

Walker 241

Chapter 241 - Testing The Boulder Collapsing Fist-II

Lin Mu looked at his hand and clenched and unclenched his fist. There didn't seem to be any difference from before and it seemed to be the same as usual.

"It is normal. I'm not feeling any strain or pain in my arm." Lin Mu replied.

"That's good. That means your body is now strong enough to bear it." Xukong spoke.

"Back to the technique then." Lin Mu muttered before entering the stance again.

Lin Mu sensed the spirit qi within his dantian flowing into his meridians as soon as he initiated the technique. The speed was actually faster than with vital energy and the spirit qi wisps quickly entered his arms.

But at this moment Lin Mu was in for a shock as the spirit qi wisps that had entered his arm did not stay in the form of wisps. Instead, they started swirling together and collided into each other over and over until they merged together.

The merging process was quite fast and soon enough, the spirit qi wisps had condensed into the liquefied form. Now instead of fifty wisps of spirit qi, there was a drop of liquid spirit qi in his arm.

"What!?" Lin Mu uttered with shock and lost his concentration.

But because of this, his control over the technique wavered and the drop of liquid spirit qi that had formed dissipated, turning back into wisps.

"Ouch!" Lin Mu yelped.

It was as if someone had pinched his arm quite hard and it had become tensed for a moment. Still, a second later the pain faded away and his arm returned to normal.

"Oh? This is interesting." Xukong spoke with an elated tone.

Lin Mu used his spirit sense and checked his arm to ensure that it was fine. He checked the muscles and meridians of his arm and found them to be the same as before. No damage had been caused to them because of his mistake.

"What do you mean, Senior?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Looks like the centripetal force that the technique generates is strong enough that it can condense the spirit qi wisps into a liquid form. This is rather unique, and I have seen few other techniques that can replicate this effect. I have to say, the creator of this technique used a rather ingenious method to extract more power from a cultivator than should be usually possible.

Though the drawbacks of this technique are rather obvious. You need a strong body to be able to use this technique without any injury." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu intently listened to Senior Xukong's explanation and absorbed all of it. He started contemplating on it and was made to snap out of his thoughts by Senior Xukong when he spoke up.

"Can you bring out the booklet of the Boulder collapsing fist for me to see?" Xukong asked.

"Ah yes, Senior." Lin Mu hurriedly replied before withdrawing the book from the ring.

Xukong saw the tattered state of the booklet and then read the contents. His attention was pulled towards the part where it said that there were no minimum requirements needed for one to practice the technique.

"Hmm, this is rather unusual. The technique is written in the common tongue rather than Dao script. This shouldn't happen, unless..." Xukong spoke and trailed off.

Lin Mu waited for five minutes for Xukong to speak, but received no answer.

"Umm, Senior?" Lin Mu spoke up.

"I can't come to a conclusion fully, I need you to use the technique more," Xukong replied.

"Alright." Lin Mu answered before entering the stance and performing the technique.

He didn't let his concentration waver this time and execute the technique perfectly. The spiral of spirit qi was formed in his arm the same as before and condensed the spirit qi wisps into a drop. But it didn't end here. The drop then continued spinning until it could not maintain its spherical shape and elongated to form a long needle like shape.

The two ends of this needle were tapering and looked sharp, while the body of the needle looked like a strand of thread that had just been spun. Considering that this 'needle' was formed from a single drop of spirit qi, it was rather thin being even thinner than that of a single strand of hair.

Lin Mu was only able to observe all these changes because they were happening in his own body and he had been seeing it from the very start. Having observed enough, Lin Mu executed the technique and punched the air in front of him.

"Boulder collapsing fist!"

~Pew~

A low but sharp sound was heard as the spirit qi needle left Lin Mu's arm and shot forward. The effect that appeared was quite different from before. There was no fist outline but rather a colorless needle of qi that had been released.

It was not even visible to the naked eye and Lin Mu could only sense it with spirit sense. The needle of spirit qi soon made the air surrounding it revolve around it and created a faint vortex that traveled in a straight line.

The vortex met with the tree and dissipated. There was no shocking effect and it looked rather anti-climatic. None of the branches broke, and neither did the leaves fall.

"Huh, did it fail?" Lin Mu muttered in confusion, seeing the technique dissipate.

"No... Rather, it did better than I expected. Go ahead, take a closer look at the tree." Xukong suggested.

Lin Mu nodded and went up to the tree. He looked at the point where the spirit qi needle had hit and tree and found a small indent there.

'Is this it?' Lin Mu thought before using his spirit sense to observe more in dept.

He then saw that the indent was merely the surface bark of the tree that had been impacted by the air vortex that was surrounding the spirit qi needle. The actual effect was masked by this, as he saw a tiny hole that had been bored into the tree.

The hole's diameter was less than that of a hair's and it went all the way from one side of the tree to the other side. The tree in question had a diameter of about half a meter and had been pierced cleanly through.

"Whoa!"

Chapter 242 - Testing The Boulder Collapsing Fist-III

Lin Mu was certainly not expecting for such an effect to happen because of the boulder collapsing fist. Before when he used spirit qi with Boulder collapsing fist, the effect was completely different and now it was something else.

"Look at the next tree behind it," Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu snapped from his shock and went to the next tree that was at a distance of three meters from the previous one. There he saw that another small hole had been bored into it as well. Except this time, it didn't pierce all the way through and stopped about half of the way.

But that was not all. As the point where it stopped, the hole had increased in size as if the needle had exploded at the end. Lin Mu probed deeper with his spirit sense and saw internal cracks in the trunk of the tree. He reckoned that if some force was applied to the trunk, it may just split apart.

Wanting to see how much damage it had actually caused, he punched the tree without any spirit qi and vital energy. This was already enough as the tree quickly split apart.

~Crack~

~Thud~

The tree in question had the same thickness as that of the previous tree having a diameter of about half a meter. The cracks that were present inside it made it split into three irregular pieces. That collapsed on the ground diagonally.

