his secrets, there was no way Lin Mu could let this go.

Lin Mu unsheathed his short sword and looked at the men with a fierce expression. The two men were a little taken aback by his sudden change from meek to fierce.

"Oh, so you're gonna resist. Let's see if you can take this blow from daddy!" said the muscular man as he stepped forward to swing the club at Lin Mu.

Lin Mu sidestepped to dodge the blow and swung the short sword at the muscular man's waist. The man saw the slash and dodged it easily.

The tall man also joined the fight and swung the axe at Lin Mu's arm. Lin Mu was able to parry it with the short sword, but felt a strong shock that made his arm hurt. The tall man was stronger than Lin Mu and the muscular man. He was in the 7th stage of the body tempering realm.

"Watch out second brother, this brat is in the 6th stage of the body tempering realm." Said the tall man to the muscular man.

The muscular man was surprised on hearing that this boy, who was still wet behind the ears, was as strong as him, an adult who had been training for years.

"So, you have confidence in your strength brat, that's why you're so arrogant. It's a shame that I will break it today." Taunted the muscular man.

Both the men attacked together in an effort to swiftly finish Lin Mu, but he rolled away and all their weapons could hit was the earth.

"Dammit, you slippery loach." Cursed the tall man.

This time the two men approached Lin Mu from opposite sides, leaving him with a tiny area for movement. The tall man slashed his axe first, which Lin Mu blocked with his short sword, but felt the impact of the blow in his wrist.

The muscular man, seeing that Lin Mu was stuck defending against the tall man, attacked his head with the club. Lin Mu sensed the movement of the muscular man and quickly withdrew the skinning knife he had bought and threw it at the face of the tall man.

The tall man had to move aside to dodge the skinning knife that was flying at him. He was surprised as he could not see where Lin Mu had pulled the knife from, thus could not completely dodge the knife, and his ear was cut at the lobe.

"You dare hurt first brother, brat." Shouted the muscular man while swinging the club.

Lin Mu grasped the moment when the muscular man paused for a moment to look at the tall man and swiftly cut the club in the man's hand. The club's head was made of metal, but the handle was still made of wood.

The muscular man was now unarmed, and only a piece of wood was left in his hand.

'I can't keep on blocking the axe with my sword, his swinging force is much stronger than mine.' Thought Lin Mu.

Seeing that his club got cut, the muscular man was enraged even more. He dropped the piece of handle left in his hand and swung his fist at Lin Mu.

This time Lin Mu could not completely dodge the attack. He was hit by the muscular man's punch in the back and dropped his sword, which was blocking the tall man's axe.

Lin Mu forcefully pushed back and did a side roll, so that the axe would not hit his head. But the muscular man was already ready to deliver the next blow and with the axe approaching him, Lin mu could not do much.

"Hahaha, now he's done for." Said the muscular man.

"DIE!!" shouted the tall man.

Lin Mu thought that this was the end for him when suddenly his body turned blurry. The two men thought that they imagined this, but when the blade of the axe was about to hit Lin Mu, it just passed through Lin Mu as if he was made of air.

Similarly, the muscular man's punch too passed through his body unobstructed. Lin Mu could not think of anything at that moment and spun around to escape from between the men. In the same spinning

motion, he seamlessly withdrew the wood chopping axe from his ring and buried it in the base of the muscular man's skull.

Lin Mu left the axe stuck in the muscular man's skull and instead entered the stance of the boulder collapsing fist. His breath melded with his movement and agitated the vital energy within his body.

At that moment he reached a level of harmony and a small string of energy spun inside his right hand and formed a small spiral, which looked unstable and felt like it would dissipate any moment.

The tall man was frozen at the sight of the bloodied axe, which was stuck in the head of his second brother. Lin Mu saw this and grasped this golden opportunity. He gathered every ounce of his strength and stuck the tall man at the very centre of his chest.

The tall man felt his ribs crack and his breath was knocked out of his lungs. Lin Mu broke the stance and suppressed the pulsating pain in his right hand. He picked up the short sword that was lying on the ground, with his left arm and swiftly slashed the neck of the tall man, decapitating him.

Lin Mu was now laying down on the ground, exhausted. He did not know why, but after the attacks of the two men passed through him; he felt as if half of his energy reserves were drained and using the axe, and boulder collapsing fist depleted the rest, leaving him with a bare smidgen of energy, which he used to decapitate the tall man.

He was out of breath and his hand was throbbing with pain, leaving him unable to move. He was completely unguarded, and anyone could kill him right now with no effort. Lin Mu must've lied on the ground for more than an hour, as the sun in the sky had moved a significant distance.

