

Walker 321

Chapter 321 - Meeting Wu Hei

The members of the Hei corps guided Lin Mu to the mansion. Along the way, he got to see the beauty of the garden and the decorations that had been placed around. Though the biggest part of the mansion's area was none other than the lake.

The lake had no specific name and was simply called as the Wu Lim City lake. All of the buildings that surrounded it were considered to be of high quality and belonged to the influential people of the city. Perhaps the only building better than these was the Mayor's manor.

There were a few small artificial islands made in the lake, and there were red wooden bridges extending from the banks of the lakes and joining them. The artificial islands had ornate pavilions constructed on them. Stone table and chairs were placed in the pavilions, which were exquisitely carved.

Lin Mu had thought that he was going to be taken into the Mansion but to his surprise, he was actually being taken towards the lake. Upon getting closer, he could soon see the back of a man that was sitting in the pavilion on the artificial island.

He was wearing a plain white robe and exuded a scholarly aura.

"My lord, senior Lin Mu is here." The member of the Hei corps introduced.

The scholarly looking man turned around and a plain smile appeared on his face. There was a small book in his left hand, while in his right hand there was a small wine cup. The man placed down the wine cup and closed the book before cupping his hands in a greeting.

"Welcome to my humble abode, brother Lin Mu." Wu Hei Spoke in a genial voice.

"I am honored to finally meet Lord Hei." Lin Mu reciprocated.

"Please sit," Wu Hei said as he gestured.

Lin Mu took a seat opposite to Wu Hei and the scholarly man poured him a cup of wine. But then Wu Hei saw the slight unwillingness on Lin Mu's face and knew that perhaps this was not right.

"Would brother Lin Mu prefer tea instead?" Wu Hei asked.

"Ah yes, that would be good. I... do not like the taste of wine much." Lin Mu replied.

"Of course, everyone has their preferences, nothing wrong with that." Wu Hei spoke, but without even his speaking a pot of tea was presented to him.

Wu Hei and Lin Mu exchanged a few pleasantries before finally getting to the crux of the matter.

"So, Lord Hei..." Lin Mu spoke but was then interrupted.

"Please call me Wu Hei, brother Lin Mu. Your standing is only equal if not higher than me." Wu Hei spoke.

Lin Mu was a bit intrigued upon hearing the surname of the Lord. Even when he had asked the Hei corps about the lord's name, they had only called him as lord or lord Hei, nothing more than that. Or perhaps it was their reluctance to say it.

"Please, forgive my overbearingness, but I wonder if brother Wu Hei is..."

"Yes, brother Lin Mu's guess is correct. I belong to the Wu clan." Wu Hei interrupted again.

"Leave us for now." Wu Hei said to the servants and the Hei corps.

Lin Mu had not expected that his guess was really correct.

'This means that the marriage Wu Hei wants me to participate in is none other than his own brothers?' Lin Mu thought.

"You are the mayor's younger son," Lin Mu realized.

Lin Mu saw that Wu Hei had sent away all the people around when he told him this, which meant that he did not want the others to know.

"I am indeed, but it is not an identity I particularly prefer. So I hope brother Lin Mu does not bother with it as much." Wu Hei stated.

"If it is what brother Wu Hei wants that it is fine." Lin Mu replied.

Lin Mu had no qualms about this though it did make him wonder why Wu Hei did not want others knowing about his identity as the mayor's son.

"Seems like this Wu Hei had many more secrets than he's showing," Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu internally nodded but did not show it on his face.

"So then brother Wu Hei, what exactly is that you want me to do?" Lin Mu finally asked the thing that he had come here for.

"You see brother Lin Mu, my position is that of the younger brother of the Groom. This means that I need to have a representative fight in the tournament that is held before the marriage ceremony. All of the powers that have been invited will be participating, and I need to come out on top of them. And also with the recent events with the mayor, there are even more eyes on us." Wu Hei answered.

"I understand. I'll do it then, though when will the tournament be and where?" Lin Mu replied.

"The tournament will be held at the mayor's manor and will be held in three days from now. They finalized the date just today, thus you came at the right time." Wu Hei spoke.

"Then I'll be there when you want me to be." Lin Mu responded with a nod.

"I... also heard brother Lin Mu has a little enmity with the Tri cauldron peony sect?" Wu Hei questioned.

"Yes, there is a certain Junior elder which I would prefer did not exist." Lin Mu stated as a matter of fact.

"I have investigated the matter on my own, and have found that the junior elder Fa Shiu is not in the city as of now. Neither has he ever come to the city before." Wu Hei informed.

"Hmm, seems like I'll need to keep a look out for him. He is going to be at the wedding though from what I heard, they were finding a gift for a certain Ye Zi Jin." Lin Mu said in a straight tone.

"Fear not brother Lin Mu, you'll be the first one to know the moment that man enters the city." Wu Hei declared.

Chapter 322 - Where Did The Young Lord Go?

Lin Mu and Wu Hei discussed a few more things before Lin Mu decided it was enough. He had a few more things he needed to get done before the tournament, and he wanted to get to them as fast as possible. He didn't know when Junior elder Fa Shiu would turn up and thus wanted to be ready for any moment.

At the end, Wu Hei called a few servants and asked them to bring a few things. He then gave Lin Mu some things like a key, and a writ of authority among some other minor things. The key belonged to the courtyard that had been set up for Lin Mu's stay. It was also in the eastern district and was a little distance from the Wu Hei's mansion.

Lin Mu thanked Wu Hei before leaving the small pavilion. He walked out of the gates of the compound and headed towards the courtyard that was prepared for him. It was not near the lake, but was still of a quite good quality. It had four individual smaller courtyards in it, and the entire place was for Lin Mu to use.

"Seems like this Wu Hei did not leave any chance for a complaint huh," Xukong spoke.

