

## Walker 441

### Chapter 441 - Wanted?

Lin Mu's spirit sense was spread around in the area as he checked the houses for the villagers. Most of them were sleeping by now while some were still awake and doing miscellaneous tasks.

Overall, Lin Mu couldn't find anything strange here, just an average village. He looked around the village and came upon the notice board that was located at the center of the village.

This was where the notices, decrees, and such kind of information was posted. Most of the people in villages were taught to read at the very least and thus it wasn't much of a problem for them to see it.

It was here that Lin Mu saw something that confirmed his conjecture.

"So they have still been looking for me huh..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

On the notice board, an old and faded poster could be seen. The poster had the portrait of Lin Mu drawn on it and his name was also written below it.

The poster read: 'Lin Mu, wanted dead or alive. Anyone that has information on his location will be heavily rewarded.

-by the order of his majesty, King Shuang'

There was also a date of issue on the poster and it was about a week from the day he fought with Gu Yao. But this still didn't tell him how long it exactly had been. But from the state of the poster, he guessed that it should have easily been more than two years.

"The poster is here, but we don't know if they are actively searching for you. Unless you encounter someone who has seen you before, I doubt they will recognize you. Look at the portrait, that is not you anymore." Xukong spoke.

"Hmm... indeed senior. I will wait till the morning before speaking with the villagers. Approaching like this at night will be suspicious." Lin Mu said.

"That would be wise." Xukong agreed.

Lin Mu nodded and went back to little Shrubby. The beast was lying at the side of a large tree cultivating. Lin Mu could feel the faint waves of spirit Qi coming from his body and knew that the beast was only getting more stronger.

Little Shrubby woke up and saw Lin Mu approach.

"Shall we eat?" He asked.

"Yes, let's go a bit further though." Lin Mu replied.

The night passed and morning came, Lin Mu could even hear the cry of a rooster from afar.

He wondered what persona would be the best to present to the villagers. He deliberated on a cultivator at first but then decided to go as a commoner. He knew that the appearance of cultivators would be recorded and he would likely be investigated even if he was not suspected.

Lin Mu thus changed into some plain looking robes and stored his short sword into the ring. Instead of that, he withdrew a staff from it. This was just a common bamboo staff and there was nothing special about it, it would suit well to his narrative as a traversal.

He then took out a large cloth and put some random things in it to make it seem like he was a common traveler going on his journey.

~huu~

"This should be decent enough..." Lin Mu muttered to himself before going to the village.

This time he had to walk there, so as to not arise suspicion and it took him five minutes to reach there. He could see some peasants working in the fields and some guards that patrolled along the paths.

The peasants quickly spotted him and spoke up.

"Who is that?" one of them asked.

"Seems like a traveler, I've never seen him in our village before." Another one answered.

The guards had heard the small commotion by now and went to intercept Lin Mu.

"Who are you?" The guards asked without showing much hostility.

"Greetings, I'm Little Ma." Lin Mu replied, making up a random common name.

"What are you here?" The guard questioned further.

"Aah, I'm just looking for a job in the city and am on the way there. I've been traveling for a few hours and wanted to rest and eat for a bit." Lin Mu answered with a genial smile.

The guard was not a cultivator and was only at the fifth stage of the Body tempering realm. Lin Mu didn't even have to actively sense him to be able to tell this, but he still spread his spirit sense around and observed the people here to see if there was anyone hiding their strength.

He had only done this as a precaution but didn't expect that one of the peasants here was at the eighth stage of the body tempering realm. Lin Mu casually glanced at the old man, who looked to be in his sixties. He was hale and hearty looking, and even his muscles could be seen faintly beneath his clothes that were patched in many places.

"I see. Well if it's food you want, there is a small restaurant if you go straight from here. On another thought, if you're going to the city, how did you come here?" The guard replied.

"What do you mean?" Lin Mu asked, feeling a bit confused.

"You came from the southern route, right?" The guard said, seeing the path Lin Mu had taken. "There is a blockade set up by the army at the start of the southern route. How did you pass?" The guard questioned.

Now Lin Mu was caught off guard, as he had not expected something like this to have happened.

"What are you even asking Old Bu, there is still the small path through the forest. Second Nie's cousin arrive through that path last week, did you forget?" A farmer who was working at the side spoke.

Lin Mu secretly took a breath of relief and thanked the simple attitudes of the villagers in his mind.

"Yes, yes! I came from that path." Lin Mu replied.

"Alright then." The guard spoke and let Lin Mu passed.

"If you're going to the restaurant, make sure you try the buckwheat noodles, they are the best." The farmer suggested.

Lin Mu nodded his head and continued onward.

#### **Chapter 442 - Gathering Intel**

Lin Mu walked into an old restaurant that had a faded name board. There were a few villagers sitting around on the tables while chatting amongst themselves.

"What would you like?" A tanned middle aged woman walked asked Lin Mu.

"Ah, I'd like some breakfast. Whatever you have." Lin Mu replied.

"I'll send some right over, you can take a seat with the others. We don't have private seats left now." The woman replied.

"Sure, that won't be a problem." Lin Mu said before sitting at a table that already had six people sitting on it.

It was evident that due to being the only restaurant, it was popular and the people who were too busy to cook would come here to have their meal. Things like these were common in villages where a majority of the population consisted of farmers.

They would need to work on the farm most of the time thus often wouldn't have time to cook. Those that had families wouldn't have to do the same as their wives would cook for them.

Lin Mu glanced at the appearance of the six men and found them to be relatively common looking.

"What's the current news around the region, brothers?" Lin Mu questioned.

The men stopped talking and looked at the newcomer.

"It's the same mostly, but after the incident two years ago things have become a bit volatile. The northern tribes have become active again and the perpetrator of the incident is still at large." One of the men spoke with a sigh.

"Oh? I see. I saw the poster at the square while coming here, is he the perpetrator?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yes. That is the person who has made the lives of us commoners difficult. We now need to pay higher taxes as the army has been deployed."