After he felt a slight reduction in his fatigue and some energy being recovered, Lin Mu stood up and finally saw the entirety of his handiwork. He saw the muscular man who had the wood chopping axe stuck in his head, lying dead behind him and the now-headless, tall man beside him.

Lin Mu swallowed the sickening feeling that was rising from his throat and collected his wits. He first stored the short sword in the ring, not bothering to put it in the sheath. Then he pulled out the axe from the muscular man's head and left a pool of blood behind.

An idea then came to his mind, and he stored the corpses of the men in his ring as well. He could not just leave them lying in the middle of the path and have someone discover them. He would be incriminated if someone was able to link these two men to him.

He also searched for the skinning knife and found it lying a little farther than the decapitated head of the tall man. He picked up the head and stored it in the ring as well, along with the knife.

Now the only evidence that was left behind was the pools of blood on the ground. He spent some time covering it with mud and soil. Once the blood was hidden beneath the dirt, he looked around for anyone spying on him.

He confirmed that no one had witnessed him by checking any footprints around the area. He did not find any fresh footprints in an area of 100 meters. Knowing that he could only leave the rest to luck, Lin Mu broke into a sprint and ran all the way to the small stream beside the apple tree.

Once he reached the stream, he washed up and changed out of the soiled clothes, which had traces of blood on them. He rested for a while, soaking his sore feet in the cold water and massaging his right hand, which was now aching less than before.

He was incredibly hungry and felt like he could eat until his stomach would burst. Lin Mu stood up and walked to the hunting shack. Once at the hunting shack, Lin Mu took out the remaining meat of the Red-snouted boar and skewered it with a stick and hung it on the large stove outside the shack.

While the meat roasted, he put some rice in the pot to cook. He sprinkled the spices on the roasting meat and watched it cook. Soon enough an intense aroma rose from the meat, which made it irresistible to Lin Mu.

Ignoring the scalding heat, Lin Mu tore off an entire leg and devoured it like a barbarian.

## **Chapter 27 - Progress In The Martial Technique**

After Lin Mu was done eating he could not even believe, that he had eaten half of an entire boar by himself. He looked at his belly and found it to be stretched taut, but there was still no way that all that meat could fit inside there.

Since he could not figure it out, he just dropped the thought. He had more important things to do for now. Lin Mu could feel a massive amount of energy being absorbed from the meat in his stomach.

He sat down cross-legged to chant the calming heart sutra. He felt the energy being assimilated in his muscles and in his skin. This time he could focus even deeper and could sense a slight trickle of energy permeating his blood vessels.

'Is this the next tier of the body tempering realm? But isn't it only after reaching the 8th stage, that one can temper their blood vessels, so why can I feel them strengthening very slightly?' thought Lin Mu.

The hypothesis that Lin Mu had in the morning about being able to assimilate more vital energy, proved to be true. Even though he still had around forty percent of energy still being stored in the body, he still assimilated more vital energy than ever before.

It also took him around 45 minutes before he stopped chanting the calming heart sutra and could not assimilate any more vital energy. He looked up at the sun and guessed it should be around 5 pm.

Now that he had completely finished the entire boar, he needed to get more meat. Lin Mu wondered if he should not have sold the meat of the two beasts, those two beasts were much stronger than the Red-snouted boar and would have had an even greater amount of vital energy in them.

Lin Mu first decided to check the traps and then go further into the forest, if he did not catch anything in them. He also needed to dispose of the two corpses of the men and what better way than to dump them in the forest and let the beasts deal with them.

He reached the trail where he had set up the traps after 10 minutes. He checked the first three snares and found nothing caught in them. The next one he checked had a Thorn-tailed rat caught in it, which he could not eat. He broke the neck of the Thorn-tailed rat and kept it in the ring to use it as a bait.

He then checked the remaining two traps and found them to be empty as well. Getting unsatisfactory results with the traps, Lin Mu decided to just abandon them and only check them for bait in the future.

Lin Mu switched the path and walked deeper into the forest. He found a larger trail where there were tracks of larger beasts and dumped the dead bodies of the two men near it for the beasts to eat.

He also checked their bodies for valuables and found 22 silvers combined on both the men. He also took the light leather armour from the muscular man. He tried it on and found it to be too big for him. He could only tighten it and bind it roughly to be able to wear it. He still put it on as some protection is still better than none.

