

Walker 251

Chapter 251 - The Gu Legion

Before entering the town, Lin Mu took out a robe from his ring and covered the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat in his hand. He did not want people to see the beast and ask questions. While it would not cause him any difficulties, it was just that he did not want to waste time on giving explanations to them.

While passing by the alley where he had knocked out the three culprits, Lin Mu could sense the tense atmosphere. He briefly glanced inside it and saw that there was no blood there on the ground and neither were there any unconscious persons.

"Hmm, they were rather efficient." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He looked around and saw that the people nearby seemed to be slightly tense due to the recent incident and seemed to be divided over his actions. Some were impressed by the strength that Lin Mu had shown, while the others were rather shocked and a bit offended by his ruthlessness.

Lin Mu passed by these people and did not take offense to their words and easily shrugged them off. Ten minutes later he was in his house and had just laid down the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat onto his bed. The beast seemed to have taken a liking to it and quickly curled up against the pillow and slid into the quilt.

"Here you go, little guy." Lin Mu muttered with slight joy.

He stared at the beast for a bit before deciding to go visit Hei Bao. He wanted to see what information they had been able to extract from those three culprits.

Fifteen minutes later, Lin Mu was standing at the entrance of the town center and was quickly escorted to a different room that was located in the basement of the town center. The guards that were escorting him were quite respectful to him and quickly guided him to the room.

Upon opening the door, Lin Mu spotted seven people inside the room. Three of them were none other than the culprits, while the rest were members of the Hei Corps, including Hei Bao. He took a look around and saw that it was rather plain and did not have anything except for some furniture and the metal chair in the center to which the culprit was tied to.

Of the three culprits, the one that was dismembered had been chained to the chair and the other two were lying on the ground. Lin Mu scanned with his spirit sense and found the two that were lying on the ground to be dead.

'Looks like they fulfilled their purpose.' Lin Mu thought to himself as he moved his gaze back to the man who was currently torturing the culprit.

~AAARGH~

The culprit's screams spread in the surroundings and rung in Lin Mu's ears.

"Please, please... No more." The culprit spoke with great difficulty.

The other member of the Hei corps that was standing beside Hei Bao looked at Hei Bao before speaking.

"This is all we can get. Any more and we will break his mind, anyway. Better to end it right now." The man spoke.

Hei Bao seemed to be thinking something, before nodding to the man.

"Alright, end him like the rest. We've already obtained plenty of information. This has been our best one till now." Hei Ba replied in a satisfied tone.

The culprit's face fell after hearing Hei Bao's words and knew what was coming. But before he could let out his last scream, a swift blow was delivered to the back of his neck, breaking his spine and ending his life.

"Clean it up, I have other things to do." Hei Bao ordered before gesturing to Lin Mu to follow him.

Lin Mu nodded in response and followed him back to the privacy of the office upstairs. They sat at the desk and Hei Bao prepared some tea.

"We obtained a good deal of information thanks to you. They were quite sneaky." Hei Bao spoke as he boiled some water in a teapot.

"That's good. Though I don't understand, how were we not able to find any of their traces till now?" Lin Mu said in a slightly confused tone.

"That's because there were actually none of the original culprits left in the town. After the assassination attempt, most of them had already left the town and once the results of the mission were out, the remaining members of their organization left as well.

These three were actually hidden members who were never revealed and had not participated in any of the incidents until now. They had cleverly mixed in with the traveling hunters and had been lying low in the town's inns for months." Hei Bao explained.

Lin Mu was intrigued by this and felt a bit impressed by their intelligence. But then he realized that for them to be able to plan this far along, they must have been prepared.

"These culprits, did you find out who's behind them?" Lin Mu questioned in a serious tone.

Just as he asked this, the water in the teapot started boiling and the teapot let out a whistling sound. Hei Bao lifted the teapot off the heat and steeped some tea leaves in it before speaking.

"We did indeed. These men belong to an organization called as the Gu legion. We have seen their traces before a few times in different places in the past, but this is the very first time we were actually able to find out their name. This is great progress and all of it is because of you.

The Lord will be very pleased with this." Hei Bao answered.

Lin Mu heard the name and nodded in acknowledgment. He then remembered what the men were talking about originally and wanted to know more.

"When I discovered them they were talking about the rest of their members being in the eastern town. Did you find out more about it?" Lin Mu asked.

Hei Bao shook his head as he poured tea into two cups and placed one of them in front of Lin Mu.

"Unfortunately, these men only knew that there were some of their companions there in the eastern town, but not exactly how many or where. Eastern town is much larger in size compared to Northern town due to its crop fields, not to mention its proximity to the forest. It will take time for us to find out where they were hiding exactly.

We also do not want to let them know that we are coming after them, thus I want to keep this mission limited to a few of our experienced members. Once we have gathered enough intelligence, it will be the time to strike and capture them all in one go." Hei Bao said in a determined voice.

Lin Mu nodded in response and found it to be reasonable. He then picked up the teacup from the desk and took a sip from it. He savored the refreshing flavor of the tea, which made him feel a bit more relaxed.

"By the way, why did you go to the forest? Didn't you already hunt yesterday?" Hei Bao questioned with curiosity.

Lin Mu finished his cup of tea and placed it back on the desk before speaking.

"I went there to make a new friend."

Chapter 252 - More Rewards

Hei Bao seemed confused upon hearing Lin Mu's words. He could not think of anyone that would fit that description and wondered if it was someone that he didn't know of. They had already done their research on Lin Mu and thought that they knew most of the things about them.

In case of friends, Hei Bao knew that Lin Mu did not have any friends left in the town. Many of his childhood friends had left the town over the years and some had even died in the plague. While there were others who chose to leave the town after their family members died.

One of the ones that was still left was Lu Xiao, but even he had become distant over time. Another guess he had that the friend Lin Mu was talking about was perhaps someone from Jing Wei's emporium. There was little they knew about that shop or its owner.