The leaves of the trees were fallen all around and it had been broken from the middle.

"This... is amazing." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

"Indeed, I reckon this would be able to pierce through the defensive techniques and skill of other cultivators. Now you have a ranged attack as well that you can quickly switch to close ranged one." Xukong spoke.

"Hmm, now we only have the combined effect of spirit qi and vital energy left to see." Lin Mu said with a little excitement.

"Yes, but before that, you should rest and replenish yourself. Better to be in the optimum condition." Xukong advised.

"Yes, Senior." Lin Mu replied before sitting down to replenish his spirit qi.

Lin Mu took out a few spirit apples and started eating them. He hadn't made use of them for a while and thought that this was a rather good opportunity. He finished two of them and had replenished all of his spirit qi to the top.

Now all he had left was to replenish the vital energy.

'Hmm, should I cook again or just eat some of the leftover stuff from before? Bah, I'll just eat the leftover for now.' Lin Mu thought to himself before taking out some of the meat.

Quickly finishing it, he sat down to assimilate the vital energy. Although Lin Mu could have let his body replenish the vital energy on its own, eating the beast meat was a much quicker method than that since he had depleted about thirty five percent of his vital energy.

Twenty minutes later, Lin Mu opened his eyes and was full of energy again. He checked the area all around him, ensuring that there was nothing that could disturb him or perhaps harm him if he is temperately incapacitated after using the Boulder collapsing fist.

'Hopefully, I'm able to control it better than last time and don't get injured that bad.' Lin Mu thought to himself before entering the stance for it.

His breath melded with his technique and the vital energy in his body started roiling. It entered his arm and accompanying it this time was spirit qi. The two of them interacted with each other and seemed to be rather gentle, but that was only until they reached his arm.

Lin Mu had decided to use ten percent of his vital energy along with spirit qi as he wanted to be on the safe side but also wanted to see a potent enough effect. The vital energy was vigorous in action while the spirit qi was fierce.

Both of them started spinning and collided with each other. The collision got faster and harder until, they finally melded and formed something different. Unlike the spirit qi which was translucent white in color and vital energy that was pale reddish in color, this newly formed energy had a dual tone.

The energy itself was white, but its edges were pink.

The energy kept on spinning but did not change into a liquid form. It was as if the force was not enough for it to undergo further condensation, and thus it stayed in a mist form. Still, the power that could be felt from this streak of mist was not to be scoffed at.

It was as if the combination of vital energy and spirit qi cause a qualitative change instead of a quantitative one.

Lin Mu could feel that this energy was much more unstable than the spirit qi or vital energy. Not only that, but it also felt rather unnatural to him. He felt that if he didn't release this energy quickly, it would implode on itself.

Lin Mu could see the energy spinning faster and faster until it took the form of a small and flat ribbon that was spiraling. Finally, he felt that this was the maximum he could withstand and executed the technique.

"Boulder collapsing fist!"

~Hong~

A strange resonant sound hit Lin Mu's senses as the ribbon of energy was shot forward along with his punch. The energy left his fist and in the process, tore the skin of his fingers and knuckles, leaving them bloodied.

The ribbon of energy seemed to be moving in slow motion at first, but that was only an illusion caused due to how fast it was moving. It had left behind afterimages, making it seem as if a long ribbon was extending out of his fist.

The ribbon of energy finally met the first obstacle that was a tree. This tree was thicker than the ones Lin Mu had targeted previously and was about a meter thick in diameter. The ribbon of energy effortlessly mowed through the tree, splintering it in the process.

Chapter 243 - Devastating Power

It was as if invisible waves spread wherever the ribbon of energy touched and these waves fragmented everything. The wooden trunk of the tree kept on splitting into smaller pieces until they were as small as fingernails.

All of this seemed as if it took a long time, but in reality, it happened in an instant.

Then, it happened.

~KABOOM~

The tree could no longer withstand and exploded, spreading all the fragments forwards. A sonic boom accompanied this as Lin Mu himself was thrown back due to the impact. The sonic boom was delayed but was impactful.

The ribbon of energy then detonated upon itself, being able to maintain its form resulting in another explosion. By now, the ribbon of energy had already traveled beyond the tree and created a stormy wind that bent the trees around it and made them bald.

All the leaves of the trees were blown away as a wave of energy spread around in the area.

The forest had now become absolutely silent.

~Huu~

~Huu~

~Huu~

Lin Mu took labored breaths as he laid down on his back, having been knocked back. While he still had most of his spirit qi and vital energy, the impact that he had felt had rocked him to his core. He could still feel his ears ringing and his head trembling.

He didn't even notice the blood that was spilling from his right hand, which had now become injured. A minute later, Lin Mu was able to gather his wits and sat up straight, looking at his injured arm.

The skin of his fingers and knuckles had been torn and cut, as if someone had slashed it with a knife. Blood kept on dripping from it and a stinging pain assailed Lin Mu.

"Damn, this..." Lin Mu cursed in pain.

He then withdrew the healing pills and popped a lesser wound restoration pill into his mouth. He closed his eyes and chanted the calming heart sutra, trying to suppress the pain while the medical properties of the alchemical pill healed his hand.

The effect of the pill to a minute to show as the injured skin of Lin Mu's hand started itching. Soon the bleeding stopped and the skin started scabbing over. Ten minutes later, the wounds were gone and replacing them were multiple brown dried scabs.

~Phew~

Lin Mu took a breath of relief as he touched the scabs and found them to be rather stiff. He tried moving his fingers and found that to be difficult. The scabs had made his skin tight, which made it harder to move and the impact of the attack had also numbed his muscles.

"It should be fine after a day. You just need to rest your right hand for now." Xukong spoke up.

Lin Mu felt a bit better after hearing Senior Xukong's words and stood up, wanting to take a look around.

"What the..." Lin Mu muttered in shock as he saw the devastation that he had caused.

