

Walker 61

Chapter 61 - A Large Fortune

Lin Mu left the town and reached the forest after fifteen minutes. On the way to the forest, he had thought about asking senior Xukong what happened in the shop back there. He had finally made his mind up and was just waiting for the right moment to ask.

Near the edge of the forest, Lin Mu withdrew the weapons manual he had just bought. He opened the manual and saw its title. Confusion appeared on his face upon seeing the title of the weapons manual.

It was titled as the 'Thousand Armament Blade Scripture'. Lin Mu started reading the description and got even more confused. The manual did not even describe the use of a sword at first, instead it taught the use of multiple different weapons.

Wanting to understand it clearly, Lin Mu sat down and read the booklet with full focus. It took him over two hours before he was able to complete reading the booklet. After finishing the entire booklet, he finally understood the title and the reason why it taught multiple different weapons.

The manual first taught one to use multiple different weapons and only when they learned these, did it teach you how to use a sword. It combined the essence of a thousand different weapons and refined them to form a sword art.

Lin Mu let out a sigh after reading the manual. The teachings of the manual were complex and would need a long time for him to learn. He did not even have most of the required weapons that were needed to learn from the manual.

Seeing Lin Mu sigh, senior Xukong spoke in Lin Mu's mind.

"Is the weapons manual not to your liking?" Xukong asked.

"No, it's not that. Please take a look senior." Lin Mu replied.

Xukong scanned through the booklet and went silent for a minute before speaking.

"The quality of the weapons manual is very high, but so is its difficulty in learning. Even the requirements for learning it are many." Xukong spoke.

"Hmm, seems like you'll have to get all the weapons that are required for the manual. Though you could still attempt with the weapons, you already have." Xukong advised.

Lin Mu nodded and decided to start practicing with the weapons that he already had. He will have to buy the rest of the weapons later in the town.

Lin Mu then thought of checking the coins he had received from Jing Wei. He withdrew the coin pouch from the ring and took a look inside. The first strange thing he felt was that the weight of the pouch was very less compared to the amount of coins present in it.

The second thing he found strange was that all he could see inside the pouch were gold coins, there did not seem to be any silver or copper coins. To count how many coins were actually inside, Lin Mu poured out the contents of the pouch.

The second he started emptying the pouch, he found the third strange thing. Coins kept on pouring out of the pouch non-stop. Lin Mu's mouth was wide open in shock at this magical sight. It was only a minute later that the gold coins stopped coming out of the pouch.

A small mountain of gold coins was currently present in front of Lin Mu. He could not make sense of this situation as it had completely blown his mind. Lin Mu had to use the calming heart sutra in order to pacify his mind.

After he calmed down, Lin Mu started counting the gold coins. It took him thirty minutes before he was able to count all of the coins. The end total shocked him and also scared him a little bit. The total number of coins in that small mountain was 5000.

This was the largest amount of money Lin Mu had ever seen in his life. This amount was something that was unimaginable to him. Even the pouch that contained these coins was a spatial storage tool. Just the cost of that coin pouch was probably equal to that of the gold coins, or perhaps even more.

'But why would Jing Wei give me such a large fortune.' Lin Mu thought.

The only reason Lin Mu could think of was senior Xukong. It was probably something caused by the influence of senior Xukong.

"What did you do to Jing Wei, senior Xukong?" Lin Mu asked.

"I just had some fun," Xukong spoke with a nonchalant tone.

"What do you mean?" Lin Mu questioned.

"I scared him a little bit, or rather it was the ward that I placed on you." Xukong answered.

"What ward? Oh, is that what you meant by the gift?" Lin Mu inquired.

"Yes. Before we left my nest, I placed a ward on you. It is basically my imprint that will warn any cultivator that is excessively stronger than you." Xukong spoke.

"Though I think its effect may have been much more severe than I originally intended. It even made him waste a top grade defensive spirit tool. If he had endured for a little bit more, the pressure would have stopped by itself." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu was at a loss for words now. He did not think that something that senior Xukong made as a mere 'Warning' would end up terrifying Jing Wei.

"What do you think Jing Wei's cultivation base was then, senior Xukong?" Lin Mu asked curiously.

"It was strange. Since I don't have my main body, I could not exactly tell what his cultivation base was as it seemed to be sealed." Xukong answered with uncertainty.

"Why would his cultivation base be sealed?" Lin Mu asked.

"There could be many reasons for that. But even though his cultivation base was sealed, his spirit sense is still active. From what I could tell from the strength of his spirit sense, he must be at the Nascent Soul stage at the very least, if not higher." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu wondered why Jing Wei's cultivation base was sealed. He wondered if that was the reason they were living in a dilapidated shop, were they perhaps hiding from someone?

Lin Mu could think of only a handful of things that could threaten a strong cultivator in this region. Even in Wu Lim city, where cultivators were more common, the strongest cultivators were only at the Core condensation realm.

For Jing Wei, who was probably at the nascent soul stage, Wu Lim city was just a small pond filled with weak little fishes. If he were to take over the city, there was no way that the city mayor would be able to resist.

Putting the thoughts about Jing Wei aside, Lin Mu thought about what he would do with these gold coins. He had more than enough gold to be able to buy his property back, which was one big load off his back. He will also be able to buy the weapons that will be required for learning the Thousand Armament Blade scripture.

Though there was another obstacle that could potentially prevent Lin Mu from buying his property back. Someone was bound to ask him where he got the money, and they will definitely suspect that he stole it from somewhere. He would have to think of a solution for that before he went to get his property back.

Lin Mu thus turned to senior Xukong for some advice.

"Why are you thinking of hiding it, did you forget that cultivators are above commoners? Why should they be questioning you? Instead, you should show them their place." Xukong said with an imposing tone.

Upon hearing senior Xukong's advice, the thoughts that were clouding Lin Mu's mind vanished. He realized that the best way to proceed was to be domineering and open. Even the incident with Gan Ma, he should just resolve it in a straightforward manner.

Even though killing was prohibited in the town, that rule did not completely apply to cultivators. Gan Ma had thrashed commoners before who later died due to the injuries. But he was still able to get away with little to no problems.

If cultivators had conflicts, they could resolve it amongst themselves, as long as they did not involve commoners. Once Lin Mu found out about the cultivation base of Gan Ma, depending on the level, he will either kill him in secret or in the city itself.

With his newfound determination, Lin Mu started his cultivation session. Perhaps because the burden of filial piety was lifted from Lin Mu's mind, his cultivation speed had slightly increased. He cultivated for four hours before he stopped and gauged the quantity of spirit qi within his dantian.

Lin Mu scanned his dantian and estimated that he had around 670 spirit qi wisps. Satisfied with this number, for now, he started to refine his spirit sense. Currently, his spirit sense was limited to a range of one meter, which largely restrained his sensing capabilities along with the range of the second skill 'Blink'.

Lin Mu continued refining his spirit sense till the night and only broke his concentration because he heard a faint roar coming from the forest. If it was just the roar of a normal beast it would not bother him, but this roar contained a slight amount of spirit qi within.

"A spirit Beast." Lin Mu muttered.

Chapter 62 - Hunting The First Spirit Beast

Lin Mu stood up and spread his spirit sense, which had now grown to one and a half meters long. He had depleted nearly half of his spirit qi in increasing the range of his spirit sense.

'I'll have to be a little careful as I only have half of my spirit qi stores left.' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu focused on the sound and estimated the location of the spirit beast. He guessed that the beast shouldn't be much farther from his location. He was also wondering why the beast wandered this far out.

Lin Mu entered the forest and swiftly moved through the trees. With his legs strengthened by spirit qi, he could run faster and made little sounds. The wind was blowing through the trees, rustling the leaves and masking the sounds of Lin Mu's steps.

A few minutes later Lin Mu reached the location which he had estimated as the site from where the roar came from. The claw marks and damaged trees confirmed his assumption. Lin Mu, therefore, kept his sense alert for any sign of movement.

He went closer and examined the claw marks that were on the trees and the ground. The marks were thin but long, making him unable to identify the beast that could have caused it. Lin Mu was not much knowledgeable about spirit beasts, except for the more common ones that the elite hunters killed and brought to the town.

Lin Mu looked at the footprints on the ground and found them to be rather shallow. The distance between the footprints was also narrow, making him think that this was a small spirit beast. Still, the claw marks made him wary of the beast.

Lin Mu looked at a corner where most of the trees were damaged and found a small pool of blood along with another different set of footprints. This made him think that it was a fight between two beasts, but the other beast was probably weaker than the spirit beast.

Lin Mu searched for any more tracks but could not find them. Suddenly he heard the sound of rustling coming from the trees. He looked up at the trees but could not find anything. He then probed with his spirit sense and found the perpetrator camouflaged in the tree.

