

Walker 521

Chapter 521 - The Signs Of Heavenly Tribulation

Lin Mu observed Alchemist Bilao from one of the walls of the residence. The middle aged man was deep in meditation and had a still expression on his face.

From what Lin Mu knew, the man was over two hundred years already, but still looked quite young for his age. Until one reached the adult soul stage of the Nascent soul realm, their body would still age, albeit at a much slower rate.

For them, ten years were the same as one year, thus the time required for them to look one year older would take ten years. But for core condensation realm cultivators, it was less than that.

For them, three years was equivalent to one year. Thus considering that Bilao should have looked like someone who was in his sixties. But he looked like someone who was in his forties instead.

Lin Mu could only attribute this to him eating certain alchemical pills, which allowed him to maintain his condition far better than another cultivator. Once he reached the nascent soul realm, his aging would slow down to ten years, and he would be able to maintain this for far longer.

But that was not all he saw on Bilao. Lin Mu could see an almost imperceptible energy around Bilao.

'What is this...' Lin Mu wondered and squinted his eyes along with focusing his spirit sense.

This led him to use his spatial perception on instinct and he saw the faint spatial abnormalities around him.

"This... what is this... it's like the space around him is getting unstable?" Lin Mu muttered.

"Oh? You were able to see the spatial disturbance caused by an impending heavenly tribulation?" Xukong questioned.

"You know what that is, senior?!" Lin Mu asked.

"Indeed. What you is one of the signs of a heavenly tribulation." Xukong answered.

"One of the signs? But why would there be spatial disturbance caused by it?" Lin Mu asked, feeling confused.

"This is more like the heavenly tribulation observing Bilao and not letting him hide from it. Hiding from a heavenly tribulation is immensely difficult. Even if you hide within the void, the heavenly tribulation will break through the space itself to come to strike you." Xukong explained.

"Truly senior? Is it really this terrifying?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Of course. Why do you think nearly everyone fears it and wants to do a lot of preparations before attempting it?" Xukong replied.

"I see..." Lin Mu muttered and continued looking at Bilao.

Except for the spatial disturbance around Bilao, Lin Mu did not find anything of importance there. Alchemist Bilao wasn't even cultivating and was just meditating there with no change.

Though now that he had learned about the spatial disturbances, he wondered if there were any spatial disturbances around his body. Alas! No matter how much he looked, there was none around him. The spatial fabric was as strong as every around him.

~Sigh~

"Seems like I'm gonna have to wait much longer for a tribulation..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Having observed him enough, Lin Mu decided to leave and take a look at the rest of the places. He would have gone all the way to the vault that was at the very end had it not been for the presence of the patriarch.

No matter what, Lin Mu would have to wait till the heavenly tribulation started to be able to get to this vault. At that time, the patriarch and all the other elders will be at the tribulation platform and there were be next to no one watching the vaults.

With the scouting done, Lin Mu chose to return to the residence of Jiao Fang. The man was not here yet. Thus Lin Mu just sat down to cultivate for the time being. It took about five hours, after which Jiao Fang finally returned.

Lin Mu opened his eyes upon his arrival and spoke, "did you figure out anything?" Lin Mu questioned.

"I did. I was able to find out the time of the opening of both the vaults." Jiao Fang answered.

"You did? When is it?" Lin Mu questioned it.

"The original timing of their opening was in a week from now. But... I managed to make it much earlier." Jiao Fang answered it.

"And how did you do that?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Usually these vaults open once every month on a regular schedule or if someone needs something in an emergency they open it as well. Certain disciples are also allowed to ask for the vaults to be opened as well so that they can receive their reward from the sect.

Rewards such as these are not easy to come by and one needs to contribute greatly to the sect or use their merit points that the sect awards them for complete certain missions and tasks.

So what I did was basically make a couple of disciples who were eligible to receive their rewards from the sect speed it up." Jiao Fang answered.

"Making them use up their reward? How is this even possible?" Lin Mu questioned, feeling curious now.

"Well, it was much easier than I expected. The higher ranked core disciples of the sect are already on the edge due to the nearing breakthrough of Alchemist Bilao. Some of them are also particularly jealous, such that they want him to die in his heavenly tribulation.

I just had to put a few words into their ears such that they would become impatient to get their resources. Once they use them, they think that they can breakthrough and improve their chances of breaking through to the nascent soul realm themselves." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu was impressed by this and had no word for Jiao Fang except for the time at which the disciples would be doing this.

"So when exactly would they be opening the vaults?" Lin Mu asked.

"One of them will be opening early in the morning while the second one will be later in the night. It should be enough for you to complete each task." Jiao Fang stated.

Chapter 522 - The Two Vaults

With the plan now in place, Lin Mu decided to wait till then. He did stay at Jiao Fang's residence though, instead of that, he went back to that residence he had previously taken over. He was currently sitting on the mat and was absorbing the spirit Qi from it.

Seeing that he had a rather large amount of spirit Qi supply, Lin Mu just decided to take this chance to further refine the range of his spirit sense. He failed many times during the night that made his spirit sense collapse, but with the nearly unlimited supply, he was able to rebuild it to its previous range once again.

Little by little, it started to increase in range with each failure. With this uninterrupted supply of spirit Qi, Lin Mu could freely practice with the spirit sense and didn't have to worry about not having a spirit sense in the time of distress.

By the time for the opening of the vault came in the morning, Lin Mu had already refined his spirit sense to a maximum range of six hundred. This was a massive increase and Lin Mu didn't know if he would be able to replicate their progress in a short time again.

~huu~

He exhaled a breath and muttered. "this will only help me more now..."

The jade slip in Lin Mu's spatial ring stirred and he withdrew it.

"It's me Jiao Fang. The core disciple has left the complex they live in. You will have to take this time to observe the formations of the vault." Jiao Fang spoke.

"I understand. I'll leave right now." Lin Mu said before blinking away.

