

## Walker 491

### Chapter 491 - 'Test Subjects'

"Hmm... yes, it would be best if they don't see the current scene." Lin Mu said as he looked around.

He took out the communication jade slip and contacted Wu Hei.

"I need your assistance." Lin Mu spoke.

"What happened this time?" Wu Hei asked while holding the bridge of his nose.

For some reason, trouble seemed to either follow Lin Mu around or he went looking for it even if he did not aim for it. They had been waiting for him to reach their first goal but Lin Mu had been interrupted twice now.

"Bandits kidnapping children near the territory of the Tri Cauldron Peony sect." Lin Mu said.

*~Sigh~*

"I'll send the men there." Wu Hei replied.

"Oh, I just want them to take the children. I'm gonna go ahead and wipe out the bandits." Lin Mu said before putting the communication jade slip away.

"Wai...t *~Sigh~* this boy..." Wu Hei muttered before contacting his men that were in that region.

Lin Mu was carrying the other jade slip which showed his location thus the men Wu Hei sent wouldn't take long to reach.

"Little Shrubby, come here," Lin Mu said through his link.

*~whoosh~*

The trees rustled and in less than five seconds, Little Shrubby was standing in front of Lin Mu, his paws having sunk into the ground due to the speed at which he had moved.

"Watch these children. If any bandits like these come to take them, kill them. And if men wearing clothes such as this come let them take them." Lin Mu said before showing the uniform of the Hei corps.

"Just watch from afar and hide. Act only when needed." Lin Mu added.

"Okay," Little Shrubby said before disappearing into the bushes.

Lin Mu nodded his head and went to the cages before breaking them and taking out the kids. He put them together in a more comfortable position and put a mild healing pill in each of their mouths.

"This should be enough for them..." Lin Mu said before blinking away.

*~shua~*

A few minutes later, Lin Mu was at the location of the next bandit camp. This one was bigger than the one he had seen before, and there were even more cages here. But unlike the previous one, they were all empty.

Lin Mu sank into the ground and sneaked closer to listen to their conversations. They were relatively mundane as most bandits would talk, but Lin Mu didn't get anything of particular importance from them.

'These ones don't have any people kidnapped as of now, but they do sell them as well. Better get rid of them as well.' Lin Mu thought before blinking to the top of a tree.

Lin Mu was currently revealed to all of the bandits if they looked up. But since they were busy in either talking or doing other tasks, they did not notice.

"This should be a good chance to test meld further..." Lin Mu said before closing his eyes.

Meld was much more difficult to use than the other four skills and when he had used it on the Gu Legion members in the Dusty Mill town, his control had been rough. That was the reason why all the Gu legion members had been cut in different manners.

Lin Mu's weaker control over Meld was also the reason why he did not test it on the earlier group of bandits. He was worried about hurting the children and thus did not want to take a risk.

The targeting area of Meld was irregular and was hard to maintain. If the target it was used on moved, their body would be split into different parts, depending on how meld was used. Thus Lin Mu looked at the bandits, who all felt a chill go down their spines.

"Meld..." Lin Mu muttered.

For a second there, it was as if everything had frozen as the bandits felt scared. But then they recovered and looked around.

"What the hell was that feeling?" One of them questioned.

"Yeah, it was like some beast was staring at us." Another bandit turned around to say.

But then...

"WHAT THE FUCK! Second Ning! Looks at your waist!" A bandit shouted in shock and pointed at him.

But when this bandit moved his hand to point at him, his hand detached and desolated to a different position.

"AHHHHHH!" The bandits all became startled.

Of course, since they were scared they all moved and some part of their body detached from them. One of them even lost his head, which was now floating in the air while his body ran around like a headless chicken.

Lin Mu watched all this closely and focused on his spatial perception. It was still not good enough, and he could barely sense the borders of the target area of Meld. It was like different chunks that attached to some part of the target, and controlling it was quite hard.

Lin Mu also had a difficult time controlling how many of these 'chunks' were used at once. He reckoned that this could have been the reason behind him requiring such a large amount of spirit Qi to use the skill.

'If I'm able to use it on a singular target, I should be able to reduce the consumption of spirit Qi.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

Currently, Lin Mu could use meld about six to seven times before his spirit Qi would be entirely depleted. This was a massive amount, not to mention that Lin Mu had three times the spirit Qi stores than a normal cultivator while being at the peak stage of the core condensation realm.

There was a chance that if it were a normal cultivator at the same stage as him, he would only be able to use the skill once or twice before depleting all of their spirit Qi.

Lin Mu continued looking at the chaos that was happening in the bandit camp while improving his understanding of Meld.

"Hmm... I'll need more test subjects..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

### **Chapter 492 - Exterminating Bandits**

Lin Mu eventually discovered that the more the targets moved, the more difficult it got to control the skill. But their movement also made it so that they moved their detached parts further away.

The bandits were all screaming in terror at seeing their body parts detaching. Some of them even tried to pull on them and found that they could actually still be moved. One of the bandits who had his hand detached tried to put it back and found that even while detached he could move it.

The bandits felt like they were in some nightmare and could not get out of it. A couple of them directly fainted due to fear while some collapsed due to the fatigue and shock.

*~huu~*

"This should be enough." Lin Mu muttered before deactivating the skill.

*~Thud~ Thud~ Thud ~thud~*

*~Splatter~ splatter~*

*~slick~*

A cacophony sounds were heard as all the bandits took their final breaths. Various body parts and entire bodies were scattered around now, dressing the earth in various shades of red.

The bandit who had a part of his waist attached was at Lin Mu's side and Lin Mu saw a kidney and a fragment of rib along with some skin lying there. Evidently, this was the part of his waist that had been detached.