The beast was about the size of a dog and had thin and long limbs. Each of its limbs had two sharp claws that looked like hooks. The beast had no fur and the color of its skin was dark brown, this along with the darkness of the night made it easy for the beast to camouflage.

Lin Mu saw the bloodstains on the beast's claws and determined that it was probably this beast that attacked the other beast and also made the roaring sound. He was also able to sense the spirit qi hidden within the beast. He found out that the spirit qi was concentrated in one spot within the beast's torso.

'That should be its beast core.' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu braced himself and studied the beast's behavior. It seemed to be biding its time and waiting for the right moment to attack. Lin Mu guessed that while he had discovered the beast, it did not realize that.

Wanting to take advantage of the beast's unawareness, Lin Mu formulated a plan. He turned around and looked in the other direction while extending his spirit sense towards his back. He then waited for the beast to react. Seemingly his plan worked, and he did not have to wait long, as the beast could not resist attacking his unguarded back.

The beast pounced from the tree towards Lin Mu's back with great speed. Its claws were extended and were aimed at his neck, intending to end him in one stroke. But as soon as the beast entered the range of Lin Mu's spirit sense, he triggered the first skill Flicker.

Lin Mu's body turned blurry and the beast simply passed through it. The beast fell on the ground five meters away and looked a little disoriented, as it had not expected this to happen. Lin Mu grasped this opportunity and used the second skill blink, teleporting to the side of the beast.

He drew the short sword and strengthened it with his spirit qi before slashing at the spirit beast's head. In the next second, the head was decapitated and the spirit beast was dead.

~Huu~

Lin Mu let out a breath that he did not even know he was holding in. He did not realize, but he was actually very nervous, as it was the very first spirit beast he had killed. He did not know how this entire thing would progress, thus he was nervous. Though in the end his confidence won over his anxiety and he successfully hunted the spirit beast.

Lin Mu touched the beast and stored its corpse into the ring. He then turned around and returned the way he came from. A few minutes later he had left the forest and was currently at the edge of the small stream. He was cleaning and preparing the spirit beast he had just killed.

Tonight Lin Mu wanted to taste what spirit beast meat tasted like. Though the beast he had hunted did not have much flesh and was rather bony. He cut open its ribs and found a small fingernail-sized brown marble in the center. This was the core of the spirit beast.

While spirit beasts had the same cultivation levels such as humans, the one difference they had was that they had spirit cores instead of a dantian. The spirit cores were usually located near the heart of a spirit beast, though some beasts had them in other parts as well.

There were also some rare beasts who had more than one spirit core. Spirit beasts of this kind were usually very strong and had a high level of cultivation.

Spirit beast cores were very useful for a cultivator, as they could be used in several different things. They were used as ingredients for alchemical pills; they were used as a power source for formations, as well as a component; they were used in the forging of spirit weapons and also for refining spirit tools.

Though there was another use for a spirit beast core, a use that could potentially multiply the strength of a cultivator. Spirit beast cores could be used to refine something called as 'Bloodline Essence'. This Bloodline essence was unique to the beast it was made from.

Bloodline essence could be assimilated by cultivators to gain new abilities and skills. Depending on the type of beast, they would get abilities that were unique to the beast. Bloodline essence would also strengthen the physique of a cultivator.

While there were multiple ways to refine Bloodline essence, using a spirit core was the most common method. Still, most cultivators would not assimilate just any bloodline essence. They would usually wait and chose a Bloodline essence that was suitable for them and complimented their cultivation base.

It was not as if there was a hundred percent chance that a cultivator would be able to assimilate a Bloodline essence. A cultivator's body could also reject the bloodline essence because of many reasons such as the bloodline essence being incompatible with the cultivator, it being impure or unstable, it could also be because of the bloodline essence being too domineering and powerful. Also, if a cultivator was weak, he could also fail to absorb the bloodline essence.

Though overall, there was always a certain percent chance of failure when assimilating a Bloodline essence. Another reason why cultivators waited to get a suitable bloodline essence was that, once they assimilated it, it would be very difficult for them to improve that bloodline.

If a cultivator wanted to improve the bloodline they had assimilated, they would have to find a higher grade bloodline that was compatible. Just finding a compatible bloodline was also not enough, most of the time, as they still needed precious materials and rare herbs to help the process.

The disciples of the sects had an advantage in this matter. Most of the sects had a repertoire of different bloodline essence along with their records. This made it convenient for the disciple to choose a bloodline essence.

Lin Mu had soon finished preparing the spirit beast. He had separated the meat and the materials such as the skin and claws. He stored everything in the ring and started his journey back to the town. After fifteen minutes, Lin Mu was very close to the town. Ensuring that no one was seeing him, he withdrew a large sack and put the beast meat he had into it.

He had put enough meat to last him for two meals, namely the dinner for now and the breakfast for tomorrow. Having done this, Lin Mu walked to the Northwind inn. As it was nighttime, there weren't many people out, except for the areas where the restaurant and eateries were located at.

Lin Mu stepped into the inn and looked at the entry desk. There was a different clerk than morning sitting at the desk. He walked up to the clerk and showed him the small wooden plate. The clerk seemed to already know him, thus he responded with respect and asked him if he wanted any assistance.

Lin Mu just told him he wanted to use the kitchen, to which the clerk nodded and gestured him to follow him.

Chapter 63 - A Letter

Lin Mu followed the clerk to the kitchen located in the backyard. There he saw the cook fatty Yuan sitting to the side and drinking from a gourd. He was taking large sips and already seemed to be drunk.

After speaking some words with Lin Mu, the clerk bade him farewell and left. Lin Mu approached the cooking area and took out the meat from the large sack. He washed the meat and chopped it up. He then took some vegetables and spices that were kept to the side and chopped them up as well.

Having done this, he took a large pot that was hanging from the wall and set it on the stove. Adding the meat along with the other ingredients, Lin Mu covered the pot. He saw that there were only embers left

in the stove with no flames left, thus he added more wood and ignited the flames. He placed the bellows in front of the opening of the stove and started to blow air into the stove.

Soon the fire was blazing hot, and the pot started cooking. Lin Mu stopped blowing the bellows and sat down. He started chanting the severing heart sutra and recuperated the spirit qi he had consumed. While he was doing this, the cook fatty Yuan was watching him with hazy eyes.

The cook's face was red, and he seemed to be murmuring to himself. Thirty minutes later, a delicious aroma started arising from the pot. By now Lin Mu had replenished a small part of his spirit qi. Soon Lin Mu's stomach groaned after smelling the delicious aroma. Thus he stopped cultivating and stood up.

Even the cook seemed to have become a little sober after smelling the aroma. What Lin Mu had cooked just now was the meat from the spirit beast he had killed. Because the spirit beast had little meat and was rather bony, Lin Mu chose to make a stew instead of the roast he usually made.

Lin Mu removed the pot's lid and scooped out a large serving of stew into a bowl. He then sat down on the side and started eating the stew. The cook named Fatty Yuan stood up in a seemingly drunken stupor and walked up to the stew, while speaking to himself.

"How can this kid cooking be better than mine?"

The cook picked up a small tasting bowl and scooped up a small serving of the stew. Lin Mu did not react and waited. He wanted to see what the reaction of commoner would be upon eating spirit beast meat.

The cook brought the small bowl to his mouth and gulped down the savory and delightful stew. He enjoyed the taste of the stew for a moment and then turned extremely red in the next. His body started heating and he could not make a sense of it.

"What... what is this?" The cook spoke.

A small amount of blood started leaking out of the cook's nose and he fainted, seemingly due to the excess amount of energy raging through his body. Lin Mu was surprised by this. He did not expect that such a small serving would be enough to knock out a commoner.

Lin Mu sensed the cook's strength and placed him at the 6th stage of the body tempering realm. Wanting to gain a deeper understanding, Lin Mu used his spirit sense and observed the condition of the cook's body.

He saw that the small amount of spirit qi that was present in the stew permeated the cook's body and was wandering randomly, without a direction. Lin Mu looked closer and tried to find the cook's meridians. He found them after a few seconds and studied the difference between them and his own.

If the cook's meridians could be compared to the thickness of a hair, then Lin Mu's could compare to that of a chopstick. The difference between the wideness of the meridians was astounding. Lin Mu decided to ask senior Xukong.

"Your meridians should have been the same at first, but perhaps because of eating that purple spirit fruit they became wider." Xukong spoke.

Xukong did not say the complete truth to Lin Mu, though. Just a spirit fruit would not have been enough to widen the meridians by such a large margin. It was rather the subtle effect of the mysterious ring which had actually been changing Lin Mu's constitution.