"Aren't the cultivation sects doing anything? I mean, isn't it their duty as well to stop the Northern Tribes?" Lin Mu replied.

"We don't know much about that we are mere peasants. We can't deal with the matters of the immortals, perhaps only in the city you will find more information about them."

"I understand." Lin Mu said before his food arrived.

While eating his food, Lin Mu made some casual conversation and learned more things about what had happened. He also learned the exact time that had passed since he was sleeping.

It had been two years and three months since he fell asleep. During that time, a lot of changes had occurred in the kingdom and even in the rest of the empire. The Army had even started recruiting more and more men now.

They were not only recruiting for the position of soldiers but also for jobs such as cleaning, cooking and maintenance of equipment. Only the villages that majors did farming were spared, as food was an essential that no army could do without.

Even the rich were not spared, as their children were being called to work as well. The kingdoms had seen the horrors of the past war with the northern tribes and thus did not want to be careless. They were doing their 120% to ensure that everything would be fine when it eventually comes. For them, they would do over preparation rather than leave the response of the enemies to chance.

Lin Mu also verified the fact that no one could recognize his appearance now that he was looking older. He couldn't find out what was going on in Wu Lim city though, as all they said was that the entry there was restricted.

'Looks like I'll have to see it myself,' Lin Mu thought.

He finished his meal and then left the village. Calling Little Shrubby, he got on his back and continued his travel to the city. The next stop for him will be the eastern town, but he didn't want to stop there choosing to go straight to the city.

Since he was with little Shrubby he couldn't travel on the main road and went through the forested area. But he would only be able to travel up to a certain point before needing to stop.

After reaching the part near the Eastern town, the rest of the way was open plains and if he traveled with little shrubby, he would be easily spotted.

"Wait here, I'll be back in two days at the very late." Lin Mu instructed.

"I can't come?" Little Shrubby asked.

"No, you are too big now." Lin Mu replied.

"But I can fight!" Little Shrubby said with excitement.

"I know you can, but I am not going to fight there... at least not now. So wait here and stay out of sight. You can cook to pass time if you want to." Lin Mu explained.

"Okay, I'll wait." Little shrubby agreed.

Lin Mu flew away on the short sword and reached the Wu Lim City after an hour. He would have been able to reach it even earlier had it not been for the multiple outposts that had been set up in multiple perimeters.

It would have been fine if it was just normal soldiers, but there were cultivators mixed in there too. Lin Mu couldn't tell which sect they belonged to though, as all of them were wearing the same kind of uniform.

He avoided them by taking longer routes or where he couldn't do this, he used Fade to travel for short distances. But when he had reached the border of the city, Lin Mu found himself to have triggered a formation array.

"What is this, senior?" Lin Mu asked, feeling anxious.

"It's a tracking and marking formation array. It is used to tell how many people are currently going in and out of the city and who is around it as well." Xukong answered.

*~Sigh~*

"This just gets more and more complicated..." Lin Mu muttered.

It was evident that the formation was recently set up while he was gone. Lin Mu didn't know if it was done under the directions of Gu Yao or the kingdom, but whatever it was, it had only caused trouble for him.

Lin Mu came to an isolated corner of the city wall and phased through it to enter the city. He knew he was already discovered the moment he stepped into the formation array's range, but he was betting on the fact that they will not be tracking each and every person closely.

Besides, even if he was found out, he was simply going to escape after that.

Entering the city, Lin Mu could see the increased security everywhere. There were even checks at the entrances of the different districts. Lin Mu simply crossed them by either phasing through the ground or blinking past the guards.

His destination was the Ancestral temple which was the main site of the incident. But upon reaching there, Lin Mu found the area to be cordoned off and there was even a strong barrier formation surrounding it.

Lin Mu spotted some Tri cauldron peony sect disciples guarding the area. Lin Mu knew that he wouldn't be able to cross the barrier without causing a lot of commotion thus, avoided it for now.

He changed his aim and went to the Mayor's Manor instead. He also wanted to check up on Wu Hei but reckoned going to the manor would be better for now. Lin Mu knew it was likely that Wu Hei had been controlled too as there was no way Gu Yao would leave his nephew alone.

Appearing at the manor, Lin Mu discovered it to be empty. There were only some servants and guards left there.

Lin Mu spent some time gathering more information and learned that they all had moved from the city.

The Mayor was now in the capital and was given a high position due to his contribution of preventing the Red tide incident from spreading further.

The Red tide is what they were calling the Human controlling blood curse now. But they had been misled and made to believe the red tide was made for just killing, as the commoners that were affected by it had been killed. The mayor claimed that he and his family managed to suppress the red tide caused by Lin Mu.

The claim gained support from the Tri Cauldron peony sect and a few other minor sects as well. The shocking thing was these sects were none other than the ones that had participated in the tournament.

"Seems like they managed to get the sects over to their side as well. But to what extent are they being controlled, that is the question." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

"From what I've seen and analyzed. I doubt Gu Yao can control so many people like this multiple times. He is probably going to only control the stronger cultivators like the supreme elder. He didn't want to waste his power in controlling the commoners and thus killed them.

This also allowed him to make a narrative of the curse being used for killing instead." Xukong said.

### **Chapter 443 - New Alliances**

Lin Mu felt furious in his heart that Gu Yao had killed the innocent. He recalled the memories of the townsmen dying due to the plague but then steeled his heart. Nothing would come out of his mindless anger, rather if he wanted to avenge them he needed to be smart.

He needed to have a plan that would hurt them where it hurt the most. Lin Mu also knew that he couldn't just start killing the people straightaway as most of them were being controlled by Gu Yao and weren't necessarily at fault.

"Senior, will the people be freed if Gu Yao is killed?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm... that is a hard thing to answer. There are a few different possibilities that can happen. Theoretically, Gu Yao shouldn't be able to control that many cultivators that are at the Dao Shell realm himself.

And if he wants to control those that are at the Dao treading realm, I believe it will be impossible if he's not at the Dao treading realm himself. We know that he is controlling the Tri Cauldron peony sect and their strongest cultivator is at the Nascent Soul realm.