This part included a good chunk of arteries so the man died rather quickly due to blood loss.

Lin Mu looked around and realized that except for the ones that were decapitated or severed half from the waist, the common cause of death was blood loss. Though he reckoned that the shock and terror had probably contributed to it as well.

Lin Mu took one last look at the dead bandits and scanned the camp with his spirit sense to see if he could find any clue.

"Nothing here... better head to the next one..." Lin Mu said before blinking away.

A few minutes later, the same scene was seen at a different bandit camp and cleanly dismembered bodies were lying all around. This camp also did not have any people that had been captured, so Lin Mu did not spend much time here.

In the next camp though, there were a few women that had been captured. They were shackled and put in metal cages. Lin Mu looked at the bandits and saw that these ones were better equipped than the previous ones.

Not wanting to risk hurting the women with Meld, Lin Mu swiftly dealt with the bandits. Leaving only one of them alive for asking questions. This bandit was their leader and was likely to know more than others.

*~Crack~*

Lin Mu stepped on the leg of the bandit, shattering it while ignoring his pain filled cry.

"Speak... where are the other bandits and who do you sell these people to." Lin Mu ordered.

"I'll speak, I'll speak! Please don't kill me!" The bandit leader pleaded.

*~Crack~*

Lin Mu shattered his other leg bone and prodded him to speak again.

"There... there are four more bandits camps. We have a map you can see on there. As for the slavers, they are from outside the kingdom. They buy slaves from us and sell them to different parts of the empire." The bandit leader uttered hurriedly.

*~splat~*

"I see..." Lin Mu replied before stepping on the head of the bandit, crushing it like a watermelon.

He freed the women that were unconscious and fed them the healing pills as well. He could see many signs of abuse on them, including deep scars and cuts. Lin Mu had a cold expression on his face as he took out the jade slip and reported his location to Wu Hei.

"They have found the children and are taking them to a safe place now." Wu Hei Spoke.

"Good. Come to this place now. There are women here." Lin Mu said, before rushing to his next target.

One by one, Lin Mu went to each of the Bandit camps and eradicated all of them. He ended up freeing over twenty people, which included men, women and children along with a couple of beasts as well.

Lin Mu looked at these beasts that looked like a mix between a turtle and a duck. He recognized them to be rare beasts that were prized for their shells and were often sold for them. They were at the early stage of the Qi refining realm and were not of much use to Lin Mu so he freed them as well.

Lin Mu had gotten a little bit more practice with the bandits, but it was still not enough for him to say that he had sufficient control over Meld. He hadn't been able to use it more due to there being captured people in the camps.

Though the one thing that was common was the herb they used to tranquilize the people. All of them used the same herb, and it was not native to this region. Lin Mu learned that this drug was provided by those slavers so that it made the task of the bandits easier.

"Damned monsters! they are worse than beasts!" Lin Mu said, flames of rage visible in his eyes.

After having taken care of all the bandit camps, Lin Mu called for Little Shrubby and went on his way to the Tri Cauldron peony sect. But he had not forgotten about those slavers and was going to kill them too if he encountered them.

Lin mu knew that the border of the Shuang Qian kingdom was only at a day's distance from this place, so it was likely the slavers were located somewhere outside it. But since there were military outposts and checkpoints at the routes that went in from the border, they were likely to be using some other secret path.

Finding this path would have been like finding a needle in a haystack and thus he just told Wu Hei to watch the locations where the bandit camps were, so that when the slavers approach they are able to capture them.

#### **Chapter 493 - Reaching The Tri Cauldron Peony Sect**

Lin Mu's eyes were closed as he was focused on refining his spirit sense further. It had been twelve hours since he had left the site of the bandit camps and was on his way to the Tri cauldron peony sect.

Technically he was already inside the sect as he had felt the border of formation at a certain point. This was the formation that demarcated the territory of the sect. Usually, this formation would have been hidden to most people but due to Lin Mu's natural sensitivity, he was able to perceive it.

This formation was intended for the disciples of the sect as it was the range in which they could ask for help or in which the sect's other formations could work. Still, it wasn't like there were many people guarding it manually.

It wasn't in the main sect's territory and would take far too many people to guard it. There wasn't anything of much value in this area either thus it didn't make sense to guard it strictly either.

"Wait here, this should be far enough." Lin Mu suddenly spoke.

Little Shrubby slowed down as his paws dug into the soil. Lin Mu spread his spirit sense around and verified that there was no one here before nodding his head.

"You can wait here, though stay alert and hide if anyone comes. I'll call for you when needed. You can find me, right?" Lin Mu spoke.

"Yes! I can always tell where you are from the link and when we're close enough, I can pin point you with your scent." Little Shrubby replied.

"Good. We will have to act very quickly when the time comes." Lin Mu said before withdrawing a bunch of things.

There were alchemical pills and spirit stones in it, that he gave to little shrubby.

"Use these when needed." Lin Mu directed.

He couldn't risk losing little Shrubby at all. He had grown way too close to him, plus he felt like family to him now. The beast had been nothing but devoted to him and was but a child, too.

"Okay," Little Shrubby replied.

Lin Mu nodded his head and changed into the robes of the Tri cauldron peony sect that She Qing had given him. They were of the perfect size and dint him comfortably. He then hung the identity badge on his waist with the belt.

Now he looked like an inner court disciple of the Sect no matter which angle one looked at from.

"Hmm... just one more thing left..." Lin Mu muttered before sitting down cross legged.

He chanted the calming heart sutra, and slowly suppressed the fluctuations of vital energy coming from his body. Although Lin Mu's vital energy fluctuations were already quite hard to detect, he still didn't want to take a chance with it.