Soon Lin Mu had emptied out the pot and had finished eating. He then sat down to chant the calming heart sutra and assimilated the vital energy. He sensed the overflowing vital energy present in the stew that he had eaten. He also sensed that the spirit qi that was present in the beast meat was readily absorbed by his body without needing much effort.

The spirit qi in the meat was enough for him to replenish his entire store. After assimilating all the spirit qi, Lin Mu stood up and walked up to his room. He sat down on his bed and continued his cultivation session. He cultivated for a couple of hours until he felt tired and sleepy.

Lin Mu soon fell asleep and appeared in the Sleepscape. It was finally time for Lin Mu to start practicing the Thousand Armament Blade scripture. There were many weapons that were described in the manual, and from those Lin Mu had a spear, axe, hatchet, and dagger, that he could practice with.

He started with the spear as it seemed to be the easiest to him. The manual described simple moves and stances for each weapon. Though they seemed to be simple to practice, what they contained was the pure essence of that weapon.

When Lin Mu started practicing, he found the process to be easy and simple, but the more he practiced, the more he became aware of the hidden complexities of the spear. He would thrust and experience that he thrust, yet it did not feel right to him.

It was as if the manual was making him reveal his weaknesses. In a little while, Lin Mu was lost in the practice. He did not even realize as the hours passed by and morning came. His consciousness disappeared from the Sleepscape and returned to his body.

Lin Mu slowly opened his eyes and looked at the unfamiliar ceiling above him. Standing up to stretch, Lin Mu flexed his body. He then heard a knock on his door, which prompted him to open it. It was the clerk who had knocked.

"The breakfast is ready, sir, or would you prefer to cook yourself again?" The clerk asked.

"Both." Lin Mu shortly answered.

The clerk felt a little strange at Lin Mu's answer but did not mind it for long and gestured Lin Mu to follow him. They went downstairs and walked to the left. They entered a small hall in which many people were currently sitting and eating their breakfast.

The clerk brought Lin Mu to an empty table and let him sit, while he brought him some breakfast. The breakfast was rather simple, consisting of some steamed buns, light soup, and vegetables. Lin Mu finished the meal in a few minutes, yet did not feel the least bit satisfied.

The Clerk was standing beside Lin Mu the entire time he was eating. The other patrons of the inn saw this and felt a little strange upon seeing the clerk standing beside Lin Mu. They wondered what could be the reason, but did not really mind it as much.

Most of the patrons of the inn were hunters with some other people like merchants, travelers, and mercenaries mixed in. Just as Lin Mu was about to get up, he saw someone familiar walk in from the entrance of the hall.

It was none other than the mercenary Yan Zhong from the Fierce Blood mercenary company. Along with him, the rest of his team members also walked in. He spotted Lin Mu and approached him.

"Greetings, Brother Lin Mu." Yan Zhong said.

"Ah, hello." Lin Mu awkwardly replied.

The other mercenaries also greeted Lin Mu next.

"Are you done with your breakfast brother Lin Mu?" Yan Zhong asked.

"No, not yet, I'm going to make more for myself." Lin Mu answered.

"Was the food here not to your liking?" the Yan Zhong asked.

"Oh, that's not it, I'm just used to something different." Lin Mu replied.

Yan Zhong nodded in response and did not ask any further. Lin Mu left the mercenaries and walked to the kitchen to prepare the meat for himself. In the kitchen, the cook Fatty Yuan was cooking food and seemed to be very energetic.

'Probably the effect of the stew from yesterday.' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu took out the remaining meat from the sack and covered it with spices before setting it to roast in a clay oven. The meat was cooked after fifteen minutes, thus Lin Mu did not have to wait long. After finishing his meal, Lin Mu left the inn and walked out of the town.

While he was on the way to the forest Lin Mu spotted many black dots appearing in the air. Though the one difference was that these black dots seemed to be aligned in a curving line. Lin Mu became intrigued upon seeing this, thus he decided to check and open the spatial rift.

Lin Mu looked around and ensured that there was no one watching him. He then extended his hand towards a black dot and willed it to open. In the next moment, the spatial rift opened and Lin Mu inserted his hand inside.

Once his hand went inside the spatial rift, Lin Mu sensed that it was not a normal spatial rift. It was instead a teleportation channel. Excited at the prospect of finding something valuable again, Lin Mu searched around for the object that was being transported.

Fifteen minutes later Lin Mu touched a small cylindrical object. After storing the object inside the ring, he pulled his hand out. Withdrawing the object from the ring, Lin Mu looked at it. The object in his hand was a rolled-up scroll, which had a wax seal placed on its opening.

"A letter?" Lin Mu muttered.

Chapter 64 - The Solemn Mercenaries

Lin Mu had not expected to find a letter in the teleportation channel. He had heard from senior Xukong that using a teleportation formation required spirit stones and sending even a small item required a sizable sum of spirit stones.

He determined that the letter was definitely valuable, as the sender considered it worthy enough to be sent by the teleportation channel. Lin Mu looked at the wax seal on the letter and found it to be familiar.

The wax seal on the letter depicted three cauldrons with a peony flower placed above it.

"The Tri-cauldron Peony sect?" Lin Mu muttered.

Suddenly something clicked in Lin Mu's mind, and he linked the events together. The four vessels restoration pill and the spirit stones, both of them were sent by the Tri-cauldron Peony sect. The only question left was why? Which would be answered once he opened the letter.

Lin Mu was about to break the wax seal and open the letter when the voice of senior Xukong rang in his head.

"Don't open the seal, it has an identification formation placed on it which would alert the sender and perhaps even the receiver. Place it in the ring, I'll open it." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu instantly stopped and heeded senior Xukong's words. He stored the letter in the ring and waited for senior Xukong to reply, and a minute later he got it.

"You can take it now." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu saw that the wax seal had been broken, and the letter could now be unrolled. He opened the letter and started reading it. The letter was addressed to the mayor of Wu Lim city, Wu Xun.

It read,

"Mayor Wu Xun, despite your incessant reports about the missing four vessels restoration pills, the peak master has rejected your demand for replacement. He is completely sure that the pills were sent and there is no conspiracy against you.

As for your report that we sent a stone instead of the pills, they are completely false and baseless. The peak master has warned that this is the last time he will tolerate this insolence, any further and the cooperation between us shall end forever.

The Tri-cauldron peony sect has been true to its words and has always provided the best quality pills. Your accusations paint us in a bad light and are unacceptable.

Since you have been doubtful about our services, we have decided to terminate our previous contract. We have returned the spirit stones you had remaining with us, as you should have noticed.

The peak master has instructed that you should cease your incessant messages. If any more messengers are found to have contacted the sect with the same reports, they shall be executed and our cooperation shall directly end.

Only contact us if you want to commission more pills or other services from the sect."

Lin Mu was a little dumbfounded after reading the entire letter. He knew that only a very rich person would be able to buy the four vessels restoration pills, but he had not expected for that person to be the mayor of Wu Lim City.

Lin Mu had also unknowingly created a conflict between the mayor and the Tri-cauldron peony sect. The result of this conflict also did not seem well to him. He could not imagine what would happen next. He had taken the one thing that would have prevented it from happening, the letter in his hands.

Seemingly in a dilemma, Lin Mu asked senior Xukong for advice. Who ended up giving him a rather quick and short answer.

"Don't bother." Xukong said.

"It is not your place to interfere. Let their destinies progress as it is, besides you don't have the capabilities to do so right now anyway, and if you do end up coming in contact with them, it won't bid well for you." Xukong further explained.

Lin Mu thought over his words and found them to be true. There was no chance that he will contact them, and if he does, it will probably end up harming him instead. He had unknowingly stolen two precious items from the mayor, so he should be hiding instead.

Lin Mu then thought about the reason for which the mayor could have bought the Four vessels restoration pills for. The obvious reason would be to heal someone, but the question was who?

From what he knew, the mayor did not have a big family, he only had a wife and two sons. This was something everyone knew and was common knowledge. If he bought such an expensive alchemical pill, then it should be for someone he cares about.

If anyone from his family was injured it would be public news and there would have been an uproar. But still, Lin Mu had his doubts. There could be a chance that someone from his family was injured, and this information was deliberately hidden.

The most likely person would be the eldest son of the mayor. Lin Mu did not know his name, but knew that he was part of the kingdom's army. If he got injured on a mission, perhaps that's why the mayor chose to hide it as it could be detrimental to him.

He also thought if it could be the second son, but doubted it, as there was not much known about the second son, except that he was a reclusive scholar who stayed cooped up at his own manor. People also did not know why he chose to live away from the mayor's manor instead of living together.

Unknowingly Lin Mu had reached the forest while he was lost in his thoughts. Putting his thoughts to rest, Lin Mu started his cultivation session. He cultivated for four hours, after which he observed his dantian and found that his maximum capacity of spirit qi had reached 750 wisps.