Lin Mu searched for fresh tracks of beasts to hunt. It took him half an hour to find some hoof tracks. He guessed them to be of a juvenile Six-pronged stag that had probably been separated from its herd.

Lin Mu followed the tracks for a few hundred meters, after which he found the juvenile Six-pronged stag grazing at some grass behind a thicket. He silently approached the beast, making sure not to step on any sticks and avoid making any noise. It was Lin Mu's luck that there was headwind blowing, which prevented the beast from smelling his scent.

Once Lin Mu was a few steps away from the beast, he focused his strength on his legs and lunged at the beast who was completely unaware. The short sword was able to slash the neck of the beast, who started to bleed profusely.

Because of the intense pain, the beast instantly collapsed on the ground, unable to run. Lin Mu quickly touched the beast and put it inside the ring, as he did not want the cries of the beast and the scent of the blood to attract other beasts.

Done with his hunt, Lin Mu turned back, as the sun had already started to set. He reached the hunting shack after 50 minutes and then went towards the stream to skin and prepare the beast.

He drained the remaining blood and then started to skin the juvenile Six-pronged stag. While he was skinning the beast with the new skinning knife he had bought, a thought appeared in his mind.

When he had thrown the knife at the tall man, only the knife had appeared without its sheath. But now when he withdrew the knife to skin the beast, the knife appeared with its sheath.

He was intrigued and wanted to test it out, so he stored the knife back in the ring and then withdrew it. The knife appeared in its sheath. He then tried it another time, this time only wanting to withdraw the knife and not the sheath. He succeeded, and only the knife appeared in his hand.

'It seems like I can control what I want to withdraw, even if the two objects are attached.' Lin Mu concluded.

Amazed by this new discovery, Lin Mu continued his task of skinning the beast. After he was done completely skinning the beast, he put the meat and other materials away in the ring.

From the juvenile Six-pronged stag, he obtained its pelt and small undeveloped horns. Even though the beast was only a juvenile, it was still roughly in the 4th stage of the body tempering realm.

'Humans and beasts simply cannot be compared. Even a juvenile is strong enough to compare to an average adult man.' Thought Lin Mu.

After he was done with the beast, Lin Mu started to practice the boulder collapsing fist. Since he had experienced some success after using it during the fight, Lin Mu was optimistic in progressing further.

Lin Mu stood in the stance, regulated his breathing according to the breathing technique, and then started to practice the fist routine. He felt like his coordination had indeed increased than before. Though he could not perform the same as he did during the fight. The vital energy in his body did get agitated, but it still got stuck and could not find the right path.

He focused on the feeling he got during the fight, on the spiral of energy that had formed in his hand. Lin Mu continued practicing until it was midnight and stars were painted across the night sky. Eventually, after countless tries, he felt the same spiral of energy forming in his hand. As soon as the spiral formed in his hand, it stayed stable for a few breaths, before starting to dissipate.

Sensing that the energy spiral was getting unstable, Lin Mu executed the technique and threw a punch. This time he could properly see with his eyes the effect of the technique. The punch that struck the air generated, a small gust of wind that made the leaves on the tree four meters away from him shake and fall down.

Lin Mu collapsed on the ground after executing the technique, as he felt all the energy he had obtained from the previous meal depleted. He struggled to sit cross-legged but was able to sit and chant the calming heart sutra.

Lin Mu finally felt the remaining vital energy that was stored in the body, assimilating into his muscles and skin. After thirty minutes he had completely assimilated all the energy and was hungry once more.

He went back to the hunting shack to prepare his dinner. Lin Mu ate with gusto and replenished his stamina. After he was done eating, he laid down on the wooden bed and soon fell asleep. Lin Mu appeared in the Sleepscape and continued his practice.

After some time, he felt like he could not progress anymore as he needed to feel the vital energy within his body to be able to execute the technique. So Lin Mu decided to sit down and recall the memories of the fight. Lin Mu did not understand some aspects of the fight, thus wanted to analyse every part of it.

In the Sleepscape, Lin Mu was able to clearly recall his memories. He went over them again and again, analysing his mistakes and finding possible solutions to them. In the end, he was able to understand all aspects of his fight except for one big mystery.

Lin Mu could not understand how he was able to dodge the pincer attacks of the two men. He did not understand how the attacks simply passed through his body as if it was made of air.

Now that he closely recalled it, he remembered that at that moment, a fuzzy feeling spread throughout his body. He felt as if a thin invisible sheet of some kind had wrapped his body in its entirety.