He quickly left the residence and entered a path that led to the courtyards of the inner court disciples. Once he was there, he went hoards the location of the vault, which was already known to him now.

Upon reaching the vault, Lin Mu kept hiding behind on the spots in the ground as no one was here yet. But in the distance, he could see a couple of people heading toward it.

"Ah, seems like I'm just early this time..." Lin Mu said to himself.

He saw that the disciple was not alone and even a junior sect elder was following him around. But when Lin Mu saw the face of the elder, he could tell that he had an expression of jealousy.

Jealousy was something he had grown good at recognizing by now. It was evident that this elder was not happy about this disciple taking whatever treasure they were going to take.

"Stand here, I'll open the vault. And remember no funny business..." The junior elder said, before taking out a small formation plate and checking it.

Even if a disciple had gotten rewards normally the man would not ever paid any mind to it. But here he was observing a good for nothing junior taking the best techniques of the sect.

That's right, the reward that had been chosen by him was nothing by a spirit tool. The elder held out the identity badge of his own and held it out in front of his body.

Then... it happed.

~huu~

The formations surrounding the vault started unraveling, and Lin Mu watched it with rapt attention. Only when five minutes passed and the formations were all open was the disciple able to enter the formation.

Lin Mu continued observing as he knew it was going to take a relatively rare technique that may be hard to get in the sect. During this time he did his best to comprehend these formations and by the time the inner court disciple returned, about thirty minutes had already passed.

~harrumph~

"Took you long enough..." The junior elder stated.

The elder didn't know what the disciple had gotten into the vault and could only act like this. He knew that even with a low grade technique he won't be able to get that from the disciple unless he was willing to break a lot of rules.

Taking out the identity badge again, the elder closed the vault behind his back. The two of them went either separate ways, and Lin Mu returned to his temporary residence in the sect as well. Upon reaching it, he got a notification from Jiao Fang.

Jiao Fang reached to him on the jade slip and asked him if everything had gone well on not. Seeing that Lin Mu was back, he reckoned it was.

"Yes. It worked just as you said. I'm now much more confident in opening the formations on my own." Lin Mu replied.

Jiao Fang nodded his head and stopped the link.

~huu~

"May as well continue refining my spirit sense, seeing I got a few hours to the next opening of the second vault." Lin Mu muttered to himself before sitting down cross legged on the prayer mat.

He raised the limit of the limiter formation and allowed his body to be doused in spirit Qi. Time passed and finally, it was evening when the second disciple would be opening the second vault of the Main peak.

Lin Mu left before Jiao Fang even reminded him to be ready for it and left for the second vault. He waited for the disciple to come as well but saw that someone else came before them.

The person was one of the elders he had seen in the elder's compound.

The elder came to a stop in front of the vault and waited, evidently for the disciple to come.

"Sorry for making you wait, elder!" A voice came from the side.

Lin Mu's gaze went there instantly as he seemed to have recognized the voice. The voice was that of a woman, and it was someone that Lin Mu recognized.

"Ye Zi Jin? Why is she here? Don't tell me... she's the disciple who wants to get resources from the vault. Since this is the second vault, then it has spirit tools kept in it. Some of them should be at the high grade too..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Unlike the previous elder and disciple, this elder was much composed and respectfully nodded to Ye Zi Jin.

Chapter 523 - An Opportunity?

Lin Mu watched on as he saw the elder and Ye Zi Jin talk.

"So you finally decided to use that chance to get a weapon?" The elder asked.

"Yes, elder. I reckon this is the right time. With Alchemist Bilao's eventual breakthrough, the power structure of the sect will change. Especially with the new peak that will be built for him." Ye Zi Jin replied.

"So you know..." The elder muttered.

"Yes... It is no longer a secret, elder. Many disciples know of the sect patriarch's plan. It will also affect the pill peak the most." Ye Zi Jin stated.

~Sigh~

"That is true. Till now the pill peak was the only one that specialized in manufacturing pills, but now with the peak alchemist Bilao is getting, there will be two pill peaks. The benefits that the pill peak got till now are bound to reduce." The elder said.

"Indeed, senior. Right now the best thing I can do is improve my own personal strength... and that of my husband." Ye Zi Jin spoke.

The elder nodded his head at this and did not speak further. Lin Mu also heard her reasoning and realized that it was valid. It was obvious that with the creation of a new peak, that too one that specialized in the refinement of pills, the previous pill peak would suffer.

Alchemist Bilao was also considered to be talented in pill refinement. Some even said he had already exceeded peak master Yi Jing. The only thing that he was restricted by currently was his cultivation base, but once that was resolved, there was nothing to stop him from growing.

With their conversations done, Ye Zi Jin went into the vault. This time the elder simply waved his hand which was holding the key to open the vault's door. Unlike the other elder, Lin Mu could tell this one favored Ye Zi Jin.

Lin Mu observed the formations of the vault and saw that they were quite similar to the one before, with there being a few minor differences. But it was these very differences that could cost Lin Mu a lot of time when he actually got to opening the vaults.

Unlike the previous disciple who had taken over thirty minutes to choose, Ye Zi Jin merely took five minutes before she walked out of the vault. She was not carrying anything which meant that she had stored whatever she got from there into her spatial storage tool.

"Farewell elder." Ye Zi Jin said before leaving the area.

The elder nodded his head once again while closing the door of the vault. He then took out a spirit sword and flew away on it, his destination unknown. Having obtained the information that Lin Mu wanted, he went back to the residence that he had occupied.

~hoo~

He took a deep breath as he laid down on the bed. Lin Mu had not slept properly for a few days and had spent a lot of time in observing the formations. This greatly taxed his mind, and he was now mentally tired.

"Now the only thing left is to wait..." Lin Mu muttered to himself as he fell asleep.

Inside the ring, Xukong had been observing Lin Mu the entire time.

"His progress with the formations is at a great pace... still this is mostly with modifications and not actual creation. He will need practical experience before he would be able to become an actual formation master." Xukong muttered to himself as the spatial energy streaks stirred around him.