The only information they knew was that it was run by a pair of grandfather and granddaughter with high cultivation bases. They didn't know if there was anyone else with them, but it did seem likely to them. They had come to the conclusion that someone that powerful must have had at least a few servants, even if they were not known of.

Suddenly Hei Bao had an idea, and he felt shocked inwardly.

'Could it be...? Is it someone related to his background perhaps... maybe even his master?' Hei Bao wondered.

Lin Mu was calmly sitting on the chair and was staring at his empty cup, thus did not notice the expression of Hei Bao. He pushed the chair back and decided to leave for now, seeing that his work here was done.

Hei Bao snapped out of his thoughts upon seeing Lin Mu stand up and spoke.

"Wait, what reward do you want? I'll be sending a report to my Lord soon and can mention your requirements in it." Hei Bao said.

Hei Bao thought that he may as well ask right now as he had a good guess that his Lord would want to surely reward Lin Mu. It was better if he told him what was the need of Lin Mu, that way there would be no loss of precious time.

Lin Mu halted in his steps and looked at Hei Bao.

"I would like spirit stones and Basic Qi pills. As many as you can give me." Lin Mu replied without hesitation.

Lin Mu had his goals set and knew that the fastest way to reach the next realm would be for him to have resources such as these. He had already gotten some from Jing Wei and Duan Ke, but considering his pace of their consumption, Lin Mu knew that they would not last long.

Practicing the nameless technique of the lost immortal also needed a lot of liquid spirit qi, and Lin Mu had been investing half of his liquid spirit qi that he refined into it. This had slowed his pace of progress into the next realm by half, not to mention that his dantian had also grown in size, thus he would be needing even more spirit qi to breakthrough to the next realm compared to other cultivators.

"Alright, that's acceptable." Hei Bao nodded in response to Lin Mu's words and knew that this was the most straightforward reward that was easy to prepare.

Although he did not know how many spirit stones his lord would be giving, he knew that these were rather precious, and even he only had some with him that were reserved for emergencies. As for the basic qi pills, he had used a few of them before and the cultivators in Hei Corps got some every month as incentives.

Basic qi pills were relatively easy to procure too, and any sect would be able to supply them. Even a few mortal organizations were involved in their production and sold them as well.

"We should receive a response in a couple of days, I'll inform you when it arrives." Hei Bao said in a calm tone.

Lin Mu nodded in response before leaving the town center and heading back to his house. After entering his room, he checked up on the Brown Shrubby Forest cat and saw that it was still asleep. Its head was curled up against the pillow while its body was half-covered with the quilt.

"It will take him a while to wake up. Mental exhaustion for beasts is much higher than humans and they take longer to recover." Xukong spoke.

"I understand, Senior." Lin Mu replied before sitting down to cultivate.

Lin Mu had been using most of his time to cultivate and was conscious of the deadline that was approaching fast. Although he still had a long time left till the Great Slumber bear woke up, Lin Mu still wanted to be ready for it beforehand and did not want to take any risks.

He took out the box containing the basic qi pills and popped one into his mouth before chanting the severing heart sutra. Hours passed by as evening crept up. Lin Mu opened his eyes and let out a breath.

~Huu~

He looked at the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat and found it to be in deep sleep.

"Hmm, guess it'll take even longer." Lin Mu muttered before heading to the kitchen to cook.

Eating the beast meat and assimilating the vital energy had become like a second nature to Lin Mu at this point, and he did not even need to think much before being able to do it.

But when Lin Mu returned to his bedroom, he found himself in a dilemma. Where was he supposed to sleep?

"Umm, I don't want to disturb him or move him. He looks so comfortable." Lin Mu said as he looked at the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

But just as he said this, the beast turned in its sleep, making space for Lin Mu.

"Seems like he understood your thoughts..." Xukong spoke with a chuckle.

Lin Mu rubbed his head in embarrassment before lying down on the bed and entering the Sleepscape.

Chapter 253 - The Beast's Breakthrough

The next day, Lin Mu was preparing more meat when the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat finally woke up.

~Nyaa~

Lin Mu looked at the sleepy expression of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat and found it to be quite cute.

"Looks like you finally woke up, little guy," Lin Mu said as he stroked its head.

~Purr~

The beast purred in pleasure and enjoyed it. It was now that Lin Mu suddenly heard a thought in his mind.

"Food?" The thought said.

"Huh, oh... you're hungry. Let's go I've made some food." Lin Mu spoke before standing up from the bed.

The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat jumped from the bed and followed behind Lin Mu. They had already formed a mental connection and could understand each other's intent, thus it was not that difficult to express such actions.

Upon reaching the kitchen, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat saw the meat that was roasting over the stove and the aroma that was occupying the air.

~Growl~

The beast lightly growled as it looked at the meat in desire. Lin Mu knew what it meant and cut off a portion of the meat before placing it before the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat, who was moving his tail sideways in anticipation.

As soon as the meat was in front of him, he pounced on it. But just as he was about to take a bite, he suddenly froze and stared at Lin Mu for a few seconds.

"No pain" Lin Mu heard in his mind.

In the next second, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat started eating the meat with gusto. Lin Mu too cut off a portion for himself and started to eat. If someone else were to see them eating right now, they would wonder which one was the beast.

The speed at which Lin Mu was eating was rather unnatural, and even the quantity seemed inappropriate for his body size. On the other hand, while the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat was also eating fast, it did not seem unusual and the portion size was also appropriate.

Lin Mu was finished eating much before the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat and assimilated the vital energy while the beast finished its meal. He actually felt a bit surprised inwardly at his own speed. He had no comparisons till now and seeing the beast eat at a slower speed than him made him feel a bit strange.

But he didn't take it to heart and soon got over it. By the time he was done assimilating all the vital energy, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat was also finished with his meal and was now licking its mouth, clearing traces of the meat.

"Oh, you're done." Lin Mu said as he then stood up.