After this Lin Mu cooked some lunch and ate it. He then refined his spirit sense in an effort to increase its range. When it was night Lin Mu returned to the town and slept. While he was in the Sleepscape, he plucked the spirit apple that had matured. He had three spirit apples in his storage for emergencies now.

Lin Mu practiced according to the Thousand Armament Blades scripture and woke up in the morning. After eating his breakfast, Lin Mu decided to check out Jing Wei's emporium. But when he reached there, he found out that the alley it was located in was not there.

"Senior Xukong is the alley still hidden by the concealing formation." Lin Mu asked.

"No, it seems the protections have been increased. There seems to be a sealing formation placed on it as well now." Xukong spoke.

Unable to find the shop, Lin Mu returned to his routine.

Two weeks passed by in a flash, the temperature had fallen even more and light snowfall had also occurred. In these two weeks, Lin Mu would wake up in the morning, eat, cultivate, refine his spirit sense, and train with the weapons manual.

Occasionally he would go out to hunt if he got bored. He had also encountered two spirit beasts during his hunts, one of which he was able to hunt while the other he could not as there was a mercenary team already after it.

Overnight, the town would be covered in a thin layer of snow, while in the afternoon it would melt and vanish. People were wondering when the first wave of frost will start, for they were thinking of the preparations needed before it.

As soon as the frost wave hits, the entire demographic of the town changes. The hunters retreat to the town and the forest becomes a forbidden area. The rivers and streams freeze overnight, while the animals and beast of the forest retreat to the depths.

Only the strongest of fierce beasts and spirit beasts wander in the forest during this season, making it an extremely dangerous place. Lin Mu saw that while the hunters had stopped going to the forest, the mercenaries were the same and were still hunting with no rest.

Another week passed and the frost wave finally hit. The town was covered in ankle-deep snow and chilling winds blew. The people had stocked up on food and necessities, while the town head had officially designated the Northern forest as a forbidden area.

It was on this day that tragedy struck. Lin Mu had just woken up and had come down to eat breakfast in the hall when he saw the solemn faces of the mercenaries sitting within.

He saw the mercenary he was acquainted with, Yan Zhong, and approached him to inquire.

"Brother Yan Zhong, what happened, why does everyone seem so tense?" Lin Mu asked.

Yan Zhong who was lost in his thoughts looked up from his rice bowl and saw Lin Mu standing there.

"Something terrible has happened, a truly fearsome spirit beast has appeared." Yan Zhong spoke.

"But that's nothing new, spirit beasts become rather active during the winter and often wander around." Lin Mu replied.

"This was much worse. Yesterday an Elite Team of mercenaries composed entirely of cultivators disappeared. It belonged to the Ashen cloak mercenary company, which is considered as the strongest mercenary company in this region." Yan Zhong spoke and took a pause as if it was hard for him to speak.

Lin Mu felt a little lost seeing Yan Zhong like this. He wondered why the mercenaries would be so depressed at this because this was something that often occurred in their line of business. It was only when Yan Zhong resumed speaking that he understood why.

Chapter 65 - Reaching The Mid Stage Of The Qi Refining Realm

Yan Zhong took a deep breath before speaking again.

"The elite team of the Ashen Cloak mercenary company was not like the other elite teams. It was bigger, much bigger." Yan Zhong spoke.

Lin Mu was getting tense upon hearing this, thus he gulped before asking.

"How many were there in the team?"

"Eighty mercenaries." Yan Zhong replied.

"All cultivators?" Lin Mu inquired.

"Yes, all cultivators." Yan Zhong answered while nodding his head.

Lin Mu went silent for a bit as he contemplated about the situation.

"How were they found?" Lin Mu asked.

Lin Mu understood that the more he knew about the situation, the better it would be for him. He had been hunting spirit beasts in the forest all this time, but now that there was a strong and ferocious spirit beast on the prowl, he may have to change his plans.

"The Ashen Cloak mercenaries sent out a search party later at night when the elite team did not return. They searched the entire night but still could not find them. It was only around four hours ago that they found them, or rather their remains." Yan Zhong answered.

"Remains? You mean there were no bodies?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yes, all that they found there was splattered blood and chunks of flesh along with the bits and pieces of their armor, which helped to identify them." Yan Zhong replied with a heavy voice.

Lin Mu was shocked by this, as he could not think of any beast that could do this. Sure, a beast would be able to kill such a large number of mercenaries, but it certainly could not eat them all. Still, from Yan Zhong's words, he could sense the hint of truth and dread.

If all that Yan Zhong said was true, then the Northern town had a huge problem at its hands. If such a beast wandered out of the forest, it would spell doom for the town.

"Where were the remains exactly found?" Lin Mu questioned.

"About Eight kilometers deep, in the northwestern side of the forest.❖❖❖" Yan Zhong answered.

Lin Mu secretly took a breath of relief, as it was still very far from the town. He knew about the area Yan Zhong had spoken about. The Northwestern part of the forest was accessible from the western exit of the town. It was the same exit where the mercenaries and hunters had set up their camp.

If one went further in the northwestern part of the forest, they would find mountains surrounded by ridges. It was a dangerous area that was very difficult to cross, as the mountains and ridges acted as a natural barrier. This not only prevented people from crossing it, but it also stopped the stronger spirit beasts from crossing over.

The only way to cross this region was to travel through the frontier bridge or to use the smaller passes and tunnels. The frontier bridge was far towards the west, so the mercenaries had most likely used the smaller passes to cross this region.

Lin Mu did not think they would take the risk of traveling through the tunnels, as they were notorious for collapsing. Some beasts would also reside within them and use them as their nests or dens.

"Do they have any idea what kind of beast it was?" Lin Mu asked.

"They don't know much about the beast except that it is likely to be very large in size and has four limbs with sharp claws." Yan Zhong replied.

Lin Mu could not do much with such a vague description, so just decided to look out for any large beast. There were far too many beasts that would fit this description, as the region beyond the mountains and ridges was filled with them.

Lin Mu bid farewell to Yan Zhong and went to eat his breakfast. After quickly finishing his breakfast, he then went to the hunting shack. While Lin Mu was no longer living in the hunting shack, he still cultivated near it.

It was the perfect location that was hidden and granted him privacy. Now that the winter had started it was even safer for him as not even the local hunters would come near there. The only problem would be the beasts, but Lin Mu was strong enough to handle most of them, and if he encountered a stronger beast, he could just run away.

The two skills that were imparted by the ring, not only allowed him to dodge strikes, it also gave him the ability to escape easily. Though that kind of situation has not occurred yet, and Lin Mu was hoping to keep it that way.

Another thing Lin Mu had done in these three weeks was to find out information about Gan Ma. He had not forgotten about the test that senior Xukong had given him and was intending to complete it as fast as possible.

But Lin Mu had reached a wall in his search for Gan Ma, as he has somehow disappeared off the face of the earth. He had tried asking around, but the answers he got were all different. He had asked the hunters as well as the taverns which Gan Ma frequented, but to no avail.

Lin Mu then tried finding the hunters who were part of his group, but found out that they had disappeared as well. Some people said that he had gone to the forest to hunt, but now that winter had started, he should have returned.

Lin Mu also heard that Gan Ma had instead gone to Wu Lim city for some reason. He had thought about it but could not figure out any reason for it.

The sun was hidden behind the clouds as the chilling wind blew. It was a little later than noon when a change could be observed in Lin Mu. A faint wave of energy emanated from his body as it slowly disappeared.

Lin Mu opened his eyes, which were glowing with joy. He had just reached the mid-stage of the Qi refining realm. He observed his dantian and saw that half of it was now filled with spirit qi. But the thing that surprised him was the actual quantity of the spirit qi wisps.

Lin Mu counted the number of spirit qi wisps and found that instead of a 1000 wisps there were actually 1112 wisps of spirit qi in his dantian. Earlier when he had started cultivating, he had estimated the maximum capacity of his dantian to be of 2000 wisps, the half of which would be a 1000 wisps.

Somehow along the way, the maximum capacity of Lin Mu's dantian had increased. He tried to sense the entirety of his dantian, but found that it seemed to be of the same size as before. Thinking that he may have just made a mistake back then, Lin Mu pushed this thought to the back of his mind.

Xukong was closely observing Lin Mu's progress and knew exactly what was happening with him. He had already known that the ring was subtly affecting the growth of Lin Mu's physique, but did not know to what extent.

Lin Mu breaking through to the mid-stage of the Qi refining realm had given him a measure. If Lin Mu kept on cultivating at this pace, Xukong estimated that when he reached the late stage of the qi refining realm, the maximum capacity of his dantian was likely to increase beyond 3000 spirit qi wisps.