'Though with the information he will probably get from these vaults, he should have enough to get started on formation creation.' Xukong thought to himself before busying himself in his cultivation.

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The moon disappeared and the sun rose up into the sky. It was finally daytime and Lin Mu had a rather rude awakening.

"THE PEAK MASTER OF THE HERB PEAK IS GIVING AN OPPORTUNITY!" A cacophony of shouts could be heard coming from the outside.

"Ugh... what is up with them all? This place is usually calm. Hang on... ah! I forgot to activate the isolation formation before sleeping. No wonder the voice was able to reach me." Lin Mu said with a groan.

He rubbed his eyes and pushed the hair that had fallen across his face.

'May as well check what this is all about...' He thought before leaving the house.

Outside, he could see that a lot of disciples were running around while some talked in groups. Lin Mu causally picked one of these groups and started to listen in on their conversation.

"Are you going to participate too?" One of the disciples asked his companion.

"Of course I am. Even if I fail, there is no penalty, and if I get even to the minimum level the peak master wants, I'll still get some rewards." The other disciple said.

"That is true, no matter how small a reward is a reward. Besides, the peak master has not set any high requirement for the test. Anyone who can ignite a Qi flame can participate."

Lin Mu's ears perked up at this and now he was wondering what kind of opportunity was this, that so many disciples would be excited. While he was curious, he didn't dare to ask them. It was fine if he was listening to them on the passive, but if he actively talked to them and they recognized him, it could be problematic.

Besides, he now had someone whom he could ask anything related to the sect. Lin Mu thus went to the residence of Jiao Fang, but it seemed to be locked. Without any sense of privacy, Lin Mu phased into the residence.

"Huh... he's really not here?" Lin Mu said upon seeing the empty room.

He took out the jade slip and messaged Jiao Fang.

"Where are you?" Lin Mu asked.

He had expected there to be a quick answer, but nothing of that sort happened. He was just about to send a second message when the jade slip hummed on its own.

Chapter 524 - The Qi Flame Control Test

Lin Mu held onto the jade slip and saw that it was Jiao Fang responding finally.

"I'm at the Herb Peak, the peak master is doing a competition of Qi flame control." Jiao Fang answered.

"Qi flame control? What do you mean?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Just come over, I'll explain it. Besides, the prize for the one that is first is something that would interest you too." Jiao Fang replied before stopping the link.

Lin Mu furrowed his brows, but then decided to go see the man who was acting strangely. Lin Mu sank into the ground and blinked his way to the herb peak. It didn't take him long to find Jiao Fang as he was standing in one of the areas near the warehouse, along with hundreds of other disciples.

He messaged Jiao Fang telling him that he was here, and the man turned around to spot him. Nudging with his eyes, he directed Lin Mu to a more secluded spot.

"So what is it that's exactly happening?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Peak master Shaoyan Qianyu had some progress in her alchemical pill refinement skills and thus she has decided to celebrate it by giving the disciples an opportunity. She is holding a tournament and those who are successful in satisfying her would get rewards.

There are many rewards corresponding to the capability displayed by the disciple. All they need to do is show their proficiency in Qi flame control and they would get ranked. The better it is the higher the rank and the reward." Jiao Fang answered.

"What kind of rewards are there? You mentioned that it would interest me?" Lin Mu asked.

"Indeed. While there are many rewards ranging from spirit herbs to alchemical pills, the reward for the first place is what I think you would like. It is something that you have been looking for all this time... a key to the vault." Jiao Fang answered.

"A key? Why would she give the key to any disciple? Even as a reward that would be too much." Lin Mu said, finding it a bit ridiculous.

"Of course it's not a permanent key. Or rather I should have said it's a temporary access token. The token would allow someone to enter the vault of the herb peak once. Then once they are inside they are allowed to pick any one thing that they want." Jiao Fang explained.

While this did pick Lin Mu's interest, he still wanted more details on this.

"Who will they determine that only one item is taken? And what is the time frame on taking the item from the vault?" Lin Mu questioned.

"The formation array of the vault will be configured such that the person can only take one item from it, no matter what. As for the time frame... there is none. It is similar to the two disciples who got the items from the vaults yesterday." Jiao Fang explained.

"Hmm... so one can go and access the vault anytime, right? Even if no elder is present there?" Lin Mu questioned.

"An elder needs to be there to let you into the compound, of course. But I believe you have no such restriction with your capabilities." Jiao Fang said with a knowing look.

Lin Mu kept a straight face and realized that this was indeed true. If he could really get a token, he would be able to get to the vault when everyone was observing the heavenly tribulation. As for the restriction on the items, he didn't care for that as much. The vault door being opened would already take away a majority of the difficulty that he had.

After the door was opened, Lin Mu was confident that he would be able to resolve the rest of the formations much quickly. This would save him a massive amount of time. If he considered the situation now, he would have free access to two of the four vaults that he needed to rob.

"Tell me more about the tournament. More particularly about how the Qi flame control would be assessed?" Lin Mu asked.

"The assessment is mostly automatic. You would enter the testing hall and the formations that are present in it would record your skills. You will simply need to do actions that the formation instructs you to do. It will measure the time needed for you to do them and also the efficiency." Jiao Fang replied.

Lin Mu liked this method of assessment. At least this way, he would not be noticed by others as much.

"And what kind of skills do you think would be required for one to get the first rank?" Lin Mu questioned.

"At the very least you would need to have Qi flame control that allows one to refine mid grade alchemical pills." Jiao Fang answered.

As soon as Lin Mu heard his words, he knew that this was not a venture he would be able to undertake. While he was indeed capable of igniting his Qi flame, he had no practical experience in refining pills. And there was no way he would be able to learn it in a day. If it were formations, he would have tried it, but even those he had learned over two years.

"Though... there is a way to get the first rank instantly." Jiao Fang added.