It is likely that the other sects that are cooperating with them have been controlled too... or rather their higher ups are. Just from this, we can assume that the number of Dao Shell realm cultivators that are under his control is around ten.

Not to mention the disciples and other elders that will follow their commands. You will have to fight a huge number of people, strong people. Going straight ahead will not work, you will need to weaken them first." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu nodded his head and thought to himself. For now, he couldn't come up with anything concrete and realized that he needed more information before creating a proper plan.

"I'll gather more intel in the city and see what else I can find. Hopefully by day after tomorrow, I get enough for the next stage." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

With this, he sank into the ground and went to spy on the disciples. Lin Mu also went to check on the underground chamber where he had fought Gu Yao, but it had the barrier surrounding it as well.

This one was even stronger than the one that was set up around the temple, and he couldn't find any way to break it himself. He knew he could force his way in using the ring by opening a portal, but there were risks to it.

By now Lin Mu had understood the implications of using the ring and was worried the Star Catching formation may detect it. Even if Xukong was able to restrict the passive spatial fluctuation coming from the ring, he wouldn't be able to stop something that directly affected the world's barrier.

Lin Mu spent a day spying on the disciples and listening to their conversations. He even stole some documents and letters from their quarters that helped him a lot.

He found out that the top ten sects were in a time of upheaval and that new alliances were being created. The Sky precepts sect had been the number one for a long time but there was now a chance their position may be threatened.

About six of the top ten sects were now forming alliances; there was the Zither Wind alliance and the Long Cloud alliance. Only the top three sects were staying independent while the sect that was ranked at the bottom the tenth in number was being fought over by the two alliances.

Whichever alliance was able to convince the last sect to join them would become the dominating one. It was a game of numbers, and the competition was only getting tougher as the days went by.

The smaller sects were not left unaffected either, and were now making alliances of their own. The empire had become alarmed and suddenly the emperor had fallen sick too. The royal physicians were unable to help him and they were now thinking of asking the Rainbow Pills sect for help.

But it was likely the Sky precepts sect and the Centennial sword sect would not allow something like this to happen. They could guess that the Rainbow Pill sect would likely put the empire in their debt, which in turn would push them to the top.

Though Lin Mu heard another news that surprised him. The alliance ceremony for the Tri cauldron peony sect, the Autumn Valley sect, the Cloven Sea sect, and the Zither Wind Sect will be held in the coming month.

As soon as he heard of this, Lin Mu understood what was actually happening.

"That damned Gu Yao! This is all his doing, isn't it? Pitting the sects against each other while the northern tribes mount their offense." Lin Mu uttered with rage.

"Perhaps the emperor getting sick may be due to him as well... there are many ways he could accomplish it if he has people being controlled in the palace too. There are far too many things we missed out on in these two years.

The hardest part is that even if the sects find out their people are being controlled, they may not be able to differentiate between who is being controlled and who is not. This will only sow more distrust and cause further conflicts in their unity.

Remember that memoir of the Lost immortal? The same thing would happen here." Xukong said.

Lin Mu was reminded of the memoir he had read some time ago in the Sleepscape.

The Lost immortal at that time was a Nascent Soul realm cultivator and was steadily growing his influence. An enemy nation at that time had planned to sow discord in the kingdoms so that they could annex them.

A great civil war occurred, and brothers fought against brothers, spilling their blood everywhere. The Lost immortal had written the conflict in detail; his aim to teach his successor about the divide and rule strategy.

Lin Mu gritted his teeth and vowed to not let it reach that level.

"That's it," Lin Mu uttered, as an idea suddenly came to his mind. "I just need to dismantle their efforts."

#### **Chapter 444 - A Plan To End The Conflict**

"The sects forming the alliances may not be totally bad, maybe they will have better preparation for the war with the northern tribes. But Gu Yao must be stopped." Lin Mu said with determination.

His eyes glowed with valor as he faded away.

A minute later he was already outside the Wu Lim city. He started flying towards Little Shrubby's location and Xukong spoke to him at this time.

"So what are you going to do now?" Xukong questioned.

"First, we head to the capital city of Shuang Qian Kingdom. I need to see what the mayor is up to and I can't leave Wu Hei like this either.

I'm pretty sure the mayor is an important trump card for Gu Yao and definitely has access to vital information. On the other hand, Wu Teng is the son-in-law of the Peak Master Yi Deng and will be the official link between kingdom and the Tri cauldron peony sect.

If we can gain control over them, we may have a chance at starting early. Besides, we also need to figure out where Gu Yao is currently. The most obvious location that I can think of is the Tri Cauldron peony sect, but that may be wrong too.

Like you said senior if he wants to control the higher ups of the sects he needs to have a higher cultivation base. And will be looking to increase it, for which he will need resources, tons of resources.

He may be getting them from the sects that are currently under his control, so that is where we need to start." Lin Mu explained.

"Of course, if you can figure out where the resources are being sent to, chances are Gu Yao will be there too. Also his mind was damaged by me too, so he probably is unstable even now." Xukong replied.

"Him? Unstable? Hmm... that will be a wild card as it will be hard to guess his actions. But... it may work in our favor too. If he is not thinking clearly, he will make mistakes and will be reckless." Lin Mu analyzed.



"You will need to find out how he is communicating with the northern tribes too though. Right now he is the main thorn in our path, but if more of his allies from the northern tribes come here, it will only become more difficult.

After all, we know some of them are already here in the kingdom, as little Shrubby told us." Xukong said.

*~Sigh~*

"It would have been good if we had Old man Jing Wei help us with this. He has lived long and knows more about the northern tribes. He also has experience with the sects and thus could have guided us." Lin Mu said feeling a bit sad.

"Don't worry. If I have grasped their character well, I'm pretty sure they will not let this happen either. As long as they have not been unaware of all these happenings, they are likely to intervene." Xukong assured.

"I hope so too senior. Plus, we still have the threat of the invader hanging on our head." Lin Mu added.