The grass all around had been uprooted and dirt had been unearthed in a circular radius. The tree that was once in front of him was no longer there, and even the ones around and beyond it were broken while some were bent.

The leaves of the trees that were close by were shredded and the others were all blown away, leaving the trees bare. Tens of broken branches were lying around mixed with the fragments and splinters from the desired tree.

"This form of boulder collapsing fist is immensely stronger than the previous ones. The qualitative change in energy is what caused such an effect. I have to say... I didn't expect this. No to mention you did not even use a lot of your energy. You barely used ten percent of both vital energy and spirit qi." Xukong praised feeling surpassed himself.

"That's true senior. But, while the consumption of the energy is less, I still can't use this form of boulder collapsing fist consecutively. The most I would be able to do it is two times, once each with both of my hands. Anything beyond that is impossible for now." Lin Mu replied as he glanced at his hand.

"Hmm, that is true but not for long. Once you reach the absolute peak of the body tempering realm, you should be able to bear it with almost no injuries. This is already an improvement from before. Another thing is, even if you can only use it once with a hand, you can still increase its power beyond this." Xukong speculated.

Lin Mu then realized the true potential of this technique.

'If I increase the output to fifty percent from both spirit qi and vital energy, what would be the effect?' Lin Mu wondered to himself.

"I advise you that you should not go beyond twenty percent output for now. I fear that even after reaching the peak of the body tempering realm, you will not be able to bear the recoil. But fear not, once that time arrives I have something that will help you greatly and will allow you to exceed it, perhaps." Xukong advised.

"I understand senior." Lin Mu was now getting even more curious about what Senior Xukong was gonna give him after reaching the peak of the body tempering realm.

He was now looking forward to it and couldn't wait to see it. But he knew that being impatient would do him no good, and the best thing was for him to steadily continue his cultivation.

"Now that you've seen the effects. I believe these techniques deserve names of their own. It would do no justice for them to be nameless." Xukong suggested.

Lin Mu's eyes lit up as ideas started popping up in his mind. He thought of their effects and the characteristics the three different forms showed to match words that would suit them.

He scratched his head in contemplation as he thought of potential names that he could use. Lin Mu ended up spending thirty minutes on it before he finally thought up names for it.

"I have decided..."

Chapter 244 - The Three Forms Of The Boulder Collapsing Fist

"So what have you decided to name them?" Xukong asked, feeling curious.

"The form in which Vital energy is used will be, 'Boulder collapsing fist: First form- Impact.'

The form which uses spirit qi will be, 'Boulder collapsing fist: Second form- Piercer.'

And the final form which uses the combination of both will be, 'Boulder collapsing fist- Devastator.'

These are what I have decided upon." Lin Mu answered.

After listening to Lin Mu's words, Xukong was satisfied and felt like the names were appropriate and could not really find any fault with them. In the end, they were but mere names and would not really affect the technique itself. Thus even if Lin Mu had named them something else, he would not have minded.

"They're good." Xukong praised.

"I think so too, Senior." Lin Mu replied, feeling proud of his naming sense.

Lin Mu then took another look around the area and he felt like he should leave now, lest someone else comes here and finds him. While it would not be a big problem for him, but it would still be too bothersome for him to give an explanation to others.

Having thought of this, he decided to leave.

"Hmm, the day should start getting longer now. We should have more daylight." Lin Mu muttered to himself as he looked up at the sky that was relatively clear.

The winter was now at its end, and the snow had stopped as well. The only place that Lin Mu could currently see snow was far in the distance on the northern peaks and the depths of the forest. While it was still cold right now, it wasn't as chilly as before.

Soon the peasants would start farming and getting ready for spring. Though in the region among the four satellite towns of Wu Lim city, only the eastern town was specialized in farming and produced the majority of grains.

The southern town was mostly an army base, yet there were still some peasants that grew grain in small tracts of land. It wasn't much, but it was still enough to satisfy the town's needs. But in the case of the eastern town, they grew a much larger quantity. So much so that around ninety five percent of it was exported to the other towns and Wu Lim city, with a smaller part also going to other regions.

"I wonder if the hunters would be organizing the spring hunt this time." Lin Mu muttered to himself while walking.

"Spring hunt?" Xukong questioned with an interested tone.

"Ah yes, senior. Before the farming can be started, the hunters organize a large hunt to cull the population of beasts that are leftover from winter. This allows the peasants to farm without worrying about random beast attacks and also allows the hunters to gain a reasonable amount of coin after the winter." Lin Mu answered.

"That seems reasonable. But why the uncertainty?" Xukong asked.

"It's just that now that there are mercenaries hunting in the forest, I wonder if the hunters will even get an opportunity to hunt." Lin Mu replied.

"Hmm, that is a bit concerning for the townspeople, but nevertheless shouldn't matter to you anymore. You are no longer a commoner." Xukong spoke up in a calm tone.

Lin Mu had a strange sense of realization after hearing Senior Xukong's words. All this time, although he had become a cultivator, he was still thinking from the perspective of a commoner and was unknowingly thinking and worrying about stuff that no longer concerned him.

"Seems like I'm still not completely used to my identity." Lin Mu spoke in a slightly embarrassed tone.

"Don't worry, you will get used to it soon. Independent cultivators often have difficulties coming to terms with their new identities compared to the cultivators that join sects." Xukong explained.

"I understand, Senior." Lin Mu replied with a slight smile.

But just as he said this, he smelled something that made him stop in his tracks.

'Hmm? Smoke? Is there someone nearby?' Lin Mu thought to himself before blinking to the top of a tree.

He then looked around and spotted smoke rising from an area near to him.

"This is strange, the hunters don't come this deep into the forest, at least not at this time, this is too early. Is it perhaps the mercenaries? No... they should be further in the depths of the forest, they won't find many spirit beasts in this area." Lin Mu analyzed.

"Why don't you just go and take a look?" Xukong suggested.

Lin Mu hummed in response before heading in the direction of the smoke. A couple of minutes later as he approached the location, he could smell something different.