Seeing him stand up, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat also responded and followed him back to his bedroom. Seeing the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat understand his thoughts with such ease made Lin Mu feel good. He now wondered if he would be able to make the beast show him the way to the Dual Circle Ascension fruit.

"Although it understands your passive thoughts right now, it would still be a bit difficult to tell it what exactly you want," Xukong said.

"I'll try and see if we get any success. Hopefully, it doesn't take much longer for him to understand." Lin Mu replied.

But just as he was about to communicate with the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat, he saw that it had already curled up against the pillow and was sleeping.

"What..." Lin Mu muttered in confusion.

He could sense the faint waves of spirit qi coming off from the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat and wondered what was happening.

"It is cultivating. This is the way most beasts cultivate, they absorb a majority of the spirit qi from their food and also absorb some from the air. Do you remember what kind of beast meat you gave it to eat?" Xukong spoke up.

"I think it was a spirit beast at the... mid stage of the qi refining realm." Lin Mu answered as he then realized.

He extended his spirit sense and observed the body of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat. He found the waves of spirit qi originating from the spirit core, which was located just above the heart of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

Lin Mu closely observed the spirit core and found it to be slate gray in color. Its size was also quite small being the size of pinky's fingernail. Right now the spirit core was thrumming with energy and wisps of spirit qi continued entering it.

The more spirit qi wisps that entered it, the deeper its color became. Fifteen minutes passed after which a large wave of spirit qi appeared and spread from the spirit core. It had now become dark grey in color from its previous slate grey color.

"It... Broke through?" Lin Mu muttered in surprise.

"Of course it did. You fed an early stage qi refining beast that was already close to the next stage, the meat of a beast that was at an even higher stage. It was bound to happen." Xukong replied.

"Actually, this is good for you. The more the beast progresses in cultivation, the more its intelligence will increase. The Dual Circle Ascension fruit merely catalyzes the process and speeds it up. A beast will increase its intelligence and wisdom as it grows.

You've already seen the intelligence of a core condensation beast that was the Alpha steel back wolf, so you should have an idea of their capabilities. I reckon the Brown Shrubby Forest cat will soon reach that level." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu felt a bit surprised by this, but then it was soon replaced by elation.

Lin Mu focused on his connection with the Brown Shrubby Forest cat in his mind and sensed that it had indeed become better than before. If it was a string that had the thickness of a hair before, now it had the thickness of a cotton thread.

Lin Mu could also sense the emotions of the Brown Shrubby Forest cat and discovered that there was only one thing there.

"Happy"

Chapter 254 - Formation Array In The Forest?

Another day passed by in relative peace, which Lin Mu spent in cultivating.

The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat had woken up a little while after its breakthrough and had eaten more of the beast meat, after which it fell into a slumber again. Lin Mu had thought that it would awaken again that night, but it did not happen.

He then learned from Senior Xukong that the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat was now stabilizing its cultivation after having broken through to the mid stage of the qi refining realm. He told him that the beasts had an innate understanding of their own cultivation thus knew how to do it. Lin Mu thus let the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat rest and focused on his own cultivation.

Finally, in the afternoon the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat woke up and Lin Mu could try to get it to guide him towards the location of the Dual Circle Ascension fruit.

Upon waking up, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat took a big stretch, raising its tail. It then walked up to Lin Mu and rubbed against him to show its affection. The beast had developed a liking to its master after having its wish fulfilled, although it wasn't really a difficult thing for Lin Mu to accomplish, anyway.

Lin Mu kneeled down and looked at the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat while trying to communicate with it. He tried to show the beast the description of the Dual Circle Ascension fruit, but was rather successful. Even after many attempts, it seemed like the idea was perhaps too much for the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

"Hmm, perhaps try asking it something else. Brown Shrubby Forest Cats usually keep to their usual territories and seldom leave them. Perhaps the location of the Dual Circle Ascension fruit is somewhere there or nearby it." Xukong suggested.

"Hmm, that's a good idea." Lin Mu replied.

He then focused on the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat, who was curiously gazing at its master.

"Home?" Lin Mu asked in a very simple thought.

"Take me" he continued.

The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat tilted its head in confusion for a bit before it finally understood what Lin Mu was trying to tell it. Having understood this, it bumped its head against Lin Mu as if gesturing him to follow him.

"Wait," Lin Mu spoke, making the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat stop in its tracks.

"Let me carry you, there are a lot of people out there." Lin Mu said as he picked the beast up.

He then took out a cloth again and covered the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat. The beast did not struggle in Lin Mu's hands and rather sat comfortably as if it knew it was safe with Lin Mu. Seeing that the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat was calm, Lin Mu left the courtyard and headed towards the Northern forest.

Along the way, although people saw him and some even looked at him with curious looks, no one really bothered much. The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat having been covered with a cloth only made it look like Lin Mu was carrying a package and not a spirit beast.

Both of them reached the Northern forest after fifteen minutes, and Lin Mu let the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat down on to the ground. The beast looked up at Lin Mu as if feeling a bit sad that its fun ride had ended, but then Lin Mu told it again what he wanted.

The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat then turned in a direction and started running that way. Lin Mu followed after it and ran. Still, it was getting harder for him to keep up with the beast because of its speed. Although it was already moving slow, so as to let Lin Mu follow it, that speed was still higher than Lin Mu's top speed.

"Brown Shrubby Forest Cats are indeed quite fast. I wonder what more can they do." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

"Brown Shrubby Forest Cats although timid are quite strong. While they are small and look like they can be harmed even by a child, that is not so. Do not forget that it is a mid tier spirit beast now, that can easily crush the bones of a commoner." Xukong added.

"I understand senior." Lin Mu replied while running.

He continued following after the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat for nearly an hour, after which he realized that they had come quite deep into the Northern forest. According to the direction it had taken him in, Lin Mu realized that it was in the Northeastern region of the forest.