The next thing that happened after it was that he felt a great drain on his energy. About half of his entire store was depleted. He could not find the reason for that, and in the end, reached the conclusion that it was related to the mysterious ring. Somehow the ring had enabled him to dodge those attacks.

'I wonder if I can replicate that again. If I can, it would be a major skill I can use in future battles that I'll have.' Thought Lin Mu, before he left the Sleepscape and woke up.

Lin Mu stood up and the first thing he did was to set up some meat to cook on the stove. He found himself thinking more and more about food, as he trained each day. After he was done with that, he went outside to practice the boulder collapsing fist.

From the minor success he had obtained last night, he was able to build on that experience. He continued training until he was sweaty and tired. The breakfast was long ready for him to eat. Once he was done with the meal, he followed the routine and sat down to chant the calming heart sutra to assimilate the vital energy.

He could feel that he had progressed a little further in his training and was on his way to the 7th stage of the body tempering realm. Suddenly Lin Mu felt like he had forgotten something and remembered the reason why he had put himself in danger two days ago.

He withdrew the purple grape-sized fruit and stared at it while thinking,

"Should I eat it?"

## **Chapter 28 - Rescue**

Lin Mu was contemplating whether this would be the right time to eat the spirit fruit or if he should wait till he reaches the 7th stage of the body tempering realm.

'The beasts were fighting to eat this fruit, and the ape beast was in the 7th stage. Maybe I should wait until I'm at least at the 7th stage of the body tempering stage as well.' Though Lin Mu.

He did not know what kind of effect the fruit would have on him, so Lin Mu felt like it would be better if he gets a little stronger before eating it. Lin Mu thus put the grape-sized purple fruit away.

Lin Mu stood up and decided to go hunt some beasts in the forest. He needed more and more meat if he wanted to keep up with the requirements of his training. Hence he entered the forest and searched for some beasts.

By the time Lin Mu returned to the hunting shack, it was already dark. He had been able to kill two beasts this time. One was a black-horned rabbit, and another was a Red-snouted boar's piglet. These two beasts would not provide him with much meat, but should last for at least two meals.

Lin Mu continued his practice with the Boulder collapsing fist and found himself steadily improving at the end of the training session. He then ate his dinner and chanted the calming heart sutra. Soon after he finished chanted the calming heart sutra and was about to sleep, he felt a spatial rift about to open.

The spatial rift opened just a few feet away from the hunting shack, thus he did not have to worry about entering the forest at night. Lin Mu searched inside the spatial rift and found a small pebble this time. He observed it closely but could not find anything peculiar about it.

Lin Mu was utterly tired and went to sleep. In the Sleepscape he recalled today's training and analysed it and tried to identify his mistakes. He continued his practice in the Sleepscape and improved his coordination between the breathing technique and the fist routine.

After waking up, he wanted to take a bath as he did not take one yesterday due to feeling too lazy and tired. The water in the stream had become colder, a sign of the approaching winter. Lin Mu also picked some sour apples while he was there. He had an idea that he wanted to try out.

In the hunting shack, he added the black-horned rabbit's meat along with some spices and condiments. But this time he also chopped up one of the sour apples finely and added it to the stew. He trained while the stew got ready. A different aroma could be smelled coming from the pot.

The stew had a little tartness that balanced the spices and cut the excess fat in the meat. It tasted refreshing to Lin Mu, and he thought he should cook with this method more often.

Lin Mu went to the forest again to hunt some beasts. While in the forest, he heard the sounds of fighting. He had taken his regular route, but this was the first time he had seen people on it. He followed the sounds and reached a clearing, which seemed like it was manmade. The trees were cleared in a radius.

He had come here a couple of days ago and the trees were still there. He continued towards the source of the sound and reached it after a minute. Lin Mu peaked from behind a bush and saw a group of men fighting three steel-back wolves.

There were four corpses of steel-back wolves lying on the ground, probably killed by the men. He took a closer look at their armour and spotted a symbol on each person. It was the symbol for 'Fierce Blood' mercenaries.

They were probably a part of the mercenary groups that had come to the town this week. There were five people fighting the steel-back wolves. Two of which were injured in multiple places and were dripping blood as they fought.

The remaining three mercenaries did not look to be injured, but one could see the numerous claw marks and scratches on their armour. Lin Mu decided to stand back and not interfere in their fight. One of the basic etiquettes of hunters was to not get involved in other hunter's fights unless asked or if they were in immediate danger.

Lin Mu could only guess that it was the same for mercenaries as well. He watched the mercenaries fight for 5 minutes, until another mercenary had gotten injured and was bleeding as well. They had also managed to kill one of the remaining steel-back wolves.