After all, there was a greater chance of finding a cultivator at the peak stage of the core condensation realm rather than one who was in the Five Treasures realm. Though he did not know if anyone would be able to tell or even know about that.

After all his vital energy fluctuation had been contained, Lin Mu started chanting the severing heart sutra and stilled his mind. Unlike vital energy, it was much easier for him to hide his spirit Qi fluctuations. His Xiantian physique contributed a lot to this and made it very adaptive for his spirit Qi.

Usually, the spirit Qi fluctuation happens due to the leakage of a small amount of spirit Qi due to the body being incompatible with spirit Qi. But the Xiantian physique took care of this part and made it highly conducive to the spirit Qi. Due to this, the spirit Qi would rather stay bound inside the body than spread outside into the air.

Lin Mu's spirit Qi fluctuations started falling and soon it was as if he was not a Peak stage core condensation realm cultivator but rather a peak Qi refining realm cultivator. This was more accurate for his standing as an Inner court disciple as those in the early stage core condensation realm would be core disciples of the sect, while those at the mid stage and the late stage were junior elders.

The disciples that managed to reach the peak stage of the core condensation realm would be directly promoted to the position of elders while the ones who managed to reach the Nascent Soul realm would become peak masters.

The Tri Cauldron peony sect had three peaks, which meant three peak masters who were all at the Nascent Soul realm. In total, there were four Nascent Soul realm cultivators in the sect, including the Sect patriarch who had the highest cultivation base being at pseudo Dao Shell realm.

Peak master Yi Deng occupied the pill peak, the sect patriarch occupied the main peak, while another female elder occupied the Herb Peak. The supreme elder was an exception to this and stayed in the forbidden area of the sect, only attending to matters of great importance. He was also the expert with the second highest cultivation base in the sect.

Though these were not the people that Lin Mu had been warned about. Rather the person he needed to be careful of was the Ancestor of the Tri Cauldron peony sect. Not even the sect patriarch or the Supreme elder knew if he was alive or not.

Wu Hei had been able to get the bare minimum information about him as Gu Yao had been looking for this ancestor too. But his location was hidden and unknown to anyone. This ancestor could be a problem for his plans and hence he was looking to either control him as well or get rid of him.

*~Sigh~*

"Time to head in..." Lin Mu muttered as he opened his eyes and looked up at the three peaks that were finally visible.

These three peaks had suddenly appeared as they had been hidden behind a concealment formation array. Before reaching this point it was as if there were only trees in the area, but now three mountain peaks each with a different symbol carved on them were visible.

#### **Chapter 494 - The Tri Cauldron Peony Sect**

"So this is what a cultivation sect looks like..." Lin Mu muttered after seeing the peaks.

He continued walking forward and could sense the rapid change in the spirit Qi concentration in the air.

"The difference is... quite a lot. No wonder people want to join sects." Lin Mu said as he took a deep breath.

He could tell that the concentration of spirit Qi was about fifty percent more than other places.

"Though it still can't compare to the Myriad Armament Canopy Abode. That place is on a different level." Lin Mu stated.

"They probably have a couple of spirit stone mines and maybe a few more spirit Qi springs in the area. This concentration of spirit Qi seems proportional to that." Xukong suddenly spoke.

"Do we need to target those too?" Lin Mu asked.

He knew spirit stones were one of the foundational resources that were needed for a sect to function. Without them, there was no way a sect would last for a long and a mid sized sect like the Tri cauldron pent sect definitely had a large requirement of them.

"Hmm... not necessarily. They can't mine beyond a certain point and most of their wealth should be stored in those vaults that Wu Hei told you about. If they mine too much, it will just hurt the vitality of the mines. If too many spirit stones are mined, the mines won't recover and will go into a decline.

Most sects will mine a certain amount and stockpile them in their vaults. Over the years they end up with a large surplus which makes the backbone of the sect. That's why the more spirit stone mines a sect has the more power they will have." Xukong answered.

"What about the spirit Qi springs then?" Lin Mu questioned.

"The spirit Qi springs work a bit differently. While they can turn into a spirit stone mine after a few decades or centuries, even before that they do help in increasing the ambient spirit Qi of an area. Not everyone uses them like how the lost immortal did." Xukong explained.

"Hmm... that's true... he did take advantage of a lot of spirit Qi springs when he found them and who knows seized how many people's future fortune." Lin Mu said as he remembered the memoirs.

Lin Mu had seen the Lost immortal find Spirit Qi springs and absorbing them dry like the very first time he had done at the mines. It was one of the reasons why he was able to reach the Nascent Soul realm despite his low talent.

He would spend his time in finding spirit Qi springs and then draining them dry. Due to his efforts in this, he had researched quite a bit and had even developed certain theories about how a spirit Qi spring would be formed.

According to him, if certain parameters were fulfilled, there was a 90% chance of a spirit Qi spring forming in that area. Lin Mu had read those theories, but they were all too much for him. Unlike him, the lost immortal had gained centuries of experience before he had come up with those.

In fact, when he had become a Nascent Soul realm cultivator, he was already close to the end of his life span. It was that very last moment when he had gotten lucky and found a rather mature spirit Qi spring that was close to turning into a spirit stone mine.

He absorbed all of that and broke through to the Nascent Soul realm.

*~Sigh~*

Lin Mu sighed at the bad luck of the lost immortal and couldn't help but compare how fortunate he was. The lost immortal had ended up spending over two hundred years before he reached the Peak of the core condensation realm while here he was at the same point at eighteen years of age.

"Better start hiding now, the longer I stay out of sight the easier it would be for me..." Lin Mu said before sinking into the ground using phase.