Lin Mu had not come to this part ever before, thus was a little confused about the area. But it mattered less to him now as he could directly scan the area with his spirit sense as he passed by. This way not only was he following the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat but also memorizing the topography.

Another half an hour later, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat had slowed down and came to a thickly forested area. The trees and bushes in this area were densely packed together, and Lin Mu had a hard time passing through them. He eventually had to use his short sword to cut the trees and plants that came in his path and blocked it.

The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat was able to maneuver through them with relative ease, and it seemed like it had a lot of experience.

But suddenly at a certain point, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat disappeared into thin air.

"What the... what happened where did he go?" Lin Mu uttered with shock as he tried looking around for the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

He checked on his connection and saw that it was still there and was just as strong as before. Lin Mu communicated with the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat, trying to call him back.

Lin Mu's attempt was soon successful as the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat returned, appearing out of thin air the same way as before. At least this time Lin Mu could see where it had gone. Lin Mu looked at the exact place the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat appeared from and observed it curiously.

The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat walked up to Lin Mu and bumped its head into him before speaking to him.

"No home?" It asked.

Chapter 255 - Deciphering The Bewildering Formation

Lin Mu simply told it to wait in his mind, and he tried using the spirit sense to check the area. He was suspicious when he had originally arrived, but soon understood the reason behind the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat's disappearance.

"Huh, there is a formation array here? How?" Lin Mu wondered.

"Not just any formation array. Look further with your spirit sense." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu did as he asked and discovered that he could not extend it beyond two meters. After two meters, it was as if his spirit sense bent and came out of another part of the formation.

"What is this?" Lin Mu questioned.

"This is actually two formations layered together into a formation array. You have seen these two before at the Myriad armament canopy abode before, but its level is significantly low. You can use your previous deciphering method to find the nodes." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu then started chanting the severing heart sutra and extended his spirit sense, touching the formation array. The same thing as before happened and his spirit sense bent, coming out of another spot. But Lin Mu did not mind this and tried again.

An entire hour passed and multiple attempts had been done by Lin Mu, yet every time the same thing happened and his spirit sense came or from another random spot.

Xukong actually knew how to help Lin Mu, but he intentionally did not help him. He wanted him to learn through trial and error, wanting to see how much he had improved from before. This formation in front of him, while similar to the one at the Myriad armament canopy abode, was not exactly the one that Lin Mu had solved.

The difference lied in the basic characteristic of the Myriad armament canopy abode. The Myriad armament canopy abode was a spirit tool and did not actually exist in the same plane as the real world, instead existing in a minor one in the lesser void. That was also the reason why Lin Mu was able to find it rather quickly, the mysterious ring had helped him.

But right now these formations had become an obstruction even though they were low leveled. This kind of formation array was composed of two types of formations. One of them was the common illusory formation that Lin Mu had seen before. It was similar to the one that was used to hide Jing Wei's emporium and the desolate alley it was located in.

The second one was the more complex one that was actually causing the bigger problem. This kind of a formation was called a bewildering formation and its only function was to confuse the intruder. It could make the intruder change his direction if they walked into it, making them leave the formation from another direction.

Some of the bewildering formations could even trick the spirit sense and would make the cultivator using it feel as if his spirit sense was blocked by something. Another effect it could have on spirit sense was that it could make the cultivator misjudge it. This would cause them to extend and contract their spirit sense randomly.

The combined effect of both these formations created this formation array and had become the obstacle in Lin Mu's path.

'Hmm, how was the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat able to get through it? I already checked the spot from where it entered, yet there was nothing there. What is it that I'm missing?' Lin Mu thought to himself.

He then thought about the characteristics of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat and realized that it did not have any spirit sense of its own. Back when the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat disappeared, Lin Mu could still sense the connection between them, telling him that the beast was right there in front of him.

"Hmm, so if I restrict my spirit sense and walk in directly, would I be able to cross it?" Lin Mu thought out loud.

He then looked at the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat and told it to continue onward, which it immediately followed.

The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat walked forward and once again disappeared. This time though, Lin Mu did not lose focus and concentrated on his connection with the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

'Only one way to confirm my theory...' Lin Mu thought with determination as he took a deep breath and took a step forward.

As soon as he crossed into the invisible formation, he felt the scene in front of him change for a slight moment. If it were some other cultivator in the qi refining realm, they would not even have been able to notice this kind of a small change as it was very quick and hard to recognize with naked eyes.

But Lin Mu had an advantage in this area, being used to the rapid changes due to him using the skill blink. He understood that something had happened and there was a change. This doubt of his was confirmed when he sensed the location of Brown Shrubby Forest Cat suddenly switching.

Previously the connection told Lin Mu that the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat was right in front of him. But now it was telling him that it was on the left. He took a few steps forward, and it happened again, this time the location of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat changed to being behind him for some reason.

Lin Mu did not follow his connection and just walked straight forward, wanting to see where it would lead him. Two minutes later, Lin Mu found himself back to where he had started from.

"So it will return me back to my original position if I keep on walking straight. My connection with Brown Shrubby Forest Cat also told me otherwise. It seems like the formation array is changing the direction I walk without me noticing." Lin Mu hypothesized.

'Hmm, let's try this again.' Lin Mu thought to himself before taking a step into the formation array again.

This time though, he did not keep on walking forward and instead changed direction to face the location of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat every time it changed. Before he had crossed the formation array and come out of it in 2 minutes. But now he had been walking for over five minutes, and yet the end was not in sight.

'He's close to figuring out. His investigational ability is not bad...' Xukong thought.

Chapter 256 - The Dual Circle Ascension Vine

Lin Mu kept on walking and following his connection with the Brown Shrubby forest cat. Fifteen minutes had passed, after which he finally discovered a pattern. He realized that while the location of the Brown Shrubby forest cat changed, his own actually stayed the same.