"Hmm... about the invader I think if you will be able to find out about them from the northern tribes too. If they are the ones who called that merchant here, they must have a way to let outsiders into this world.

There should be a teleportation formation for that. If we can find that, you may be able to trace the location of the invader by using that formation. I will guide you in formations till then, you will need to be proficient with them in order to do something like that." Xukong said.

"I will do it diligently, senior. Since we are heading to the capital, we may as well get some supplies to make formations there too." Lin Mu suggested.

"Or... since this is a difficult time, we can ignore certain rules." Xukong said after thinking for a bit.

"Oh? What kind of rules, senior?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Do you know what is the fastest way to gather a fortune?" Xukong asked.

"... you mean to say... we should just steal them?" Lin Mu replied.

"Yes, we do not have the liberty of time. We will need to act quick and this will be the best method. After all, this is for the benefit of the people; you will be saving them." Xukong stated.

Lin Mu thought about it for a bit and found it to be reasonable. While thinking of the plan, Lin Mu eventually reached Little Shrubby, who as he had expected, was cooking some more meat. Though this time the beast was a common beast at the sixth stage of the body tempering realm.

"I'm back!" Lin Mu said.

"Master, come eat then cook more." Little Shrubby said.

"Alright, I guess a little rest is in order." Lin Mu said knowing that he needed to rest his mind, which had become distressed.

He reckoned that if he got some rest, a new solution may automatically pop up in his mind. After all, a chaotic mind will only give rise to disorder.

Little Shrubby went out to hunt a few more beasts while Lin Mu meditated while chanting the calming heart sutra. After that, they cooked some delicious food which helped Lin Mu stressed even more.

"What now, master?" Little Shrubby asked.

"Now? Now we head to the capital city. We have a lot of things to do now... and perhaps even you will get to participate." Lin Mu answered.

"Yay! I wanna fight someone that can actually fight back too. All the beasts I fight only run away now." Little Shrubby said, feeling happy.

Lin Mu raised his brows as he realized he was not without allies, either. Little Shrubby was formidable in his own way, and his speed was the key.

'Wait his speed... I can use it like that, can't I?...' Lin Mu thought as a better idea formulated in his mind.

It was on this day that the beast every cultivation sect would dread was born.

#### **Chapter 445 - Preparations For Tribulation**

Lin Mu was on his way to the capital city of Shuang Qian Kingdom. The distance was of about ten days if one went on a horse but for cultivators that went there flying on their spirit weapons, it would take them three to four days.

But Lin Mu was gonna reach there much earlier than that. He didn't have an exact estimate since he had never been to the capital city but judging from the distance it took little Shrubby to travel previously, he was guessing a day or two.

Little Shrubby had monstrous stamina and could maintain his full speed for at least twelve hours before he had to rest for a couple of hours. Still, this was greater than a cultivator flying on their spirit weapon as depending on their cultivation base, they would have to rest after every couple of hours or risk depleting their spirit Qi too much.

Only Adult stage Nascent soul realm cultivators could fly for long periods of time on their own and were faster than Little Shrubby. But compared to an infant stage or even a child stage Nascent soul realm cultivator, he was already faster.

Lin Mu had gotten a map long ago from Wu Lim city and thus didn't need to ask anyone for directions. Not to mention that there were signboards that showed the path to the capital city everywhere on the road.

The capital city was located slightly south of the center of the kingdom. It was the largest city of course and had a lot of people living in it and around it. There was a military base located a short distance from the city and a smaller one within the city itself.

These were important points for Lin Mu, as he needed to know them if any conflict were to occur. Entering the city itself wasn't going to be difficult, and he would be able to enter just by showing his identity as a cultivator or paying some tax as a commoner.

Unlike Wu Lim city or other major cities of the kingdom, here cultivators were rather common and as such had more liberty. Though Lin Mu didn't know if they will be recording identities here as well.

He was leaning on the likelihood of it and as such would just sneak into the city if it so came to it. Thankfully, with the ridiculous amount of money he had, gathering information in the city would not be that difficult.

"The first stop in the city will be at the mercenary union's branch then. They should have an information supplying section where I can pay to get it. I don't know how much confidential information will be available but it should help me with the overall situation of the cities.

And if this contains the information about trades and shipments, I may even be able to figure out the location of Gu Yao." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Lin Mu looked in the distance and saw another city there. This was none other than Xianwei city, which had a lot of merchants and mercenaries working here. If it were normal time, he would have even thought of visiting but right now he wanted to stick to his plan.

Unless something came up that needed him to visit the city, he would not be going there. Lin Mu was traveling through the more rugged path that was filled with trees and shrubs so as to avoid being seen. The thing was even if one did spot him all they would see is a blur but they will definitely spot him.

Till now Lin Mu had not seen any cultivator travel on beasts, thus he didn't know if he should do it openly. Perhaps the sect disciples would do it, but in this place, it may be rather unfamiliar and would only bring attention to him.

Time passed and now it was time for little Shrubby to rest. They stopped near a hill that had a few villages nearby and prepared some food while watching the people working in the distance.

Lin Mu had already gone past the area where the winters were considered to be strong and thus the number of villages here was much higher than in the north. If one split the kingdom in half, the southern part would contain about seventy percent of the population, while the north would have thirty percent. Such was the population density of the kingdom.

The land in the south was more prosperous, and the earth was fertile due to which a lot of farming could be done here.

After they finished eating, Lin Mu waited for Little Shrubby to rest up. He cultivated in that time and sensed his core that was fully saturated. He didn't know when the heavenly tribulation would be arriving and thus wanted to be ready for it.

"Senior, what kind of preparation should I do for the heavenly tribulation?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm... there are many things that can be done. The only question is whether you can afford them or if you have the resources for them. If we take the example of a common sect disciple that was about to undergo heavenly tribulation to break through to the Nascent Soul realm, they would have elders acting as their Dharma protectors, defensive treasures that can reduce the impact of the tribulation lightning and supportive pills as well.