Lin Mu raised his eyes and knew that there must be a catch to this.

"If a disciple can ignite an intermediate rank Qi flame. As long as they can do this, they don't even need to do the assessment, the formation will instantly give them the first rank." Jiao Fang explained.

"An intermediate Qi flame... the blue flame," Lin Mu muttered.

"Indeed. But I doubt this method would be possible for you or any disciple here for that matter. That condition is only set by the peak master as a formality. Perhaps only alchemist Bilao would be qualified enough to refine an intermediate ranked Qi flame in addition to the other peak masters." Jiao Fang said, thinking that Lin Mu was disappointed.

While Lin Mu looked calm on the outside, internally he was rejoicing.

Chapter 525 - Lin Mu's Plan For The Competition

Unlike the other disciples who would have to learn how to ignite an intermediate ranked Qi flame by constant practice along with refining alchemical pills, Lin Mu had directly seen it being used before.

But it was not as if the other disciples could replicate the same by just watching an intermediate ranked Qi flame. No, just in order to reach that point, they would require great control over their spirit Qi, and along with it, them having a massive store of it.

If they didn't have a large amount of spirit Qi, they would simply be unable to ignite the intermediate ranked Qi flame. Lin Mu thought had many times more spirit Qi than what an average peak stage core condensation realm cultivator had. In fact, he had enough spirit Qi that he would be able to compare with a child soul stage nascent soul realm cultivator.

The only thing he would be missing would be their ability to manipulate the spirit Qi in the environment around them and their faster regeneration of spirit Qi.

Lin Mu had confidence in himself that even if he was unable to learn how to refine alchemical pills, he would still be able to ignite an intermediate ranked Qi flame at the very least.

But then came the question. Would he even have enough time to learn how to ignite an intermediate ranked Qi flame?

"How long would this competition be available for and when would its results be announced?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Peak master Shaoyan Qianyu has said that the competition would be available till Alchemist Bilao had his breakthrough and the heavenly tribulation came. Though it is likely most disciples would end up finishing the competition before that since they only have one chance each." Jiao Fang answered.

Lin Mu nodded his head and knew that if he had a few days, he would surely be able to do this.

"Alright... I'll see what I can do." Lin Mu said.

"So you're gonna participate in the competition?" Jiao Fang questioned.

While he could see that Lin Mu was interested in the competition, he actually didn't know if Lin Mu could even ignite a Qi flame.

"I'll think of it." Lin Mu said before going away.

Jiao Fang didn't ask him any further either and went back to the front. After all, he was an alchemist too and wanted a chance at the items in the vault. While he knew it would be quite difficult to get the first place, he was sure that he could get into the top five.

Jiao Fang also didn't care that he already had a lot of resources that he had gathered from Yulong's inheritance. For him, the more he got the better it would be. Thus, there was no way he was going to let go of this opportunity.

Lin Mu had returned to his residence and sat down on the prayer mat which had the Qi gathering formation set up on it.

"Hmm... with the continuous infusion of the spirit Qi, I shouldn't have any problem..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He closed his eyes and chanted the severing heart sutra before checking his Dantian. He observed every part of it and slowly guided out some spirit Qi out of his Dantian. It traveled to his meridians before leaving out of his hands.

The spirit Qi started to compress before it suddenly ignited in the air. The flame looked vigorous but after a minute of burning it started to get unstable. Another five minutes later, the flames started flickering before snuffing out.

"Hmm... I need to learn how to keep a stable output." Lin Mu realized.

He repeated the process and ignited the Qi flame again. And during all this, his body was also absorbing the spirit Qi that was being emanated from the prayer mat below him constantly. This kept his Dantian at its maximum capacity the entire time.

Lin Mu spent about two days like this, and his control over the Qi flame had gotten much better. But this control was only interns of keeping the flame ignited, not the kind of control that was needed for the refinement of pills.

~huu~

Lin Mu took a deep breath and relaxed his body.

"I should check what happened in these two days..." Lin Mu thought to himself before leaving the residence.

He went around the sect and listened to the conversations of the various disciples, learning of all that occurred during these two days. Most of it was mundane except for the competition of the Herb peak.

Apparently, over eighty percent of disciples of the sect who were eligible had already taken part and were now just waiting for the final results. As for those that were remaining, they were either not going to attempt it or were still preparing.

Having learned enough, Lin Mu went to check on alchemist Bilao. While there was no news about him from the disciples, Lin Mu could just go and check how he was doing on his own. After all, he had a better way of knowing if the heavenly tribulation was close for him or not.

Lin Mu swiftly made his way to the place where Alchemist Bilao was staying at. This time Lin Mu didn't need as long to reach there as he had experienced from before. Though he could tell that the security had been lessened here.

"Did they go for the competition, too? Or something like that?" Lin Mu wondered.

Feeling a bit strange, Lin Mu decided to check out the nearby situation as well. He went around the different blocks, including the place where Ye Zi Jin and Wu Teng lived. But the thing was, only Alchemist Bilao's residence had its security reduced.

"Something is definitely wrong." Lin Mu realized.

He made his way back to Alchemist Bilao's residence and phased inside. His spirit sense spread around, but it detected something else that was not there before.

"What's this... formations?" Lin Mu said, as his brows furrowed.

He quickly entered the room where Bilao was meditating and saw the scene of a blade that was about to pierce the man's neck.

Chapter 526 - Assassination Attempt

Lin Mu almost froze upon seeing the shocking scene. There was a masked man standing behind Bilao who was calmly mediating without a care in the world.

The thing is, he should have woken up but there was no spirit Qi fluctuation coming from the masked man either.

Lin Mu's mind worked at the speed of lighting, and he disappeared from his position before appearing beside the masked man. He extended his hands and quickly grabbed onto the masked man. One hand was on his head and the other on the sword blade that was approaching Bilao's neck.

A brown glow appeared on Lin Mu's hand as it defended against the sharp edge of the blade. The masked man though, was absolutely bewildered. Out of nowhere, someone had appeared beside him and grabbed onto him.

