

Walker 631

Chapter 631 - Observing The City

Having learned quite a few things from the waiter, Lin Mu was given a lot to think about. The more he did, the more he felt like things were not right here. He gazed out of the gallery and saw the hustle and bustle of the port below.

'This place is way too prosperous for the cheap prices that they have.' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu could easily list over ten different sources of income that the city had and despite that, the people didn't seem to be that rich. Even this tea shop, which was supposed to be for the richer people, wasn't particularly expensive.

Even in Wu Lim city, Lin Mu had seen places more expensive than this. He was not feeling even more sure that there was something wrong with this place. The waiter took his leave after Lin Mu dismissed him and was tipped a few more silvers.

Lin Mu took another sip of the warm tea and closed his eyes. Low chanting that was inaudible to anyone in the room came out of Lin Mu's voice as his spirit sense spread around.

While before Lin Mu had done a quick scan with his spirit sense, it was only to get a gauge of the area of the city. If he wanted to see what was actually going on, he would need to focus on particular parts to be able to do that.

Once Lin Mu's eyes were closed, darkness descended in his vision. But as his spirit senses started to pick up things, that darkness started to be filled with things. At first, the building and people that were the closest to Lin Mu appeared in the darkness.

They were all in black, white and Grey in color now and if Lin Mu focused on any particular part, he could see its color as well. The more 'diffused' his perception was, the lesser details there were for him to 'see'.

Lin Mu went from the closest area around him in circles and expanded outwards. There he saw the commoners toiling and working hard, some cultivators fighting and arguing among themselves, fishermen carrying large wicker baskets filled with fish, women doing their daily chores and cooking, children playing around in the streets and old people watching them while reminiscing about their own childhood.

Lin Mu's perception kept on expanding as he started sensing the cultivation bases of everyone in the city. Those that were in the Qi refining realm and body tempering realm couldn't even feel anything when Lin Mu's spirit sense swept over them.

Eventually, Lin Mu even found Jing Luo on the opposite side of the city. He too was sitting in one of the city's establishments and this one seemed like a restaurant. Currently, he seemed to be enjoying a table full of dishes and was eating in a manner quite similar to that of Lin Mu himself.

Jing Luo felt when Lin Mu's spirit sense arrived near him and he responded with a simple nod. But upon seeing this, a thought appeared in Lin Mu's mind.

"Does he... even have money to pay for that food?" Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Lin Mu tried to recall but he didn't remember ever giving the man any of the coins that he had with him.

'He should be fine using the spirit stones for payment, he should have some low quality ones left probably.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

Lin Mu pulled his spirit sense from Jing Luo's area and proceeded ahead. After a bit, he finally reached a place of interest, the building where the council of merchants assembled.

"Hmm... interesting," Lin Mu muttered to himself.

His spirit sense easily bypassed the few formation barriers that were set up around the building and entered the building. The building was not that big compared to its importance and there were other buildings in the Jiao Long city that were over ten times bigger than this, but those buildings were warehouses for storing goods and raw materials.

There were several rooms in the building and it was mostly empty, other than a few servants and clerks going about their data. Only when Lin Mu reached the inner most hall of the building did he meet some resistance.

'Hmm... this is a stronger barrier. My spirit sense won't be able to enter at this range.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

He opened his eyes and stood up from the table before leaving the tea house. Once he was out of the building, he directly went to the side alley that went from the left of the tea house and then entered an even smaller alley.

Lin Mu had already scanned the entire Jiao Long city and now knew it like the back of his hand. He knew exactly what would be the best locations to hide and the places that would be empty.

Lin Mu sank into the ground using phase and quickly made his way to the merchant council's building. In less than ten seconds, he was already there. Lin Mu's movement speed while underground had increased by quite a bit since he could now fly using just his cultivation base due to being at the Nascent Soul realm.

To him, the ground was pretty much the same as air when he used Phase, and thus he could just fly around in the ground that way. Thus reaching the merchant council's building didn't take him that long.

Once he was there though, he quickly found some flaws in the barrier and made an opening just big enough for him to pass. He easily reached the innermost hall where the ten council members were likely to meet.

While there, Lin Mu saw several servants gossiping.

"Did you hear, they are going to remove the Mu clan from the council?" One of the servants whispered to another one.

"Hasn't that rumor been going around for a while now? Nothing strange there," the second servant replied with a whisper as well.

Chapter 632 - The Council's Secret Meeting

Lin Mu's ears perked up upon hearing the servant's words and he got closer to them.

"Isn't that why the council has met up today?" The servant asked.