Some sects may even have tribulation platforms set up for their disciples. Tribulation platforms allow the cultivators to observe the person undergoing the heavenly tribulation safely without risking the chance of inviting the wrath of the tribulation themselves.

The platforms would even help reduce the power of the tribulation and depending on its specificity, would even reinforce the cultivator. But stringing up such tribulation platforms is expensive for smaller sects and most of them are specific depending on the cultivation technique the cultivator uses and are destroyed during the tribulation, thus becoming a single use disposable.

There are multiple use ones that can be used by nearly any cultivator despite their cultivation technique, but those ones are immensely difficult to set and require the support of formation masters, alchemists, and even spirit tool refiners to set it up." Xukong explained.

### **Chapter 446 - Blockade**

Lin Mu knew that a tribulation platform was out of the question for him since he didn't even have a Qi cultivation technique. Senior Xukong had explained to him back in the Sleepscape that he was following what was called the path of the primordials.

The primordials were none other than the very first Qi cultivators that were born in the cosmos. They were the ones who established the way of qi cultivation and from where Qi cultivation started.

At that time they did not have any Qi cultivation techniques, and they followed the body cultivation path. But that was not possible for everyone to practice and thus when the hostilities and conflicts with the other races were reduced, mankind thought of finding a way to cultivate Qi normally.

It took them many years before they figured out a method to absorb spirit Qi from the environment. They gained the knowledge of meridians and the Dantian becoming more erudite.

Back then cultivation was simply absorbing the spirit Qi into one's body passively and there was no specific method as everyone figured it out on their own. Those that had good observation and perception were able to do it better than others and succeeded.

Then as time passed, the cultivators started to figure out methods to better absorb and assimilate the spirit Qi. These methods were recorded and refined, before they became the first cultivation techniques.

But it wasn't as if the cultivation techniques from back then were necessarily good than the ones that were practiced currently. In fact, even Lin Mu would have been extremely slow in cultivating had it not been for the support of the ring.

But now that he had the bloodline of the Great Slumber Bear assimilated in his body, he had overcome one of the flaws of the primordial path.

Xukong had told him that the primordial path would help him in the future, but he hadn't told him exactly how because of the restriction of the world. The simplest way he could do was to give a comparison.

He said that the primordial path was like a key that was compatible with nearly any lock, while cultivation techniques could restrict them to a lesser number of the locks.

*~whoosh~*

While pondering on his thoughts, Lin Mu suddenly felt a strong gust of wind passing by. The wind shook the trees and made some leaves fall from them. He looked around and spotted a group of cultivators passing by in the sky. But they were not flying on separate spirit tools, but rather on a boat of some kind. It was ten meters long and two meters wide from what Lin Mu could estimate.

It flew through the air and did not have a sail. But its speed was quite fast and whipped up winds as it passed by.

"Is that a spirit boat?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yes, that is indeed a spirit boat. A low quality one though." Xukong confirmed.

Lin Mu gazed at the people that were sitting in the boat and saw they were wearing the same type of outfits which made him think that they belonged to a cultivation sect. By the time he saw them though, they had gotten far and thus he couldn't tell which sect they belonged to from their outfit.

"They came from the west and are heading to the south as well... the closest sect that is located in the west is the Cloven Sea sect. Hmm... I don't think their outfits match those of Dumu Ao from the tournament." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

"They are in a spirit boat which is an uncommon spirit tool for this world, they are probably not from some low level sect," Xukong said.

"That is true." Lin Mu muttered and got up.

Little Shrubby was now fine and stood up with a long stretch.

"I'm ready!" he said.

"Alright, let's continue." Lin Mu said and got onto his back.

Lin Mu had not expected it at first, but little Shrubby's back was relatively comfortable to sit on. The fur was soft and thick which made it ways, though the main problem raised from the speed which threatened to throw him back because of which he needed to tightly grip his fir.

'Hmm... maybe I can get a harness made too...' Lin Mu thought to himself.

Lin Mu added that to the list of items he wanted to commission for little Shrubby. Right now the things on the list were; a spatial storage tool, a spirit tool that could help him to better cook and do other stuff since he did not have hands, and then finally this harness.

Lin Mu and Little Shrubby shot forward in a leap and covered hundreds of meters in a second. A couple of hours passed and then they came upon an obstacle.

There was now an army blockade in front of Lin Mu. If this were any normal blockade, Lin Mu would have been able to go around it but the problem was it was set up in a circular perimeter around the capital city.

Lin Mu could tell that there were cultivators in the blockade as well, and they were vigilantly watching around for anyone passing by. Near the blockade, he spotted a long line of carts and carriages along with people who were waiting for their turn to get in.

Now here came the problem for Lin Mu. It was no problem for him to enter the blockade alone but he wouldn't be able to take Little Shrubby with him. He wanted him there near the city so that he could help him if any problems arose.

With little Shrubby's speed, it wouldn't take him long to cross over into the city and come to his aid. He could even escape with him if needed, as only an adolescent stage or adult stage nascent soul realm cultivator would be able to catch up with him.

"Hmm... how do we get through here now?" Lin Mu wondered for a bit before an idea came to his mind.

### **Chapter 447 - Getting Past The Blockade**

Lin Wu approached one of the checkpoints where the cultivators were standing around. There were no other people at this checkpoint, unlike the other ones due to this being a rarely used route.

"HALT!" The cultivator at the front shouted.

"Who are you? State your identity." They asked while their spirit sense spread towards Lin Mu.

Lin Mu could tell that one of these cultivators was at the core condensation realm and that was the one who was using his spirit sense.

"Greeting, I am Wu Lian a wandering cultivator." Lin Mu said giving a fake name.

The core condensation realm cultivator sensed his cultivation base and a serious expression appeared on his face.

"He's at the peak stage of the core condensation realm," He whispered to his companions.

They too showed similar expressions and became even more alert.

"What is your business here?" They asked.

"My business? Oh, it is just..." Lin Mu said and started chanting.