"I guess so." Lin Mu muttered as he walked into the courtyard.

"Greetings master, Lin Mu." A man suddenly appeared out of the corner.

Lin Mu had already scanned the entire area with his spirit sense and thus knew that this was the servant that took care of the courtyard. He had been assigned to take care of Lin Mu's needs while he lived here.

"Does master need help with his luggage or anything? Should I prepare a bath or would master like to eat first?" The servant asked.

"No need. I'll be looking around the city for a while. I just came to check in." Lin Mu replied.

"As the master wishes." The servant responded.

Lin Mu waved his hand and sent the servant away while he took a closer look at the courtyard. It was much bigger than his own and was also much more luxurious. Lin Mu could guess that renting a place like this probably cost a lot, but it didn't matter to him as long as he was not the one that was paying the price.

Having had enough of the courtyard, he left the courtyard and headed towards the location that he wanted to go to the most, the ancestral temple.

Lin Mu walked through the crowded streets and took in the sights of the city. There were a lot more cultivators in the Wu Lim city compared to the northern town. Even though there were a lot more cultivators in the Northern town due to the presence of the Hei corps, they were not the actual residents.

Until last year there were only five cultivators in total that lived in the Northern town, but now of those five three of them were dead. Two killed by Lin Mu's own hands. Being reminded of the doings of the former town head only made Lin Mu irritated, and he stopped thinking of that.

Lin Mu was seeing the cultivation bases of the cultivators that passed by and found every one of them to be at the qi refining realm. A majority of them were at the Early stage with a few rare ones being at the mid stage and a couple even at the late stage.

This let Lin Mu know how rare the cultivators truly were. Even in a big city like this, there weren't any at the core condensation realm walking around. Though Lin Mu guessed that this should change soon, once the Powers that have been invited for the marriage ceremony turn up.

The ones that are close by will be here by tomorrow while the others should reach here in three days at the latest. While walking, Lin Mu came across a large and elaborate building.

"Alluring Wisteria Pavilion" The board read.

"So this is the place where the lieutenant Wu Teng has been spending his time at." Lin Mu muttered.

"Ahh, would this young lord like to come in? Fear not, we don't bite... Hahaha!" A lasciviously dressed woman spoke.

She was standing at the entrance of the pavilion along with a few other similarly dressed women and saw Lin Mu staring at the building.

"Jung Mi, you already took another customer last time. It's my turn now." Said another woman with pink rouge on her lips.

She came forward and held Lin Mu's arm, pressing it against her bountiful chest.

A blush spread across Lin Mu's face and he became flustered. He didn't know what to do and froze up.

"Ahaha! Seems like the young lord is shy. Don't worry, we'll take good care of you." Spoke the woman who was sticking to Lin Mu.

She then started dragging Lin Mu to the Alluring wisteria pavilion, seeing that Lin Mu did not disagree with her. The other women standing around teased Lin Mu and gave him seductive glances as he was taken past them.

Meanwhile,, Xukong was laughing inside the ring and could not stop seeing the reacting of Lin Mu.

"Ahaha! At least say something Lin Mu. Do you really want to go in? I won't mind, you are getting older and need to experience the matters between men and women." Xukong spoke between chuckles.

Lin Mu was snapped out of his daze after hearing the voice of Senior Xukong. Suddenly he felt as if he heard a familiar woman's voice in his head.

"Remember Lin Mu, women are devious and will try to trick you. Mother will find a good woman for you, so don't you go around falling into their wiles." The Voice spoke.

Lin Mu then saw the stern face of his mother appearing in front of him. This invoked the fear that he had of her. He remembered how she would give him a good beating if he was naughty.

"Uhh!" Lin Mu uttered, but did not know what to say.

"Oh, does Young lord want anything specific? This sister will try her best to fulfill all of your desires." The woman spoke.

Lin Mu turned a shade of red deeper and could not hold out anymore. The woman suddenly found her arm empty and Lin Mu having disappeared from her grasp.

"Huh? Where did the young lord go?"

Chapter 323 - The Ancestral Temple

Lin Mu couldn't handle it anymore and the embarrassment was threatening to drown him, if not his mother's voice that would nag him at the back of his head that would kill him as well. Unable to hold on anymore and unable to speak, Lin Mu ended up using blink to get away from the woman that was dragging him into the Alluring Wisteria pavilion.

The entire thing had happened in such a short amount of time that the woman had not seen anything happen and to her, it was as if Lin Mu had disappeared into thin air... which he kind of did.

~Phew~

Lin Mu took a breath of relief as he looked back at the Alluring Wisteria pavilion.

"Hooh! Almost got trapped..." Lin Mu muttered.

"Hahaha! Seems like you still have time to grow up." Xukong laughed again.

Lin Mu ignored senior Xukong's teasing and just focused on walking. Eventually, he reached the place that he so wanted to go to, The ancestral temple.

The ancestral temple was located in a wide open square and there were a lot of people that came here to pray to their ancestors. The entry to the inside of the temple was not allowed to most of the people and all they could do was pray from the outside.

The temple would only be opened to the commoners on the day of the annual temple festival. Currently, only a few influential people could enter the temple and pray there. Lin Mu didn't have to wait in the crowd for long before he was able to get close to the temple.

"Hmm, some of the runes carved on this temple are indeed from the Dao script," Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu looked and read all the characters that he could and realized that some of them were from the Dao script, while the rest were just common runes. There were ancestral couplets written in the form of runes on the temple.

But when Lin Mu tried to read the Dao script characters, he realized that he could barely understand their meaning. He had not learned these ones yet and thus could not understand the entire meaning of them.

"Senior, what do the characters mean?" Lin Mu questioned, feeling curious.

"Hmm, they are the characters pertaining to reincarnation, worship, family, virtue and... fate." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu could hear the strangeness in senior Xukong's voice and wondered if there was a problem.