Even if Lin Mu had the robes and the identity badge of a Tri cauldron peony sect disciple, there was still a chance that he would be found out by someone. While not everyone didn't know everyone in the sect, there could still be people who get suspicious.

Another thing was that while Lin Mu had the identity badge, it didn't mean that it was 100% authentic. The disciples who were part of the sect were all recorded in the sect registry. So while Lin Mu would have the badge, if anyone cross checked it with the registry they would find out the truth.

The less Lin Mu came into the sights of others, the fewer chances of him being found out.

*~pew~*

"Getting up there will take a while..." Lin Mu said.

Since he couldn't fly he would have to take the long winding route that went to the peaks. The Tri cauldron peony peak was built in a rather unique manner. The entire region of the three peaks was rising up from the ground like a singular mountain and then from that three different peaks separated.



If one looked at it from afar, it kind of looked like a three pointed cauldron.

Lin Mu first needed to reach the base of the sect which took him an hour to climb. Since he was traveling underground the entire time, he moved smoothly but the drain on his spirit Qi was also substantial.

Along the way, he saw plenty of outer disciples and servants. These were the majority members of the sect and did most of the labor in the sect. Lin Mu paid attention to their conversations, as these were the people who would know the finer nuances of what happened in the sect.

And just as Lin Mu was listening to one of the gossips between a few Outer court disciples, he learned of an interesting development.

"Did you know, Alchemist Bilao will be getting his own peak after his Ascension?"

### **Chapter 495 - A New Peak?**

Lin Mu paused in his tracks after hearing the words of that disciple. This was the type of information that was very important to his mission and there was no way he could miss it. Thus he went closer which was pretty much right below the small group of disciples.

"Where did you hear this? And why would they do this?" One of the disciples questioned.

"That's the wrong question brother, you should ask how would they do this? Can't you see we only have three peaks?" Another smarter disciple added.

"You gotta believe me, guys. My brother's neighbor's cousin is a servant at one of the elder's residence. He heard the elders discussing about this in a meeting. They said that if Alchemist Bilao managed to successful breakthrough, they will make an entirely new peak for him." The first disciple answered.

"Another peak? How in the world would they do that? Making something out of nothing, even Nascent Soul realm cultivators can't do that much. I'm not that smart but even I know this much." The second disciple spoke.

Even Lin Mu wondered about how they would make an entire mountain where there wasn't any to add. If one looked around the area where the Tri Cauldron Peony sect was located, they would only find a forest.

There were no other mountains than the three peaks of the sect in an area of about three hundred kilometers.

"Senior, can they make a mountain just like that?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm... it is possible. One doesn't even need to be a cultivator to make a mountain. Even simple mortals can do so with enough time. Rather, the importance of mountains and peaks in the cultivation sects is usually due to the presence of the Spirit stone mines and spirit Qi springs.

These mountains all have intricate formation arrays that evenly distribute the spirit Qi around the sect. Even the spirit stone mines and spirit Qi springs are located beneath these mountains, or inside them.

So if they are willing to make another mountain, it means that either a spirit Qi spring is about to mature into a spirit stone mine, or a couple more spirit Qi springs will be combined to supply for a mountain." Xukong explained.

"This... is rather surprising. Will Gu Yao do something about this? I mean won't all this require a lot of resources." Lin Mu questioned.

"It is quite likely. Or... since this alchemist Bilao will be a new Nascent Soul realm cultivator there is even a chance Gu Yao would want him under his servitude. Even if he isn't able to control him with the Human controlling Blood curse, I think he should still be able to passively give him ordered through the sect." Xukong answered.

"That's right! As long as Alchemist Bilao successfully becomes a Nascent Soul realm cultivator Gu Yao will get another talented Alchemist at his disposal that can make pills for him. This will just be more beneficial for him." Lin Mu said.

"Then perhaps... you should prevent this from happening..." Xukong suggested.

"I may be able to do that, but will that be right? Besides, interrupting a heavenly tribulation is deadly isn't it?" Lin Mu asked.

"Not if the tribulation never comes," Xukong replied.

"You mean to say..." Lin Mu muttered.

"End him before he can become a problem," Xukong stated.

Lin Mu went silent and didn't know how to reply to this. He knew senior Xukong was right on this matter, but he did not want to kill a man for simply being there at the wrong place. If he killed him, what difference would be there between him and the type of people he hated.

"I don't think I can do this, senior. I simply cannot kill an innocent man for something that is not his fault." Lin Mu said with determination.

"That's alright. These decisions are yours to make and the consequences yours to live with as well. I can at most advise you, but you are the one who is supposed to act." Xukong said in a sagely voice.

Lin Mu nodded his head and continued to head forward. He was now near the area where all the outer court disciples of the sect lived. They all had their individual courtyards, but they were smaller than he had expected. In fact, they were smaller than the houses of some villagers too.

"Don't just go on their size, these houses should all have a spirit Qi amplifying formations in them. Each of these houses should cost a few hundred spirit stones as well." Xukong spoke.

"I understand senior." Lin Mu said as he continued looking around.

Another thing Lin Mu noticed was a lot of security barriers that were in the form of barrier formations. These formations restricted one from entering areas they did not have the authority to enter.

Every house had these formations placed on its four walls, while some of the other areas here were entirely restricted. Lin Mu looked at them and realized that they were training areas where the disciples were taught and trained.

Even when Lin Mu proceeded on the upward path that went to the three peaks, he was forced to temporarily halt. A barrier had stopped him even while he was underground and the badge that he had on his waist was humming.

"Use the badge. This should be the demarcation area between the outer court and the inner court. It will block you from entering unless you go in from the gate." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu took a look around and saw that there were still some people in the area. He waited for them to pass and the path to become empty before he returned to the ground. He held out the identity badge and let the gate's formation check it.