He tried to resist, but the man's grip was extremely strong, not letting him budge. His struggle was short lived though, as in the next moment he felt like he lost control of his body and his vision went dark.

The masked man disappeared from the real world and Lin Mu immediately used fade to enter the parallel world.

"WHO!!!" Alchemist Bilao suddenly woke up with a shout as he felt the movement of spirit Qi in his room.

His eyes darted around as he looked for an intruder. His shout was loud enough that the guards that were outside came rushing in soon.

"QUICK! TO ALCHEMIST BILAO'S ROOM!" The guards shouted.

They all barged into the room only to find it empty except for Bilao who had a confused expression on his face.

"Senior Bilao, did something happen?" The guard asked, seeing no one in the room.

Bilao didn't answer right away and spread his spirit sense around, unable to find anyone there.

"No... nothing." Bilao answered.

"Why did you shout then?" The guards questioned.

"I thought I felt someone, but no one is here. Must've been my imagination." Bilao answered.

The guard leader didn't feel at ease though, and asked the others to check the area. A few minutes later, they all came back to report.

"What did you find?" The guard leader asked.

"Sir, a lot of the other guards who were supposed to patrol the streets are missing. At least the ones in our block are gone." The guards reported.

"WHAT! Where are they?" The guard leader asked.

"We don't know, sir. I've already asked the other guards from the blocks and they don't know either." The guards replied.

The guard leader's expression fell, and so did alchemist Bilao's.

'Did someone really enter?' Bilao wondered.

Lin Mu who had just saved Bilao though, was quickly getting away as fast as possible from the area. By the time the duration of fade ended, he had already reached the area near his residence. Though he had overshot and appeared in one of the disciple's residences.

That took inside one of the walls.

~Crash~

The wall that Lin Mu appeared inside was suddenly broken apart as Lin Mu's body resisted it. A brown glow was visible on his body as it shielded him from any damage. But Lin Mu didn't pay attention to this first. He checked if there was anyone inside with his spirit sense and took a breath of relief when there was found to be none.

~pew~

"That was a close call..." Lin Mu muttered to himself as he looked at the broken part of the wall.

"This... I didn't know the Mortal Strengthening scripture would work like this too." Lin Mu said, feeling surprised.

If he had normally appeared inside a wall or any other place, while Phase was not active, he would have definitely sustained some flesh injuries as the molecules of the wall would have tried to push his body's molecules.

"Seems like the Mortal Strengthening scripture is good as a safety net for when you use Fade." Xukong said.

"Maybe for weaker materials like this wooden wall. If it were something stronger, I'm pretty sure I would have gotten injured." Lin Mu replied.

"Still, it is a good addition that you got to know. Though you should probably leave this place." Xukong suggested.

Lin Mu simply nodded his head and blinked to his own residence. Once he reached there, he looked outside to see if anyone had come to check on the residence that he had just damaged.

Thankfully, it seemed like no one had listened to the noise made by him and he was still undiscovered.

"Looks like someone does not want Alchemist Bilao to live." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu narrowed his eyes and nodded.

"Don't know what kind of a storm would have started if Bilao died there. Our plan would have definitely failed had Bilao been killed." Lin Mu said.

Lin Mu then looked at his hands that were still glowing with the brown light of the mortal strengthening scripture.

"Thought appearing inside a wall did drain a lot of durability of the armor. It's barely at fifty percent." Lin Mu said.

"Oh? Lin Mu you should take a look at this person." Xukong suddenly said in a surprised tone.

Lin Mu then remembered that he still had the masked man inside the mysterious ring. He didn't have many choices back then. He could either quickly kill the man there with an attack or restrain him.

But the thing was Lin Mu could not let out any spirit Qi fluctuations that were strong, thus he had chosen to forcefully put the masked man inside the ring.

Though Lin Mu knew the man would be killed if he did that. But this was not something he was bothered with, since he was intending to kill another person anyway.

Lin Mu willed it and the body of the masked man appeared on the ground, but his mask was half broken, evidently due to Lin Mu gripping his head too hard. But through the broken part Lin Mu could see the appearance of the person.

"It can't be..." Lin Mu muttered and quickly took off the rest of the mask.

"Ye Zi Jin!"

Chapter 527 - Ye Zi Jin's Scheme

Lying in front of Lin Mu was none other than Ye Zi Jin, the daughter of peak master Yi Deng. Lin Mu didn't know what to make of it at first, but then a few seconds later, he was able to connect the dots.

"Ye Zi Jin said something back then at the vault... so this is what she meant by gaining power..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Lin Mu could understand the anxiety of Ye Zi Jin and the peak master, but he had not thought that she would go to this extent. Another thing that bothered him was that Gu Yao should have had control over Ye Zi Jin as well.

'Was this his doing, perhaps? No... it wouldn't make sense. Why would he lose a potential Nascent soul realm cultivator like that?' Lin Mu wondered.

"Seems like when Gu Yao has not given any command to his servants actively, they will act in their own capacity. I don't think peak master Yi Deng was behind this either." Xukong suggested.

"That does seem like now, senior. But still... this is quite bad." Lin Mu said, remembering that Ye Zi Jin was the wife of Wu Teng and sister-in-law of Wu Hei.

Wu Hei was someone Lin Mu considered to be his friend now and he didn't know how he would react to this.

~Sigh~

"This is a mess..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He chanted the calming heart sutra to normalize his state of mind before taking another look at Ye Zi Jin. Now that he thought of it, he had not recognized her to be a woman back at the residence of Bilao.

Even now he could not see her figure, that should have been of a woman. He pulled the outer robes apart and saw the bandages that had been appeared around her body to hide her bosom.

"No wonder..." Lin Mu said.

"Though wait, how did she get into the residence and what about the other guards?" Lin Mu wondered.