"Senior, is there... something wrong with the temple?" Lin Mu asked.

"Hmm, it's hard to tell but it does not seem to be as old as it's looking," Xukong replied.

"Not as old as it looks? Do you mean is newer than it looks?" Lin Mu asked.

"No, rather the opposite. Even if its materials look like they were made around a few hundred years ago, the aura that is felt from the characters is different. It's far more older..." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu looked at the temple and probed it with his spirit sense. At first, it breached the wall rather easily and entered the internal hall. There Lin Mu saw all the ancestral tablets that had been erected and the hundreds of incense sticks that were burning.

Then he saw an old monk that was kneeling at the corner of the temple. He observed him and found him to be a commoner with no cultivation. Yet, Lin Mu could feel something strange from the temple now. Lin Mu wanted to look further, but his spirit sense had reached its limit.

If Lin Mu wanted to see more, he would have to get closer, which was not possible currently. Lin Mu looked ahead and saw the guards that were standing at the border of the temple, not letting anyone get close. Unlike the other guards, these guards were all cultivators and one of them was even a late stage qi refining realm cultivator.

"Do you know about the history of the ancestral temple?" Xukong suddenly questioned.

Lin Mu tilted his head and thought for a bit before remembering what he had heard before about the temple.

"From what I heard from my father, the temple was made about a hundred years ago along with the city itself. It was actually one of the first buildings to be erected and has stayed the same since then, even if more buildings have been added to the town." Lin Mu answered.

"Hmm, even if the building was made a hundred years ago, the materials it was made from look older than that and the aura that it exudes is even older than that... perhaps over a thousand years," Xukong replied.

"Should we perhaps take a look inside senior?" Lin Mu asked.

"No... at least not now. Perhaps if we get an opportunity in the future or when we have no choice but to do it." Xukong replied.

"If you say so, Senior." Lin Mu muttered.

He then got to the tiled floor and knelt down kowtowing to pray to his ancestors. Lin Mu prayed to his descended parents and grandparents, before standing up. There were tens of people doing the same, and some of them even seemed to be crying while others seem to be begging.

"You didn't tell me about your grandparents," Xukong said with interest, seeing Lin Mu pray to them.

"I didn't? Oh yes, but I don't really have much to tell either. I don't remember much about them as they passed away a long time ago. I think only my grandmother was alive back when I was born and my grandfather had died a long time ago.

My father was around my age when my grandfather died as well." Lin Mu spoke.

"I see..." Xukong said with a calm tone.

Xukong thought over his words and suddenly realized something.

'Could Lin Mu really have a bloodline, perhaps? I couldn't detect any in him, but perhaps it's too diluted or beyond my understanding?'

"Lin Mu these grandparents you talked about, they are your paternal grandparents, right? What about your mother's parents?" Xukong questioned.

"I... I... don't know?" Lin Mu uttered.

Chapter 324 - Lockdown?

Lin Mu then tried to remember but could not find any memory related to his maternal grandparents. He realized that he had never asked his parents about his maternal grandparents either.

"I think... my mother was an orphan? My father met her at the town when she was working in the orchards." Lin Mu spoke.

"So you don't know anything about your maternal grandparents?" Xukong asked for confirmation.

"Yes, I have no idea who they are." Lin Mu replied.

This put Xukong in a deep thought and wondered if he should investigate it more.

'The boy's fate is incredibly complex, and his links to karma are not visible to me either. I don't know if it is because of the ring or something else, but perhaps there is a link to his family.' Xukong thought.

Xukong closed his eyes and a wave of spirit qi started emanating from his body. It spread in the ring and made all the spatial energy streaks in the sky twirl around him. Five seconds later everything settled and went to normal, except that the aura that Xukong had fallen by twenty percent.

~Sigh~

'Let's hope that I get some results...' Xukong thought to himself.

Lin Mu was unaware that senior Xukong had done something right now and was calmly walking away from the ancestral temple. He was now heading towards the manor of the city mayor. He wanted to take a look at the place where the tournament would be held soon.

The city mayor's manor was located in the southern part of the city and was thus quite far from the location that Lin Mu was in right now. Because he could not run there due to the number of people on the roads. There was a high chance that he would collide with someone and then the guards would get involved.

It took him about an hour to reach the manor and finally saw its true size. From far it seemed to be big, but from close it was massive. Lin Mu guessed that the land of the manor took up the area of an entire district, perhaps.

'How much money would have taken to build something like this?' Lin Mu wondered to himself.

He circled around the manor and saw a lot of servants preparing for the events before the marriage ceremony. From what Lin Mu had heard it would start with a martial tournament then there would be poetry, dance, music and art.

A variety of programs were held for the enjoyment of all the guests that were invited. Then at the very end was the marriage ceremony set up.

"Move aside, move aside!" Suddenly a group of guards appeared from the entrance of the manor and shouted.

The people walking around heard it and became alert before following the orders. Lin Mu was already on the other side of the street thus didn't really have to move, but his attention was attracted. He looked towards the Manor and saw a carriage being brought out of the manor.

"Who is that? Isn't the mayor in the Shuang Qian city undergoing interrogation?" Lin Mu wondered.

"That should be the wife of the city mayor." A random person answered.

Lin Mu could not see who was inside the carriage as it was too far. He pushed the people and walked closer to use his spirit sense to take a look. His spirit sense easily penetrated the carriage walls and then he saw a middle aged woman sitting in the carriage.

Her face was calm, but a sense of dignity could be felt from it. But the moment Lin Mu's spirit sense touched her, she felt it and became alert.

'She's a cultivator too. A peak stage qi refining realm cultivator.' Lin Mu thought and immediately pulled his spirit sense back.

But before it could leave the carriage the mayor's wife intercepted it with her own spirit sense trying to find its source. She kept on following it, but soon realized that it had gone beyond her range. Her face became even more alarmed after this.

