

Walker 481

Chapter 481 - A New Team

~hoo~

Lin Mu let out a breath that traveled far and shook the curtains on the windows. He opened his eyes that glimmered with a serene look. This was quite different from the fierce one he had before this.

"I'm close... just need another push like this to complete the first stage of the Five treasures realm...."
Lin Mu muttered to himself.

His spleen had reached 85% refinement level and would need just a bit more to reach the next stage. Once he finished the first stage, just his bodily strength would be equivalent to that of a peak stage core condensation realm cultivator.

If he was able to do this before reaching the nascent soul realm with his spirit Qi cultivation he would probably have the strength of an infant stage nascent soul realm cultivator just from this.

Not to mention since then, Lin Mu's Dantian had a larger capacity than others and his core was also bigger, his overall strength would still be higher than that of an infant stage nascent soul realm cultivator.

The foundation that Lin Mu had built until now and the slow progress he had taken was now close to showing fruit for him.

Lin Mu looked at the jade slip which had a message left in it.

"So it's time... I didn't miss it though." Lin Mu said.

A message had been left in the jade slip which was from none other than Wu Hei. He had now gathered enough information that, Lin Mu could continue their mission. He had contacted for about a meeting tomorrow.

"No wait... how much time has it been?" Lin Mu questioned.

"A day has passed. The meeting should be soon." Xukong answered.

"I should head out then..." Lin Mu said before standing up and using fade.

Disappearing from the real world, Lin Mu traveled in the direction of the pleasure pavilion. He was using phase at the same time and appeared in the ground below it. Since the distance traveled was rather large, Lin Mu couldn't use his spirit sense to keep track of it.

But as long as he knew a general direction, he could travel far and just appear in the ground. This was another workaround he had figured out by now and would use until he was able to increase his spatial perception.

He had also not had the chance to use his newly acquire fifth skill, 'meld' due to being inside the city. Not only did it have a massive drain on his spirit Qi but it also created some large spatial fluctuations. While these faded away quickly, there was still a chance someone in the city could detect them.

Lin Mu rose up from the ground and blinked to the alley behind the pleasure pavilion. This was where the entrance to the secret room was located and where Wu Hei had asked him to come. His spirit sense was spread around to keep a track of what was nearby. Just in case something unsavory happened.

Lin Mu could already see that there were people in the room. He counted six people in the room, including Wu Hei and Hei Wan.

~creek~

Six pairs of eyes trained at Lin Mu upon seeing the door open. They looked alert but didn't seem to be in an offensive stance.

"Sorry I got a bit late," Lin Mu apologized to the people.

"It is fine, brother Lin Mu, we know you were undergoing a breakthrough. Hei Wan came to check up on you." Wu Hei replied.

"She did? Ah, I see." Lin Mu said.

"Since we have everyone here, we can start now." Wu Hei said after taking a look around the room.

"I can now officially introduce you all to brother Lin Mu. I believe you all know who he is." Wu Hei spoke.

The four new people nodded at his words before speaking.

"Indeed, how can we not? Had it not been for him, perhaps we would have all been dead and this empire would have perished in the future." An old man spoke.

Lin Mu looked at him and could not recognize him.

"This is Jin Kou, he used to be a mercenary but has retired since then." Wu Hei introduced.

"This is She Qing, one of the former disciples of the Tri Cauldron peony sect, she is the one who has provided us with a lot of information." Wu Hei spoke.

"Greetings, sister She Qing." Lin Mu greeted.

Lin Mu had not expected that She Qing would be a former disciple.

"How did you leave the sect, though sister She Qing?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Back when the red tide happened, I was there to witness it. I saw how Gu Yao attacked everyone and controlled them. At that time I was heading to the Wu Lim city to deliver an emergency missive to the peak master Yi Deng, and was at a distance from the city.

As soon as I saw it all, I barely managed to escape the area. I deliberated on returning to the sect, but Gu Yao's servants had acted quickly and started capturing the other people. Since the supreme elder was also controlled, I didn't think it would be a viable choice to return to the sect.

This turned out to be correct since the sect changed its behavior quickly after that day. Gu Yao's roots had already spread deep by then and knew I would have to do something else." She Qing expanded.

"I see... it is indeed quite unfortunate." Lin Mu acknowledged.

He then turned to the third person, who was a young man with a scar on his face. He was wearing rough clothes and looked no different from a peasant. But Lin Mu could sense his cultivation base and knew that he was at the peak stage of the core condensation realm like him.

"And who I this?" Lin Mu asked.

"I am Shuang Zedong." The man introduced himself.

"Shuang? Zedong? Isn't that..." Lin Mu said, feeling like he recognized the name.

"Indeed, this is the former crown prince of the Shuang Qian Kingdom."

Chapter 482 - Two Broken Men

Lin Mu had definitely not expected to meet the former crown prince here. He recognized the name as he had heard that a few times before. The last time he heard about a prince was from Tongguo Bing who had told him that the prince came to the Big Zhao's Heavenly Delicacies restaurant with the other young masters of the noble clans of the city.

He had thought that this was the none other than Shuang Zedong, but it turned out to be false.

"How did you become like this? If you're not the crown prince, who is now?" Lin Mu questioned, feeling shocked.

"The crown prince is none other than my second brother now." Shuang Zedong spoke.

"Second brother? You had a brother?" Lin Mu questioned.

Till now he had not heard that the king had another child from the queen. He knew that there were more children from the concubines but not from the queen.

~Sigh~

"He is not my blood brother, rather the son of my father's favorite concubine. He schemed against me and assassinate me with the assistance of Gu Yao. But Lord Wu Hei managed to save me." Shuang Zedong spoke.

"What! But the assassination of a prince would have been great news if it happened." Lin Mu said.