"Someone's cooking something? What's this... ~Sniff~ Fish?" Lin Mu muttered as he got closer.

Lin Mu soon reached the location where the smoke was coming from and was surprised upon seeing the scene.

"What?!" He uttered in surprise.

In front of Lin Mu, a pile of sticks and dried leaves were burning in a pile that looked as if they would go out any moment. They were placed rather messily, and it seemed as if the person who made the bonfire did not have any experience in setting one.

Though that was not the most surprising thing, the surprising thing was actually the fish that was being cooked over the barely burning fire. The fish was skewered into a stick and was being held over the fire at a very low angle. But it seemed to be attached to a bush or whatever was hidden behind a bush, as Lin Mu could not see it from this angle.

"What is that, did someone set camp and go away?" Lin Mu wondered before walking closer.

He saw that the stick that was skewering the fish was shaking for some reason, but when he turned to the side and saw what was hiding behind the bush he was shocked, to say the least.

"The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat... is it... cooking?"

Chapter 245 - A Cooking Beast?

The sight in front of Lin Mu was something that would shock most people if not all. What he was seeing right now was a beast cooking something, or rather attempting to cook something as the fish being cooked seemed to be charred in some places.

~Clack~

The fish skewer fell into the fire as the beast finally noticed Lin Mu, who had approached it. The beast seemed shocked and dropped the skewer into the fire. But this led to small embers from the fire being kicked up, which then landed on the foot of the Brown Shrubby forest cat.

~Meoow~

The Brown Shrubby forest cat growled in pain as it flinched. It then took a step back and looked at Lin Mu as it froze in surprise.

"Umm, hi?" Lin Mu spoke.

The Brown Shrubby Forest cat seemed to be startled by this and ran away in the next instant. Lin Mu thought of running after it, but then decided to let it go. He instead came to stand in front of the bonfire, which had now stopped burning.

"Am I wrong or was that beast really trying to cook this?" Lin Mu said as he picked up the skewered fish.

The stick was crudely skewered into the fish from the middle of its body, and the fish was not gutted either.

"This is strange... very strange," Xukong replied.

"Isn't it? This is the first time I'm hearing... or rather seeing a beast cook." Lin Mu said with a perplexed tone.

"Indeed, beasts don't cook their food. At least not beasts of this level. They have no need for cooking food." Xukong affirmed.

Lin Mu picked up Senior Xukong's words and a new question formed in his mind.

"Oh, you mean some beasts cook, senior?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Of course. Some beasts can transform into a human form when they reach a high enough cultivation. While there are some that simply like food cooked by humans more so they steal from the humans. But it's rare to see a qi refining realm beast trying to cook." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu nodded in response and thought about why the beast would cook. But soon the pieces started clicking together.

"Hmm, it took the burning stick before, and now it was cooking here. There's no doubt that its aim was to make fire from the start. And now that I think of it, every time that I encountered it before, it was always around the time when I cooked something." Lin Mu thought out loud.

Xukong too was now intrigued by this beast and was thinking of all the possibilities.

"I have to say, this Brown Shrubby Forest cat has intelligence which does not match its species. Sure, Brown Shrubby Forest cats are slightly more smarter than other beasts, but this kind of intelligence is beyond that." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu listened to Senior Xukong's words and started hypothesizing himself.

"Senior, could it be a mutant beast, perhaps? We know that its cultivation base is quite low, so the only thing that can be possible is that. Maybe something made it mutate in such a way that its intelligence was increased instead of its strength or cultivation?" Lin Mu spoke.

Once Xukong heard Lin Mu's words, he couldn't help but think that they seemed to be likely.

"Yes... that does seem to have the highest possibility. It would also explain why this Brown Shrubby Forest cat is alone and does not move around with its companions as it should." Xukong said and took a pause. "There is a possibility... but I don't know if it would be possible for this world," Xukong added.

Lin Mu was now even more curious and wanted to know more.

"Oh? Please tell Senior." Lin Mu requested.

"There are some special kinds of spirit fruits that have the effect of increasing the aptitude of cultivators. But these very fruits can have different effects when eaten by beasts. One of these effects being raising the intelligence of a beast." Xukong answered.

"So you mean this Brown Shrubby Forest cat must have eaten one of those fruits?" Lin Mu further questioned.

"Yes, and not only that, but I have a guess about what fruit it could be... it is called as the Dual Circle Ascension fruit." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu was lost in thought after hearing Senior Xukong's answer and stayed silent for a few minutes before speaking.

"This fruit Senior, do you think there could be more of them?" Lin Mu asked.

"Hmm, that is a possibility. This kind of fruit grows on a vine that attaches itself to other trees and sucks the nutrients out of them. As long as the main tree is alive, the vine will keep on producing fruits every few months." Xukong replied.

"Hmm, if we consider that the Brown Shrubby Forest cat ate one of them four months ago, then perhaps a new one could be grown by now. If I gain it, won't I be able to increase my cultivation speed?" Lin Mu spoke.

"That is indeed a possibility. Though you shouldn't get your hopes up. There are chances that it is not even a Dual Circle Ascension fruit, but rather a different kind of fruit. Not all fruits regrow that fast and there is a chance that the spirit plant it grows on may not even be there now." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu contemplated on what Senior Xukong said for a while before replying.

"Still, I think I want to search for it, Senior. On the off chance that I find one, it will be a great fortune for me." Lin Mu said in a firm tone.

"Alright, you can search for it, of course. But for that, you will need to find the tracks of that Brown Shrubby Forest cat. A beast will always remember the places where spirit fruits grow and will often return to that location to see if more have grown.

You will first need to find that Brown Shrubby Forest cat and then follow it around for long enough that it returns to the fruit." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu nodded with determination in his eyes as he then started thinking of a plan.

Chapter 246 - Dual Circle Ascension Fruit

An hour passed during which Lin Mu had thought up of a plan that he may be able to use, but there were still some uncertainties that were problematic for him. The two biggest ones being him needing to find that Brown Forest Shrubby Cat and then somehow making it show him the way to the spirit fruit.