A second later the eyes of all the cultivators went dull, and they entered a daze. There were ten cultivators here but all of them had been affected at the same time. Lin Mu had used nothing but the severing heart sutra.

He had not seen its effects after he reached the peak stage of the core condensation realm and thus had expected it to be much stronger than before. And that was exactly what happened here.

'Go ahead, little shrubby.' Lin Mu said through his link.

*~Zoom~*

In the next moment, a blur passed by them, but they did not notice it. Lin Mu glanced and saw that Little Shrubby had already gone far enough and stopped chanting the severing heart sutra.

"... I'm here to visit the city and buy some things. I need to get spirit tools and also sell some of the resources that I do not need anymore." Lin Mu continued.

"Huh?" The cultivators felt a bit strange for a moment and looked around.

"Is there a problem?" Lin Mu asked with a friendly smile.

"No... nothing. So what did you say again?" The core condensation realm cultivators asked.

"Oh, I said I was visiting the capital city to buy and sell things." Lin Mu repeated.

"Hmm... wait a little bit." The cultivator replied before turning to his companions.

"Check and see if he matched anyone wanted or blacklisted." He said.

"Yes, senior." The others replied and looked through some information that was stored in a jade slip.

It took them a minute before they spoke again.

"Everything seems normal, senior," they replied.

The core condensation realm cultivator nodded his head and looked at Lin Mu.

"Give me your communication jade slip, it needs to be marked before you can enter the capital's region. Entering and exiting the city will require this mark and if you lose your jade slip, you will have to pay a fine and may even have to go through a trial if any convictions are found to be made against you." He explained.

"Alright, that will be fine." Lin Mu said before handing him his communication jade slip.

The core condensation realm cultivator took it and placed it on a small table that was kept to the side. The top of the table was made of metal and some carvings could be seen on it.

*~shua~*

Some runes appeared from the table before embedding themselves into the jade slip. After that was done, the core condensation realm cultivator picked up the jade slip and handed it back to Lin Mu.

"Can I go ahead now?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Yes, you can." The core condensation realm cultivator replied.

Lin Mu nodded his head and jumped into the air, where a short sword appeared below his feet.

*~Zoom~*

He flew past at a great speed, leaving the cultivators behind who finally lifted their serious expressions.

*~phew~*

"Senior, who was that? Have you heard of any wandering cultivator that is at the peak stage of the core condensation realm?" one of the junior companions asked.

"From the name he told us Wu Lian, I can't recognize him. If my memory serves right, there isn't anyone that is in any of that tame in the cultivation sects either so he is telling the truth about being a wandering cultivator." The core condensation realm cultivator answered.

"Shouldn't he have been a bit more famous? It's like he never existed. From his appearance he looks young too, probably in his forties." Another disciple said.

"Hmm... that is true. Though now that we have this information we can update the sects about it." The core condensation realm cultivator stated.

"I'll do it right away, senior." One of the juniors replied before talking out a commutation jade slip and holding it.

He closed his eyes for a few seconds and then opened them. "I've sent the information ahead."

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Lin Mu landed after going a sufficient distance away from the cultivators. He soon spotted little Shrubby, who was waiting in a small patch of trees.

"Let's go ahead." Lin Mu said and got onto his back.

Lin Mu had to circle around the perimeter of the blockade till he found a checkpoint where there were fewer people guarding. He didn't want there to be additional public as his plan would have probably not succeeded then.

Lin Mu didn't exactly know how many people he would have been able to affect using the Severing heart sutra and thus had tested it out on some beasts that he found nearby. He was able to control fifteen of them at once, but they were all weak beasts that were at the body tempering realm.

Thus Lin Mu estimated that he should be able to control at least that many cultivators as well. And thankfully the checkpoint he had found had only ten cultivators guarding it, which had made his work easy for him.

Lin Mu's plan was to actually do what he had said to the cultivators at the start. It was just that he would be buying more things than just resources in the city. He hoped that his identity would not be found out for a while, but he knew that it would eventually be found.

### **Chapter 448 - Entering The Capital**

He just wanted to delay it as long as he could so that his plan would progress without much obstruction.

Lin Mu and little Shrubby traveled for about one hour before they were able to see the large city in the distance. Lin Mu halted there and looked for a suitable place where Little Shrubby could stay for the time being.

"Alright, I'll call for you if I need you. I don't know how long it is going to take me so be patient." Lin Mu said.

"Okay. But can I cook?" Little Shrubby asked.

Lin Mu had to think for a bit before he came upon an answer.



"Yes, you can. Just make sure to cover the fire after you are done, it will make it look like a human did it. There are a lot of people living nearby so they will just assume it was a person and not a beast." Lin Mu replied.

"I'll do that then." Little Shrubby replied.

Lin Mu nodded his head and headed towards one of the gates of the city, leaving little shrubby behind. His link with little Shrubby was now effective for quite a long distance and thus he knew he wouldn't really have much problem with calling him, should he need help.

While flying there, Lin Mu could see beyond the tall walls of the capital city. The walls were about ten meters tall and some guards could be seen patrolling it from time to time.

Just as he got near it, he once again felt a familiar feeling.

"It's that formation again... looks like I'll have to head through the gate." Lin Mu muttered with a sigh.

This was the same formation that detected when a person got near the city's area. It was just this one had a longer range, which Lin Mu had not expected. Even him being able to detect it was actually unusual, as normal cultivators wouldn't even know about it.

This made it easy for the authorities to tell when someone unknown entered the city or got near it. If they were found to be criminals and denied that they were in the city, this formation would help in confirming their location.

Lin Mu circled around the wall, and he eventually found a gate where a lot of people were standing.

"Mother, look it is a flying cultivator." A child who had snot running down his nose pointed to Lin Mu.

The guards spotted him too and were a bit surprised. Multiple spirit sense probes came towards Lin Mu and he allowed them near him. If Lin Mu wanted to, he could easily block them all but he knew this was to check him and would make it a bit easier to enter.