"I think the answer to this should be what she got from that vault. Whatever spirit tool it was, it should be something that helps hide one's spirit Qi fluctuation or something along the lines of that." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu checked her body, but could not find anything. She did not even have any spatial storage treasure with her. But then he spotted something that he had missed at the very start.

"The mask!" Lin Mu exclaimed.

He picked up the broken mask from the side and checked it. The mask was quite plain and had some common features of a man. But the one thing that was different was the small stone that was embedded at the forehead of the mask.

Lin Mu probed this stone with his spirit sense and realized that it was like a quicksand, pulling his spirit sense in.

"What is this?" Lin Mu wondered as he looked at the stone closely.

He also checked the rest of the mask, but it was made out of normal wood. Even the paint on it was normal.

"I think I know what that stone is. It should be a Seventh Veil Mirror stone." Xukong spoke.

"A Seventh Veil Mirror stone?" Lin Mu asked.

"The stone in itself is a natural treasure and has the properties of absorbing spirit Qi along with spirit sense. If someone has it on their body, it would passively absorb their spirit Qi fluctuations which will make them better at hiding.

And if someone tries to probe them with spirit sense, the spirit sense would be absorbed by the stone as well. Making it seem as if there is nothing there." Xukong explained.

"Won't that make it too powerful then? Shouldn't this be enough to make it qualified for the top level vault?" Lin Mu questioned.

"No... the Seventh Veil Mirror stone has its own limitations. It cannot work continuously and can only absorb a certain amount before it will stop working. After that, it needs to dissipate the spirit Qi to start working again.

The time limit for it is usually short, around ten-fifteen minutes. But... if it is inscribed with formations its powers can be amplified and more features can be added to it. This mask should be a spirit tool that was made with it and the formations laid on it.

But your grip broke it..." Xukong answered with a chuckle.

Lin Mu felt a bit embarrassed as he had just destroyed a high grade spirit tool just like that. It was actually something that could have come in handy to him as well.

"No use crying over spilled milk. Though I need to think of what to do with Ye Zi Jing now." Lin Mu stated.

Lin Mu sat in silence for a while before deciding that it was best if he kept his head to himself for the time being. He would have to assess the situation in the sect first and see how the reactions of the others were.

If Ye Zi Jin had acted like this, it was likely that there was someone assisting her. It was probably some other elder, or the disciples near the area should not have disappeared.

'The truth should come out in a bit. I'm sure they didn't expect Ye Zi Jin to disappear after the assassination attempt. They will just think the attempt failed and Ye Zi Jin went into hiding or something like that. So I shouldn't have much trouble from the side of Ye Zi Jin's allies.' Lin Mu analyzed.

Having thought of that, Lin Mu went outside the residence and did an assessment of the situation. And just as he had expected, there was an alarm currently in the sect. Though it was about the disappearance of the disciples who were guarding Alchemist Bilao.

After taking a round in the sect, Lin Mu returned to the residence.

'Should finish up the practice...' Lin Mu thought to himself as he ignited the Qi flame in his hand once again.

Chapter 528 - Changes And The Test

Two days passed like this and Lin Mu finally had some progress with the intermediate ranked Qi flame.

Currently, one could see that there was a large amount of spirit Qi moving around his arm. It was in the shape of a circle and was revolving around itself, trying to compress as much as it could.

At first, it was a thick circle that was as wide as a wok. But then the circle started getting smaller and its thickness also started decreasing. The more it decreased, the stronger its aura got.

Sweat dripped down from Lin Mu's forehead as he focused on the spirit Qi.

"Come on... just a bit more..." he murmured.

The ring kept on shrinking until finally it became the size of a coin. And then... it ignited.

~Shua~

A bright flash appeared in front of Lin Mu's eyes as the room suddenly heated up. A blue glow replaced the flash as the intermediate ranked flame burned on his palm.

A smile appeared on Lin Mu's face as his eyes trained on the intermediate ranked flames.

"Congratulations, you truly did it." Xukong praised.

"Thank you, senior. But it's just for show now. I can't use it for anything, if I try to do anything it will fade away." Lin Mu replied.

"Mmhmm. But this should be enough for the test. Even nascent soul realm cultivators would find it difficult to do what you have just done. This was only possible for you because you have never used a cultivation technique and have used the most primitive method of absorbing spirit Qi.

The control you have gained over spirit Qi is impeccable due to that. The other cultivators who use cultivation techniques won't be able to do this as they are stuck in their rigid paths. They would need quite a lot of comprehension to do the same." Xukong stated.

Lin Mu finally realized the meaning of what senior Xukong had said a long time ago when he had asked if he was doing wrong. At that time Xukong had told him that he should just continue to follow what he was doing and that it would have a lot of hidden benefits in the future.

Lin Mu was finally getting to see those benefits now.

"I should get ready for the test. Though I need to check up on the situation first." Lin Mu said before talking out the communication jade slip.

He contacted Jiao Fang, who picked up quite quickly this time.

"Are you not going to participate in the competition?" Jiao Fang asked straightaway.

"I am. I'm finally done with the preparations." Lin Mu stated.

"Then come quick. Most of the people have finished and since it was taking too long, some of the disciples asked for Peak master Shaoyan Qianyu to make changes to speed it up. She has thus instructed the ones who have not taken part yet to declare if they are just preparing or never going to participate.

Today is the last day for that and most of their responses have come. If you don't report soon, they will end it most likely." Jiao Fang said.

"Didn't you say they were going to wait till alchemist Bilao's breakthrough?" Lin Mu asked, feeling curious.

"That was a thing of the past. Since his guards were arrested for dereliction of duty, things have changed. Even the elder who asked them to change their posts has been detained by the discipline hall." Jiao Fang answered.

Hearing this, Lin Mu instantly understood that this must be the elder that was behind Ye Zi Jin or was perhaps assisting her.

"He probably took the blame for it so as to save Ye Zi Jin. And since no assassination actually happened, they have only detained them for now. Xukong suggested.