The badge glowed in a green light and let him pass. But just as he was about to take a step across the gate, he heard a loud shout coming from the back.

"STOP RIGHT THERE!"

#### **Chapter 496 - A Weird Disciple**

Lin Mu tensed up and became alert. He didn't know why this person had called out to him like this but knew that he would have to be careful from here on.

Lin Mu didn't turn around but rather looked at the person using his spirit sense. This way if he was getting into trouble at least they would not have seen his face. But when Lin Mu saw the person who had called out to him, he was rather dumbfounded.

"Is that guy okay?" Lin Mu couldn't help but say.

The person who had called out to him was a young man who was dressed in tattered robes, looking like some homeless beggar. His face was covered with dirt and his hair was messy, leaves and twigs stuck in them. There were also some injuries on his body that Lin Mu could see.

The man seemed to have a relieved look on his face upon seeing Lin Mu stop and relaxed his speed. But by the time he reached Lin Mu he was panting and his chest was heaving.

"Thank you for stopping brother, my identity badge was broken while I was out of the sect, so I needed someone else to open the gate for me." The man in the tattered robes spoke.

"What... happened to you? Why are you in this condition?" Lin Mu couldn't help but ask.

He was now sure that he had not been found out and thus turned around to take a direct look at the man.

"Whoa! Where have you been hiding all this time, brother? I've never seen you before. I'm sure there would have been talks about you if such a handsome and heroic looking man was in the sect." The man ignored Lin Mu's question and asked something else.

"I... I've been in seclusion." Lin Mu gave an excuse.

"Ah, I see. Have you been in seclusion for a long time? Did you come out of seclusion for the heavenly tribulation of Alchemist Bilao too?" The man started shooting off a string of questions without stopping.

'Damn, he's a chatterbox.' Lin Mu thought.

"*Ahem*~ Better to get inside and change your clothes. I also need to get to my work." Lin Mu said, interrupting the man.

"Ah, look at me. Me and my big mouth again. You're right brother, I should clean up and heal my injuries first." The man said.

Lin Mu nodded his head and walked towards the gate that automatically opened for him. The man in the tattered robes walked behind him and passed the gate too.

"Thank you for your help, brother. If it were not for you, I don't know how long I would have had to wait here for the other Inner court disciple to pass by. And now that everyone is anticipating Alchemist Bilao's breakthrough, no one is coming to the outer court.

My chances of meeting inner court disciples would have been quite less." The man in the tattered robes spoke.

"I see..." Lin Mu muttered.

"What is your name though, brother? I'm Jiao Fang. I owe you one for this; when the Heavenly tribulation of Alchemist Bilao is over, I'll treat you to wine and some good food at one of the pleasure pavilions." The man in tattered robes said.

"I'm... Wu Lian." Lin Mu gave the same fake name that he had been using for a few days now.

"Ah, Wu Lian. I'll remember it from now on. When the tribulation is over, I'll find you for drinks." Jiao Fang said before going on his merry way.

After the man was gone, though, Lin Mu kept on looking in his direction.

"...Weird man." Lin Mu muttered.

'I should get going too.' Lin Mu thought and continued on his path.

Now that he was in the inner court, he could choose which peak he wanted to go to. The three peaks were divided according to their functions. The Herb peak was where all the spirit herbs required for the Alchemical pills were grown.

The Pill peak was where they refined the Alchemical pill. And finally, the Main peak was where the sect patriarch and a lot of elders resided. It was also the peak that had the important buildings of the sect like the Skill pavilion, libraries, merit hall, sect registry, and other such places.

Lin Mu's targets were on all three peaks and from what he had learned from Wu Hei the Tribulation platform where Alchemist Bilao will be having his breakthrough will be at the main peak. So according to that, that peak was going to be the last one that he was going to visit.

For now, Lin Mu was only supposed to check out the areas where the vaults were located so that he could quickly visit them during the time of Heavenly tribulation. He chose his first target to be the herb peak.

This peak was located in the south western part of the sect and looked rather beautiful. There was a large symbol carved on its surface that could be seen from afar. The symbol was of a single cauldron that had the character for 'Herb' on it.

There were many colors on the peak due to the numerous spirit herbs that grew on it. They were grown on flat surfaces that had been carved around the radius of the peak and were of many types. There were also different buildings located between these fields of herbs where the disciples that took care of these herbs resided.

At the very top of the peak, Lin Wu could see a few large courtyards and a palace.

"So that's where the peak master of the Herb peak resides. What was her name again... oh yeah, Shaoyan Qianyu." Lin Mu remembered.

This peak master was at the Child stage of the Nascent Soul realm and was the weakest Nascent Soul realm cultivator of the sect. Her presence was also quite limited in that she barely participated in administrative matters unless they related to her peak.

"Let's see where they keep the herbs..."

#### **Chapter 497 - The Herb Peak**

There were many warehouses where the herbs were stored. This was a necessary part of the peak since most of the herbs took a long time to grow. Thus if they wanted a sufficient quantity and a stable supply, they needed to grow a lot of them at once.

Even the low grade spirit herbs needed few months to years to grow. While those that were of high grade would even need centuries to grow. Currently, the herbs that Lin Mu was seeing everywhere, were of either low grade or mid grade herbs.

These herbs were not as valuable as high grade herbs and did not have growth conditions that were as strict as those for the high grade herbs. The high grade herbs were grown in specific gardens that were well controlled by the elders of the peak.

As for the peak grade herbs, those were far too rare to be grown here. One could only chance upon them and not cultivate them. Though there were sometimes when a sect was able to grow a peak grade herb successfully. But any such instance was exceedingly rare, and repeating it would be taunting the heavens.