He tried marking the ground where he walked and discovered this. He thought that the Brown Shrubby forest cat was actually moving around that much, but after a few more tests he realized that it wasn't true either.

'Hmm, I need to start over...' Lin Mu thought to himself as he walked straight ignoring the change and returned to the starting place.

Now Lin Mu had another idea which he wanted to try out. Lin Mu entered the formation array but did not take another step forward. Instead, he turned back and started walking. It seemed as if he was leaving the formation array, but the opposite happened.

The scenery that was in front of him was supposed to move closer as he walked towards it, but what happened was that the more he walked the farther it got.

Still, Lin Mu did not panic as he knew that his idea seemed to be the correct one. His connection with the Brown Shrubby forest cat told him that it was in front of him and was not changing locations anymore.

Lin Mu kept on walking, and five minutes later appeared in a new area. The scene in front of him suddenly changed from that of the starting area and new trees appeared there. He looked back and saw that the starting area was now behind him, in the distance.

"Yes! I crossed it." Lin Mu exclaimed.

"Good, you figured it out. You found the right method to cross the formation array without even breaking it." Xukong praised.

"Thank you, senior." Lin Mu said in a grateful tone before continuing, "but Senior, what do you mean by breaking it?"

"Well, the most common method used by cultivators who are not proficient in formations is to break them with brute force. This involves overwhelming the limits of the formation with spirit qi and destabilizing it. Though this method comes with its risks and can be dangerous. Some formation masters even lay traps that take advantage of this method and harm the cultivators that try to break the formation with brute force." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu thought over Senior Xukong's explanation and wondered if he would have been able to attempt this.

"Can I do this senior? I mean, if the situation so arises," Lin Mu asked.

"You've already done it before, actually. When you opened the portal to the Myriad armament Canopy abode, that was actually a type of brute force method as you overwhelmed its limitations and opened the gate. Though the formation was able to recover due to being a pseudo immortal tool." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu nodded in understanding and started looking around the area. The surroundings were pretty much similar to the previous area, except that the concentration of the spirit qi in the area was slightly higher.

'Hmm, this is strange? Is this due to the formation array, or something else?' Lin Mu wondered.

Lin Mu sensed his connection with the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat and walked towards that direction. He could sense that it was coming from behind a patch of densely packed trees. This patch was blocked by overgrown shrubs and vines that interwove with the trees, creating a natural blockade that made it impossible for Lin Mu to proceed.

"This is even more strange. Why are there so many plants grown together here?" Lin Mu said as he then gestured with his hand.

The short sword that was on his back flew out and slashed at the trees and the shrubs, butting them apart and making way for him. When the blockade was cleared, Lin Mu finally saw what was behind it.

He appeared in a small clearing that had a few trees growing in the center. And among these trees, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat stood. Lin Mu walked towards it and saw the thing he came for here.

"The Dual Circle Ascension Vine!" Lin Mu exclaimed.

On one of the trees, the Dual Circle Ascension Vine was growing. It grew from the ground in a pair of vines and wrapped around the trunk as it grew upwards. It had reached the middle part of the trunk and had many large leaves growing from its vines.

Lin Mu could also feel the faint waves of spirit qi arising from the vine.

"Indeed, this is the Dual Circle Ascension Vine," Xukong confirmed.

Lin Mu kneeled and stroked the head of the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

"Thank you" He expressed through the connection.

~Nyaa~

The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat purred in pleasure as it enjoyed the act.

Lin Mu stood up and went to inspect the Dual Circle Ascension Vine. He extended his spirit sense and scanned it with it. Upon doing so, his eyes lit up as he found his goal.

"There are some fruits!" Lin Mu said with joy as he lifted the large leaves of the vine.

He saw the small fruits of the Dual Circle Ascension Vine that looked more like berries. There were about eleven of them growing on the vine and they were hidden because of the leaves of the Dual Circle Ascension Vine.

The fruits were orange colored and were oval shaped. Thin veins were visible on its surface that spread all around the fruit.

"This is unusual..." Xukong suddenly spoke.

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

"Hmm... there are far too many fruits growing on the vine considering the environment of this area. The spirit qi in this area is simply not enough for it to be able to grow so many fruits. Another thing is that... if there were so many fruits growing on it, why did the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat or any other beast eat them yet?" Xukong replied.

After hearing Senior Xukong's concerns, Lin Mu too wondered why it was like this. He extended his hand towards the fruits and was just about to touch them when he suddenly heard the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat in his mind.

"Danger"

Chapter 257 - A Trap?

Upon hearing the urgent message in his mind, Lin Mu became alert and his spirit sense spread around. But in the next moment, he was knocked back with great force, as if being hit by a bull.

~Thud~

~Cough~

~Cough~

~Cough~

Lin Mu coughed in pain as he tried to lift himself from the ground.

~Meow~

The Brown Shrubby Forest Cat came running towards him to check up on him.

"Dammit, what was that!" Lin Mu cursed as he rubbed his head.

"Seems like there was a trap concealed in the Dual Circe Ascension vine," Xukong said.

Lin Mu propped himself up and sat down on the ground as he checked on his body. He couldn't find any injuries on his body, and the only pain he had was from being knocked back. He then looked at the Dual Circe Ascension vine and found it to be glowing with a faint light.

"Why did I not sense it before?" Lin Mu questioned.

"It seems to be a trap that can stay concealed from the spirit sense of a cultivator. You're still inexperienced about these matters so it's no wonder that you couldn't sense it. Though, now you know to be more careful. There may be more traps that we don't know of here." Xukong answered.

"I see..." Lin Mu muttered as his spirit sense scanned the entire area deeply.

He had been alarmed by this, hence wanted to be extremely sure of everything before continuing. He stood up and walked around, searching a radius of about two hundred meters before returning to the Dual Circe Ascension vine with the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat following behind him.

"Seems like there is only that one trap and no more in the area." Lin Mu stated as he gazed at the Dual Circe Ascension vine.