The increase in the size of his dantian would slow down Lin Mu's cultivation progress, but it would also increase his overall qi. Xukong guessed that when Lin Mu finally reaches the core condensation realm, he would probably have the same amount of spirit qi as that of a Nascent Soul realm cultivator.

Lin Mu sensed the vital energy coursing through his body and saw that it had reached a breaking point. He estimated that he would probably break through to the 11th stage of the body tempering realm at any moment.

Lin Mu focused on his spirit sense and spread it around. Over the three weeks, Lin Mu's spirit sense had increased to a range of five meters. He had been cultivating and refining his spirit sense every day. Perhaps if he had not refined his spirit sense, Lin Mu would have reached the mid-stage of the qi refining much earlier.

Even though Lin Mu knew that he could break through to the next stage faster by stopping his refining of spirit sense, he chose not to. He was determined to increase the range of his spirit qi to at least ten meters, which was also the maximum teleportation range of the second skill Blink.

Senior Xukong had also told Lin Mu that, by stabilizing his pace of cultivation, he was only helping his future progress. His foundation would become more stable, as his body acclimatized to the increased amount of spirit qi.

Lin Mu cultivated all the way to midnight and only stopped when his spirit qi was reduced to 200 wisps. After this, he returned to the town and went to the inn to eat his dinner. But while he was walking towards the inn, a pair of eyes were hidden in the darkness, watching him.

Chapter 66 - Disappearance Of The Mercenaries

Lin Mu stepped inside the inn, and the eyes that were watching him disappeared. Completely unaware of this occurrence, Lin Mu went to eat dinner. After an hour he returned to his room and recuperated the remaining amount of spirit qi.

After he was done Lin Mu lied down on the bed and entered the Sleepscape. As soon as he appeared in the Sleepscape, he saw the spirit apple tree in front of him. He looked at it and saw a change in it. There were three spirit apples hanging on it, one ripe and two unripe.

Over the weeks, Lin Mu had been plucking the ripened spirit apples from the tree and had stored them in the ring. He had stockpiled a sufficient quantity of spirit apples and would be ready for most emergencies.

Lin Mu could only think of one reason why the number of spirit apples had increased, him breaking through to the mid-stage of the Qi condensation realm. Senior Xukong had already told him that the garden of karma would develop along with its owner. Thus, with this knowledge, he only had more things to look forward to in the future.

Lin Mu then started practicing with the Thousand Armament Blade scripture and engrossed himself in it. A few hours later he heard senior Xukong's voice in his mind, which prompted him to stop. He then let senior Xukong out of the ring.

As soon as Xukong appeared in the Sleepscape, he flew away to observe it. He returned a few seconds later, having completed his survey. He floated in front of Lin Mu and spoke.

"So it has started developing a little now."

"Yes it has, the number of spirit apples has grown by one." Lin Mu replied.

"That's not all, its area has also increased by a minute amount." Xukong added.

Lin Mu was a little surprised but understood. Senior Xukong's senses were much stronger than his and could even find microscopic changes that were hidden from him. He then sat down and waited for senior Xukong to start his lesson.

Lin Mu had been learning Dao script from senior Xukong every day in the Sleepscape. Although he studied every day, it was still difficult for him to learn the Dao script. Senior Xukong had explained to him that Dao script was not just about reading the characters, the characters also contained more intent and meaning in them than he understood. Thus for him to learn even one character took him a long time.

Until now he had barely learned seven characters, and even the understanding of those characters was still kind of shaky for him. He was able to read them and understood some part of its meaning, but the intent was still fuzzy. There were far too many variables that influenced the use of the Dao script, which was why it was so difficult for him to learn it.

Senior Xukong had told him that Dao script was the only universal writing script that could be understood by every species in the cosmos. Lin Mu was fascinated by this and asked senior Xukong how this was possible if there was no one to teach them.

Senior Xukong explained that Dao script was actually not created by a person but was rather a natural creation of the Heavenly Dao. He told Lin Mu that any species would be able to read it once they reached a sufficiently high cultivation realm.

Dao script was often present on natural treasures and precious materials. It was the imprint of the Dao itself, thus would enable a person to learn it if they spent a sufficient amount of time comprehending and learning it.

Dao script's direct relation to the Heavenly Dao was what made it so important in the construction of formations, refinement of alchemical pills, forging of spirit tools, and creation of techniques. It would still take Lin Mu a long time till he learned enough Dao script to learn from the legacy of the lost immortal.

More time passed by and Lin Mu woke up. He stood up and looked out of the window. It was snowing outside, and the town was covered in a thick sheet of snow. Looking at the people walking outside, Lin Mu could estimate that the snow was at least six inches deep.

While this kind of snow would not bother him, the same could not be said about the commoners as they did not have the same resistance to cold and higher strength as him. A minute later he saw the team of snow cleaners pass by.

The snow cleaners were equipped with shoves and other equipment, which helped them clear out the snow from the streets. Though the most eye-catching were the snowploughs, which were pulled by horses. Although it could not cover the entire street, it still reduced the workload of the snow cleaners.

Having watched enough, Lin Mu went down to cook and eat his breakfast. He walked into the hall and saw that it was surprisingly empty. Most of the mercenaries that should be present here at this time had disappeared to heaven knows where. The only people that were currently sitting there were the other hunters and regulars.

A clerk saw Lin Mu and approached him.

"Do you need anything, sir?" the clerk asked.

Every clerk in the inn now knew about Lin Mu and also knew that he was a cultivator, thus they were always respectful and courteous to him. The other patrons of the inn used to be surprised at this, but had become pretty used to it by now.

"Why is the hall so empty?" Lin Mu questioned.

"The mercenaries were called in for an emergency meeting after what happened last night." The clerk answered.

Lin Mu felt a depressing feeling rising from the pit of his stomach upon hearing the clerk's words.

"What happened last night?" Lin Mu asked.

"You didn't hear? The entire town was in an uproar last night. Two teams of mercenaries disappeared from their camp last night." The clerk replied.

"Two teams? How many people were there in total?" Lin Mu impatiently questioned.

"Around fifteen people." The clerk answered.

"Did no one see them? There are hundreds of people in the camp." Lin Mu stated.

"That's the reason why all the people are scared. They somehow disappeared in the midst of so many people and no one knows how or why. Another thing was that, out of the fifteen mercenaries, three were cultivators." The clerk replied.

"People are scared, hence the town head has advised everyone to be careful and stay inside their homes as long as possible." The clerk added.

Lin Mu was lost in thought after hearing this. An uneasy feeling kept on prodding Lin Mu's mind, as if it was warning him. He was also a little worried, as even cultivators had disappeared. If there was someone or something capable of doing this, they must be very strong.

Lin Mu quickly finished his breakfast and left the inn. There was one big task that he was intending to do today. The task was none other than buying back his house. Two weeks ago he had gone to the town center and had asked the staff working there about his house. They had informed him that while he could indeed buy it back, he would still need to wait until the town head returned from Wu Lim city.

Apparently, all the town heads were ordered by the mayor to present themselves at the city hall as soon as possible. The town head had thus been absent for the past two weeks. Even the workers at the town center felt strange when the town head did not return for so long.

Now that Lin Mu knew that the town head had returned, he wanted to go there as fast as possible. The town center was located in the center of the town, as its name suggested. It was close to where the merchants had set up the market when they had visited the town a month ago.

Lin Mu reached the town center after fifteen minutes and looked up at the tall building. It was the tallest building in the town and also the oldest. He walked in through the main door, at the sides of which two guards were standing.

The guards looked at him and blocked his path. Lin Mu informed them of his purpose here, and they let him inside after asking him to leave his sword outside. He had already known about this, thus did not mind.

Lin Mu walked up to a staffer that was working at a desk.

"What are you here for?" The staffer asked.

"I'm here to buy back my confiscated property." Lin Mu spoke with determination.

The staffer showed a surprised expression but soon became calm.

"And what property is that?" The staffer questioned.

Lin Mu then informed the staffer about his name and the location of the property.

"Please wait here while I go inform the town head." The staffer spoke.

The staffer then stood up from his seat and went up the stairs. Lin Mu had to wait thirty minutes before the staffer returned.

"The town head has given his permission. You can claim your property as long as you pay the fine of 1200 gold coins." The staffer informed.

Chapter 67 - Buying The House Back

Lin Mu was dumbstruck by the price the staffer had just quoted. There was no chance that the fine could be this high. Even though the loss caused due to the damaged spirit apples was high, it was still less than a thousand gold coins.

The price that the staffer had told Lin Mu was enough to buy a completely new house if that was possible. Ever since a restriction on the expansion of the towns was placed by the city mayor five years ago, the prices of houses and property had shot up.