But it still looked like the steel-back wolves had the upper hand and the mercenaries had become tired. Lin Mu could see that they were getting slow and making mistakes.

"Keep it up brothers, we just have these two beasts left and then we can rest for the entire month." Spoke one of the mercenaries who was injured.

"Dammit, I knew we should have retreated beforehand, now we don't even have enough stamina left for that." Complained the mercenary who had just gotten injured.

"Shut it, you two, and focus on the beasts." Shouted the man who seemed to be their leader.

While fighting, one of the mercenaries missed his step while dodging and fell down. Taking this opportunity, one of the wolves lunged at the fallen man.

"NOOO! hold the beast back." Shouted the leader as he tried to block the beast but could not as the beast was much faster and the other steel-back wolf had also interrupted the mercenaries.

The injured mercenary who had fallen was still reeling from the impact of falling and could not respond in time. All the mercenaries were tense and had already accepted that they were going to lose one of their brothers-in-arms.



But as they continued watching in shock, the steel-back wolf who was in mid-air was suddenly hit with an immense force and was knocked into a tree. When the mercenaries looked at the steel-back wolf that was knocked away, they found it to be missing a major part of its skull.

The mercenaries who had fallen opened his eyes and found Lin Mu standing over him in a horse stance with his right arm extended. He could see the gory remains of the steel-back wolf stuck to his fist and his face.

The other steel-back wolf was startled by the sudden demise of its companion. The mercenaries took advantage of this and killed the beast with a coordinated pincer attack, which it could not dodge.

All the mercenaries exhaled with relief, now that the danger had passed. After his nerves had calmed down, the leader turned to face the person who had saved their companion.

The person in question was still standing in the horse stance and had his eyes closed. Lin Mu was currently trying to carve the feeling he got when he executed the boulder collapsing fist into his mind. He had nearly been able to perfectly execute the technique just now, but it was still lacking in the proper utilization of vital energy. The spiral of energy that formed in his hand collapsed before it could be released properly.

Lin Mu heard someone calling him and opened his eyes.

"Thank you for saving our companion boy." Said the leader of the group who was standing in front of Lin Mu.

"Huh, ah yes, it's fine." Said Lin Mu awkwardly.

Lin Mu was expecting them to be a little angry, but it was completely different than he thought. Since Lin Mu was so focused on memorising the feeling of the martial technique, he did not realise that his face was bloodied and when he talked, some blood entered his mouth and made him spit it out in disgust.

~Ptui~ 'That was disgusting.' Thought Lin Mu.

The leader of the mercenaries was also a little stunned by Lin Mu's awkward response and the subsequent act of spitting. The other mercenaries had also gathered to pick up and support their injured companion.

They brought him towards Lin Mu and spoke,

"We give our heartfelt thanks to you." Said the men in unison.

"We would like to reward you for saving our companion." Said the Leader.

Lin Mu was a little surprised by the mercenaries' offer and thought for a moment before answering,

"Can I have the meat of the steel-back wolf?"

"That's all?" questioned the leader with raised brows.

"Yeah, that's not enough for the help you provided us. You at least have to take an entire beast corpse." Said the mercenary who was nearly killed by the beast.

"No, right now I only have the need for beast meat." Replied Lin Mu while shaking his head.

"But for a person of your standing, you deserve more than that." Said the leader.

Lin Mu's brows were wrinkled in confusion of the leader's words. He did not understand what the leader meant by 'A person of your standing'.

"Yes, as a disciple of a martial sect, you can rightfully demand more. We won't mind it." Said another mercenary.

Lin Mu finally understood why the mercenaries were being so generous and courteous. They had mistaken him for a disciple of a martial sect. With the power, Lin Mu had displayed and his young age, it was no wonder they had mistakenly assumed he was a disciple of a martial sect. As even a person in the 8th stage of the body tempering realm would find it nearly impossible to split the tough skull of a steel-back wolf.

"Okay then, I'll take as much meat as you can spare." Replied Lin Mu after thinking for a moment.

Lin Mu thought that now that he had this free opportunity to get the meat of a strong beast, he may as well take it and not correct the mercenaries' assumption.

## **Chapter 29 - Making An Acquaintance**

On Hearing Lin Mu's answer, the Leader ordered two of the mercenaries to prepare the Steel-Back wolves. While the remaining two took care of their injuries. The leader of the mercenaries asked Lin Mu to wait for a little while and offered him a wine gourd, which he politely refused.