"Make way! Make way! All commoners move aside!" The guards shouted.

The guard who seemed to be the leader, came forward and cupped his hands.

"Senior, may I know your name and take your jade slip for verification." He asked.

Lin Mu descended onto the ground and flipped his palm, making a jade slip appeared in his hand. The guard noticed the ring on his hand and gulped.

"Thank you senior." The guard said respectfully and checked the jade slip before passing it back.

"Everything is alright senior. Is there anywhere specific you want to go to? Most of the locations frequented by cultivators are far from this point? You should have gone through the main entrance perhaps, this entrance is usually used by peasants." The guard explained.

"Ah! I see. I just came from a different route and thus came to this gate as it was the closest for me." Lin Mu replied.

"Oh, that is fine, senior. People of your standing do not have restrictions on the gates that they can enter from, only commoners do." The guard spoke.

Lin Mu nodded his head and decided to ask the guard about some shops. This may even help him establish an alibi in case anything happened.

"Well, I have never been to the capital of this kingdom before and wanted to buy as well as sell some cultivation resources." Lin Mu stated.

"Senior is not from this region I see. Well that is fine, I have a guide here that you can read to find out more about the city. It has a catalog of all the popular shops that cultivators frequent." The guard replied.

"Oh, that will be very good." Lin Mu replied.

The guard asked one of the others to bring the guide, which he then passed onto Lin Mu.

"Thank you for your assistance, here take this." Lin Mu said before handing a spirit stone to the guard.

The guard graciously accepted the spirit stone and spoke, "thank you for your generosity senior."

Lin Mu nodded before entering the city.

It was Xukong who had advised him to be a little generous to the guard as it would help in keeping a good image in their minds. If any trouble arose, and these guards were questioned, they would subconsciously assume that Lin Mu was not the one to do it.

Such was human psychology, and a little tip worked a long way. Lin Mu looked through the guide and quickly found a few places that aroused his interest.

The first place was none other than the branch of the mercenary union, which was located in the south of the city. The second was a shop that specialized in spirit tools and both sold and bought them. Lin Mu was looking to see if they would also make some custom things that he wanted for little Shrubby.

The third place was another shop that specialized in the sale of alchemical pills. But the most special thing about this shop was that it was actually being run by the Tri cauldron peony sect itself.

Lin Mu didn't actually want to buy anything here, but wanted to visit for the disciples themselves. If anything, he would be able to spy on them and find out more about their workings here.

"Gu Yao is bound to have some people working here... after all, this is the capital."

#### **Chapter 449 - The Desolate Mercenary Union**

Lin Mu was standing in front of a rather broad building that had two smaller buildings attached to it at the sides.

The name board hanging on top of it read: **Mercenary Union (Shuang Qian Kingdom Branch)**

Lin Wu looked around but found the building to be rather empty. There were barely any people here and even the mercenaries seemed to be missing.

"This is strange..." Lin Mu muttered to himself before stepping inside.

Currently, there was only one clerk sitting on the desk at the corner. The main desks were empty and even dust had settled on them now. Lin Mu walked to the clerk sitting on the desk and coughed lightly.

The clerk himself was busy reading something intently.

"Ahem," Lin Mu coughed to get his attention.

"Oh? Someone's actually here." The clerk said feeling a bit shocked.

"Why is this place so empty?" Lin Mu questioned.

Upon hearing this question, a frustrated expression appeared on the clerk's face.

"Are you here to make fun of us?" The clerk replied.

"What? No! Why would you think that?" Lin Mu asked.

"So you are telling me you've been living under a rock and don't know of the entire fiasco that happened six months ago?" The clerk said getting a bit angry.

"Nope, I've been in seclusion you see... for the past two years." Lin Mu said before letting out a bit of his spirit Qi.

As soon as the clerk sensed his spirit Qi, he sobered up and a scared expression appeared on his face.

"Fo-forgive me senior! I didn't know of your status." The clerk said hurriedly.

"It's alright," Lin Mu said and waved his hand, "now tell me what actually happened?" he asked again.

~Sigh~

"After the incident in at the Wu Lim City and the blood tide great upheaval happed. Investigations were done, and the culprit was found to be a person called Lin Mu.

Originally, the Mayor of the Wu Lim City, Wu Xun and the mercenary union were at odds due to the false accusation that he had put on us. But then the involvement of Lin Mu flipped the entire thing on us.

The sects and other powers found out that when they had sent out people to investigate the kidnappings, this person called Lin Mu had actually accompanied them. This basically caused them to reject all of the findings and they claimed that the evidence was all fabricated.

The current head of the mercenary union had used the royal decree to ask the king to question Mayor Wu Xun. But after he found out about this all, he canceled the decree and levied sanctions on the mercenary union.

Ever since then the reputation of the mercenary union plummeted and people started accusing us of being traitors, although they had no proof of it.

Little by little most of the mercenaries left the union and a majority have even left Shuang Qian kingdom itself." The clerk said.

Lin Mu's eyes went wide as he had not expected there to be such a story behind this and even in this somehow his involvement was there. But soon anger appeared in his heart too as he could imagine why Gu Yao or Wu Xun must have done this.

'He was getting rid of thorns in his path. By discrediting and framing an influential power such as the mercenary union, he removed one of the parties that were opposing him.' Lin Mu inferred.

But he didn't show any expression on his face as it would only cause the clerk to feel weird.

"Why are you still here then?" Lin Mu asked curiously.

*~Sigh~*

"I'm still here for the few mercenaries that are still left in the kingdom. If they come to me, I'll assign them some other jobs in places where they won't be as infamous.

Or if they want to resign... I take their resignations as well." The clerk answered.

Lin Mu nodded his head in understanding.

"So what did you want, senior? We don't really have much to offer here, there are barely four people left including me." The clerk asked.

"I believe the mercenary union has an information catering department right?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm... yes we do. It's one of the few departments that are still active here, though there is only one person running it." The Clerk answered.

"That may work I guess... I wanted information." Lin Mu said.