The mayor had instead ordered the town to increase the size of their respective specialty. The Northern town was ordered to expand their spirit apple orchards, the eastern their crop fields, the western their merchant site, and the south their army camp.

Even though the order could be considered to be Draconian, no one dared to question the city mayor's words. This restriction was also the reason why hunters had a hard time saving money, as they would just end up spending it in the winters.

Lin Mu could not just accept this and decided to ask the staffer.

"Why is the fine so high? Even the actual price of the property is not this high." Lin Mu complained.

"Due to undisclosed reasons, the city mayor has doubled all the taxes. This also includes the fines paid for crimes and law-breaking. The town head was also called for this specific reason by the city mayor." The staffer replied calmly.

"But still, you can't just do this." Lin Mu protested.

"There is nothing I can do. If you want your property back, pay the fine, otherwise, there are other people ready to buy it." The staffer explained.

'I have to get it now or I won't be able to buy it later.' Lin Mu thought.

Because of the scarcity of houses, the cost of properties was already inflated, yet there were still people who would be willing to buy it for such a high price. Lin Mu knew that if he waited too long, others may get to know of a vacant house and buy it. He was already lucky that no one had bought it yet in the past two months.

Lin Mu gritted his teeth and decided to pay the price.

"Fine. I'll take it." Lin Mu spoke through clenched teeth.

Lin Mu then put his hand in the sack he was carrying on his back and withdrew the exact amount of coins. He then placed them on the counter and let the staffer see it. The reaction of the staffer was worth watching as Lin Mu saw his jaw drop.

The staffer had frankly not expected this to happen. He had originally thought that Lin Mu would just be put-off by the fine and walk away. Even he himself had not expected for the fine to be so high. He could not think why the city mayor would double the taxes.

But now that he had seen Lin Mu put out such a large amount of coins, he'll definitely have to inform the town head.

Lin Mu saw the change in the staffer's expression and knew what he was thinking. He guessed that he may have some problems in the future, so decided to end it before they started.

"Take care of those coins, you wouldn't want to get into trouble would you." Lin Mu said with a stern tone.

And as Lin Mu said that, he grasped the edge of the desk and crushed it in his hands. The staffer saw this and immediately became silent. Lin Mu could even see the speck of fear in his eyes. Feeling a little satisfied, he took the deed of the property from the staffer, and walked away. It was good that there were few people in the hall, so no one noticed this.

The staffer waited until Lin Mu walked away and watched his back. Once he was gone, the staffer gathered the coins in a pouch and walked upstairs to the town head's office. The staffer stood in front of a door and knocked.

"Who is it?" A voice asked from behind the door.

"It's me Kun Ming, town head." The staffer spoke.

"Come in." the Town head replied.

The staffer opened the door and walked into the office. The town head was sitting behind a desk and was drinking a cup of wine. The town head was old and his head was nearly bare. With a thin mustache and a small beard, he looked sly.

The staffer walked up to the desk and placed the pouch on it. He looked up at the town head and waited for him to speak.

"What's this?" The town head said as he looked at the pouch that was kept on the desk.

"The fine sir. That boy Lin Mu paid it in full." Kun Ming answered.

The town head looked a little surprised as he placed his cup down and picked up the pouch. He weighed it in his hand for a bit before pouring it out on the desk. A small pile of gold coins was soon formed on the desk.

"I've already counted it, sir. It's a total of 1200 gold coins." Kun Ming spoke.

"And he paid it all at once?" The Town head asked.

"Yes sir. It seemed he was ready for it somehow." Kun Ming replied.

A complex expression appeared on the face of the town head and he appeared to be thinking. Kun Ming seemed to understand the town head's thoughts, thus spoke.

"That boy Lin Mu's a cultivator, sir. He gave me a little warning before he left." Kun Ming spoke.

"Are you sure?" The town head asked.

"Yes sir. He was able to crush my desk with little effort." Kun Ming answered.

A perplexing expression appeared on the town head's face and he waved his hand, gesturing for Kun Ming to leave. After the staffer left the office, the town head opened a drawer and withdrew a sheet of paper. He picked up a brush from the side of the desk and started to write on the paper.

Outside the town center, Lin Mu was walking towards the location of his house. His house was located towards the eastern part of the town. It was the most densely populated area in the town and was also the area with the most houses.

Lin Mu reached his house in thirty minutes and stood in front of its gate. There was a lock on the gate along with a sheet of parchment that read 'sealed'. Lin Mu took out a small key that he got along with the deed and opened the lock.

He then tore the parchment from the gate and walked in. Lin Mu's house consisted of a courtyard in which the living quarters were located, along with three bedrooms and a kitchen. It was an old-style house that was common in this region.

There were some trees and plants in the yard, along with enough space for Lin Mu to practice his skills. He looked around with nostalgia in his eyes and felt somber. It had only been a little over two months, yet he felt as if years had gone by. The place looked familiar to him, yet a little different, perhaps because he had gone through so many life-altering changes.

Lin Mu saw the yard, which was littered with dead leaves and the dust that had settled on the doors. He opened the door to his room and saw the dust floating in the air. Looking around, he saw the nearly empty room.

Most of the valuables had already been sold off when his mother had fallen sick during the plague last year. Thus he did not have a lot of furniture in the house. There were only some beds, tables, and chairs. There wasn't anything else left.

Though the most valuable thing to Lin Mu was the graves of his parents and those of his ancestors. He walked to the backyard of his house and kneeled at the graves. There were eight graves marked on the land. Two of them belonged to his parents, while the rest belonged to his grandparents and the ancestors that came before them.

Lin Mu's family has always had only one child in each generation, thus there weren't many graves. Usually, the woman who married into the clan would not have a grave in the cemetery, she would instead be sent back to her own clan when she died. But because Lin Mu's mother was an orphan, she was buried in the clan's cemetery.

Lin Mu knelt at the graves until it was sunset and prayed to his ancestor. In the end, he kowtowed to the graves, which represented the seven generations of his clan one last time, and stood up. He walked out of the house and went to the Northwind inn.

Lin Mu walked up to the clerk that was sitting at the desk and spoke.

"I'm checking out of the inn." He said.

The clerk looked a little perplexed, but nodded. He asked Lin Mu to return the wooden plate and then refunded two gold coins to him. Lin Mu took the coins and stored them in his pouch before leaving the inn behind.

"Now it's time for you to properly cultivate." Xukong suddenly spoke.

Chapter 68 - Seven Days Of Enlightenment

Lin Mu stopped in his tracks upon hearing senior Xukong's words.

"Now that your filial duty is complete, you can now focus on your cultivation. As for the test that I gave you, you can complete it whenever you can, as it seems like your target has disappeared." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu nodded inwardly and agreed with senior Xukong's words. After paying his respects to his parents and ancestors, he was indeed feeling much lighter than before. An invisible burden was lifted from his mind, making him feel free.

Lin Mu returned to his house and sat down in his room. Sitting down, he started his cultivation session. Chanting the severing heart sutra emptied his emotions, allowing him to sense things he would not be able to normally.

Lin Mu could observe the difference in his sensitivity to spirit qi. It had increased by a little bit once again. He understood that the reason for it was the fulfillment of his filial duty, but he could not understand why.

'Is this perhaps why the disciples of the cultivation sects are ordered to sever their ties to the secular world when entering the sects.' Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Senior Xukong seemed to have heard his muttering, as he spoke in his mind.

"You are correct in this aspect. The secular ties of a cultivator weigh down on their mind, dampening the progress of their cultivation. Severing them is a necessity in order to be eligible to walk on the myriad paths of the Grand Dao." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu was deeply affected by senior Xukong's words. It was as if there was something inside him that was resonating with his thoughts. He then thought about the feeling of liberation he experienced after fulfilling his filial duty and linked it with senior Xukong's words.

Lin Mu felt that the feeling of liberation was a little similar to something he had felt before. Unknowingly as he went on this train of thought, he had stopped chanting the severing heart sutra. Instead of it, he had started chanting the calming heart sutra.

What Lin Mu grasped now was the tranquillity offered by the calming heart sutra. He correlated it with the liberating feeling and the calmness that occurred after that. Hours went by as Lin Mu pondered on his thoughts.

Slowly but steadily, Lin Mu was sinking into a state of trance. His breath had harmonized, while his mind had stilled. A bout of enlightenment filled Lin Mu's entire being as the chants of a thousand monks filled his mind.

Their esoteric and obscure chants started to make sense to him, and he started to grasp their meanings. His mind returned to the time when he first obtained the calming heart sutra. He started to remember the words he had seen imprinting in his mind, the same ones that he had forgotten.