Not to mention the amount of time needed for a peak grade herb was far too much, often exceeding for a thousand years or more. Most cultivators were not even able to survive for that long.

Many plants had longer lifespans than animals. Even common trees could live for thousands of years if they never cultivated. Such was the blessing bestowed upon by the heavens, but in exchange, they did not have the movement or the intelligence that animals had.

Thus when these plants became spirit herbs and gained the ability to absorb spirit Qi, their aspects such as these were amplified further. Accordingly, they needed more spirit Qi the higher their grade was, because of which the higher the grade of the herb the further up they were grown on the Herb Peak.

Lin Mu was currently on the level where only the low grade herbs were grown. He could see a wide variety of flowers blooming along with herbs that had exquisite looking leaves and stems. Their colors so vibrant, that one could not help but admire them.

The aroma of herbs that spread in the air was ever-present and the closer Lin Mu got to the location of the warehouse, the stronger the aroma got. This just made it easier for him to find it. He continued on ahead and finally reached a large building, which had three floors.

There were of course, disciples present around it that were acting as guards. They had a sharp look in their eyes and vigilantly watched every one that passed. Whenever one needed to enter the building, they were stopped a hundred meters away from it and their identity badges were checked.

Only after they were verified would they be allowed to get closer. Then, when they actually entered the building, their badge would be scanned once again. Lin Mu carefully watched the entire process, including the part where the formation would get activated when checking the badges.

Lin Mu got closer to the warehouse while still underground and saw that there were multiple barriers surrounding it from all sides, including the ground below it. He checked the formation with his spirit sense and tried to find the nodes.

"Hmm... I should be able to resolve this if I get some time. I'll need to make a schedule after I confirm the locations of all vaults and warehouses." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

The warehouse in front of him only had low grade herbs in it, and even then the security was quite high. If he wanted to steal all the resources, he would have to sort out the formations protecting them beforehand.

'I should see the other warehouses as well. Then there is the vault at the very top too.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

The most important herbs were kept in the vault, which was personally under the protection of the peak master and elders. Accessing it was going to be the toughest part of Lin Mu's mission, not to mention there were a total of twelve that existed, of which Lin Mu needed to rob from at least four.

The herb peak had only one vault, which meant that Lin Mu definitely needed to rob this one. The Pill peak had two vaults and the main peak had three vaults instead, so Lin Mu would have the option for those peaks. Along with these, there were six storage pavilions in the entire sect.

Two of these were the warehouses that were located in the herb peak, then the two pill repositories in the pill peak and the final two treasure pavilions in the main peak. Lin Mu would have to carefully pick his targets or he would never be able to complete his mission successfully.

Lin Mu continued on ahead and reached the second warehouse. This one was located halfway up the peak and was smaller than the previous one, which was understandable since the mid grade herbs took a longer time to grow than the low grade ones.

Lin Mu checked the security, which was obviously better than the previous warehouse's.

"I will need more time to figure out the formations in this warehouse. If these are already this difficult, how will I open the vaults?" Lin Mu wondered to himself.

Lin Mu recorded the number of disciples guarding the warehouse as well as their patterns. Though there weren't many changes to it, as they mostly stayed in the same place for twelve hours. Before a different disciple would replace them. There wasn't even a lapse between the shift change as the second disciple would be here before the shift even began.

*~Sigh~*

"Let's just see the vault and then on to the next peak." Lin Mu muttered to himself, feeling a bit overwhelmed.

He continued on ahead to the top of the peak. This was where the peak master resided and the core disciples lived as well.

### **Chapter 498 - The Vault At Herb Peak**

Lin Mu had to be extra careful as if the elders or heavens forbid the peak master ever scanned the ground with their spirit sense they would end up finding Lin Mu there. These people were either as strong as Lin Mu or even stronger than him, thus their range of spirit sense would be higher as well.

He finally reached a compound that had high walls. There was a large gate at the front which needed an identity badge to enter inside as well. Lin Mu tried to enter using phase, but the barriers surrounded it from everywhere making it difficult to pass.

"I'll just have to use fade, I guess." Lin Mu said to himself before disappearing from the real world.

His proficiency with fade was getting better with time and now he could judge how much distance he had traveled just by estimating it with his eye. This was good for the short distances he needed to travel like these barriers.

He would have done the same with the formations on the warehouse but they were different. While he would be able to enter them using fade, an alarm would still ring as soon as he deactivated it and appeared in the real world.

The warehouses had active formations that prohibited one from staying in it for long times and also checked who was in it at all times. So to overcome this, Lin Mu would have to override the formations themselves.

As for the barrier in this compound, it only prevented one from entering but did not constantly check for the identity. Thus, once Lin Mu entered it, things were a bit easier. Lin Mu looked around and saw all the buildings that were located within it.

The biggest building was where the peak master stayed at. There were two more buildings in it that were smaller than it. These were the buildings where the elders and the core disciples of the peak lived in.

They were layered in an ascending manner, with the building where the core disciples lived first, then the elders' building and finally the peak master's building.

'According to the information I was given, the vault is located between the elder's building and the peak master's building.' Lin Mu recalled.

Lin Mu spread his spirit sense around and sensed the spirit Qi fluctuations in the area.

"So there are about seven core disciples in the building and they are all at the early stage of the core condensation realm." Lin Mu discovered.

He didn't worry much about these disciples as they couldn't do much to him, even if they all attacked him at once. He then continued on ahead and reached the elder's building. Here the spirit Qi fluctuations were a bit stronger and Lin Mu was able to see that there were three elders in here.

"Oh? One of them is missing. Perhaps he's gone out..." Lin Mu guessed.