Meanwhile, Lin Mu walked away from the area, unaware that he had just scared the woman.

"Guards!" The mayor's wife shouted.

The carriage stopped moving and a group of guards surrounded it. One of them who seemed to be the leader waked closer and cupped his hands.

"Do you have any problems, madam?" The leader of the guards asked respectfully.

"I sensed a cultivator spying on me..." The woman spoke.

Now it was the turn of the guards to become shocked.

"But madam, we were alert and didn't sense anyone approaching." The guard spoke.

"I know but the cultivator's spirit sense came from quite far." The woman spoke.

"Madam, you mean..." The guard leader gulped at that sentence.

"There is a core condensation realm cultivator in the town. Someone sneaked in..." The woman spoke.

"But madam, why would they do that? Any core condensation realm cultivator would be an honored guest that would get the utmost respect. If they wanted to meet you, they would have to merely mention it. Even the mayor would not reject it." The guard replied.

"You think I don't know that?" The woman scolded. "What other reason is left? What do you think, you imbecile?"

"A spy?" The guard muttered as he realized.

"GO! I WANT THIS DISTRICT UNDER LOCKDOWN! Entry and the exit to the city will be stopped until further notice! I want a list of each and every person that entered the city in the past three days." The Guard leader ordered the others.

"YES LEADER!" The guards replied and went to do their tasks.

The carriage was turned around and went back into the manor while all the people around were gossiping about what had just occurred.

Lin Mu though, had gone quite far from the spot and didn't know that his casual probe had alerted all of the guards of the city now. He was now visiting all the shops that he found interesting and buying stuff from there.

Chapter 325 - Avoiding The Check

Lin Mu had been planning to get a lot of stuff that he thought he would need in the future, thus that was exactly what he was buying right now. It wasn't anything too important though, just things that would make the quality of his life better.

And since Lin Mu could keep everything in his ring, it was extremely convenient.

"You know there are special spirit tools that function as a house, you can simply get one of those in the future," Xukong suggested seeing Lin Mu buying all the things.

"Oh? You mean like the myriad armament canopy abode?" Lin Mu asked.

"Well, that one is a rather extreme example. But yes, something like that. Though if you want one in this world, it would be hard to find a spirit tool refiner that can make it." Xukong replied.

"Due to the difficulty, you mean?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Not really that, but rather due to the niche kind of a tool that it is. It isn't really something used for offense, particularly so the people here may not be experienced in it. Though a small one should be around the same category as a high grade spirit tool." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu was intrigued by this and wondered if he could find anyone that could make it for him. But then he realized that while he did have a lot of gold, he didn't have as many spirit stones.

'Hmm, I'll need to get spirit stones.' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu of course had other things that were worth a lot of spirit stones but he couldn't sell those. They were of big use to him, like the pills and the tools that he already had. But he did have certain things he could sell, such as the spirit apples that he had.

His stock of the spirit apples had reached quite a large amount by now and their growth rate had also increased to seven apples a day ever since he reached the peak stage of the qi refining realm. He knew that the spirit apples that grew in the garden of karma were of a better quality than the ones that grew in the orchards and thus should be worth more.

"I should find a place to see how much they're worth. This is Wu Lim city so it shouldn't create any trouble even if I sell the spirit apples." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Lin Mu had just finished buying from the seventh store when he noticed that the route was blocked for some reason. There was a crowd of people standing around and beyond them, he could see some guards standing.

"What's happening here?" Lin My asked a person standing nearby.

"We don't know either. The guards have put the entire district on lockdown and no one can leave till they verify their identities. They're especially checking for cultivators, apparently." The person said.

"Huh? Why though?" Lin Mu asked further.

"Only the guards know, and they won't tell us. They're just forcing us to follow their orders." Another man that was standing beside him replied.

Lin Mu nodded and realized that there was probably some incident that had happened. He extended his spirit sense and checked all the other exits that were nearby, only to find the same thing happening there. He also noticed that the guards were all cultivators and were actually using spirit sense to check for cultivators.

As soon as Lin Mu saw that he retracted his spirit sense and knew that he couldn't let his identity be exposed here. While he had been given a writ of authority which he could use, he knew that it was better to only be used in a time of emergency.

Since he still had an opportunity to avoid them right now, he chose to do that.

After all, with Lin Mu's skills, a thing like this was quite easy. He quickly found a suitable place from where he could get to the roof of the buildings using Blink. Because the buildings and the houses in the city were rather closely packed, it was easy for Lin Mu.

But then upon reaching the roof, he suddenly laid down.

"Dammit! They got guards on the roof too?" Lin Mu cursed.

"Of course they would. If they didn't, they would be rather stupid, wouldn't they? A cultivator that was a criminal can easily scale buildings, this would be the most obvious route of escape." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu realized his mistake and got back down. There were far too many guards even on the roofs and he knew even with blink there was a great chance he would be found out and he didn't think Fade would be as effective here, the buildings were rather densely packed.

~Sigh~

"Seems like I need to go the proper way this time. I don't want to create trouble unnecessarily the day that I come here." Lin Mu said to himself.

Lin Mu took out the writ of authority and put it into his sleeve to show it at the right moment. He then used his spirit sense to find a route that had the least amount of people. Even if guards knew that he was a cultivator, Lin Mu didn't want other common people to know it.

After all, people liked gossiping and who knew whose lips would take it where and turn it into what. But just as Lin Mu was doing this, he suddenly felt something under one of the paths.

"Huh? Another cave?" Lin Mu muttered with surprise.

He had not expected that there would be caves here as well.

"It could be a sewer system," Xukong suggested.

"A sewer system? What's that?" Lin Mu asked.

Xukong "...".

Lin Mu didn't know why, but an awkward silence descended after asking that question.