While Lin Mu was lost in his enlightenment, Xukong was experiencing a different scenario. He saw a blinding light arising from the altar that was located in the ring. He did not dare approach the altar and stayed where he was, as after his last encounter, he did not want to suffer again.

In a surprising revelation to Xukong, it wasn't a peerless sword intent that had risen from the altar. Instead, it was the soothing and tranquilizing Buddhist aura. He felt as if an eminent Buddhist monk was chanting the sacred scriptures while banishing foul demons of the mind.

A similar effect was currently occurring in the northern town as well. The waves of Buddhist aura that were spreading from Lin Mu's body had covered the entire town and had even spread beyond it.

The residents of the town felt as if their struggles did not seem as awful as before. The earthly sufferings that a mortal suffered from, became gentle for the residents. The aggression and fights that were common once, had become rare now.

Tranquil expressions could be seen on the faces of the residents. Even the hunters and mercenaries who had recently suffered from losses came to terms with them. The mourning and acceptance, which would take a person weeks or months, was completed in a day.

The Northern forest had also become silent. Last time it had been intimidated into being silent by the peerless sword intent, but this time it had become silent because of the absolute tranquillity granted by the Buddhist aura.

In an elaborate courtyard there existed a luxurious mansion. Two people were currently sitting in this mansion, recuperating from their injuries. These two people were none other than the pair of grandfather and granddaughter, Jing Wei and Duan Ke.

While no physical injury could be seen on their bodies, their pale and weak appearance said otherwise. Both of them had suffered from internal injuries caused by the ward that was placed on Lin Mu by senior Xukong.

They had been recovering from their injuries for a month now. Yet their injuries were only healed by fifty percent. Even though they were using a formation that assisted in healing, their rate of healing was still slow.

Along with the physical injuries, they had also suffered from mental trauma, which was also inhibiting their cultivation base, which in turn restricted their speed of healing.

During their encounter with Lin Mu a month ago, they had experienced the presence of a being so strong that its mere imprint had shaken their cultivation bases and had destabilized their foundations. There was also a high chance that they would end up developing mental demons because of it.

Between the two of them, Jing Wei had borne the full brunt of the impact, in an effort to protect his granddaughter. His own cultivation base was sealed, thus he had ended up using the heirloom that was passed down in his clan.

In that situation, he had originally intended to break the seal on his cultivation base but knew that he did not have enough time to do that. Hence he was left with only one solution, which was to use the heirloom treasure.

Jing Wei had also seen the partial appearance of the being that had put its imprint on Lin Mu. The ten golden yellow eyes that he had seen had terrified him to his very core. Those eyes looked at him as if he was worth less than dirt. Its mere gaze had made him aware of his own mortality.

Having learned from this, he had chosen to distance himself from the boy named Lin Mu and thus had retreated into seclusion along with his granddaughter.

Suddenly a wave of tranquillity spread over the courtyard and penetrated into the mansion. The waves covered the bodies of Jing Wei and Duan Ke, permeating into their minds. They felt as if a great burden of theirs was relieved and all their stress disappeared.

The mental demons that were in the foetal stage were smothered. The waves of Buddhist aura culled their existence and brought forward peace in their minds. The wounds that were unable to heal had suddenly started healing at a great pace. With the assistance of the healing formation, Jing Wei and Duan Ke were soon returning to their optimum condition.

Below the city mayor's manor in Wu Lim city, there existed a large cave. Inside this very cave, an emaciated man was sitting cross-legged in a large blood pool. The blood in the pool reached all the way up to his neck, leaving only his head exposed.

Outside of the blood pool, four large troughs could be seen. These troughs were carrying more blood into the blood pool. The supply of the blood seemed to be endless, yet the blood pool never overflowed, making one think where it went.

Currently, the emaciated man had an expression of pain on his face. He seemed to be trying his best to resist it, yet a few stray grunts still escaped his mouth. With each pain-filled grunt, the blood in the pool rippled.

Suddenly the wave of tranquillity penetrated the cave and started to spread into it. The waves eventually reached the emaciated man and his expression became peaceful. The pain that had been bothering him all this while had now been banished.

A few minutes later the blood in the pool started reducing at a visible pace and the flow of blood in the troughs increased accordingly, in order to keep a stable level of blood in the pool. A few minutes later the blood in the pool stopped reducing and the flow of blood in the troughs also slowed down.

Sometime later, in the dim space of the cave, a pair of red eyes slowly opened and a peal of faint laughter echoed.

Back in the Northern Town, five days had passed since Lin Mu had entered the state of enlightenment. He had been sitting in the same posture without moving, which had caused a faint layer of dust to settle on his body.

Xukong had been patiently waiting for Lin Mu to wake up from his trance. During this period even he had an acceleration in the speed of his cultivation. Back when he had created this avatar, he had not given it any of his cultivation base. He had been intending to use this avatar to only absorb the absolutely pure and refined spatial energy present in the ring.

Xukong's main body had long since exhausted its potential. He did not have any growth in his cultivation base for the past ten thousand years. His encounter with Lin Mu had renewed his hope, thus he had created this avatar to absorb the spatial energy and also to assist Lin Mu in the process.

In the blink of an eye, another two days passed by and now it had been a week since Lin Mu had entered his trance. Finally, on the morning of the eighth day, Lin Mu opened his eyes.

Chapter 69 - Awakening From The Trance

Upon opening, Lin Mu's eyes looked dull and empty, but slowly they lit-up and gained their vigor back. Lin Mu looked around and remembered where he was. He stood up and shook off the dust that had settled on his body.

He opened the door of the room and walked outside. Lin Mu was feeling uncomfortable because of the dust, so decided to take a bath. He walked to the small well in the yard and drew up some water for a bath.

A few minutes later Lin Mu was refreshed, but then suddenly his stomach started groaning. A severe pang of hunger struck him, as he realized that he had probably not eaten for a while. He withdrew the beast meat from the ring and started to cook it.

Meanwhile, in the ring, Xukong was engrossed in absorbing the spatial energy. His progress had been great, and he had increased his cultivation base by a significant amount. The effect of the Buddhist aura on him was much greater than he thought.

Xukong's gains in these seven days were more than the entire month. He reckoned that if he was able to somehow maintain this pace, he'll probably be able to exceed his previous cultivation level in less than a million years.

While a million years would be an unimaginable amount of time for most people, it was but a mere fraction of his lifespan. For beings of his standing, it was immensely difficult to progress in cultivation. Their pace could even be considered to be slower than that of a snail.

Xukong still felt nice that his decision to start over by creating an avatar was correct. He wondered if that old monster knew an artifact like the ring existed, would he turn green with envy.

A few thousand years ago, in the Grand Void.

A colossal platform could be seen floating in the space. It was black in color and its size was immeasurable. The borders of the platform could not be seen, making one wonder about its actual size.

On this colossal platform, an old ruined temple existed. The walls of the temple were mottled and degraded. It seemed as if they would collapse at any moment, yet it did not happen and they stood tall and unyielding. Hundreds of sky-piercing pillars held up the ceiling of the temple, which was glowing with a faint light.

A giant figure was approaching the colossal platform from above. The figure soon landed on the platform and walked towards the temple. The figure had a pale white body, eight legs, and ten golden yellow eyes. This was none other than the Void Weaver spider, Xukong.

Xukong walked towards the gate of the temple and entered through them. Even though Xukong's body was colossal, it had no problem passing through the gates, as they were even more massive. The inside of the temple looked similar to the outside, except for a large number of statues and sculptures placed inside of it.

Some of the statues and sculptures looked lifelike while others looked esoteric, making one lose themselves in its origins. The statues were made of a variety of materials and depicted beasts, demons, devils, plants, ghosts, humans, gods, buddhas, immortals, and a myriad of weapons.

The more Xukong walked forward, the more the number of statues increased. At a certain point, paintings also started appearing on the walls. The paintings were of various beings, landscapes, and mystical things.

Xukong kept on walking, and after an unknown amount of time, he finally reached the end of the temple. At the very end of the temple, a massive stone throne was erected. The throne was empty, yet a presence could be felt from it.

Xukong looked up at the throne and spoke,

"I'm here, old monster."

Xukong's deep voice echoed in the temple, making the statues shake. A faint silhouette appeared on the throne and then slowly materialized.

A person was now sitting on the throne. Compared to the throne, the person could be considered to be tiny. The person was wearing long and pitch-black robes, which had twinkling stars depicted on it. The stars would move and fade, thus making them look alive.

The person was wearing a hood over their head and one could not see their face as it was hidden by darkness. The person gently lifted its head towards Xukong and spoke.

"I see that."

"My duty is complete." Xukong spoke.

"Hmm, that could be said to be true and false." The hooded person replied.