"Information? We can give you some but it is likely to be outdated as we don't have much intel coming now due to a lack of people. Still... what kind of information do you want?" The clerk asked.

Lin Mu was about to speak but then changed his question at the last moment.

"I want... everything." Lin Mu stated.

"Everything? What do you mean by everything?" The clerk questioned feeling confused.

"All of your records. Everything that you have left, it doesn't matter how old the information is, or what it is for. Give me everything you have." Lin Mu explained.

The clerk's expression was that of a shock after hearing Lin Mu's words.

"Se-senior... I can get that but the cost for it will be huge. I... don't think I even know what to charge you, I don't think anyone has ever asked for this." The clerk said.

"Hmm... the price shouldn't be a problem. Try to come up with a price." Lin Mu said.

"Umm, I can't do it on my own. I'll need to ask the person who is working in the information department." The clerk replied.

"Go ahead and call him then, I'll wait." Lin Mu said.

"Y-yes..." The clerk replied before rushing into the other parts of the buildings.

While he was gone, Lin Mu spread around his spirit sense to the fullest and checked the entirety of the building.

"Hmm... so there's a library in the western building. I can check it out later but what does it contain? Oh it's a pretty wide variety." Lin Mu muttered to himself and turned to look towards the direction of the library.

#### **Chapter 450 - Buying The Information**

"Sorry to make you wait, senior!" The clerk announced as he came with another female clerk.

"This is the clerk who manages the information department currently." The male clerk introduced.

The female clerk seemed a bit flushed upon seeing Lin Mu and a blush had appeared on her face.

"Mm? Is there something wrong?" Lin Mu asked.

"No-no nothing senior." The clerk replied in a meek voice.

"Alright. So what will it cost to get all the information?" Lin Mu asked.

"Since we are shutting down senior, we will give you a discount." The female clerk said before pulling out an abacus from her satchel.

She quickly calculated an amount on it before showing Lin Mu. But Lin Mu looked on awkwardly at the abacus.

"Umm... senior Xukong, how do I read an abacus?" Lin Mu secretly asked.

Lin Mu had seen abacuses before but had never used one himself, thus he didn't know how to read it. And even in these past two years he never did that while he was in the Sleepscape, thus he was now confused.

"You count it from the center row. The four beads on the bottom part are all one unit and the one on top is worth five units. If you go to the left, you increase the amount by ten and if you go to the right, you instead enter fractions." Xukong explained.

With Lin Mu's mind, it didn't take him more than a second to calculate the amount.

"Ah, so it's, ten thousand six hundred and twenty nine? But in what coins?" Lin Mu replied.

"Gold coins of course." The female clerk replied.

"Ah, that will be no problem." Lin Mu said before causally pulling out a large pouch from his ring and placing it on the desk.

*~THUD~*

The loud sound shocked the clerks as if they had not expected something like this. Each of gold coin was of one gram and thus that bag weighed over ten kilograms.

"Umm... just hundred and sixty spirit stones would have been enough too, but since senior has so much gold then we can accept it too." The clerk replied feeling a bit awed.

Usually, large transactions in gold rarely happened and the cultivators specially used spirit stones in their stead as they were convenient to carry. A single low grade spirit stone was worth a hundred coins.

It was now that Lin Mu realized he had never asked for the price of spirit stones compared to gold coins.

'Damn... I've been carrying around a fortune since the start.' Lin Mu thought.

"Haha! You will be even more shocked if you find out the worth of the other cultivator currencies. But I can tell you that the value of gold compared to the spirit stone is probably less due to it being of low quality.

Cultivators can further refine ordinary metals such as iron, copper, silver, and gold into higher quality forms that are then minted into coins to be used by them." Xukong said.

"Oh? Is that what the green gold that old man Jing refined was?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yes, that's correct. The higher refined forms of these metals can be used for various things such as forging of spirit tools and weapons." Xukong replied.

"I see..." Lin Mu replied.

The female clerk was rummaging through a set of registers that she had brought along with her. It took her about ten minutes before she was finally done.

"So in what form do you want the information to be in senior?" The female clerk questioned.

"Umm... the best would be if it's in a jade slip." Lin Mu said.

"That... may be difficult." The male clerk said.

"Oh? Why so?" Lin Mu questioned.

"With the amount of information there is, there is no way a normal jade slip will be able to hold it. You will need a mid grade jade slip for it." The clerk said.

"Hmm, will this one work?" Lin Mu asked, showing the jade slip that he had been using.

"Oh, it's a mid grade jade slip!" The clerk exclaimed.

She took the jade slip and held it for a second before her expression fell.

"This one is already filled with a lot of information I can tell, so you will need to get another one." The female clerk replied.

"Hmm.., alright. Do you guys sell that? I think there should be a department that sells spirit tools too right?" Lin Mu asked.

"That department was the first to shut down, so you will have to go and buy it from elsewhere senior. Jade slips are widely used so you should be able to buy them from any shop selling spirit tools in the city." The male clerk replied.

"Oaky, which is the closest shop?" Lin Mu questioned.

"The Gengbai emporium is the closest one, senior. If you go to the street that's on the right three cross roads from here, you will reach it." The male clerk answered.

"Alright, I'll get it. Oh, and I also wanted to ask if you have a library here?" Lin Mu said.

"Yes, we do. Do you want to visit it senior?" The female clerk asked.

"Yes, how much will be the charge for it?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Since you've already paid so much, you do not need to pay senior. You can stay in the library as long as you want, it's free for you to use." The clerk answered.

"Ah, that is perfect." Lin Mu said feeling pleased.

He nodded his head and left the mercenary union's building, heading towards the shop that the male clerk had told him about.

It took Lin Mu about ten minutes to reach the shop, which was decent looking. There was a large board on which its name was written in elaborate calligraphy.

"Welcome to Gengbai Emporium, what would you like, customer?" the shopkeeper immediately greeted Lin Mu upon seeing him stand in the door.

While Lin Mu's clothes were that of a commoner, the shopkeeper could easily identify a cultivator.