"Hmm... that is likely." Lin Mu replied.

"Well then, you should head on quick. I think even Alchemist Bilao is going to have his breakthrough soon." Jiao Fang said.

"Alright." Lin Mu replied before putting the jade slip away and leaving the residence.

Since he had been continuously absorbing the spirit Qi from the prayer mat, his Dantian had been at its full capacity always. This saved Lin Mu from spending extra time in recuperation. He sank down into the ground and quickly made his way to the herb peak, where he emerged from a tree that was in a relatively secluded area.

He headed to the area where the testing buildings have been set up. He had already heard of the address and Lin Mu only needed to use his badge to gain entry to it.

"Seems like most people are just waiting now." Lin Mu said as he saw the short line.

There was barely anyone waiting for their turn to enter one of the five testing buildings. Lin Mu joined one of the lines and in less than two minutes he was ready to enter the testing building.

He held up his badge and the formation of the testing building scanned it before letting him in.

"Please follow the instructions show on the mirror." A plain voice suddenly said upon Lin Mu's entry.

Inside the room, Lin Mu saw that there was a mirror set up on one of the walls. A few lines were written on it, which were the techniques of Qi flame control that he was supposed to do.

~huu~

"Let's get started." Lin Mu said as he extended his arm.

For two minutes, he was only focused on condensing his spirit Qi.

"Please start the test in one minute or you will be considered having failed." The plain voice stated.

Lin Mu gritted his teeth and sped up the condensation process. The ring of spirit Qi started to shrink at a quicker speed than before and finally reached the size of a coin.

~shua~

As soon as the blue flame lit up on Lin Mu's palm, the formation arrays of the room started ringing.

"INTERMEDIATE RANKED QI FLAME DETECTED! Test passed.

Rank obtained: First!"

Hearing the announcement, Lin Mu took a breath of relief and the intermediate ranked flame snuffed out. But at the same moment that he did this, up on the top of the herb peak, Shaoyan Qianyu opened her eyes that were filled with shock and excitement.

"Someone actually did it?!"

Chapter 529 - Shaoyan Qianyu's Surprise

When Shaoyan Qianyu had sent igniting an intermediate ranked Qi flame as a qualifying factor as the first prize, she had only done so out of formality. This formality stemmed from an old rule where they were supposed to put an exceptional condition for passing a test like this.

So for this test of Qi flame control, Shaoyan Qianyu had chosen to put an intermediate ranked Qi flame, which basically only the peak masters could use. Even the elders of the sect were unable to do the same.

Thus virtually, there was no chance that a disciple would be able to do the same. Unless... there was a wild exception like the one that had just happened.

Shaoyan Qianyu stood up from her seat in her residence and left behind everything before flying to the location of the test. There she saw that the tests were nearly done and barely anyone was left now.

"Where is he? The results have not appeared on the main notice board yet, which means he has not left the site yet." Shaoyan Qianyu muttered to herself.

But she was also feeling a bit confused about all this. There was a hint of doubt within her heart whether it truly was a disciple or if the formation had malfunctioned. While she would be happy if it truly was a disciple, she knew it was quite unlikely.

Someone like that would be immensely talented and would have already been discovered. The sect patriarch himself would come forward to take that person in as a disciple if it ever so happened.

Quickly combing through the testing sites, she found the one which had sent out the alert.

"There he is!" Shaoyan Qianyu said before flying down.

The rest of the disciples finally noticed her when she descended. Before this, she was far too high for them to see. But now they were all in awe and were wondering why the peak master had come down from her abode.

But before anyone could say anything, they saw the peak master rushing to one of the testing sites. A young man had just walked out of the building and slight fatigue could be observed on his face.

"Halt!" Shaoyan Qianyu commanded.

Lin Mu who had just left the building, looked up at the woman who had just appeared. Upon seeing her he instantly realized what must have happened.

'Time to do as I planned.' Lin Mu thought to himself and took a deep breath.

"THIS UNWORTHY DISCIPLE GREETES THE PEAK MASTER!" Lin Mu greeted with the utmost respect.

Shaoyan Qianyu who had prepared her own string of questions, was stunned by this and almost forgot them.

"State your name, disciple," Shaoyan Qianyu asked.

"Peak master, before I do this would you listen to my request. I assure you it is not overbearing and I mean you no disrespect." Lin Mu hurriedly uttered.

A lot of eyes were currently trained on him, and he was trying his best to pretend to be confident. Upon hearing his words, Shaoyan Qianyu furrowed her brows but then nodded her head.

"Go ahead, ask." She stated.

"I only wish that we speak in private, peak master." Lin Mu replied.

Shaoyan Qianyu had thought of many things that she had expected him to ask, but this was not one of them. Thinking it to be quite reasonable and conducive to her own goals, she decided to agree.

"Alright, come on." Shaoyan Qianyu said before waving her hand.

~Huala~

A few formation runes appeared around Lin Mu and formed a platform below him. It then lifted him into the sky and followed behind Shaoyan Qianyu, who had taken the lead. Lin Mu probed the platform and could tell that it was part of the overall formation array of the herb peak.

It looked simple on its own, but when integrated with the entire array was complex. Its function was similar to that of a spirit tool, to allow a cultivator to fly. Though in this case, it was a temporary construct and would disappear in a bit.

The peak master took Lin Mu to the palace at the very top of the peak. Lin Mu had been here before of course, but still showed a look of interest, just to keep up appearances. Shaoyan Qianyu took a few gazes at him and was satisfied by his reaction.

This was one of her methods to coax Lin Mu into becoming part of the herb peak. It wasn't much, but she reckoned it was worth the effort even if she was unsure of his talent. The two of them landed in the garden of the palace where hundreds of spirit flowers were blooming.

"Sit." Shaoyan Qianyu directed towards a stone table that had stone chairs kept around it.

Lin Mu cupped his hands in ceremony before taking a seat, and Shaoyan did the same.