According to the information he was given, there were a total of four elders in the herb peak, two of which were at the late stage of the core condensation realm and two at the peak stage of the core condensation realm.

They all were currently busy with preparations for the event that would be happening in the coming few days and seemed to be engrossed in it.

'This may make it a bit easier...' Lin Mu thought.

He finally went past the building and reached the middle area between the elder's building and the peak master's building. There was a garden in between them where spirit herbs were planted as well. These were all high grade spirit herbs and were quite difficult to grow.

Lin Mu checked the properties of these herbs and found some interesting ones.

"Oh my, the main herb needed to make the four vessels restoration pill is here too." Lin Mu said upon seeing a small plant that had four cylindrical leaves.

This was the Tube Rest Grass and was a high grade herb that was the main ingredient for the four vessels restoration pill. There were a total of ten such plants which showed how expensive the pill really was.

There were also other herbs that were used to make other high grade pills such as the high grade basic Qi pill and even the Earth resurgence pill. Lin Mu's eyes particularly trained on the flower that was used for the Earth Resurgence pill.

His gaze lingered over it for a bit before he reluctantly withdrew it. He looked at the small pavilion that was built at the other end of the garden and moved towards it. This was the vault of the Herb peak that contained all the high grade herbs that the peak had grown over the many years it had existed.

It was built along a cliff and the other side of it extended out the side of the peak. This gave it quite a mystic look and the formations the faintly glowed around it only made it more enchanting. But Lin Mu knew that this only accentuated the danger that was there.



Lin Mu checked the formations with his spirit Qi and saw the complicated formation array that was layered over the vault.

"Dammit, just unrevealing this single vault will take me a few days. If this is not completed before the tribulation I may really fail this." Lin Mu said in a frustrated tone.

The original plan was that Lin Mu would quickly break into the vault formations, during the time of tribulation and steal all the things in it. But this was a final gambit kind of a goal, which was to only be done when there was no option.

Optimally, Lin Mu would have resolved the formations that protected the vaults and storage pavilions before the tribulation even came. This way, not only would the sect take longer to realize that they had been robbed, Lin Mu may even be able to gain more time to rob more of the storage pavilions.

But just as Lin Mu was observing the vault, he sensed someone approaching it.

"Shaoyan Qianyu..."

#### **Chapter 499 - An Opportunity To Observe**

The person who had just appeared was none other than Shaoyan Qianyu, who was the peak master of the Herb Peak. The woman looked like she was in her late thirties, yet still had a special charm.

She had no wrinkles on her face, but there were a few strands of white hair on her head that could be seen. She was wearing the robes of a peak master with the symbol of the Herb peak embroidered on them.

On her face, there was a rather calm look as she strolled to the vault.

*~swish~*

She waved her hand and a small jade appeared in her palm. As soon as the jade appeared in her hand the formations on the vault started to light up and a wave of spirit Qi fluctuations could be perceived.

Lin Mu instantly knew what was the jade in her hand.

"The key to the vault..." He muttered.

"Quick! Don't waste this opportunity. Look at the formations and observe how they are unraveling. It will make it much easier for you to do it later." Xukong prompted.

"Yes, senior!" Lin Mu responded before focusing on the formations of the vault.

He saw how each layer reacted to the key and the specific waves of spirit Qi that were released from it one by one. Lin Mu memorized the patterns and the order of their movement. The process was rather quick, lasting only two minutes, but even in that Lin Mu reckoned that he had seen at least a hundred layers of formations.

"Thankfully, I get the chance to observe it opening, or I would have had a bad time unlocking them one by one. Not to mention there are three more of these vaults, each with a different formation array." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

After the formations were finally open, the door of the vault moved to the side, giving one the view of what was inside. There were a lot of boxes and containers kept in the vault, each of which was made from special preservative materials.

Some of them were made out of fragrant wood that helped maintain the qualities of the herbs kept in them, which some were made out of precious blue jade that kept the herbs cool. In addition to this, each of these containers were inscribed with more formations.

Overall, the security was top notch. Thankfully, Lin Mu only needed to enter the vault, as after that he would be able to store everything in the ring at once. The peak master Shaoyan Qianyu entered the vault and went to a specific shelf.

There was a brocade box kept on it which gleamed with the glow of formations. She traced her finger over it and made a seal before the box opened. Lin Mu couldn't see what was in the box from this angle and neither could he risk using his spirit sense to see it, as there was a chance that the woman would sense him.

Thus he just waited till she was done. Shaoyan Qianyu closed the box and carried it out in her hands, before closing the door of the vault again. Lin Mu didn't waste this chance either and observed how the formations locked the vault. This allowed him to deepen his understanding even more now.

He saw how each node reacted with the other and how the layers intersected with each other. The complexity was profound and it would take a formation master a few months before they would be able to figure it out on their own.

Lin Mu was in luck due to his enchanted perception offered by the mysterious ring. Still, once the formations were all locked again, he couldn't help but sigh at the difficulty. He then saw as Shaoyan Qianyu walked back into her residence.

An idea appeared in Lin Mu's mind, and he followed behind the peak master. There was another barrier that restricted his entry into the residence, but he was able to use fade to bypass that easily. He had expected the interior of the residence to be quite luxurious, but once he saw it he was underwhelmed.

"This... is quite simple..." Lin Mu said upon seeing the plain things in the residence.

There was nary an item that could be called as luxurious here. The furniture was made out of basic wood and some of it was made from stone. He saw the teapot and teacups which were made from clay, and then the set of brushes that were made out of donkey hair.

"Hmm... this woman is rather sober." Xukong said upon witnessing it.

"Indeed. Even the peak master Yi Deng's residence in Wu Lim city was much better than this. Except for the high concentration of spirit Qi in the air, there is no luxury here." Lin Mu agreed.