While being lost in his thought, Lin Mu didn't even realize that he had already entered the Northern town. He only broke out of his stupor after being greeted by some town guards. Lin Mu recognized one of them to be part of the Hei Corps and simply nodded at them before continuing on to his house.

He looked around the town and could see the stalls being set up along the street.

'Oh? They're starting already? Are the merchants coming early this year or something?' Lin Mu wondered.

The merchant's caravan would come to the region every year, four times or once every three months. Their first visit of the year was at the start of the spring and their last one was before the start of the winter. Although they would usually come to Northern town at the very last and would normally start from the western town circling around to the southern town, eastern town, and then finally northern town before entering Wu Lim City.

They did this because the Hunters took a little while to complete their first hunt of the year and obtained sufficient materials and goods to sell to the merchants. The merchants would also bring them fresh grain from the southern parts of the kingdom so that they could replenish their food stocks that get depleted during the winter.

Lin Mu felt curious and thus decided to ask around. The people this time were quite genial to him as he was now recognized as an influential person in the town. Lin Mu could not help but feel a bit emotional at this moment.

'Mother, Father, your son finally has the recognition that you once wished for me.' Lin Mu internally prayed.

For a very brief moment the character meaning 'Ordained' glowed on Lin Mu's forehead. This went unnoticed by everyone, and even Xukong did not sense it, not to mention Lin Mu.

Lin Mu talked with a few people and learned that the hunters were already ready for the hunt and would be going for it tomorrow. The acting town head who was Hei Bao had apparently asked the mercenaries to let them hunt and vacate the area for three days.

The mercenaries happily accepted and did not mind it as they were going to head deeper in the forest, anyway. Not to mention, after all the help that the Hei Corps provided them, they would be staining their honor if they did not heed his request.

"Seems like Hei Wan taking over was a good decision." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Having learned all this, Lin Mu reached his house and immediately started setting up the meat to be cooked. While the meat cooked, Lin Mu pondered more on his plan and decided to ask Senior Xukong a few questions.

"Senior this Dual Circle Ascension fruit, can you tell me more about it?" Lin Mu asked.

"Of course. Dual Circle Ascension fruit is a spirit fruit that grows on the Dual Circle Ascension Vine. The vine sprouts into two from the ground and forms circles around the tree that it is growing on, thus the name Dual Circle Ascension.

It is a rather rare spirit plant and its fruits are used to raise the aptitude of cultivators. But of course, the increase is not that great, being around one percent at the very most. While the fruits can grow every few months depending on the nutrients available, the vine itself can take decades to grow." Xukong answered.

"But Senior, if it can raise the aptitude of cultivators, doesn't that mean it's very valuable? Won't cultivators just keep on eating the fruits to raise their aptitude?" Lin Mu questioned again.

"While it is indeed quite valuable, its fruits become ineffective after a while. A cultivator won't be able to raise their aptitude for a certain point using them as they will soon develop a resistance to the effects of the Dual Circle Ascension fruit.

Still, as long as the vine can keep on producing fruits, it will stay valuable, especially for sects. For cultivation sects, such a spirit herb that can keep on producing fruits is immensely valuable, and they would do anything to get their hands on one.

But the thing that I am doubtful about is that the Dual Circle Ascension Vine cannot grow easily. Not only does it require a strong tree to absorb nutrients from, but it also needs a large amount of spirit qi to grow, an amount which is quite likely not present in the Northern forest.

That's why I have doubts whether it is a Dual Circle Ascension vine or some other spirit herb. But considering the effect it had on the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat, others seem unlikely." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu carefully listened to Senior Xukong's words and contemplated on them. He realized that the chances of it being a Dual Circle Ascension vine were getting lower and lower the more he thought. Still, he did not lose hope and wanted to find it.

But the thing that would lead Lin Mu to the Dual Circle Ascension fruit was none other than the Brown Shrubby Forest cat. In order to make it guide him to it, he would first have to find it.

"For this, you would need to tame the beast. That would give you the best chances of finding the Dual Circle Ascension fruit as just betting on the off chance that the Brown Shrubby Forest would go back there is quite less.

On the other hand, this would also allow you to test your aptitude in beast taming." Xukong suggested.

Lin Mu's eyes lit up after hearing Senior Xukong's suggestion, and he started looking forward to it.

Chapter 247 - How To Tame A Beast?

"But Senior how do I go about taming a beast?" Lin Mu asked with curiosity.

"Well, first of all you would need to find that beast. The best way would be to use a bait to attract it. You've already seen the actions of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat, so you should have an idea about what to do first." Xukong replied.

"Ah yes! Since that beast seems to be interested in food, I just need to cook some to attract it. Then whether it is the food itself that it wants or the fire, it doesn't matter." Lin Mu answered.

"Exactly. But, beast taming is much more than that. The next step in beast taming is understanding the beast. You would need to use your spirit sense to probe its mind, and find out its desires. Then you should try to fulfill those desires, but here comes the problem, beasts won't really speak to you as they don't understand the human tongue.

The difference in beast taming talent lies here. It depends on how well you can understand the beasts' emotions and desires without directly talking with them. Then once you know that, you communicate with them using your spirit sense.

This is also the most dangerous part, as the cultivator can be quite vulnerable in this stage. Not only would he put all his focus on establishing the connection, but he would also have to be careful about external threats that may attack them.

Even the formation of a connection between the beast and the cultivator is a sensitive process, and any mistake during in the stage can result in damage to the cultivator's mind. The most important thing to do before this is to ensure that the cultivator's spirit sense is stronger than that of the beast. This increases the success rate greatly.

Finally, if the beast accepts and the connection is established, then the beast can be said to be tamed." Xukong explode.

Lin Mu was surprised that the process would be so complex and had not expected there to be such intricacies.

"But you have an advantage here. The beast in question does not have spirit sense of its own, not to mention that it is much weaker than you, so it shouldn't pose much problem to you." Xukong added.