"Indeed... but the current crown prince managed to convince father that letting such news spread would be bad for the current morale of the kingdom. Instead, they fabricated a story of how I have entered seclusion to focus on cultivation and have given up on my position of the crown prince." Shuang Zedong explained.

"This... utterly ridiculous! How can the king be so stupid?" Lin Mu said, feeling enraged.

Lin Mu's thoughts about the aristocrats and nobles were already in the negative since before, and now this was only infuriating him more.

"I don't know either. But our best guess is that the concubine had managed to charm the king so badly that he does not question his own actions." Shuang Zedong spoke.

"Wu Xun also had a hand in this and supported the current crown prince's rise to his position." Wu Hei added.

Hearing the answer only made Lin Mu angry but then he forcibly calmed himself down. He swore to himself he would take them down one by one.

"I believe I should introduce myself now." The final man who was remaining in the group spoke. "I am nameless, one of the elders of the Gu Legion." He revealed.

Lin Mu raised his brows as he looked at Wu Hei for answers.

"He is another person who has been aware of the Gu Legion for a long time. In fact, he knew about them before me and had the same aim as me to decimate them." Wu Hei spoke.

"Then why did you join the Gu Legion." Lin Mu questioned, still not feeling safe with the man.

"My family was exterminated by the Gu Legion as well. Back then I was a wandering cultivator and had been away from them for a long time. But when I returned, I found them to all be dead and only skeletons were left behind in our house. All twenty members of my family were dead.

It took me a couple of years before I was able to find out who the culprits were. I originally wanted to kill them and die in the process, but I realize that it was not just my family who was their target. Many more had been affected and more would be coming in the future.

Unlike my family, they did not have people to avenge them and thus I took it upon myself. I researched more about the Gu Legion and found out that they had a lot more power than I had expected.

Knowing that I would not be able to kill them all myself, I had to take a different approach. Eventually, an opportunity presented to me and I infiltrated the Gu Legion. I rose up the ranks and managed to sabotage the plans of the Gu Legions.

Although I was not always successful." Nameless explained.

"He was the one who actually managed to hide the existence of the Hei Corps for so long. Nameless would kill the members who found out about the Hei corps. All these years I wondered if I was just lucky but it turned out that I had a hidden ally all this time." Wu Hei added.

"You are an honorable man." Lin Mu praised.

He couldn't imagine what the man would have gone through all these years. Knowing that the killers of his family were with him, yet not being able to act and wait patiently. If it were Lin Mu in his place, he probably would have lost his patience a long time ago and slaughtered them all.

"Now that the introductions are all over, I believe we can get started. Brother Lin Mu will be the one who's going to execute the main part of the plan while we all will be supporting him." Wu Hei spoke.

"Yes, so what is our first target?" Lin Mu asked.

"It is none other than the Tri Cauldron peony sect." Wu Hei answered.

"Hmm... I'm fine with it, what's the information on it, and what do I need to do?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Originally our first target was going to be the Cloven Sea sect, but a different event is going to happen at the Tri cauldron peony sect in a few days which will present us with the best opportunity." Wu Hei answered.

"And what is this event?" Lin Mu asked.

"One of the disciples of the Tri cauldron peony sect will be undergoing his Nascent Soul realm breakthrough. There is going to be a ceremony and the people will be observing a tribulation platform for it.

The person who is undergoing the heavenly tribulation is one of the talented alchemists of the sect, Alchemist Bilao." Wu Hei revealed.

"Alchemist Bilao?!" Lin Mu exclaimed, recognizing the name. This was the very person who had made the Dark Soil pill for him.

Chapter 483 - A Plan For Infiltration

Lin Mu remembered when he had met the man, his cultivation base was at the very peak of the core condescension realm. He had expected that he could have been in the pseudo nascent soul realm but now this had confirmed it for him.

"Yes, I believe you've met with the man before." Wu Hei said.

"Yeah, Hei Wen was there too. I bought an Alchemical pill from him." Lin Mu answered and Hei Wan nodded her head in acknowledgment.

There were very few people who could refine a pill like the Dark Soul pill thus it obvious that it would be him.

"So how will this event be useful to us?" Lin Mu questioned.

"The heavenly tribulation of each disciple is considered to be an important matter for any of the sects. If the disciple successfully overcame it that would mean the sect would have another Nascent Soul realm powerhouse.

And since heavenly tribulations are so rare as not many people reach that point, the sects make it a point to get as many disciples to observe and learn from it. Even the other Nascent soul realm cultivators who have already experienced it before, observe it with great interest, as it will only bring them more insights.

For the Heavenly tribulation ceremony of Alchemist Bilao, a tribulation platform is being set up. They are making a custom one for him that is suitable for his cultivation technique.

Due to this, there will be a large influx of resources and we will be able to see their movement. Along with this, there can be lapses in security that we will be taking advantage of.

But the time of action for us will be the moment when the heavenly tribulation actually starts. Most of the people will be focused on it and even the guard disciples of the vaults will be at the ceremony.

That will be the time you will act and seize the resources. Sister She Qing already gave us the locations of where the major vaults and storage pavilions of the sect are located. In total, there are twelve of them, but you only need to target four of them.

If you have more time or the opportunity, you can go to the others as well." Wu Hei explained.

"I understand. I'll do my best." Lin Mu said with confidence.

"Don't risk entering places that will expose you or put you in excess danger. We cannot afford to lose you. Oh, and... if you cannot take the resources away... don't hesitate to destroy them. While the Northern Tribes may take advantage of this in the future, Gu Yao is the immediate threat for us.

I believe the sects will be able to figure it out on their own if the danger becomes apparent." Wu Hei added.

Lin Mu nodded his head and knew that this was a valid choice. They couldn't hesitate to destroy the resources just because of the potential danger from the Northern Tribes in the future.