"Now tell me, why did you ask to speak in private?" Shaoyan Qianyu questioned.

"Forgive me for this insolence peak master, but I did this to keep my identity hidden." Lin Mu said.

"Oh? And why would you want to do something like this? Other disciples would prefer that their name spread across the sect so that they could get recognition." Shaoyan Qianyu asked.

"It is because I have sworn to not let myself be known until my goal has been fulfilled." Lin Mu stated.

"And what goal is this?" Shaoyan Qianyu asked again.

"To kill the killer of my family!" Lin Mu revealed.

Shaoyan Qianyu's face turned serious upon hearing this, and her gaze tensed.

"And this person you want revenge on... they're another disciple?" Shaoyan Qianyu questioned with apprehension.

"Yes, peak master. I cannot afford to let my name be revealed to them and I have already tried to keep a low presence in the sect all these years. I've been cultivating hard so that I can fulfill my goal and pay back the humiliation my family suffered." Lin Mu spoke with determination.

Shaoyan Qianyu could feel the power in his words and realized that there was probably a lot more to this than he let on.

Chapter 530 - Lin Mu's Act

A big question still stood for Shaoyan Qianyu; if a disciple was intending on harming another fellow disciple, she had to take an action for it.

But just to know the rest of the story, she decided to hold back.

"Tell me more." She said.

~huu~

Lin Mu took a deep breath and recited the story that he had prepared all this time. He had practiced this many times in his heart so that it was believable.

Overall, the story went like this:

He was Wu Lian, who came from a small village. His parents were killed by a disciple of the Tri Cauldron peony sect casually just because they offended him by not knowing his identity. After that the disciple humiliated him and stepped on him, telling him that trash like him who can never cultivate should know

his place. Time passed and Wu Lian took an oath that he would definitely take revenge on that disciple and had been diligently cultivating all this time.

If one were to hear it, they would find it to be quite generic and they would have heard it from a lot of storytellers that roamed the settlements. Shaoyan Qianyu also found all of it to be a bit too much and doubted it.

"So when is it that you will let your name be known?" She asked, just to entertain him a bit.

"When I reach the Nascent Soul realm." Lin Mu stated without hesitation.

Shaoyan Qianyu had a strange look in her eyes, which Lin Mu noticed quickly. Knowing what she was thinking, he closed his eyes for a moment before releasing his aura.

Suddenly the peak master's eyes went wide as she felt the full extent of his cultivation base.

"Absolute peak of the Core condensation realm...?" She muttered.

Lin Mu gently nodded his head and said, "I have been hiding my capabilities all this time so that my enemy does not notice me and try to kill me beforehand. He and his background are quite strong and I cannot go against them yet.

I hope the peak master understands and keeps my identity hidden." Lin Mu added.

Shaoyan Qianyu narrowed her eyes and asked, "this enemy of yours... is he related to some elder?"

"Indeed, peak master... he is... quite strong and his background even stronger." Lin Mu answered.

Shaoyan Qianyu almost face-palmed but managed to stop her to keep her appearance as the superior. Now she could honestly believe Lin Mu, as she knew of the people of the sect. She had been part of the sect for long enough to know how the elders behaved and how bad their offspring could be.

They were entitled and would act without a care in the world, when they went out of the sect. For them, commoners were less than dirt. Before she couldn't do much, even if she wanted to and thus could only ignore it.

She could understand Lin Mu's pain on a certain level, as she too was once a commoner.

~Sigh~

"Alright, I'll keep your identity hidden. But you need to show me how you ignited the intermediate ranked Qi flame. I want to confirm it myself before I can give you the reward token." Shaoyan Qianyu said.

"Of course, peak master." Lin Mu said with a smile, knowing that the plan had worked.

Had it not been for the intel Wu Hei had given Lin Mu on the backgrounds of the elders of the sect, Lin Mu would have been unable to come up with this plan. In the information that he was given it was said that peak master Shaoyan Qianyu was a cold woman but was not unjust.

She was of low birth and had become an elder over five hundred years ago. Thus Lin Mu built upon this point and appealed to the sympathy within her.

Lin Mu closed his eyes for a bit before extending his palm in front. Spirit Qi rose from his meridians and formed into a thick circle. It then kept on condensing within itself before finally a blue flame ignited with a flash.

"This..." Shaoyan Qianyu murmured.

'How did he? How does he know my method of igniting the intermediate ranked Qi flame? Unless... he comprehended on his own.' Shaoyan Qianyu thought to herself.

She was extremely sure that no disciple had ever seen her use this method before, except for the other peak masters and a few elders. Thus the only option left was that he had learned this on his own. This gave rise to a strange feeling within Shaoyan Qianyu's heart, and she didn't know what to think of it.

"That's enough." She said, and Lin Mu extinguished the flame.

~pew~

Lin Mu took a breath of relief while thinking, 'thankfully she asked to stop early or she would have seen I have no actual control over it.'

"That confirms it. You are indeed qualified to receive the reward." Shaoyan Qianyu said before retrieving the token for the first place.

She placed it on the table and Lin Mu picked it up.

"Thank you peak master, for understanding me. I shall not forget this grace." Lin Mu spoke.

"It is fine. Though once you are done, I want you to join the Herb peak." Shaoyan Qianyu added, taking the opportunity to nab him for her peak.

She could very well see that Lin Mu was obviously talented and would one day become a Nascent Soul realm cultivator himself. While she could not tell his age exactly, she reckoned that he was probably less than two hundred years old, which made him more talented than Alchemist Bilao.

Shaoyan Qianyu now felt excited at finding this hidden gem.

"Will you be taking the reward now?" Shaoyan Qianyu asked.

"No, peak master. I still have a lot of preparations. Only when I am done, shall I deem myself worthy of choosing the right reward from the vault." Lin Mu answered.

"That is wise. Choosing the right herb for your breakthrough will be the proper choice indeed." She said, thinking that Lin Mu wanted to support his breakthrough with the help of herbs.