"I understand senior." Lin Mu replied in a grateful one.

Having learned the process, Lin Mu focused back on to the task at hand. The meat was still cooking.

'Ugh, I forgot that I still need to skin and prepare all these beast carcasses.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

He then got to prepping the beasts while alternating between cooking the meat. The reaming part of the day went by in this and midnight had arrived by the time Lin Mu was finished with everything.

~Phew~

"At least I won't have to do this again for a while, and it will also make it much more convenient for me." Lin Mu stated to himself before having his last meal of the day.

Lin Mu assimilated the vital energy and immediately went to sleep appearing in the Sleepscape. There he first refined more liquid spirit qi drops and infused half of them into the tissues of his stomach according to the nameless technique of the lost immortal.

After being done with this, he practiced the Thousand armament blade scripture till he felt utterly exhausted and left the Sleepscape, entering deep sleep. In the morning he woke up with vigor feeling

unbearably hungry as always and instantly pulled out the previously cooked beast meat before devouring it.

~Phew~

"I wonder if I'll ever get used to this..." Lin Mu muttered to himself with a wry smile.

He stood up and looked outside, hearing the sounds of people talking.

'Hmm, what's going on? Oh right, the hunters should be leaving by now.' Lin Mu realized.

"I should get going too," Lin Mu muttered to himself as he left the room.

A mild breeze tousled his hair as he looked up at the sky, finding it to be much clear than yesterday. He left the courtyard and headed towards the exit of the town while hearing the conversations of the town's residents on the way.

"Ah, finally we can hunt again. I was getting sick of staying in the town."

"Yeah, but what would we have even done. It's too cold to wander out, anyway."

"I hope that the hunters have good luck and hunt plenty of beasts, the kids are getting sick of eating the same food now."

Lin Mu could hear a plethora of people from all walks of life talking around him. With his enhanced hearing, he did not even need to stand close to them to listen to their conversations. Most of the conversations were rather mundane and seemed like the usual banter.

That was until Lin Mu's ears picked up something interesting which almost made him stop.

"What do we do now, we have been laying low for a while now do we just watch as it is or act? We can't even go to the warehouse anymore it's been discovered and is being watched by those guards." A voice spoke around the corner.

Lin Mu could not see who had spoken as they were in the corner of an alley, but he could hear them.

'Hmm? What's this?' Lin Mu internally questioned before extending his spirit sense.

Hidden in the alley, he found three people talking to each other. They were dressed in the clothes of commoners and but were unfamiliar to Lin Mu. He didn't go further from there and instead went to sit at a stall near the alley so that he wouldn't seem suspicious.

The stall was selling some warm buns, so Lin Mu bought some and ate them while listening to the three men.

"Don't worry, master understands that the situation is risky and has not ordered us to do anything yet. The other teams have taken up the workload and now the sacrifices will be coming in from the eastern town instead."

As soon as Lin Mu's heard this, his eyes went wide and the bun in his hand fell.

"Finally!" He muttered.

Chapter 248 - Fear And Respect

Lin Mu had not expected that after all these weeks he would finally find a clue to the culprits and not only that from the looks of it these men seemed to be part of the culprit's organization as well.

"This will make it much easier, now I just have to capture them before they kill themselves." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Lin Mu had known that the previous ones that were captured had killed themselves after being caught to prevent any information from being revealed. Thus he now had to be quick enough and incapacitate them before they can react or do anything.

Lin Mu stood up from the bench he was sitting on and did a quick sweep of the area with his spirit sense, ensuring that he knew of all the paths that they could run to.

'I'll have to attack them instantly after I probe them with my spirit sense, as they may get alerted if they have experienced spirit sense before.' Lin Mu thought to himself as he approached the alley.

He took a look up and blinked to the top of a house that was attached to the alley. Now he was right on top of the three men and could attack them easily, and that's what he did once he discovered their cultivation to be at the early stage of the qi refining realm.

Lin Mu jumped from there on top of one of the men and punched another when he was down. The two men had no time to react and fell down to the ground unconscious. The third man was dumbstruck as the companions that he was taking with till now had been taken down instantly.

But his shock only lasted a moment as he immediately realized the severity of his situation. He did not even look towards Lin Mu and instantly started running while pulling out something from his sleeves.

Lin Mu had his spirit sense locked on him from the very start, thus knew what he was attempting to do.

"Oh no, you won't!" Lin Mu spoke before gesturing with his hand.

~Shing~

~Splatter~

"AHHHHHHH!" The third man screamed in pain as blood spilled on the floor of the alley.

His scream was extremely loud and attracted the attention of people who were surprised by it. Some of them directly peeked in and saw the bloody scene. Lin Mu standing over two men whose heads were bleeding, while a third man was lying a little farther, whose right hand was missing and two legs were severed.

Lin Mu had used his short sword to cut off the hand of the man which had the poison in it, and after that he cut the legs of the man as well to prevent him from running.

The people that witnessed this horrific scene screamed with terror.

"GUARDS! MURDER!"

"THERE IS A MURDERER HERE, RUN!"

Lin Mu paid no attention to the people's scream and instead went to the legless and handless man. The man was now crying in pain and had his face covered in snot and tears. He saw a shadow looming over him and looked up with difficulty as he was lying on his chest.

"Wh-why?" The man uttered.

"Can't have you running away or killing yourself before we get some answers." Lin Mu answered in a cold tone.

By now the guards had reached the alley after listening to the screams of people. Their numbers had already been increased ever since the past incidents, thus there were some posted at every corner. The guards had their weapons drawn and were ready to act as they approached the alley.

"HALT! You are under arrest!" A guard shouted as he looked at Lin Mu with a stern gaze.

Lin Mu turned around to face the guards and their expressions fell.

"Se-Senior... Senior Lin Mu!" The guards uttered with shock.

Lin Mu looked at them with a calm expression before speaking, "Gather these three men... They're part of 'them'."