"Besides, the Tri cauldron peony sect is just one of our targets. Even if its resources are destroyed, there will still be other sects to support the fight against the Northern Tribes in the future." Wu Hei assured.

"I can see that. An enemy at the gates of a higher priority that's the one beyond the mountains." Lin Mu replied.

"I'll be going with you too." Jin Kou spoke.

"You will? But I doubt you will be able to enter the sect with me." Lin Mu said.

"I will just be there as a backup. And will help relay the information, after all the range of the communication jade slips is not enough to reach the capital city." Jin Kou replied.

Lin Mu looked at Wu Hei for an explanation which he probably gave.

"Jin Kou and a few other mercenaries that we saved will be acting as the relay points for communication between you and me. Jin Kou will be the nearest to you and will help in case of any emergency.

There will be three mercenaries each at the maximum range points of the communication jade slip. This way they will be able to transmit the information from one point to the other." Wu Hei explained.

"Ah, I see. This is a rather novel way of doing communication. Why don't the other sects and kingdoms do something like this?" Lin Mu questioned, feeling interested.

"Well, they just use a long distance communication jade if a need arises or just use a teleportation formation to send letters. Relay points like these are usually only used by weaker powers who don't have the same resources or in times of war when there can't be a delay in actions." Wu Hei answered.

Lin Mu nodded his head and found the merit in the information.

"Alright then, when is the Heavenly tribulation going to be?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Alchemist Bilao had informed the sect that he sensed the tribulation coming in the next ten days. So it's better if you get to the sect as soon as possible. You can even infiltrate it beforehand and check out the

situation so that you won't have problems later on. Though I already have a map for you ready, which should assist you in your task." Wu Hei answered.

"Hmm... I'll probably infiltrate beforehand. But I'll need to hide well or they'll find me." Lin Mu said.

"We have that covered too." She Qing said before giving Lin Mu a set of robes and a badge.

"This is the robes of an inner court disciple of the Tri cauldron peony sect. As for the badge, since I was a junior elder before, I was able to modify parts of it to make it seem authentic to your identity. But know this that some people may still recognize you and you will also need to hide your cultivation base." She Qing explained.

Lin Mu took the robes and the badge before checking the badge with his spirit sense. He put a brand on the badge so that it would work and stored the robes in his ring for the time being.

Chapter 484 - Onto The Tri Cauldron Peony Sect

A few more discussions happened among the members before they finalized the entire plan. Still, the main pivot of this plan was none other than Lin Mu. He was the only one who was capable of going past the barrier and defensive formations without letting others get alerted.

Lin Mu understood this very well and knew the huge responsibility that was on his head.

"I'll take my leave first now. I should be able to reach the Tri cauldron peony sect by tomorrow night at the earliest." Lin Mu spoke.

"Alright, brother Lin Mu. Jin Kou will be leaving now too but should be at his position before the time of the mission. The other mercenaries are already at their positions so there shouldn't be a problem on that end." Wu Hei spoke.

Lin Mu nodded his head and bade farewell to everyone before leaving. He directly used fade and flew through the parallel world at great speed. Since he was already near the city wall, he was able to leave the city in a single use of the skill.

He then circled around and went to Little Shrubby's position.

'Oh? He changed his location.' Lin Mu realized.

He was no longer in the same area that he had left him in two weeks ago.

"Perhaps some people came there and he moved to hide," Xukong suggested.

"Hmm, could be that. It's not like they will be able to catch him, anyway. Even a Nascent Soul realm cultivator will have a hard time. And since I didn't sense any danger from him, that means he's just fine." Lin Mu replied.

In a few minutes, Lin Mu entered the small patch of forest and went to Little Shrubby position. It wasn't hard either as he could see smoke coming from what could only be a campfire.

Upon reaching the area, Lin Mu saw little Shrubby cooking something in a large pot while stirring the contents with the prosthetic hand that he had gotten for him.

"Your control has gotten much better, I see," Lin Mu spoke.

The beast turned around and leaped with joy. "Master! You're finally back!"

"Yup, it's time for us to head on to our mission." Lin Mu said before explaining it to Little Shrubby.

He simplified the parts for him so that it would be easier for him to understand. Little Shrubby didn't worry about it much either and just said that he will do what Lin Mu asks. This would in turn make things easy for Lin Mu too.

After he was done explaining, his gaze went to the pot that had been cooking on the fire for now.

"What did you make?" Lin Mu asked.

"I made the soup as you showed me once before." Little Shrubby said.

He then took out a bowl from his spatial storage belt and used the prosthetic hand to ladle out the soup into the bowl. Lin Mu nodded his head at seeing the skill of little Shrubby and felt happy.

He took the bowl of soup and took a sip.

"Mmm it is good... but needs salt." Lin Mu said.

"Ah yes, master, I need more condiments and spices. I finished all of them." Little shrubby said.

Before leaving little Shrubby last time, Lin Mu had given him all the essentials that were required for cooking, including vessels, utensils, and condiments. The only thing that he needed to find on his own was beast meat and herbs. Which was not a tough job for him.

"Ah, you did? Take these then." Lin Mu said before talking out more sets of spices and condiments for little Shrubby to use it later on.

The beast stored them in his belt, and the pair sat down to drink the soup. There were chunks of meat floating in the liquid while the bones had long since sank down to the bottom with their flavor having been infused into the soup.

In fact, had it not been for Little Shrubby's presence, it was likely that the nearby animals and beasts would have already become greedy from the aroma of the meat.

Lin Mu and Little Shrubby enjoyed this little break before the big mission, and it also helped Lin Mu relax and gather his thoughts.

Little Shrubby stored everything back into his belt and waited for Lin Mu's instructions. Lin Mu went over the map one last time and charted a route to the Tri Cauldron peony sect.

"The Tri Cauldron peony sect is to the east of our location and it will take us two days to reach it I think." Lin Mu said.