"Fortunately, you can destroy this trap rather easily. It is a simple knock back trap that you can break by finding its node. Before, it would have been impossible for you to find it as it was in a concealed state. But now that it's revealed, you should be able to find it." Xukong spoke.

"Alright Senior." Lin Mu replied before focusing on the Dual Circe Ascension vine.

He extended his spirit sense and tried to find the formation node on the trap. It took him about five minutes before he discovered it right below the tree.

"I found it, Senior," Lin Mu said.

"Good, now use your spirit sense and pour your spirit qi into the node. Keeping on doing it till it destabilizes." Xukong taught.

Lin Mu nodded in response before doing as he was instructed. He channeled wisps of spirit qi into his spirit sense tendril and started pouring it into the formation node. Lin Mu was already proficient in using his spirit sword with the spirit sense thus had no problem doing this, as the concept was pretty much the same.

Lin Mu could see the light of the formation getting stronger and stronger. The more spirit qi he channeled into it, the brighter it got.

"Is this correct, senior?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yes, just continue what you are doing. It should soon be reaching its limits." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu continued doing so, and two minutes later the effects started to show. He could feel that the formation node was trembling and cracks started to appear on it. Another minute passed by and finally, the cracks covered the entirety of the node.

~Pop~

Then, with a small pop, the glowing formation disappeared leaving the Dual Circe Ascension vine unprotected.

"That... was rather anti-climatic," Lin Mu said as he reached out with his hand.

He touched one of the Dual Circe Ascension Fruits with his index finger and found there to be no reaction.

"Well, now I can get the fruits." Lin Mu spoke with a happy tone as he plucked the first Dual Circe Ascension fruit.

He looked at the small berry like fruit clenched in his fingers for a few seconds before storing it in the ring.

Meanwhile, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat was looking at the entire process with interest and waved its tail from side to side.

Lin Mu quickly finished plucking the eleven Dual Circe Ascension fruits and stored all of them in the ring. He then turned to look at the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat and petted its head.

"No wonder he didn't eat the fruits, seems like he too was scared by the knockback trap formation." Lin Mu said. "But then how did it obtain the fruit that it had eaten before?" Lin Mu asked.

"One of the fruits probably fell from the vine and left the confines of the trap. The Dual Circe Ascension fruits stay on the vine for quite a while even after becoming ripe, thus it is likely that the Brown Forest Shrubby Cat probably obtained it after quite some time. Though, looking at these fruits, I can estimate that they should have fallen soon too." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu nodded, showing that he agreed with Xukong and kept on staring at the Dual Circe Ascension vine.

"Hmm, Senior can we... take this vine with us?" Lin Mu asked.

"No, that is impossible. The Dual Circle Ascension vine will wither away when it's plucked from the ground. It's already a miracle that it was able to grow in an environment such as this." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu hummed in response as his gaze curiously went to the base of the Dual Circle Ascension vine. There he spotted something protruding from the ground. It was rather hidden because of the thick grass and the leaves of the Dual Circle Ascension vine thus could not see it clearly.

"Hmm, what's this?" Lin Mu wondered as he kneeled to take a closer look.

He moved the leaves and grass aside and saw that there seemed to be a grey crystalline object protruding from the ground.

Lin Mu first carefully probed it with his spirit sense to make sure that it was safe to touch. Finding there to be no problems, he pulled out the object from the soil.

"This?"

Chapter 258 - A Skeleton?

Upon pulling out the object, Lin Mu found it to be a crystal. It was about the size of a finger and was dull grey in color.

"A peak grade spirit stone?" Xukong muttered.

"What! This is... a peak grade spirit stone?" Lin Mu exclaimed.

"It is indeed. But it has been depleted." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu couldn't begin to imagine how a peak grade spirit stone would end up here, albeit a depleted one. The highest grade spirit stone he had seen until now was a defective mid grade spirit stone that he had previously used.

Lin Mu was now extremely curious, thus he searched the ground with his spirit sense carefully. This turned out to be effective as he detected more things hidden in the ground.

"Senior, there is more stuff buried here." Lin Mu said with excitement.

"Dig it out then," Xukong replied.

Lin Mu immediately started digging and soon unearthed a few objects that were buried in the ground. There were about three more depleted peak grade spirit stones that were buried in the ground, and on these spirit stones, the roots of the Dual Circle Ascension Vine were wrapped.

"This makes sense. No wonder the Dual Circle Ascension Vine was able to grow in an environment like this. It has been absorbing the spirit qi from these Peak grade spirit stones." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu picked one of the depleted peak grade spirit stones out of which led to the roots of the Dual Circle Ascension Vine that were wrapped around it to break. The instant those roots broke the Dual Circle Ascension Vine started withering.

"Senior, what's happening?" Lin Mu questioned in a shocked tone.

"It is as I said before, the Dual Circle Ascension Vine cannot be moved from its position once it has grown. Not to mention it has lost its only source of sustenance that was the peak grade spirit stones. The tree it was parasitizing is not sufficient to sustain it either.

It seems like it was barely holding on after growing all these Dual Circle Ascension fruits and this was the last straw." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu watched as the Dual Circle Ascension Vine withered and its leaves turned yellow before falling to the ground. The vines that were wrapped around the trunk of the tree too crumbled and the Dual Circle Ascension Vine was no more.

~Sigh~

"At least I was able to get the Dual Circle Ascension fruits." Lin Mu said in a helpless voice.

"The Dual Circle Ascension Vine was a lost cause already. No need to worry about it." Xukong stated.

"I understand, Senior." Lin Mu replied before turning to the other objects that were buried in the ground.

Along with the three depleted Peak grade spirit stones, there seemed to be a cloth of some kind buried. Lin Mu pulled it out and looked at it. The cloth was actually a pouch of some kind that was torn in the middle.

"This is rather high quality," Lin Mu said as he felt the texture of the torn pouch.