"You don't know what a sewer system is?" Xukong asked with apprehension.

"I know what sewer is, but not what a sewer system is." Lin Mu replied.

Xukong didn't know if he should laugh or cry, but then he remembered the state of the northern town and even this city. He realized that there were actually surface level sewers here that were simply covered by large stone tiles.

~Sigh~

"I forgot what kind of a world this is..."

Chapter 326 - Runes?

Xukong then went on to explain to Lin Mu what a sewer system was in brief.

"Oh yeah, I think I've heard of them. The Empire's capital has that to drain the water from all the rain that they get." Lin Mu spoke.

~Sigh~

"At least this world is not that backward..." Xukong muttered.

"But still, senior it's strange that there are caves here too." Lin Mu replied.

Lin Mu had looked around and discovered that there were actually quite a few caves here. Though most of them were about ten to thirty meters deep in the ground. Even his spirit sense was barely able to reach them due to the density of the ground.

If it were not for it having strengthened recently, he may have not even discovered it. Lin Mu thus decided to take advantage of these caves. He first found a suitable location that hidden from people and also had a cave below it.

For this Lin Mu had to go all the way to the other side of the district. But this also allowed him to see the increased security around the Mayor's manor. While passing by, he finally heard what had happened from the people here.

"So it was my fault..." Lin Mu muttered with embarrassment.

"That's what happens when you carelessly probed people with spirit sense. Thankfully, your spirit sense was long enough that she didn't know why it was." Xukong warned.

Having learned his lesson, Lin Mu found a suitable place that satisfied both the conditions. He then used the third skill Phase and started sinking into the ground. It was a strange sensation for him, as when he usually used the skill he wouldn't go into the ground.

This time he felt as if he was sinking into thick mud, which was actually what it was... kind of. A few seconds later Lin Mu fell through the roof of the cave and landed on a wet floor.

~Cough~

~Cough~

"What the hell is this smell!" Lin Mu exclaimed.

"Hold your breath! This air could be poisonous or at the very least stale." Xukong warned.

Lin Mu immediately held his breath and looked around for the path. It wasn't a problem for Lin Mu to hold his breath in for more than five minutes now. But while waking he discovered another problem, his eyes had actually started burning due to the fumes in the air.

"This seems much worse than I thought. The air here shouldn't be this bad though to hurt your eyes, unless... there was something rotting here." Xukong stated.

Lin Mu smelled it a bit and realized that it was indeed a rotting smell in the air. He followed his spirit sense and tried to find the quickest way out. He was using his spirit sense to look up onto the surface of the ground to see where to go.

Even the path that he had seen from above didn't seem to accurately match the one that he was seeing here.

'Seems like I was mistaken due to the difference in the depths.' Lin Mu thought.

Still, Lin Mu didn't worry that he was in danger, as if he really had a problem he could just use phase and blink to get to the surface quickly.

~Woosh~

After walking for a minute, Lin Mu felt a faint breeze hitting his face.

"Wind, here?" Lin Mu wondered.

Unlike the rest of the air, while this had a rotten smell in it too, it was not as strong and it didn't irritate his eyes either.

"You should go that way, it possibly leads to an open path maybe," Xukong suggested.

Lin Mu checked it with the map that he had in his mind and realized that the direction this tunnel was going was right through the center of the district.

'Doesn't this pass right below the manor then?' Lin Mu estimated.

~Trickle~

Lin Mu continued onward, and soon the sound of water hit his ears.

"Huh water?... of course the three rivers, they enter the ground when they reach the city!" Lin Mu exclaimed.

"The air is probably coming from a well, if you follow the water you should find a suitable path faster. The air should be good too there." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu nodded and followed this path. Not even a minute later he found the air clearing up, and becoming breathable.

~Huu~

"This is much better..." Lin Mu muttered.

Soon he found the underground river and saw the gushing water.

~Gulp~

But upon seeing the force of the water he knew he had to be careful, one wrong step and he could fall into the water.

There was a very narrow space to walk along which Lin Mu traveled and soon spotted the first opening. There was a rope dangling from the opening as well.

"That's a well, alright." Lin Mu muttered.

From the well, Lin Mu could let his spirit sense exit out and take a look around.

"Oh damn, I'm right inside the manor..." Lin Mu realized.

The well that was above Lin Mu opened up in the garden of the mansion. He could even see a few guards patrolling around and these were even stronger than the others that he had seen outside. With even the weakest one of them being at the late stage of the qi refining realm.

"They got plenty of people indeed. Though if they really have these many, then they should assign some to the towns as well, then we wouldn't have had incidents like in the past." Lin Mu muttered with a grievance.

Putting the matter aside, he continued on the path. But soon he felt something unnatural.

"Wha-what is this feeling?..." Lin Mu wondered.

There was a certain aura coming from one of the tunnels near him that was quite obnoxious. While it wasn't outright repulsive, it certainly did not feel comfortable to him. He curiously scanned it with his spirit sense and discovered something.

"Are those... runes?" Lin Mu discovered.

"What do you mean runes?" Xukong asked as he focused on Lin Mu's vision.

There he saw runes carved into the walls. Most of them had faded away, and some had crumbled with the dust and gravel lying on the floor.

Chapter 327 - Tunnels

Xukong carefully tried to read the runes but found most of them to not make much sense. A vast majority of them had been destroyed, and thus they could not really be read anymore. Lin Mu tried to read it as well and could only make out some basic words.

But even then, the uncomfortable feeling that he was feeling was not dissipating and was still the same. Thinking of a solution, Lin Mu started chanting the calming heart sutra and a few seconds later felt much better. The uncomfortable feeling could not affect him anymore.

"Let's see what is here, there's bound to be something if it can make me feel like this." Lin Mu said before walking ahead.