Little Shrubby nodded his head and spoke, "get onto my back then. We'll get there faster than before, I feel like my speed has improved from before."

"Oh? That's good. Let's see then..." Lin Mu replied before climbing onto the seat of the harness.

Strapping into it, Lin Mu ordered, "Let's go!"

~Whoosh~

Now that they had a harness that helped Lin Mu stay on Little Shrubby's back comfortably, little Shrubby could now run from the very start, instead of pacing it like before. His sprint stirred up winds that shook the leaves of the trees nearby, while the ones that had weak stems directly swayed from side to side.

Just as little Shrubby had said, his speed had increased more than before. It was not a major increase, but Lin Mu estimated it to be about five percent faster. But if one compared this with a nascent soul realm cultivator, they would realize that little Shrubby was already comparable to that of Child Soul stage Nascent Soul realm cultivator.

In less than twenty minutes, they were already at the location where the checkpoint was located. Lin Mu didn't even need to stop this time, as he simply spread his spirit sense and targeted each cultivator.

He chanted the severing heart sutra and the ten cultivators became dazed; taking this opportunity, Lin Mu and little Shrubby breezed past them like a gale.

"Hmm... I guess this will be a good practice method too..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Chapter 485 - Dust Mill Town

It had been twelve hours since Lin Mu had left the Capital city. Along the way, he had met quite a few blockades and checks that the kingdom had set up. He now saw the reality of how much the kingdom was anxious about the Northern Tribes.

A few bandit groups had also risen up in the recent months to take advantage of the presence of Northern Tribes. The strange thing was, people were only speculating that the Northern Tribes had arrived in the Empire.

Most commoners did not even know for sure if this was true, only the king and the other nobles knew the truth currently. Yet, a strange belief had settled in their hearts after hearing countless rumors.

Now it was a fact for them that the Northern Tribes were in the empire and in that way the Shuang Qian kingdom. Even if the tribes had not spread to the entire empire, it was likely that they were in the Shuang Qian Kingdom, as it was located right near the border of the continent.

If one went north from the Shuang Qian kingdom and went beyond the northern forest, they would reach the Pear's belt which was the great wall that divided the Great Zhou continent from the forbidden northern continent.

The pressure was also exerted on the vermilion legion that guarded the pear's belt. But they were used to this and were able to take it well. They had increased the security and had even increased their numbers with recruitment drives.

But this posed a question to the people; if the vermilion legion was guarding the pear's belt, how were the northern tribe people entering the empire?

Right now the people that questioned this were in the minority. But it wouldn't be long for it to spread to the majority. And if any problem was caused by the northern tribes and it was found out, it was likely that the commoners will be blaming the officials.

All of these were the points that Lin Mu had analyzed while traveling. He was reading through the records he had collected from the mercenary union and some things that Wu Hei had provided him. It was obvious that there were a lot of conspiracies and schemes in the background as well.

~Sigh~

"The nobles and the aristocrat just can't get enough, can they?" Lin Mu said in a tired tone.

"The human greed is boundless, but it also drives them further. It is up to you how you perceive it and how you use it." Xukong reminded.

Lin Mu nodded his head in acknowledgment and looked ahead. He was now nearing a small town called Dust Mill town.

"We should take a break. Little shrubby, you can recover your stamina till then." Lin Mu said.

"Okay," Little Shrubby agreed.

He had been running at his full speed for over twelve hours now and it was already nighttime. Even when they came across blockades Lin Mu didn't stop as he just used the severing heart sutra to daze the soldiers or the guards, before passing quickly with Little Shrubby.

Not only was this helping him hone his proficiency with the severing heart sutra, he discovered that his control over his spirit sense was also increasing. In fact, in these past twelve hours, he had been able to increase his spirit sense's range all the way to 380 meters.

Such a fast increase was rather surprising to him, but it was bound to happen as his cultivation base was already quite far. Once he reached the Nascent Soul realm, it wouldn't be a problem for him to have spirit sense that extended all the way to 1000 meters.

In fact, there was a chance that Lin Mu may end up exceeding it before that. But he knew that the difficulty would only get more with each 100-meter increase in range. Every hundred meter was like a bottleneck that took a lot of effort to overcome.

~Whoosh~

Little Shrubby paused near some trees outside the town, and Lin Mu got down from his back. He then spread his spirit sense and checked the town.

"Hmm... there isn't much here. Even the population seems less than it should be..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He had seen the houses, but when he checked the people using his spirit sense, he found them to be lesser than he had expected. At least 40% more people could be accommodated into these houses.

After leaving little Shrubby outside, Lin Mu walked into the town. At the end of the town a hill could be seen, on which an old mill was built. The mill looked quite old, but it was still operational from what Lin Mu read about the town.

Since it was already nighttime, most people were sleeping in the town and there were barely any lights lit up. Lin Mu was only stopped by the guards at the entrant for a couple of minutes before he was let in.

"The security is rather lax too... they just asked me what I was here for, not even the name..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He soon found a restaurant that was still working and stepped in.

"What would you like, sir?" The waiter asked.

Lin Mu saw that the restaurant was mostly empty and the workers were just sitting around.

"Hmm... get me one of every dish you have." Lin Mu spoke.

The waiter looked at Lin Mu for a few seconds longer, but did not question him.

"Alright, sir. Please take a seat and I'll be with you in a moment." The waiter spoke before leaving.

Back in the kitchen,

"We have another traveler, he ordered one of each dish." The waiter spoke to the cook.

"Huh? Why would he want that much food?" The cook asked.

"I don't care as long as he pays. He looks decently dressed so shouldn't have a problem paying. I even saw some jewelry on his hands so he should be fine." The Waiter responded.

~Sigh~

"Alright. We have to do whatever since the business is dying, anyway." The cooks replied.