While waiting for the mercenaries to finish their task, Lin Mu decided to ask the leader some questions and gather some information.

"What mercenary company are you from?" asked Lin Mu.

"I'm Yan Zhong from the Fierce Blood mercenary company, and brother, may I ask what your name is?" said Yan Zhong.

Lin Mu did not know if he should tell the man his real name or not. But then after a moment of thinking decided to tell him his real name. Even if he tried to somehow verify his identity as a disciple of a sect, it would not matter as his name was rather common.

"My name is Lin Mu."

"Ah, so its brother Lin Mu. Please accept my formal greetings." Replied Yan Zhong with cupped hands.

Lin Mu was once again surprised by the level of courtesy shown by Yan Zhong. In fact, this was the most courteous anyone has ever been to him. This reminded him of the prestige of a cultivator, that too of one that belonged to a sect, even if it was just a martial sect and not a cultivator sect.

Martial sects were considered inferior to cultivation sects and many of them were usually subordinate to cultivation sects. Martial sects trained disciples in the body tempering realm and the most talented ones would go further on to join a cultivation sect. Many martial sects also trained elite soldiers for the armies of cities. The elite city guards of Wu Lim city were also trained by some martial sects.

"What city are you people from?" asked Lin Mu.

"We are from Xiangwei city in the south. It's a large city that has many mercenary companies located in it." Answered Yan Zhong.

Lin Mu had heard of Xiangwei city before. It was larger than Wu Lim city and also more prosperous than it. It took one 15 days to reach it by carriage. Lin Mu then thought of the many mercenary groups that had entered the town and wondered about the reason.

"Do you know why so many mercenary groups are coming to the Northern town?" asked Lin Mu with a curious expression.

"From what I know, the mayor of the Wu Lim city has commissioned multiple mercenary companies to hunt beasts for him." Replied Yan Zhong.

"What kind of beasts?" Lin Mu asked, as he did not understand why the mayor would spend so much money on mercenary companies when he could just order the hunters to do the same,

"We were asked to hunt as many beasts as we can, the only requirement being that they should be above the 5th stage of the body tempering realm." Answered Yan Zhong with a thoughtful expression.

That kind of answered Lin Mu's question as common hunters would barely be able to hunt a single beast of the 7th stage of the body tempering realm. If the mayor wanted a large number of beasts, only mercenary companies could hunt that many strong beasts.

"So, you have been hunting here all this while?" said Lin Mu.

"Yes, we have been hunting here for a week now, while the elite groups have been hunting in the deeper parts of the forest for more than a month now. We were divided into multiple groups depending on our strength and allotted different regions of the forest to hunt in." Yan Zhong elaborated.

Lin Mu did not know that mercenaries have been hunting in the forest for more than a month. He wondered, why he did not see any when he was still living in the town. His mind then moved towards the steel-back wolves, how were they this far out in the forest. They lived much deeper than this.

"How did you come upon steel-back wolves here?" asked Lin Mu.

"We spotted this small pack, some distance from here. We were resting nearby when one of my companions heard their howls. We went to check and accidentally alerted them." Replied Yan Zhong.

"But, don't they live much deeper than this?" questioned Lin Mu.

Yan Zhong also seemed a little confused and stayed silent for a minute before answering.

"We heard from the other mercenary groups that a spirit beast has been scaring many fierce beasts away from their territories."

Lin Mu had guessed that it was some strong fierce beast that had been scaring the other beasts, but did not think that it would be a spirit beast.

"Do they know what kind of spirit beast it is?" asked Lin Mu.

"No, they have not seen it yet, they have only heard its roars till now." Answered Yan Zhong.

Lin Mu remembered the group of crimson fang mercenaries that were attacked by a spirit beast.

"Could it be the same spirit beast that attacked the group of crimson fang mercenaries?" thought Lin Mu out loud.

Yan Zhong's eyes widened upon hearing Lin Mu's words.

"Oh, you know of that?" questioned Yan Zhong.

"Ah, yes, I saw the injured mercenaries in the town a few days ago." Replied Lin Mu.

At this time one of the other mercenaries came back and spoke,

"The crimson fang mercenary, who was heavily injured, died two days ago."

Lin Mu and Yan Zhong turned their heads towards the man who had come and sat down on the side. It was one of the mercenaries who was injured in the fight against the Steel-back wolves. He was now bandaged and looked a little better than before.

"This is little Hao." Yan Zhong introduced the man to Lin Mu.