A few minutes later he could smell the foul stench in the air again. He saw that he had reached a point where the tunnel branched into multiple parts. There was one of them that was the biggest in size and was also giving out the feeling of discomfort, while one of the other branches was where the foul stench was coming from.

The remaining tunnels had no effect on him, and he didn't particularly find them unique.

"Which one do we head to first?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm, let's go to the one that is the biggest one." Lin Mu decided after a few moments.

Lin Mu walked ahead and saw that the runes that were carved into the walls were much more degraded than the previous parts. He touched the walls and could feel they were steeped in that uncomfortable aura. But even then the main source of that was quite ahead.

It took him about five minutes to reach the end of the tunnel. This was where the uncomfortable aura was the strongest, nearly ten times as much as when he first felt it. But now Lin Mu could not proceed anymore, for there was a large wall in front of him. This wall also had runes that had deteriorated with time carved on it.

"Now what?" Lin Mu asked.

He touched the wall and could feel the uncomfortable aura behind it. He tried probing the wall with his spirit sense and realized that he could not penetrate it more than an inch.

"Hmm, seems like this is a gate of some kind. But looking at the runes carved on it, the opening mechanism for it has also broken due to the time." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu looked at the wall and felt unwilling to head back. But then an idea appeared in his mind. He triggered the third skill phase and walked ahead.

~Thud~

"Ouch!" Lin Mu winced.

Lin Mu recoiled from the collision and rubbed his head. He looked at his hands and saw that they were still blurry. He touched the wall with his hands and found them unable to penetrate through them.

"But how?" Lin Mu felt confused.

"Looks like there is a barrier or some kind behind the wall that's protecting it. It is probably one of the defensive mechanisms and was part of the main one, but the one that controlled the gate has been destroyed over time. But due to the method by which the gate was made, it is still blocked." Xukong answered.

~Sigh~

Sighing in defeat, Lin Mu thought of any other idea. He got the idea of using the fourth skill Fade, but knew that it was risky. He had no idea what was in front of him and now that his spirit sense could not pierce it either, he couldn't use the method that he had previously used.

Even if he used the skill anyway, while he would be able to bypass the wall, he didn't know what kind of place he would end up in. Who knows what kind of a trap existed behind it. Or there could even just be nothing there, and his entire effort could have been wasted.

"It's better to come back later since we don't know much about this place. There are still other tunnels that you haven't checked, perhaps there is an alternate path there." Xukong suggested.

Lin Mu thought over it and indeed found it better to not take a risk.

He turned around and walked back to the place where the tunnel branched into the other tunnels and then chose another one of the tunnels. He walked ahead and soon reached another dead end. This time the tunnel in front of him had collapsed and there was no way to proceed ahead.

Lin Mu used his spirit sense and found it to easily penetrate it. But even after using all of his spirit sense, he couldn't find an opening behind it. The debris had covered the entirety of the tunnel behind it. Now here Lin Mu could use his third skill phase, but he didn't want to as he felt like there wouldn't be anything here.

He went back to the point of split and checked the other tunnels. Nearly all of them were blocked as well in different manners. Some were collapsed like the previous one, some simply ended in a wall, while some were flooded with water.

~Sigh~

Lin Mu was now standing at the fork again and was looking at the last tunnel he had not gone through. This was the tunnel that was filled with the foul stench and the one that Lin Mu had the least desire to head into.

Still not wanting to give up mid way, he gritted his teeth and headed inside. This tunnel was deeper than any other tunnels and was also the steepest. This tunnel was heading downwards and the more Lin Mu walked in the harder he found himself to breathe.

The stench was once again burning his eyes, and he decided to hold his breath in. Lin Mu had walked in nearly twice the distance he had than any other tunnels, and he finally saw a change. A wide opening appeared in front of him and the tunnels ended up in a wide open cave.

This was the place that had the vilest of stench. It was as if corpses had been rotting side here for a few months and an area of absolutely horrific conditions was created.

Chapter 328 - Blood?

Similar to the previous parts this area was pitch dark and Lin Mu was using his spirit sense to 'see'. But unlike the others, this area was so large that his spirit sense was only able to feel the air and the ends were not visible to him.

"This area is at least a hundred meters wide." Lin Mu muttered.

He extended his spirit sense upwards and finally felt the roof of the cave. But even then it was quite far up as Lin Mu had walked a large distance downwards. He wanted to continue but felt hesitant as his spirit sense did not seem to be able to perceive everything.

There could be things that were beyond his spirit sense that may be dangerous to him. Not wanting to continue directly he took out a torch from the ring. He gestured with his hand and suddenly heard a shout in his mind.

"NO! Stop!" Xukong yelled, but was too late.

A spark appeared in Lin Mu's hand and then "BOOOOOM!"

Lin Mu felt as if time had slowed down and he could see the small spark he had made in his hand using the minor fireball technique rapidly expanding. There was something in the air that fueled the flames and spread around.

In that fraction of a second Lin Mu instinctively activated the three skills Flicker, Blink and Phase all together. He appeared inside the walls of the cave and stopped there. His breath was still held in, but he could feel the tremors that were traveling through the walls of the cave.

They lasted for about five seconds, after which Lin Mu felt them stop. He used his spirit sense to check if everything was fine and after confirming that walked outside. The cave was still pitch black, but the heat could be felt in it.

There was also the sound of rocks crumbling, echoing in the cave.

"That was close, you almost killed yourself!" Xukong scolded.

Lin Mu knew that he had messed up big this time and if it were not for him reacting quick enough, he would have sustained heavy injuries if not for death. But he was still confused about what had just happened, how did the flames grow so big and cause an explosion?

Xukong saw the confusion in Lin Mu's mind and knew that this wasn't exactly his fault either. If anything, it was more because of his ignorance than anything.