"Yeah... I can't believe the kingdoms won't listen to our pleas that the people are disappearing. If they are all gone, how would we do business."

Chapter 486 - Kidnappings Here Too?

"Oh? What's this? Disappearing people here too?" Lin Mu muttered to himself.

It wasn't hard for Lin Mu to hear the waiter talk due to his enhanced hearing.

'Even the kingdom is not listening to them? This shouldn't be possible, they should send someone to investigate.' Lin Mu thought before taking out the communication jade slip.

He was still in the range of the city so should be able to contact Wu Hei.

"Is there a problem?" Wu Hei instantly asked.

He knew that if Lin Mu was contacting him, in the middle of his travels, there was bound to be something wrong.

"Another town with people disappearing, the Dusty Mill town." Lin Mu replied.

"That's not right... we have no reports of this." Wu Hei replied.

"I overheard the people in the restaurant talk about it. Besides, I took a look over the town. The number of people is really less than there should be." Lin Mu explained.

"Did they ask for the guards to investigate?" Wu Hei questioned.

"They did. Apparently, the kingdom won't listen to their plea or something. I don't know but this does not add up. Perhaps the Gu Legion is part of this too." Lin Mu replied.

"Let me check, give me a few minutes." Wu Hei said.

Lin Mu put down the communication jade slip and continued hearing the conversation of the waiter and the cook. But they had already stopped speaking and the waiter was now coming towards him with a tray.

He poured Lin Mu a glass of water upon reaching his table.

'May as well ask him directly.' Lin Mu thought.

"I saw that the town looks rather empty, why's that?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Is it that obvious now?" The waiter spoke before sighing.

~Sigh~

"A lot of people left the town as was told to us by the 'guards' but we knew they would not leave without informing the others. We suspect that they disappeared or were kidnapped." The waiter answered.

"Did the kingdom soldiers not take action, I mean there is an outpost nearby that I went past when I came here?" Lin Mu asked.

"They're even worse. Unless they get ordered from their superiors, they won't act on it. We even tried to send some people to the capital city to inform the official there, but they were prevented from going past the outpost itself." The Waiter spoke.

"Why were they denied? And what about your town head, why do you guys not ask him, he's an official too?" Lin Mu questioned.

"They simply told them that there were bandit attacks going on currently and that it was dangerous to go ahead. The people had no option but to come back. As for our town head, there isn't one for the past six months." The waiter answered.

"Six months? Where the hell is your town head?" Lin Mu asked, feeling this to be absurd.

"He died. He was sick for a few years now and finally succumbed to it six months ago. We were supposed to get a new town head, but the capital city's officials never appointed anyone. I now think it is our bad luck that our main city is the capital city and not some other regional city.

I've never seen such a slow response before in other towns." The waiter said, feeling frustrated.

Every town and village that existed in a state, came under the authority of the regional main city. In the case of the Northern town, it was the Wu Lim city. But in this case, since the region of the capital was simply too large, this town came under it as well. Usually, things in the capital region should have been taken care of promptly but there was a slack attitude.

"I see..." Lin Mu didn't know what more he could say to the man.

He just watched as the waiter went on to attend to the few customers that were still in the restaurant. Just as Lin Mu looked around, he felt the communication jade slip hummed in his hand.

"You were right," Wu Hei said.

"I talked more and found out that they haven't had a town head for six months either and that they are being restricted from leaving the town by the soldiers at the outpost." Lin Mu Informed.

"Just as I expected. I believe this is one of the towns the Gu Legion is targeting. This is their classic modus operandi. First, they isolate the peoples, spread rumors that the people are leaving for better job prospects or better life and then start kidnapping people." Wu Hei explained.

Lin Mu's eyes lit up, showing a fierce look and he spoke, "should I take care of them?"

"Unfortunately, no... if you act now, it is likely that the spies at the Tri Cauldron peony sect will be alerted as well." Wu Hei replied.

Lin Mu gritted his teeth and knew that he would have to bear with it for now. He could not compromise their mission for this, not at this point, at least.

"Alright..." Lin Mu replied after a short period of silence.

"Don't worry, I'll send my men there. They should be able to stop the next kidnapping, and once that happens, we'll blow the whistle to the king. He will definitely have to act at that point." Wu Hei spoke.

An idea popped into Lin Mu's mind upon hearing Wu Hei's words.

"That's right, we can use this as an opportunity. Make the king aware of the actions of the Gu Legion and their reach. If we bare everything to the people, he will have no option but to act on it." Lin Mu said.

"Yes, that can work." Wu Hei replied.

"Hmm... I'll investigate a bit more and see where they are hiding here. Though I think I may already have an idea about that..." Lin Mu replied.

"Okay, feel free to do that. Inform me if anything new arises." Wu Hei replied before stopping the link.

"Gu Legion... I'll eradicate you all!"

Chapter 487 - The Hidden Members

It didn't take Lin Mu long to finish his meal and leave the restaurant. The waiter had expected he would not be able to finish the food and would get some as take away, but Lin Mu really did end up eating the entire thing. But before he could think of much or ask Lin Mu, he paid the bill and left.

Lin Mu had used blink and gone to the top of the tallest building in the town, which was none other than the Mill on top of the hill. He had a hunch about where the hideout of the Gu Legion was in this town and he went to look.

His spirit sense spread far and wide, penetrating deep into the ground. The soil here was not as densely packed as the one near the Northern town or the Wu Lim city, because of which Lin Mu didn't have as much difficulty.

His spirit sense's range was now over 380 meters which allowed him to observe multiple things at once. And this time his hunch turned out to be true, as he found the hideout right where he thought it was.

The hideout was inside the hill on which the mill was located. The main entrance to the hideout was in the mill itself, but Lin Mu simply used phase to sink into the ground. About six meters deep, there was an empty hall.