He put it aside for the time being as he then dug the next object from the ground. This object looked like a circular flat stone that had some strange characters engraved on it. Lin Mu couldn't read the characters, thus decided to show it to Senior Xukong.

"Hmm, these characters are written in the script of a different world. Not only that, it seems to have an identification formation placed on it, though it looks like it has been damaged as well." Xukong stated.

Lin Mu curiously looked at the Stone and tried to probe it with his spirit sense, but was unable to observe the formation that was placed in it.

"You won't be able to read the formation this way. It is a special identification formation that can only be read using the counter formation for it, similar to a lock and key. Such kinds of formations are rather unusual and are used for identification badges, but only for secretive organizations.

It is unusual for them to be used by anyone else, as it means that they would rather have it destroyed than others discovering this stone badge." Xukong explained.

Xukong was now quite curious as well and did not know how such a thing could turn up in a world such as this. He had heard about organizations that would use such kinds of identity formations, but nearly all of them were dangerous.

While looking at the stone badge, Lin Mu's eyes spotted a small white pointed object sticking out from the ground. He had already known that it was the last object that was rather big. It was also the one that his spirit sense was not able to recognize easily as the object seemed to be repelling it.

The repulsion was so strong that Lin Mu could not even tell the shape of the object.

Lin Mu did not dare to dig this out directly with his hand and instead decided to use a stick to do so. Since he couldn't sense the object properly, he couldn't tell for sure if it had any traps placed on it, thus he was extra careful and did not want a repeat of before.

But just a second after he prodded the white point, he saw what it was and became extremely shocked.

"A bone!" Lin Mu exclaimed.

He then carefully dug the soil around the bone, slowly expanding the dig area. Eventually, he ended up excavating an entire skeleton.

"What the! How did this skeleton end up here?" Lin Mu wondered.

"Careful, step back! It's not just any skeleton, rather it's the skeleton of a nascent soul realm cultivator, it could have a remnant of a soul on it." Xukong warned.

Lin Mu immediately took a few steps back as he contemplated on the revelation.

Lin Mu had learned about the Nascent soul realm from Senior Xukong before, but it was only some surface level information, thus he did not know what Senior Xukong was talking about.

"What do you mean Senior?"

Chapter 259 - The Two Souls Of A Cultivator

"The Nascent soul realm cultivators are different than the cultivators in the Qi refining realm and the core condensation realm in that they have two souls," Xukong spoke.

"Two Souls?! What?" Lin Mu asked with a surprised tone.

"Yes, two souls, although they are of different kinds. You see, the soul which everyone has and is born with is called as the True Soul. This is the soul which forms the very basis of your existence and without it, you cannot live nor reincarnate.

The True soul is what undergoes the cycle of reincarnation and is also the soul which accumulates karma. It is the soul whose destiny is dictated by Fate.

The Nascent soul meanwhile is a construct born from the Spirit Qi Core of a Core condensation realm cultivator. When a Core condensation realm cultivator reaches the peak of the core condensation realm, they undergo a heavenly lightning tribulation which allows them to hatch a Nascent soul from their spirit qi core.

With the spirit qi core as the egg, the Heavenly lightning as the life spark and the Dantian as the incubator a nascent soul is born." Xukong explained.

Xukong stopped and let Lin Mu digest this information first before continuing. He had not told him the actual circumstances behind the creation of a Nascent soul realm cultivator before and knew that the information was a bit complex to understand.

"The difference between the True soul and Nascent soul is in that the True soul cannot leave the mortal body under normal conditions. Thus, the nascent soul acts as the secondary vessel for the consciousness and allows the cultivator to leave his body.

This can even allow the cultivator to escape death and live on in the form of a soul. And if the cultivator is fortunate enough, they will even find a suitable vessel and be able to take over it, allowing them to be reborn.

This is the reason I warned you, Nascent soul realm cultivators can leave behind remnants of their soul on the remains of their body upon death. These remnants can latch onto the body of an unfortunate person and allow the nascent soul to find that person to take over them.

In some cases, the nascent soul may even stay back in the remains of their dead body, waiting to chance upon a passing person to take over. Thus, unless one is strong enough or is sure that there are no soul remnants on a corpse or dead remains, they should avoid all contact with it." Xukong continued.

Hearing the entire explanation from senior Xukong made Lin Mu feel a bit fearful of the nascent soul realm cultivators. But he knew that this was inevitable, and one day he would have to fight with one. All he could do right now was to take precautions and be extremely sure of whatever he was to do.

He closely looked at the skeleton and spotted something on the other hand of the skeleton. This hand's fingers were slightly covered with dirt and Lin Mu had not fully uncovered them as senior Xukong had warned him before that.

But now that he saw them again, his eyes caught the glint of some kind from there.

"Senior, there's something on its finger!," Lin Mu spotted "it's a ring of some kind perhaps."

Xukong focused on the hand and indeed saw the faint outline of a ring there.

"How do I proceed Senior?" Lin Mu asked, desiring to check out the ring.

"Hmm, looking at the state of decay, this man has probably died over a year ago. Considering the time frame and the environment, it is impossible for the nascent soul to survive this long. That is, if it was also not destroyed at the time of its death.

But seeing that the Brown Shrubby Forest cat was able to approach it before without any problem, it is likely the Nascent soul left the skeleton behind or was destroyed.

You need to check the skeleton with your spirit sense, use the same method you used to break the trap. That way you should be able to overcome the repelling from that Skeleton." Xukong instructed.

Lin Mu nodded in response and took a step back before using his spirit sense to probe the skeleton. The result was the same as before, and his spirit sense probe was repelled. But Lin Mu did not lose hope and tried again, this time with more power than before.

The spirit sense tendril came in contact with the repulsion layer of the skeleton and hovered there, unable to proceed. A strange equilibrium had been reached, and Lin Mu knew that now was the time. He started channeling the spirit qi into his spirit sense tendril and pushed further into the repulsive layer.