~Sigh~

"That stench you were smelling, they were the gases in the air. Some of those gases are toxic while some are even flammable, so even a small spark can cause an explosion if you're not careful. Now that the gases have ignited, while the gases themselves will have disappeared." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu nodded his head and took a light breath finding that the foul smell had indeed disappeared. He realized that he could now breathe again here and his eyes did not irritate anymore.

~Hooh~

"This is much better..." Lin Mu muttered.

"It should be fine if I ignite another torch, right?" Lin Mu asked, just to be sure.

"Yes, it should be fine now. Though I don't know how long it will burn though... there won't be enough air in the cave left." Xukong answered.

"I'll just take a quick look." Lin Mu replied before taking out another torch from his ring.

The one that he had taken out previously had been destroyed in the explosion, and no traces of it could be seen. He used the minor fireball technique and ignited the torch, illuminating the cave. Lin Mu finally saw how big the cave was.

"Whoa!" Lin Mu exclaimed as he saw the size of the cave.

The cave was at least eighty meters tall and around two hundred meters wide. The ground that Lin Mu was standing on was flat, but it slanted towards the center of the cave. Lin Mu looked ahead and saw a large hole in the center of the cave.

This hole was the source of the foul stench that had been bothering Lin Mu this entire time. He looked inside and saw that there was a pool of what looked like a thick sludge of some kind. It was black in color and the foul smell was emanating from it again. From time to time, bubbles would appear from the black sludge and pop in the air.

"Ugh! What in the heavens is this!?" Lin Mu recoiled with revulsion.

He looked around and saw that there were actually some channels that were joining this hole. He traced the channels and saw that they were heading towards the other side of the cave and reached the walls of the cave. At that point, there were holes for each of the channels and they merged into them.

Lin Mu could also see some dried up sludge similar to that of the large hole, present on these channels.

"So this is where the black sludge comes from. Whatever is behind this wall is the source of it." Lin Mu realized.

"Could it be?..." Xukong suddenly spoke.

Lin Mu was abut startled, but this and wondered if there was danger again.

"What is it senior?" Lin Mu asked with concern.

"Hmm, I think this black sludge wasn't exactly like this before. Rather it should have been liquid and only after being here for a long time has it become like this. As for what it is... it's blood." Xukong revealed.

"Blood?! But why would there be blood here?" Lin Mu asked.

He immediately went to check the wall on the other side and probed it with his spirit sense only to find it blocked again. He tried to use the skill phase but could not pass through it either.

"As I guessed, the first tunnel we went through whatever was behind that gate is behind this wall as well. The source of the blood was from that place as well." Lin Mu guessed.

"There is only one thing that comes to my mind, Lin Mu... The Blood Sacrifice!"

Chapter 329 - Who Are The Culprits?

Xukong's words made the cogs in Lin Mu's brain turn and everything started to link up; the culprits hiding in caves, them disappearing easily, the kidnapping of the mercenaries, the presences of caves everywhere in the region of which nearly no one seemed to have knowledge of.

Lin Mu then looked at all the runes that had been carved into the walls and realized that all of this should have been ancient and have been exiting here for countless years. He then realized one of the most important things.

It seemed too suspicious that barely anyone knew about the caves. At least the people who took care of the wells in the city should have known of them, and if they knew then normal people should have found out about it as well.

A serious expression appeared on Lin Mu's face as his train of thought progressed. He knew from the kind of thick sludge that had been formed, the quantity of blood that was originally present must have been quite large. He checked the depth of the sludge pool and was even more shocked.

"Senior the sludge pool, it's more than fifty meters deep." Lin Mu spoke.

Now even Xukong was getting worried about this, as he understood the amount of blood required to fill such a large pool would not be easily obtained.

"Lin Mu, I don't think this is all blood," Xukong said.

"It's not? Then what it is?" Lin Mu asked.

"Use the method I tell you and test it out yourself," Xukong replied.

He then gave Lin Mu a small technique which was actually part of the refinement skills. Lin Mu didn't have a hard time in learning it, as a lot of the steps were similar to those he used for the refinement of the Bloodline of the Trunk Faced Cow.

Lin Mu used his spirit sense and created a few runes in the air. He formed a few seals with his hands and a small amount of sludge came floating up from the pool. It entered the formation which the runes had formed and stirred before turning to dust and dissipating.

But after this, the runes that constituted the formation also changed and then entered Lin Mu's head. He closed his eyes, and a troubled expression appeared on his face.

"You were right, senior. This isn't just blood, but entire bodies mixed with them. There is not only human blood in it, but also a lot of beast blood. In fact, the majority of it constitutes of beast blood." Lin Mu informed.

"Hmm, as I thought. They are using a certain refinement technique to refine the corpses and blood in a certain ratio to prepare blood essence rich fluid. They absorb the blood essence while discarding the rest as a waste." Xukong explained.

Upon hearing this, Lin Mu's rage flared up, but then he quickly chanted the calming heart sutra again to calm himself down. He knew that it would not be the right time to get senselessly angry and it would be the better choice to find out what was going on.

"We should explore a bit and check what exists in the other caves. Even if this one is blocked, there should be others that should be accessible. Besides this many beast corpse should not have been easily obtainable which means, the mayor is definitely part of the entire thing." Lin Mu said in a cold tone.

"That makes sense. First, he employed the mercenaries to hunt beasts for him and then killed them as well to contribute to the blood sacrifice. But this leaves us with another problem. If the mayor is involved in this then does it mean that his sons are as well?" Xukong stated.

Lin Mu was thinking about this very question as well, and it had put him in a dilemma. From the actions of the Hei corps, it was obvious that they were fully against the culprits and that they were definitely bothered by them. The dislike of the Mayor by Wu Hei was also quite obvious and from what Lin Mu had known about it, the mayor had always kept the existence of his younger son in the back.