It looked like it had originally been part of the mill and was its basement where grain used to be stored. But now there were better warehouses in the town which were used instead as it made it easier for people to carry the grain down the hill, rather than to carry it up there.

'Seems like the people either forgot about this, or it was made to be forgotten.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

He looked around the hall, which had a few items which showed that it was the hideout of the Gu Legion as there were their uniform and robes lying here. There were some bloodstains in one of the corners and some rusty cages as well.

There was no dust in the hall though, which showed that it was actually being used regularly. But now the question was, where were the members of the Gu Legion.

"Looking at the uniforms and robes, it's likely that they are either part of the populace of this town itself. Or they abandoned this place only recently." Xukong spoke.

"I think so too senior. I'm betting on the first option though, I doubt they would abandon this town so fast." Lin Mu said.

Seeing that there wasn't much here, Lin Mu phased out of the hill and went back to the town. This time he wanted to take a walk around the town and see the condition more in detail. He looked at the houses which had been locked up for a long time and shops that had been boarded up.

He could even see joss sticks placed in front of a few houses, which made him think that these may have been the most recently kidnapped.

But while he was walking, he was suddenly stopped by a small group of men.

"Here he is, this is the new guy I saw in the restaurant." One of the men spoke while pointing at Lin mu.

"Good job. At least we will be filling this month's quota early. Haha!" One of the other men laughed.

As soon as Lin Mu heard their words, he knew who they were.

"Gu Legion?" Lin Mu asked openly.

His question stunned the group of men as they had not expected someone to recognize them. They were not even wearing their robes or hiding their faces here. Either they were very confident that nothing would happen to them, or they had just become careless.

"Huh? Why the hell do you know that name?" The man at the front asked.

"Well, that confirms it..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

"This guy speaks too much, GET HIM!" The man ordered.

~Sigh~

"And here I thought I would have to stick to the plan... but now you come show yourselves." Lin Mu said, as his eyes lit up with a fierce glint.

He then extended his right hand and lightly spoke, "Meld."

Then a shocking scene could be seen in front of him. The men who were running in front of him were divided into multiple segments. Some of them had their torso stuck in the air with the same expression, while their legs kept on running towards Lin Mu.

Some of them were segmented diagonally and left behind an arm, while some had their legs segmented such that one leg went in one direction and one in the other. Lin Mu raised his eyebrows as he watched a strange scene.

He sensed the drain on his spirit Qi but didn't mind it, he wanted to test the effects of Meld and this was a good opportunity. He would be able to recover it all while he traveled with little shrubby anyway.

It took the men a couple of seconds to register what had happened. Since their torsos were left floating in the air, they were able to look at their legs or whatever segment that had been displaced from their body.

An expression of absolute shock was present on their faces as they looked at their body parts.

"WHAT IN THE NAME OF HEAVENS!" They exclaimed in fear.

Another strange thing was these segments that had been displaced from their bodies were not bleeding. In fact, their legs and the rest of their parts were fully functional. Due to the shock, they had stopped moving and could not help but look at their bodies.

One of them sensed their leg and tried to lift it, and it actually did even though it was a few meters ahead of their body. The others did the same with their parts and discovered that there was no pain, it was as if everything was normal.

"What did you do to us?"

Chapter 488 - Meld And Bandits

The men were now frozen in fear and could only look at Lin Mu as he casually approached them. He bent and looked at the underside of their torsos and the bottom parts of their bodies.

"Hmm... interesting... very interesting." Lin Mu said.

"This is rather unexpected, this level of spatial manipulation... amazing," Xukong said.

"Indeed senior. But the drain on spirit Qi... it is still quite a lot. And it hasn't stopped either, the longer I keep this state the longer it keeps on draining." Lin Mu replied.

"Well... let's see what happens when it stops." Xukong suggested.

The members of the Gu Legion could not see who Lin Mu was talking to and it terrified them. His words were especially depressing to them as they could see their demise in the proximity.

"Alright," Lin Mu said and stopped the skill.

A cacophony of screams echoed in the town at that moment as blood and guts splattered on the earth, the stench spreading in the air.

~Woof~

~Howl~

The stray dogs smelled the scent of the blood and howled in excitement, while the people of the town tightly closed their doors and windows, fearing that if they went out, they may suffer the same fate as what those voices did.

The scream of the men only lasted for a couple of seconds after which a deathly silence had descended in the town.

"Uff... this is a messy skill..." Lin Mu said as he wiped the blood that had splattered onto his robes and hands.

"Should have gone a bit far before deactivating the skill... now these robes are stained too..." Lin Mu complained.

Lin Mu walked to the bodies and stored each of them into the ring. There was still blood left on the ground but Lin Mu didn't care for it much as the stray dogs would take care of that for him.

They had already rushed to the place and were licking the spilled blood.

"At least they were good to be food for the dogs." Lin Mu muttered to himself before fading away.

The next morning, the townsmen would find more of their populace missing but they would not forget the pain filled screams that they had heard. A legend would be born from this day onwards of a being that swallowed men whole, not even leaving blood behind.

But the person behind this, Lin Mu could not care less. He simply contacted Wu Hei to tell him what had happened.

~Sigh~

"Since they are the ones that chose to attack you and they were not in their robes I should be able to find it. I'll frame it as if they attacked a cultivator that was beyond their strengths and were killed. Won't be the first time something like this has happened so we should be fine." Wu Hei said.

"Alright... at least there won't be any kidnappings in the near future there." Lin Mu said.

"Master, you're back already?" Little Shrubby asked.

"Yes, I was done early." Lin Mu replied.

~sniff~

"Blood? More enemies there?" Little Shrubby asked.

"Yup." Lin Mu said as he rubbed the beast's head.

They rested there for another hour before little Shrubby was ready to go. Lin Mu got onto his back and the duo sped away like the wind.