Lin Mu nodded and spoke,

"He did have very severe injuries when I saw him."

"Yes, the crimson fang mercenaries have been very pissed-off because of that. They have asked their elite teams to search and kill the spirit beast." Spoke Yan Zhong.

"Did they have any luck in finding it?" asked Lin Mu.

"No, they are still searching for it." Replied Yan Zhong.

Lin Mu and the other two men soon fell silent, and he just waited for the beasts to be skinned. 10 minutes later the mercenaries, who were asked to skin the beasts, brought the meat to Lin Mu. The men had removed the pelt and gutted the beasts. They had also chopped the meat into smaller parts, so that it could be carried with ease.

The total weight of the meat of the three steel-back wolves added to a little over 80 kilograms. Lin Mu was in the 6th stage of the body tempering stage, so it was not that difficult for him to carry that much weight and he only had to carry the meat for some distance away before storing it in the ring.

"Goodbye, Brother Lin Mu. May we meet again." Said Yan Zhong

Lin Mu bade farewell to the entire group before returning to the hunting shack.

'I obtained a lot of meat today, I can't wait to taste it. Not to mention the steel-back wolves are in the 7th stage of the body tempering realm, so they will be very rich in vital energy.' Lin Mu thought with excitement.

There was still some time until the sunset, so Lin Mu decided to continue practicing the Boulder collapsing fist. He had already had a little more progress and thus wanted to experience it again.

Lin Mu stood in the stance and executed the martial technique. He kept on practicing until a few hours after sunset. By now, his punches were able to create short gusts of wind that made the surrounding leaves sway.

After another hour of practice, he stopped to eat dinner. He had roasted the steel-back wolf meat, which was emanating an amazing aroma. He ate the meat and instantly felt the difference in vital energy, compared to the Red-snouted boar.

The density of vital energy was almost twice that of the Red-snouted boar and made him feel stuffed, even though he had not even finished half of the meat that he had cooked. Understanding that he would not be able to finish it right away, Lin Mu sat cross-legged to chant the calming heart sutra.

He only stopped when around seventy percent of the vital energy was assimilated. Then he tried to finish eating the remaining portion of meat. Lin Mu ate it all and felt extremely bloated after that. He continued practicing the boulder collapsing fist until midnight, when he felt the spatial rift about to open.

Lin Mu stopped practicing and waited for the spatial rift to open. He moved a few feet away, and the rift opened in front of him. His hand was sucked inside it as always, and thus he started the search for today's item.

He spent five minutes searching inside the spatial rift, after which he touched something which felt like cloth. Lin Mu pulled his hand out of the spatial rift and withdrew the item that he had found. The item this time was a piece of cloth, which looked ragged and damaged.

Lin Mu had gotten used to finding items such as this in the spatial rift, thus did not mind it and stored it in the ring. He then entered the shack to lie down to sleep. Sleep was just more time for Lin Mu to improve upon the martial technique.

'I think it would not be long until I would be able to perfectly execute the boulder collapsing fist.'

Thought Lin Mu.

'I should also be breaking through to the 7th stage of the body tempering realm soon, I feel like I'm already half-way through the stage.'

Pondered Lin Mu.

Lin Mu would never have imagined that he would be progressing through the stages of the body tempering realm this fast. Even the people who have a training technique, take years to reach the 7th stage. He did not know how lucky he was to have the calming heart sutra.

### **Chapter 30 - The Astonished Sky Precepts Sect**

Sky Precepts sect, The Grand Palace.

The patriarch of the Sky Precepts sect was sitting in the throne at the head of the grand hall. Tens of men and women were also currently present in the hall. Some were seated in front, on elegant chairs, and some in the back on modest cushions. While the rest were all standing at the very back against the wall, behind their respective head elders.

This was the grand hall of the Sky precepts sect, where earth-shaking decisions were made every day. Every person who was currently present here had the authority to shake mountains and move seas.

There were elderly as well as youthful men and women in this hall. Some people who were seated at the front looked youthful while some were elderly, making one question who was the older among them.

The patriarch was wearing a plain and flawless white robe. He had his hair tied with the help of a plain wooden hairpin and was currently listening to a black-robed elder speaking. Even though the patriarch was sitting casually on the throne, no person in this hall would ever question his dignity.

The black-robed elder currently speaking was the head elder of the Armament Pavilion.

"We have successfully refined the Profundity carving shield and it will be deployed in the upcoming week." Said the Armament pavilion head elder.

"Excellent, next report." Said the patriarch, not saying any excessive word.