Most of the people did not even know the name of the younger son of the mayor, which showed that there was some conflict in between them. But even if it was sure that Wu Hei was not involved with the mayor, it didn't mean that Lin Mu could simply tell him that.

In the end, they were still father and son. Blood was thicker than water. Who knew if he had a change of heart at the very end.

"Old man Jing Wei and Duan Ke should have been here at this point, it would have been immensely helpful." Lin Mu muttered.

Xukong heard Lin Mu's words and knew that they were true. Their existence would have definitely made it much easier for them.

"Senior Xukong, what do you think? Should I proceed in investigating the place or not?" Lin Mu asked, feeling unable to come up with a conclusion.

"Hmm, I think you should stop for a while. Whoever it is, they will definitely be strong. Just the amount of cultivators and beasts they have sacrificed would be enough to push them to the nascent soul realm, at the very least if they were a qi refining realm cultivator.

Another thing we know: that the mayor is at the core condensation realm and has been for a few years. The same is for both of his sons, they are in the condensation realm as well. This means that they shouldn't be the ones that are taking the advantage of the blood sacrifice, but rather a third party." Xukong replied.

"As far as everyone knows, the mayor does not have anymore family except for his wife and two sons. He has also been the mayor of Wu Lim city for nearly forty years now." Lin Mu said.

"Who was the mayor before that, and how did Wu Xun become the mayor?" Xukong questioned after thinking for a bit.

Chapter 330 - Finding The Secret Location

Lin Mu thought over it and realized that he didn't know who was the mayor before this.

"I don't know Senior." Lin Mu replied.

"Hmm, then perhaps that is what we need to find out. That could be the key to the identity of the culprits." Xukong said.

Lin Mu nodded and started to move towards the exit of the tunnel. It was already starting to get a bit hard for him to breathe here and he understood that the air was thinning out. It would take a while before this area was breathable again.

But then he realized that the sludge pool will probably turn the air foul again, and he may have to repeat the same thing as before again.

'Wait, the foul smell was not just from here, was it? I was able to smell it on the very end that too beyond the river, where the air was fresh. The foul smell should have dissipated there, but there was still some of it in those tunnels.' Lin Mu thought.

"Senior, I think this is not the only sludge pool and they are more of them. Or the air would not have been so bad in other tunnels." Lin Mu stated his concern.

"That does seem likely." Xukong acknowledged.

Lin Mu soon reached the end of the tunnel, and the sound of the river could be heard again. He continued following it and reached another branch where there was a bigger tunnel heading deep. Lin Mu saw the runes carved there as well, and the uncomfortable feeling that was coming off it.

"Seems like you found another one," Xukong said.

Lin Mu went inside and saw that similar to before it split into multiple branches, but this one had less than before. There was a bigger one that had a large gate at its end which was impassable and another tunnel that had a sludge pool.

Lin Mu compared the location in his mind and realized that this one was a bit to the northern direction of the previous one. He couldn't tell the exact direction because of his spirit sense being unable to reach the surface at this depth.

Lin Mu returned and walked along the river, only to encounter more openings that were spread along with it and the tunnels that would branch out. In all, he found about five more sludge pools and five closed gates that had barriers.

Along the way, he was also able to see that the river had a curving path that it flowed around. And along this path were the tunnels placed around. The wells were particularly helpful for Lin Mu to get a rough estimate of where the tunnels were compared to the surface.

Eventually, he had walked the entirety of the river and had reached a point where he could not continue anymore. The river had entered an underground path that was completely flooded and he could not walk there. He thus went back and found a suitable place to leave them.

He had already gone way past the district where he wanted to leave and was now three districts away. He fording a place that was the closest to the surface and then used the combination of Blink and Phase to climb up. About a minute later, he was out and standing on the side of a tree.

Lin Mu had spent nearly three hours underground and had crossed the entire city to come to the opposite side.

"Now to check the wells here and pinpoint the location of the blocked area." Lin Mu muttered.

Lin Mu then started his journey to see what wells were located where in the city. While he had seen them from the inside, he could only tell the short area around the well as that was all his spirit sense could extend for. Since he didn't know much about the city's locations either, he had to search them manually.

He spent another hour and a half checking all of the wells and finally figured out the layout.

The underground river curved in the east to west direction. At the bottom of the curve was the first well that Lin Mu had discovered which was none other than the one that was located in the garden of the Mayor's manor. Then if he plotted all of the blocked gates and the sludge pools, he was able to find the central location.

Lin Mu knew that all the sludge pools must be linked to one single location and the blocked gates must lead there as well. With this in mind, he finally figured out the main location.

"The ancestral temple! It's roughly below it..." Lin Mu muttered.

"Did you sense any caves below the temple?" Xukong asked.

"No senior. They are probably quite deep into the ground beside the ground below the temple was also quite dense and mostly made up of rocks which my spirit sense could not penetrate." Lin Mu answered.

"Hmm, seems like we will need to investigate the temple. Perhaps you can take advantage of your connection with Wu Hei?" Xukong said.

"Yes, that could work, but if it doesn't then I'll just enter it directly with the help of my skills." Lin Mu said with a sharp expression on his face.

Having said this, he started his journey back to his courtyard. It was now getting dark and the sun was hidden beyond the horizon, with the sky a shade of orange. Along the way, Lin Mu avoided the Alluring Wisteria pavilion and reached the courtyard.

"Welcome back, master Lin Mu." The servant greeted.

Lin Mu nodded and stepped in.

"Should I prepare the dinner?" The servant asked.

"Umm, I'll take a bath first." Lin Mu said.

"I'll set it up right now." The servant said before going away.

Having spent his time underground in a smelly place had made him feel a bit gross. Thus Lin Mu wanted to clean up as fast as possible. Soon the bath was set up and Lin Mu was soaking in a warm pool of water, with his clothes sent for washing.