Hours passed by and they traveled across the lands. They encountered several beasts in the forests nearby and some of them were even at the Peak stage of the core condensation realm. Lin Mu didn't fight them though as it was much easier for him to just use the severing heart sutra and quickly pass from the side.

He didn't want to delay anymore, and seeing the situation in the Dust Mill town had only made him more impatient. After a certain distance, the outposts of the Shuang Qian kingdom's army had stopped appearing and even the blockades could not be seen.

Not that it mattered to Lin Mu, as he could easily bypass them all.

Twelve more hours had passed and it was time to let little Shrubby rest again. They found a spot in the forest and Lin Mu got to cooking this time. Finding a couple of early stage core condensation realm beasts, Lin Mu skinned and cut them.

In less than half an hour, a fragrant barbecue was set up. The master and beast enjoyed the meal while resting for the time being. But just as both of them had finished their meal, Little Shrubby smelled something.

"Humans, they're coming from the south east." Little Shrubby said.

Lin Mu furrowed his brows and spread his spirit sense to the furthest limit, but still could not see them.

"They're farther than four hundred meters at the very least." Lin Mu said before blinking to the top of a tree.

He looked in the approximate direction of the humans and was able to spot one of them. The man was dressed in light armor and had his chest bare. His face was cascaded and so was his chest. On his back, there was a club hanging and in his arm, he carried a large burlap sack.

Lin Mu blinked to get closer to them, while keeping his presence hidden.

"Hahaha! It was the right decision to move here, Little Bu. There are no soldiers to fear and the travelers are also plenty to rob." The man spoke.

Hearing their words, Lin Mu instantly knew who they were.

"Bandits..." Lin Mu muttered as he counted them

There were seven of them, one at the qi refining realm and the rest in the body tempering realm. Some of them even had dried blood on their weapons. Though when Lin Mu scanned them with his spirit sense he found there to be more than seven people.

"That sack... there is someone in it. A child..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He followed behind the men while giving some orders to little shrubby. After following them for about thirty minutes, Lin Mu reached their camp that they had set up.

It wasn't much just a few crude tents, but seeing the cages there only made Lin Mu seal the fate of these men.

Chapter 489 - Safe Location For The Bandits?

The cages were made out of hardwood which could be found anywhere in the forest. If it were a normal adult man, or even a teenager with little body tempering realm cultivation, they would be able to break through the cage easily, but for children, something like this would not have been possible.

Lin Mu could see the traces of the cages being used extensively and there were even scratch marks on the cage which showed that whoever was imprisoned within them struggled a lot.

His spirit sense spread around and discovered two more cages kept inside the tents. But these cages were not empty. Each of the cages had a child trapped in it, both of them being boys of around six or seven years of age.

From their clothes Lin Mu could tell they were probably low born peasants and seeing their tan skin, they were probably from this region since they got more sunlight here than in the north.

"Seems like they were kidnapped by these bandits to be sold as slaves..." Lin Mu muttered to himself as his eyes trained on the bandits.

The scarred man who was carrying the sack with the child put it down and opened it, revealing the unconscious girl within it. She looked to be of five years of age but was wearing better clothes than the other two boys.

'She doesn't seem to be a peasant... perhaps the child of a merchant or businessman?' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu did not act right away, as he wanted to know what these bandits did with the other children. Even if he could save these three children right now, and kill the bandits, he would be missing out on the information about the other children.

He could also interrogate them, but obtaining information that way would be a bit inefficient. Whereas just by eavesdropping on them, he reckoned, he should be able to obtain plenty of clues to the whereabouts of the others.

"Today was a good haul, we'll get a good price for this girl. Look at her, she got better skin and face, in a few years she'll be worth ten times her price." The scarred bandit spoke.

"You're right. Though, when will those people be coming to buy next?" Another short bandit questioned.

"They come around every week, so perhaps today or in a couple of days from now. Shouldn't matter much, we just need to watch them for a bit and keep them here." The scarred bandit spoke.

"Who would have thought the safest place for us to hide would be near the territory of a cultivation sect." Another bandit spoke.

"Though what sect is it that we are near?" A younger bandit questioned.

"You should ask this to Ba Lian, he's the only one who's a cultivator here." The short bandit replied.

The bandit who had the scarred face was evidently named Ba Lian. He opened a gourd that was placed nearby and took a swig. The pungent smell of cheap and crude wine could be felt coming from it.

"Ah~ good wine... The cultivation sect? It's called as the Tri Cauldron peony sect, they're pretty big in the kingdom and call shots nowadays. Apparently, even the king heed's their orders and they have great sway among the other sects too." Ba Lian answered.

"Why would they allow us to function here, then? I mean aren't the sects 'righteous'?" The Younger bandit asked curiously.

~slap~

The short bandit slapped the back of the younger bandit's head while the other bandits chuckled in delight.

"Whose side are you on Little Bo, huh? You're gonna jinx us if you say things like that." The Short bandit said.

"Bah! What do you know, those sects are just like us all, dirty. They're just better at hiding it, but behind their 'masks' they're all the same." Ba Lian spoke.

"Now don't spoil the mood and get the food. I'm hungry after all that work. Get some of that money and buy more stuff tomorrow when you go out, and don't forget to get the wine I like." Ba Lian spoke.

The other bandits also made requests of what they all wanted while the Little Bo did his best to remember it, though it looked like he was having a hard time. One of the bandits looked at the kidnapped girl and spoke.

"Look, she's waking up. Put her in the cage too." The bandit ordered.

Little Bo couldn't do much but to listen to the orders. He was new here and just like any junior, he would have to do menial tasks for his seniors till another junior came in. He couldn't do much other than to just grit his teeth and do his work. At least he was getting good money from banditry, much more than he did when he worked at his old man's farm.

He picked up the girl and locked her inside one of the empty cages outside. Once he returned back, he was sent to prepare the food while the rest of the bandits lazed around.