Another black-robed elder stood up from a chair and walked in front of the patriarch before cupping his hand in greeting. This elder was none other than Head elder Han.

"Greetings patriarch, all the preparation for the upcoming trials has been done and the spots will be allocated as before, with an elimination tournament." Said Head elder Han.

"Hmm, try and see if you can increase a few more spots this time." Said the patriarch.

"More spots patriarch? I'll see to it if it can be done, but I don't know if the trial grounds will be that accommodating." Replied the head elder Han.

◆◆The Second Grand elder has informed me that the formation of the trial ground is ready to accommodate more disciples this year." Said the patriarch.

Most of the people sitting in the hall were surprised upon hearing the patriarch's words, except for a few individuals. The Second Grand elder was in charge of all the trial grounds as well as the inheritance grounds of the sect. He was one of the three Dao treading realm experts of the sect. The second grand elder was a reclusive man, who considered his every word as gold. This was the first time he had communicated in a decade.

Head elder Han bowed in acceptance of the patriarch's words and spoke,

"If the Second Grand elder has spoken, then it will be done."

After Head elder Han was done speaking, he was about to turn around and return to the seat, when the patriarch spoke,

"How's the investigation of the spatial disturbance going?" asked the patriarch with a plain tone.

Head elder Han stopped in his tracks and straightened his posture before speaking,

"The disciples and elders who were assigned the mission have already departed from the sect, while the external elders who are located in their respective regions were informed of the matter as well." Said Head elder Han.

"Has there been any more spatial disturbances?" the patriarch questioned.

"Yes, the spatial disturbance has been detected every day, ever since the first incidence. The disciples at the star catching peak have been working hard at finding the source, but it is too short-lived and complex to trace." Replied the Head elder Han.

The patriarch had his chin in his palm as he spoke,

"You say it's too complex to trace?"

"Yes, at first the disciples were barely able to even detect a rough location of the spatial disturbance, and but later they could not determine the location. They then decided upon another route to identify it, by analysing its signature." Elder Han spoke before taking a pause.

"But they could not identify even a single source which could barely resemble one percent of the signal." Said the Head elder Han.

Except for a few people who knew what Head elder Han's words meant, the rest of the people looked on with questioning faces.

"So you mean to say, it is 'that'." Said the Patriarch with ambiguity in his voice.

"Yes, it is as you think patriarch, it is beyond the capability of the star catching grand formation to identify it. It... It most likely came from a higher world." Replied Head elder Han with slight dread in his voice.

Astonishment could be seen in the eyes of every person located in this hall, except for the patriarch and Head elder Han. Most of the people had been informed of this matter a few days ago, but they certainly did not expect for it to be so severe.

The patriarch closed his eyes and looked as if he was in deep thought. It was not until an hour later that he spoke, during which not a single person dared to speak, nor did the Head elder Han move from his position.

"Increase the disciples involved in the investigation and also inform the Supreme Grand Elder and the First Grand Elder." Declared the patriarch with might in his voice.

Back at the outskirts of the northern forest, Lin Mu was sleeping in the hunting shack, unaware of the chain of events that had been set off, ever since he obtained the mysterious ring.

The sun was hiding behind the hills, and the air was chilly. One could hear the morning call of the birds coming from the forest. Lin Mu had just woken up from sleep and was currently cooking some meat for his breakfast.

While the meal got ready, Lin Mu slipped into his routine and started his training for the day. He was getting better and more proficient with each training session. After he was done with his first training session of the day, Lin Mu ate his breakfast and then sat down to chant the calming heart sutra.

He had learned from yesterday and had prepared a lesser amount. It was just enough for him to finish and assimilate entirely. Lin Mu then prepared for today's hunt. He wanted to hunt some beasts today so that he could sell their materials tomorrow when he goes to the Northern town to inquire about a room at the inns.

Lin Mu put on the leather armour he had taken from the corpse of the thief he had killed and tightened it until it fit him snugly. He wiped his short sword clean and returned it to its sheath.

Lin Mu had learned something from his first battle, and it was that he wanted more weapons. After analysing the battle multiple times, he came to the conclusion that one of the reasons he won, was that he had two extra tools that he used as weapons. He understood that if he did not have them, he would have lost, or worst died.

This made him determined to buy more weapons the next time he visited the town, which was tomorrow. Lin Mu decided that he should check up on the traps he had set up to get some bait, which he could use.

He wanted to make use of every opportunity he could get today, as it could be possible that once he was able to book a room to stay in for the winter tomorrow; he may not return here again for a long time.