~Gulp~

The guards swallowed their saliva, trying to suppress their fear. Two of the guards were part of the Hei Corps, thus knew exactly what Lin Mu was talking about. They were also the ones that were the calmest among the group of guards that had arrived at the scene.

They saw that the other guards had still not lowered their weapons and had them pointed at Lin Mu. A horrifying memory reappeared in their mind as they remembered their first meeting with Lin Mu.

"What are you all doing, lower your weapons!" One of them shouted while the other approached Lin Mu.

"We'll do it right way senior, don't worry." The send guard spoke.

"Hmm, you know where to take them. Inform me later when you have obtained something, I'm going out to the forest for a bit." Lin Mu replied.

"It shall be done." The man replied.

Just as Lin Mu had taken a step, he stopped and turned back to the man.

"They were talking about there being more of them at the eastern town and their workload of sacrifices being transferred there. Tell this to Hei Bao." Lin Mu added before leaving the alley under the gazes of everyone.

The people stepped back in fear as Lin Mu got closer to them and gave way to him. Although Lin Mu had become an influential figure in the town, he still wasn't known by everybody and even the ones that knew him, only knew his name and did not know how he looked like.

But seeing him dismember someone and nearly kill them was still terrifying to these people. They were used to beasts killing people but not humans killing other humans, at least not so openly. They were used to hearing bandits killing people, but seeing something with their own two eyes was completely different.

Lin Mu noticed the change in their demeanors and was a little surprised inwardly.

"Such is the truth of the world. Fear is often more powerful than respect. And for a cultivator, if they have a choice, it's better for them to be feared than respected." Xukong suddenly spoke.

Chapter 249 - First Taming Attempt

Lin Mu was sitting below a tree as a fire blazed on his side. A beast was currently being roasted over the fire but Lin Mu's focus was on something else.

His eyes were closed and he was contemplating over the words that Senior Xukong had spoken. He couldn't help but feel entranced by them and those few words were stuck in his mind, repeating over and over again.

"Fear or respect, whatever it may be all stems from power... and that is all I need right now." Lin Mu muttered.

Xukong was currently engrossed in his own cultivation and had not paid attention to what Lin Mu had just said. He was suddenly woken up from his trance as he felt something terrifying. His body shuddered and he recoiled in terror.

"What was that...?" Xukong uttered as he looked at the ethereal altar in the distance.

The terrifying feeling that he felt faded away rather quickly and he could not find its source, but considering previous incidences he had a good guess that the altar was most likely the source.

Xukong flew towards the ethereal altar and gazed at it deeply, not finding any change in it.

'Did I imagine it? Or was that a premonition?' Xukong thought to himself as he closed his eyes and focused on himself for a minute before opening his eyes again.

"The connection is still the same... So, a premonition. Hmm, I need to keep a closer eye now."

"That feeling... I haven't felt it before. The Demonic path?... no this was... much worse." Xukong muttered to himself as he got more and more anxious.

Lin Mu was completely oblivious to this and had now opened his eyes. His spirit sense was spread around and he was on the lookout for beasts. He had been in the forest for about two hours now and had lured a couple of beasts to his current location.

But it was not the beast he was looking for. Though, Lin Mu had expected that this would not be easy even though he had taken precautions beforehand and ensured that no blood was spilled when he killed the beasts that approached him.

'Do I need to try a different location, perhaps?' Lin Mu thought to himself.

~Rustle~

Just as Lin Mu was about to give up, a bush in the distance rustled and he became alert. His spirit sense moved there, and he waited for the beast to reveal itself. He had to be sure that the beast that appeared was the right one as he did not want to accidentally kill the Brown Shrubby Forest cat.

Soon the beast revealed itself and a smile appeared on Lin Mu's face.

'Here it is.' Lin Mu thought as he stayed still.

He did not want to startle the beast as he had seen how timid it was. Every time he had encountered it before, it had run away and the only time it had approached him closer was when he had cooked and had not moved.

"Senior, it is here." Lin Mu spoke in his mind.

Xukong who was thinking about all the possibilities for that premonition finally snapped out of his mind. He first calmed himself down forcibly and only then did he speak. He knew that it would do no good if he revealed his anxiety and did not want to affect Lin Mu with it.

"Oh, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat is here? Good, now focus and let it approach you. Once it is sufficiently close, I'll tell you and that's when you will use your spirit sense, understand?" Xukong replied.

"Yes, senior." Lin Mu replied.

The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat peeked its head out from the bush and looked at Lin Mu for a moment before retreating. It repeated the same thing it had done yesterday and spied from all different angles before being comfortable enough to approach.

It slowly approached, still alert about any movement, and seemed to be tense. It eventually reached the campfire and came to stand in front of it. The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat had stopped and was curiously gazing at Lin Mu, who had his eyes closed so as to not startle the little beast.

Still, he was observing everything through his spirit sense and watched every reaction of the beast while waiting for Senior Xukong to give him the signal.

"Now!" Xukong uttered.

Immediately Lin Mu's spirit sense shot forward and entered the head of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

The little beast flinched and took a step back, but was unable to move much because of its mind being pressured.

~Meow~

It yelped in pain as it slumped onto the grass, not being able to bear it.

"Reduce the pressure, it's too much for the beast," Xukong ordered.

Lin Mu immediately reduced the force that he was using and became much more gentler. He had been used to probing humans till now and used the full extent of his spirit sense, being unaware of the amount of pressure that it actually exerted on them.

Still, humans were much more stronger mentally compared to beasts, thus they were able to recover rather easily. At least that was the case for the weaker beasts, such as those in the qi refining realm and below. Lin Mu's spirit sense was already much stronger than most qi refining realm cultivators and was comparable to a Core Condensation realm cultivator.

The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat finally stopped trembling in pain and became a bit calmer.

"Now you need to feel. Sense its mind, its emotions. Feel its desires and fears." Xukong instructed.