Lin Mu's eyes narrowed as he checked the distance between the bandits and the cages where the children were held. Confirming that the distance was sufficient, Lin Mu decided to act.

He sank into the ground using Phase and appeared below the group of bandits. They were completely unaware of him and were joking around when suddenly a squelching sound was heard.

~splatter~

"XI LAO!" The bandits shouted as they suddenly saw the legs of a bandit pretty much explode.

"AAAAAAA!!!!" The bandit named Xi Lao cried in pain.

Xi Lao was sitting at the very back and hence the rest of them had not seen what had happened. But they didn't have to wonder about it for long as it happened another time.

~splatter~

And again.

~splatter~

And once again.

~splatter~

"What the hell is that?!" Ba Lian exclaimed, not knowing the cause.

"I-I... I think I saw a hand..." another bandit said while stammering.

"What?" Ba Lian questioned again.

"A HAND CAME FROM THE GROUND!"

Chapter 490 - Interrogating And Rescue

Just as the bandit had spoke, his legs were grasped by two hands which then pressed hard, crushing the legs to minced meat.

"ARGH!!!" The bandit cried in pain as snot trailed down his nostrils and his body fell to the ground, writhing in pain.

"WHO ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU!?" Ba Lian shouted in shock.

But now Lin Mu had broken the legs of nearly every bandit, and only Ba Lian and little Bo were left. Upon hearing his question, a voice appeared.

"Me?" The voice said, before a person emerged from the ground. "I am your death."

~shua~

Lin Mu's leg moved like a whip and hit the legs of Ba Lian, severing them instantly and knocking his body away.

~Crash~

The legless Ba Lian crashed into the tents as he groaned in pain. All the bandits that Lin Mu had fought were weak compared to him, being in the body tempering realm, except for Ba Lian who was a cultivator and at the early stage of the Qi refining realm.

"LEADER BA LIAN!" Little Bo shouted upon seeing the scene. He had rushed back upon hearing the pain filled shouts and was greeted by a horrifying scene.

~shing~

A sword suddenly appeared next to Little Bo's neck, which made him freeze in place.

"Take another step and lose your head." Lin Mu spoke in a cold tone.

"Wh-what... why-why are you doing this?" Little Bo questioned.

Lin Mu didn't know whether to laugh at his word or pity the man. Such a question was ridiculous if he considered his position.

"I don't think I need to answer that. Any sensible person will know why, and since you need to ask such a question, you are definitely not one of them." Lin Mu ridiculed.

He turned back to Ba Lian and stepped on his gory stumps that were bleeding profusely.

"NOO!!" The man shouted in pain as Lin Mu pressed his heel against it.

"If you don't want a repeat of this, tell me everything. Tell me where you got these kids and who you are selling them to." Lin Mu questioned, his eyes looking deadly sharp.

The injured man spilled the beans pretty quickly. What Lin Mu had done was enough to reduce a grown man to a crying child. There was no way he could hold up against the threat.

Lin Mu finally learned how all these bandits were actually working. Ever since the kingdom set up multiple army outposts and blockades, these bandit groups had to move to the outer regions of the kingdom that were either less protected, or were under the authority of a local power like the cultivation sects.

Usually, these powers would exterminate criminals like these bandits on their own, but for some reason the Tri cauldron peony sect didn't. The bandits didn't know the exact reason for it, either. It was either out of ignorance, or arrogance about the fact that no bandit group would dare to operate in their territory.

As for the kids, the bandits had simply taken them from the carriages that passed by. A lot of people had been moving to the southern kingdoms ever since the news about the Northern tribes had spread. Their numbers were in the minority, but they were slowly growing little by little.

'Hmm... so what they said about people migrating in the Dusty Mill town wasn't entirely false. It's just that they are moving from other towns and the ones in the Dusty Mill town were being specifically targeted.' Lin Mu thought.

But when Lin Mu heard who was buying the kids, he couldn't identify them. Lin Mu had originally thought that the Gu Legion was behind this too, but then he realized that they would much prefer the grown adults as they had more blood than children. Though he didn't know if they really discriminated against that or not.

The people who were buying the children would come by this bandit camp and buy them for two to ten gold coins each. This was a rather high price for these bandits and thus they now referred to kidnap children rather than steal heavy goods which would yield lesser profit.

Lin Mu got the description of the group of slavers and memorized them.

"Where are the other bandit groups?" Lin Mu questioned.

But unfortunately, by now Ba Lian had suffered a massive blood loss and could not speak coherently. In less than a minute, he took his last breath and died. Lin Mu looked around for the other bandits, but they were dead too, leaving Little Bo alive.

Lin Mu extended his finger and beckoned the man to come to him.

~gulp~

Little Bo swelled his saliva in fear as he felt his legs turn to jelly. He had seen the torture that his now-descended companions had gone through and was utterly terrified of the man in front of them. To him, Lin Mu may as well be a devil in disguise.

Little Bo gradually approached Lin Mu and struggled to speak.

"Now tell me, where are the rest of the bandit groups?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Do-don't kill me... I'll tell you... please..." The man pleaded while crying and trembling.

"Speak!" Lin Mu ordered.

"There are two camps to the south, three to the south west and one to the west. There are more, but I don't know about them. If you ask those bandits, I think they should know." Little Bo answered.

"I see..." Lin Mu muttered before a muffled thud was heard.

~thud~

A head rolled on the ground and then the body fell beside it as well. The man named little Bo was now dead, having fulfilled his purpose in Lin Mu's eyes.

Lin Mu went to check up on the condition of the kids and found them to be relatively well. They had some minor scratches and bruises, but they were not in a bad condition. Lin Mu could tell that they had been dosed with some tranquilizing herb and found it in one of the collapsed tents.

"I think it's better you leave them sleeping." Xukong suggested.