For the first minute, no change was observed but after another minute a small depression seemed to be forming as Lin Mu's spirit sense pressed on.

Ten minutes passed by and Lin Mu's forehead was covered in sweat by now. He had depleted a good chunk of his spirit qi wisps by now and barely had four hundred left. His progress was also evident though as the repulsive layer was nearly gone by now.

~Pop~

Another five minutes later, Lin Mu finally breached the repulsive layer and it dissipated but in exchange, Lin Mu was now left with only fifty wisps of spirit qi in his dantian. Of course, there was still the liquid spirit qi there too, he had not touched them yet.

~Phew~

"That certainly was exhausting, I didn't expect it to take so much spirit qi from me." Lin Mu stated as he wiped the sweat off his forehead.

His back was covered in sweat too making his clothes stick to it.

"Rest and recuperate your spirit qi. Only after your stores are back to the top should you proceed, there can be some unexpected surprises so it's better to be cautious." Xukong advised.

"I understand, Senior." Lin Mu responded before sitting down to recuperate his spirit qi.

Chapter 260 - A Spatial Storage Ring?

While Lin Mu was doing all this, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat was lying in the grass and was basking in the warm sunlight while taking a nap. It had long since fallen asleep and did not notice Lin Mu do all this.

Lin Mu opened his eyes after recuperating his spirit qi to the full and looked at the skeleton. No physical change could be observed on the skeleton, and it seemed to be the same as before. Lin Mu extended his spirit sense and probed it, facing no repulsion like before it easily touched the skeleton.

Upon finally touching the skeleton, Lin Mu could not find anything peculiar on it.

"That was... a bit underwhelming, after all that." Lin Mu uttered as a sigh escaped his mouth.

"It is safe to touch now. There are no remnants of a soul on the skeleton. If there were, you would have felt them there." Xukong spoke up.

Lin Mu nodded in response before a question popped up in his mind.

"But Senior, what was that repulsion I felt?" Lin Mu questioned.

"That was the final layer of protection that was left on the skeleton of the cultivator. Usually, when a nascent soul realm cultivator dies, their remaining spirit qi would accumulate onto their skeleton due to its characteristics.

This ends up forming the repulsive layer that you felt before. It is a kind of precaution that prevents the remains from being disrespected. But this also ends up preserving the remains, as you can see. Although the flesh may wither away, the bones will stay on." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu was listened on with interest and felt amazed by this new tidbit of information. He then pushed these thoughts aside as he now needed to check what was actually left on the skeleton.

Lin Mu brushed the soil away and revealed the ring that was hidden beneath.

On the index finger of the right hand of the skeleton, a plain golden ring was left. It was loosely hanging on the finger as there was no flesh left on it. At the top of the ring, a square surface was formed on which a green gem laid.

As soon as Lin Mu saw it, only one thing appeared in his mind.

"Is that a spatial storage ring?!" Lin Mu exclaimed.

Lin Mu probed the ring with his spirit sense and confirmed his assumption, it was indeed a spatial storage ring.

But a moment later, Lin Mu's brows furrowed as he sensed something else.

"There are barely any spatial fluctuations coming from it, is this normal Senior?" Lin Mu asked as he pulled the ring off of the skeleton's finger.

"No, this ring is damaged and those items that you found before were probably kept in this ring. They were probably ejected out after the ring was damaged." Xukong answered.

"But don't the injects stored in a spatial treasure get lost in the void if they are broken?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Not always. There are certain modifications that can be made so that the objects in a ring are not lost in the void and are instead ejected out. Though most cultivators prefer having the ability to destroy their spatial treasure so that others cannot obtain its contents.

Usually, a modification such as this is only done for specific purposes, as it is rather difficult and expensive to make. Also, it is impossible for any spirit tool refiner below the immortal Ascension stage to make it." Xukong answered.

"But then Senior, doesn't this mean..." Lin Mu replied before he was interrupted.

"Yes, it is from a higher world and similarly this skeleton also belongs to a cultivator that came from a higher leveled world. This also makes sense as the Dual Circe Ascension Vine is rare in worlds such as this. It is likely that it grew from a seed that the cultivator was carrying, which was ejected upon the spatial storage ring being damaged.

The other objects such as the peak grade spirit stones and the stone badge were also ejected along with it, after which the seed sprouted and took support from the peak grade spirit stones." Xukong hypothesized.

Lin Mu was lost in his thoughts after hearing Senior Xukong's words as things started linking up in his mind. He silently thought for a few minutes before coming up with a theory of his own.

"Senior... considering all the events that have happened till now, the beast storage treasure, the invader, and now this; they all seem to be linked. Is it possible that this cultivator is the source behind all of them?" Lin Mu said in a serious tone.

Xukong did not immediately reply to Lin Mu and did an analysis of his own before responding.

"I think that you are right. But... this brings us to a rather grave question; there is no chance that this cultivator died naturally, there was certainly something that killed him. It was definitely not a beast, as any beast strong enough to kill a nascent soul realm cultivator would have been able to easily eat it whole.

It does not seem like the cultivator suffered from any qi deviation or even a tribulation, otherwise there would certainly be signs present on the skeleton.

This leaves only one option, another cultivator killed him." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu realized the graveness of Senior Xukong's words and wondered who could be the likely culprit.

"Hmm, if the cultivator was able to kill this man easily then they would have definitely taken his spatial treasure right? They would have left it behind like this. Also, there doesn't seem to be any damage to the bones which could mean that the cultivator wasn't attacked from by any kind of overwhelming power, rather by someone who was at the same strength level as him." Lin Mu thought out loud.

"That's a possibility. The two cultivators probably battled and both must have sustained injuries otherwise the spoils of the battle would have surely been taken by the victor. This narrows down the list of suspects to all the nascent soul realm cultivators that have been recently injured. The most obvious suspect would be someone from a cultivation sect." Xukong added.