"Stop with your word games and speak straight with me." Xukong said with a hint of annoyance.

"In terms of that place your duty is complete, but overall it is not." The hooded person spoke.

"Just tell me the new coordinates then." Xukong spoke with a sigh.

A surge of qi was released from the hooded person, which was then absorbed by Xukong. Having heard the coordinates, Xukong turned around to leave.

"Hmm, perhaps you should get a disciple." The hooded figure mysteriously spoke.

Xukong stopped in his tracks and replied without turning around.

"A disciple? As if I want that. Besides, how would I even get one, if I'm stuck performing my duty." Xukong replied.

"Teaching a disciple would help you learn. It will give you a new perspective of yourself and you may finally be able to exceed the limitations of your kind." The hooded person spoke.

"I'm sure you'll figure it out sometime." The hooded person added.

Xukong did not reply and swiftly left the temple. The hooded person was still there, sitting on the massive throne in silence.

"The time of upheaval is nigh, the heir of cosmos should be born soon." The hooded person muttered and then disappeared.

Back at the northern town, Lin Mu had just finished eating. He had ravenously devoured all the meat that he had stored in the ring. He barely had any beast meat left, thus would have to hunt more today.

Lin Mu wondered how much time had passed, considering the kind of hunger he just experienced. Not being able to estimate the time or the day, Lin Mu decided to ask senior Xukong.

This time it was Xukong's turn to be woken from his reverie. Lin Mu spoke out in his mind, and Xukong heard it, which made him stop his cultivation session.

"Senior Xukong, How many days has it been?" Lin Mu asked.

"Hmm, it should be a week since you entered your state of enlightenment, this is the eighth day." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu was a little shocked by this revelation. He had expected it to be a couple of days, but never a week.

"So, what did you gain from the enlightenment? If you stayed in that state for such a long time, you should have some really great gains." Xukong spoke enthusiastically.

Lin Mu nodded and spoke,

"Yes senior, I ended up learning a lot of things. My comprehension of the calming heart sutra has also progressed to the next stage. It is now in the second stage of external comprehension."

"You should test out the effects of both the calming heart sutra and severing heart sutra on other people now." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu agreed with senior Xukong's words. Originally he had been averse to the idea of testing out the severing heart sutra on other people, as he did not know how severe the effect would be. But now that the calming heart sutra was in the second stage of external comprehension as well, he should be able to use it on other people with no problem.

Lin Mu then remembered the condition of his beast meat stock. Wanting to get enough meat for at least the dinner, he left the house for the forest. While walking on the streets, Lin Mu saw a few scenes that made him feel strange.

He walked past a tavern that was usually boisterous even in the morning, yet today it was silent. The patrons within were sitting in silence, calmly drinking their choice of intoxicating liquid. He then passed the market and saw that it was also eerily silent. The people shopping were neither haggling nor arguing with the vendors.

Everywhere he walked by, he witnessed similar scenes. He started to wonder if the city mayor had declared a ban on noise or something.

"Umm senior, something seems wrong." Lin Mu muttered.

"Indeed. These signs are very strange." Xukong said.

'Seems like the Buddhist aura was much stronger than I thought, it was able to affect the entire town or perhaps even more.' Xukong thought.

Lin Mu randomly chose a person for his experiment. He started to chant the calming heart sutra and let its effect spread to that person. Now that he was in the second stage of external comprehension, he inherently knew how to do this.

Though a few moments later, Lin Mu could not see any change in the person. The person was still doing his previous task and was shopping. Unhindered by this failure, he tried using it on a variety of people. Yet in the end, the effects were the same, in that there were no effects.

"What am I doing wrong?" Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Chapter 70 - Testing The Effects Of The Sutras

Xukong was a little lost upon seeing that Lin Mu was unable to affect any people. He could not figure out the reason for that either. Even if they had been affected by the Buddhist aura, they should still show some signs.

Understanding that this may not work, he decided to tell Lin Mu to try something else.

"Try using the Severing heart sutra on them." Xukong said.

"But senior..." Lin Mu spoke.

"Trust me. I think the reason why they are not affected by the calming heart sutra is that they are already under its effects." Xukong spoke, interrupting his sentence.

"Already under its effects? What do you mean senior?" Lin Mu questioned.

"While you were gaining enlightenment, the aura of the Buddhist path was being released from you. At first, I didn't know its reach, but now that I've seen these people, I can say that it was very strong." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu gently nodded and decided to go ahead. He took a deep breath and started chanting the severing heart sutra. He had chosen another man who seemed to be shopping. The effects of the severing heart sutra spread to the man and in an instant, the effects could be seen.

The man's eyes turned dull and his face became expressionless. It was as if he was a puppet whose strings were cut off. The man was currently standing in front of a vegetable vendor and holding some vegetables.

When the severing heart sutra affected him, he held onto the vegetables and just walked away without paying the vendor. The vendor noticed this and went after him to demand his payment.

"Hey! You can't just walk away without paying." The vendor shouted.

Seeing the vendor agitated, Lin Mu was a little surprised as the effect of the Buddhist aura had stopped. But a few seconds later, the vendor became calm again. The man who had taken the vegetables was still walking away. He had not responded when the vendor called out to him.

The vendor sighed seeing this and just went back to his shop without bothering to chase after the man.

"Hmm... this is interesting." Xukong spoke.

"Try using the calming heart sutra on that man now." Xukong ordered.

Lin Mu nodded and started chanting the calming heart sutra. The effects of the calming heart sutra spread to the man and his expression changed. Instead of the expressionless face and the dull eyes, a tranquil look appeared on him. A certain glint of intelligence returned to his eyes along with the glamor on his face.

"The effects are rather quick and abrupt, other people may notice it." Lin Mu spoke.

"That is true, but I think it's more of a question of practice. You just need more practice and then you should be able to control it better." Xukong advised.

"Yes senior." Lin Mu affirmed.

Lin Mu then set out to test the other aspects of the two sutras. He tested out its duration and range. He found out that the range of the sutras was currently limited to a range of ten meters, while the duration of its effectiveness was fifteen minutes. Though, if he kept on chanting, the effects would continue on.

Lin Mu also found out that the more he used the two sutras on other people, the more tired he got. This fatigue was not physical, but rather mental. If he continued using it despite his fatigue, a splitting headache would soon stop him.

It took him four hours to test it all out, and he even had to change his "Test subjects" as he could not just randomly follow people for that long without raising suspicion. Also, the people who he tested the sutras on started to feel strange as their emotions were going haywire. Lin Mu did not want to push his luck and harm innocent people, hence he stopped his experiment.

Lin Mu then walked out of the town and went towards the forest to hunt. He reached the forest after ten minutes and looked around for changes. The forest also felt a little calmer than normal. Though it was not completely silent, the noise was lower than normal.

"Did the effect spread to the forest as well?" Lin Mu questioned himself.

"It does seem like it, though I think the intensity was much less. The effect of the sutras on beasts should be different than humans. Most beasts have a distinct set of emotions than humans, thus you'll have to test out the specific effect yourself." Xukong replied.

"I'll have to capture some beasts then." Lin Mu muttered.

Lin Mu walked into the forest and went towards the depths of the forest. He wanted to hunt some spirit beasts, or at least some high tier beasts, as he did not feel satiated by lower-tier beasts. He soon found a beast, but it was a mid-tier beast. Not wanting to waste the time, Lin Mu swiftly killed it and stored it in the ring.

A few minutes later, he encountered a high tier beast. The beast had grey and green spotted skin with short limbs. It was the size of a calf and looked like a mix between a leopard and a bull. The beast had a screeching voice that disoriented Lin Mu for a bit.

While Lin Mu was disoriented, the beast pounced on him which he had to dodge by using the skill Flicker. After dodging, he twisted around and slashed at the beast, killing it. He stored the corpse and continued his hunt.

Lin Mu hunted four high tier beasts and nine mid-tier beasts over four hours, but he still could not find any spirit beasts. Only when the sun was about to set did he encounter a spirit beast. The spirit beast was the same kind of spirit beast that he had hunted before.

The beast was hiding on the top of a tree and was stalking him. Lin Mu had to use his spirit sense to get its exact location. The beast was around four meters away from him. Having confirmed this, Lin Mu used the second skill Blink, and appeared on the branch. The beast seemed startled by this and could not react.

Lin Mu stabbed his short sword through its back and ended its life. He then stored the corpse and decided to return to the town.

'Increasing the range of my spirit sense was definitely a good decision.' Lin Mu thought.

The sky had turned dark, and it had started snowing. The cries of the beasts had faded away, only to be replaced by the silence of freezing snow.

While on the way to the town, Lin Mu saw a small group of people standing on the side of the road. They were all wearing dark grey clothes and had their faces covered.