Lin Mu saw Shaoyan Qianyu enter a pill refinement room and begin her work. There were already a lot of herbs kept in the room along with other materials like minerals, beast parts, and natural treasures.

There was also a black cauldron kept in the center of the room, on which there were many runes carved. The cauldron looked old, but a faint medicinal fragrance could be felt coming from it. It was evident that this was a pill cauldron that had been used for pill refinement for a long time.

"It's a Dark Iron Alchemical Cauldron. It's a rather simple type of a cauldron but it's compatible with nearly any type of pill. Still, with the large number of runes that have been carved into it, the cauldron is no less than a high grade spirit tool." Xukong explained.

"I see..." Lin Mu said as he watched Shaoyan Qianyu begin her work.

She flipped her palm and closed her eyes. A few seconds later wisps of spirit Qi rose from her palm and then started to condense together before forming into ring like shape. The wisps kept on collapsing within themselves and then they ignited.

"Whoa... a blue flame?"

### **Chapter 500 - Vitalizing Red Lingzhi**

Lin Mu looked at the blue flame that was burning above Shaoyan Qianyu's palm. He could tell that it was a Qi flame, but it was quite different from his own that he had ignited before when he was purging the impurities from his body.

His Qi flame was yellow in color but this one was blue. Another thing that was different was the method by which Shaoyan Qianyu had ignited it. The level of compression was much higher than his.

"What is this senior?" Lin Mu questioned.

"That is an intermediate rank Qi flame. It is better than the low rank Qi flame that you made. An intermediate rank Qi flame is one of the basic requirements for Peak rank pills." Xukong answered.

"I see... wait does that mean she is about to refine a peak rank pill?!" Lin Mu wondered.

"Hmm... could be, why don't you wait and see." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu nodded his head and watched as Shaoyan Qianyu began to refine. She opened the lid of the cauldron with her spirit sense and levitated it to the side. She then picked up a few spirit herbs and dropped them inside.

Then she placed her palm onto the cauldron and the blue flame started swirling around the cauldron, heating it up rapidly. In less than thirty seconds, the bottom of the cauldron was already red hot.

*~shua~*

Smoke was released from the top of the cauldron as the herbs in it were getting burned. But they did not burn up directly, rather they first started to shrink due to the heat which caused them to release their juices.

These juices were able to bear the heat better than the herbs themselves and dripped to the center of the cauldron. Once the juice of the herbs was completely released, the herbs themselves turned into ash due to the intense heat.

But just as the ash was about to fall back into the juice, Shaoyan Qianyu flicked her other hands and executed a hand seal, causing a gust of wind to swirl inside the cauldron. This gust of wind swept away the ash out of the cauldron and deposited it into a small basket at the side.

But the function of the wind did not end just here. The wind also dissipated some of the excess heat of the cauldron and prevented the juices from getting burned. The woman then controlled the blue flames again and reduced their intensity.

She picked up a few more ingredients and tossed them into the cauldron, using the same method as before. But there was still a difference here, such that the timings and periods of cooling were different. Even the time at which the herbs were added changed.

Some of the herbs were refined to extract their juices, while some of them were allowed to directly mix with the juice at the bottom of the cauldron. For some, the ash was removed while for others the ash was allowed to mix with the juice.

Overall, Lin Mu got to witness the different methods that were used in the field of Alchemical Pill refinement. He paid his full attention to this, even though he knew he was spending the precious time he had to check the other vaults.

This was not something he could witness often and thus did not want to miss out on it. Besides Pill refinement was something that even Senior Xukong did not know much about. Even if he knew some theories behind it, he actually did not know how to refine alchemical pills.

Thus Lin Mu watched Shaoyan Qianyu refine with rapt attention. Two hours had already passed and she had used up a lot of herbs and other materials. Then finally came the turn of the ingredient that was kept in the brocade box.

She carefully opened the brocade box and pulled out a large red mushroom from it. It was the size of a palm and was as thick as a finger.

"Is that... Vitalizing Red Lingzhi?" Lin Mu muttered upon recognizing the herb.

He had read about a lot of spirit herbs and alchemical materials from the records and could now identify them by name and appearance at least. This Vitalizing Red Lingzhi was a High rank spirit herb and took over five hundred years to grow.

If a cultivator were to consume this directly their injuries would heal rapidly and if they had experienced blood loss, it would also be remedied. The Vitalizing Red Lingzhi had the medicinal property of stimulating Blood production in the body.

Another thing that was different about the Vitalizing Red Lingzhi was that unlike other herbs, it did not have a specific aroma. Even if one placed it next to their nose and took a deep whiff, they would not smell anything. This was one of the reasons why it was hard to find it in the wild.

Even cultivating it artificially was a pain and took many decades of effort before the specific conditions required for it were made. Only after these conditions were met would the Vitalizing Red Lingzhi be able to grow.

Lin Mu had not seen any of them growing on the path here, which meant that this Vitalizing Red Lingzhi was likely found in the wild, which only increased its value by a great margin.

"What kind of a pill is she making such that it would require a valuable herb like this?" Lin Mu wondered.

While Lin Mu had learned about various herbs, he still did not know what kind of pills would be refined from them. There were simply far too many different formulae such that a single pill could have multiple permutations and combinations to make the same thing.

Lin Mu could only see the end result to know what she was making. He also did not dare to check what kind of a pill it could be, as that would mean taking his attention off her.

The woman stared at the herb in her hand carefully for a few seconds before finally dropping it in the cauldron.

But the moment the Vitalizing Red Lingzhi touched the liquid at the bottom, a violent reaction happened.

*~BOOM~*