Lin Mu focused his mind and tried to see if he could do so as he was instructed. But even after a minute, there was no difference. All Lin Mu felt was emptiness.

"There is nothing, senior. I can't feel anything." Lin Mu spoke.

"Hmm, the beast is too scared and its mind is scattered. Perhaps your first approach was too much for it. You may need to try later again." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu was a little disappointed after hearing Senior Xukong's words and did not want to give up so soon.

"It's no use, taming a beast in this condition will be nearly impossible for a novice like you. It would be better to try later when it has calmed down." Xukong advised.

After hearing Xukong's words an idea suddenly appeared in Lin Mu's head.

He gritted his teeth as he thought, 'May as well give this a try.'

~Huu~

Lin Mu took a deep breath and let his body relax a bit. He then opened his lips and started chanting something in a low voice. These chants were esoteric and mysterious. One could feel the intent behind them, yet could not understand the meaning behind the words themselves.

This was none other than the calming heart sutra. It was the very first sutra that Lin Mu had obtained, and yet it was the one which he did not fully understand. Lin Mu had heard the mnemonic behind the severing heart sutra and burning heart sutra right when he obtained them, yet he had not comprehended the same for the calming heart sutra.

All Lin Mu knew about it was its effects, and it was those were effects that he was betting on right now.

Chapter 250 - A Little Friend

A few seconds passed by as Lin Mu chanted the calming heart sutra. At first, no change could be perceived, and the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat still seemed to be in the same condition as before. Its eyes were closed and its whiskers were scrunched in distress.

Lin Mu could not feel anything from his spirit sense either. The mind of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat was still empty, and no thoughts arose. But soon he could sense a cry. The cry seemed to have only rung inside his mind and was not audible in the real world.

The volume of the cry was slowly getting lower and lower until it completely disappeared and the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat also relaxed.

"Pain" An innate feeling appeared in Lin Mu's mind.

"Hungry" He heard again.

"Food" Another thought popped into his mind.

'Huh, are these... it's thoughts?' Lin Mu thought to himself.

"Incredible, it's actually working!" Xukong exclaimed.

"Is this how I am supposed to proceed, Senior?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Yes, yes, continue. Focus on its thoughts and try to convince it by offering it what it wants." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu inwardly nodded before focusing completely on the mind of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat. He could hear the same words repeating in his mind, although they were not exactly words but rather an innate understanding of those emotions.

'So it just wants food, it seems. Like cooked food that Senior Xukong talked about.' Lin Mu thought to himself before trying to communicate.

At first, Lin Mu spoke a sentence but realized that no matter how much he tried, it was not transmitted to the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat. Then he realized that he would have to simplify it, making it similar to the thoughts the beast was having.

"Food" Lin Mu expressed first.

The beast seemed to have understood him this time and had stopped its incessant thoughts. Seeing that it seemed to be working, Lin Mu decided to continue.

"Give" Lin Mu paused and took a look; finding the beast to be calm he went further.

"Me" He stated.

"Hot Food" Lin Mu explained.

He realized that he could now increase the complexity of the thought by a slight amount as he got more used to this kind of communication.

"Food give?" The beast expressed.

"Yes, give" Lin Mu replied.

"Pain?" The beast asked, which actually made Lin Mu feel its fear.

There was something hidden deep inside the beast's mind, but Lin Mu could not understand what it was. But he could realize that whatever it was, it had made a great impression on the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

"No Pain" Lin Mu answered while trying to show a calm state of his mind.

As soon as he said this, there was a change in the state and Lin Mu could feel a strange wave spreading into his mind. A second later, the wave disappeared and Lin Mu could feel a connection forming between himself and the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

"Good, good, very good. You have succeeded." Xukong congratulated.

"I did?" Lin Mu questioned, still being in disbelief.

"Yes, you did. You should be able to feel it now," Xukong said.

Lin Mu focused on his mind and indeed could find something new there. It felt similar to his connection to Senior Xukong, yet completely different. Lin Mu felt as if a string was connected between himself and the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

The string was invisible and incorporeal, yet it felt very real. Through this connection, Lin Mu could feel the mental state of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat. Right now he could sense extreme tiredness and fatigue from the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

Lin Mu opened his eyes and saw that the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat was lying on the ground and seemed to be in a deep sleep.

"Hmm, it has been quite exhausted due to the process of formation of connection. You should let it recover before you try to obtain the location of the Dual Circle Ascension fruit." Xukong suggested.

Lin Mu nodded with approval before approaching the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat. He touched its belly and found it to be rather soft due to being coated with fur. He then stroked his hands over the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat's back and head.

"So soft..." Lin Mu muttered to himself as he basked in the feeling.

Lin Mu felt as if his fatigue from earlier attempts was now fading away.

'This is rather nice.' Lin Mu thought to himself before picking up the beast in his hands.

The beast did not squirm in his hands and instead curled up in a more comfortable manner before sleeping again.

"Seems like it likes you," Xukong spoke up.

"It's a 'he' Senior." Lin Mu chuckled.

"Ah, so it's a male Brown Shrubby Forest Cat. That's fine, it doesn't matter either way." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu nodded with a slight smile on his face before looking around the area. He knew that he could have been in great danger if he stayed vulnerable like that while trying to tame Brown Shrubby Forest Cat thus wanted to be sure that he was still safe in his current area.

A quick sweep of spirit sense later, Lin Mu confirmed that there was no man or beast nearby his location and that he was completely safe.

~Phew~

"Now that this is done, time to head back to the town and wait for the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat to wake up again." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

"You also need to make plenty of food for him as you promised, remember." Xukong stated in a teasing tone.

Lin Mu rubbed his head in embarrassment with one of his hands and then stored the meat that had now been cooked into his ring.

'Let's head back.' He thought before leaving the area.

Lin Mu walked through the forest rather calmly and tried not to disturb the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat. This resulted in him talking over two hours before he reached the town. But the slow journey did seem like a waste of time to him, and he rather enjoyed stroking the fur of the beast during the journey.