"Oh yeah, I don't think I saw the Mu clan's leader either." The second servant replied.

"No way. Do you think they might be doing this secretly?" The first servant said with an apprehensive tone.

"Hey, you two! Get to work and stop gossiping!" A clerk who had just appeared from the corridor said out loud.

"Y-yes, sir!" The servants said before rushing away.

"Humph, dare to slack off on my watch..." The clerk said before returning to his work as well.

Lin Mu furrowed his brows upon hearing the words of the servants.

"Something is definitely fishy..." Lin Mu muttered as his head turned to the innermost hall.

He approached the barrier and placed his hand on it. About five seconds later, an opening appeared on its surface, allowing Lin Mu to enter freely. To Lin Mu, a formation of this level was easy to crack, taking him mere seconds to unravel.

Upon entering the inner hall, Lin Mu first sensed the spirit Qi fluctuations in the room. Since he had known that there were several core condensation realm cultivators in the council, they could still sense his spirit sense if he directly used it.

"Hmm... five at the early stage of the core condensation realm, two at the mid stage, and the remaining two at the peak stage of the Qi refining realm." Lin Mu quickly analyzed the cultivation bases.

He then turned his spirit sense into a fine tendril and probed the walls of the hall, before finding a location that was suitable to spy from.

"That shelf should be fine..." Lin Mu muttered before blinking to the wall behind the shelf.

He then slightly extended his head from the top of the shelf such that only his eyes were peeking out of it. The shelf itself was over five meters tall and there were several decorative show pieces kept on it. And no one was likely to directly gaze at the very top of the shelf between two statues that cast a shadow on the wall behind.

Lin Mu's eyes were hidden in these shadows and thus were not visible easily for others. But it allowed him to take a view of the room quite clearly.

"Hmm... so these are the so called council members..." Lin Mu internally said.

He saw five old men, three middle aged men, and one woman in the hall. They were sitting around a long circular table where one chair was currently empty. In all of them, Lin Mu quickly identified the one person he knew, Jingming Shang.

He looked the same as he did before when the last time Lin Mu had seen him, with the only difference being that his cultivation base had reached the Mid stage of the Core condensation realm and he was wearing more luxurious clothes.

A few seconds later, one of the old men started to speak.

"So we all agree that the Mu clan is no longer qualified to be part of the merchant council?" the old man stated.

"I'm fine with it. Even if they had already paid their council fees for about ten years beforehand, I doubt they would be able to keep up their businesses for that long." A middle aged man said with a clean shaved face said.

"Are we sure about this?" The only woman in the council asked. "I mean, the Mu clan was one of the founders of this council. Should we really remove them?"

"Has Miss Fen forgotten that we are merchants and all we care about are profits. The Mu clan is no longer profitable and beneficial to the image of the Merchant Council. Do you have doubts about that?" The Old Man questioned.

"Isn't this dishonorable, though? We would be going against our promise that was made to the patriarch of the Mu clan." The Woman replied.

"Oh? Does Miss Fen have some other interests in the Mu clan?" an old man that had small eyes asked.

"Who knows, perhaps Miss Fen is interested in the brat of Mu Clan, haha!" The second middle aged man who was dressed in a Grey aristocrat's robe joked.

"You! Think before you speak!" The woman named Fen got angry.

"Why? Did I step on a sensitive nerve?" The man teased.

"Gun Kai, you dare insult me to my face!?" The woman named Fen stood up from the chair and pointed at the man.

Spirit Qi fluctuations came off her body and it was obvious that she was at the early stage core condensation realm.

~shua~

Equally powerful spirit Qi fluctuations came from the man named Gun Kai as well and clashed with Miss Fen's. The two were in a stalemate for about thirty seconds while they stared at each other, with neither coming out on top.

~Sigh~

Jingming Shang, who had been silently watching it all, suddenly sighed.

"People, people, people, we are civilized humans here. No need to act like those prudes on the streets." Jingming Shang placated the two.

"Besides, it isn't just Miss Fen that seems to have extra interests. If my sources are correct, isn't there an additional party exterior to the merchant council that is interested in the removal of the Mu clan from the council?" Jingming Shang said with one eye open.

"What do you mean by that Jingming Shang? Do you dare to accuse us openly?" The old man who had spoken at the start said, feeling irritated.

"No, no. All I mean is... we all have benefits to pursue. Why don't we just discuss them openly so that a conflict like this doesn't appear? Who knows, perhaps you might even find an option which is far more profitable?" Jingming Shang suggested in a nonchalant tone.

The members of the council heard his words and deliberated over them for a bit before nodding their heads.

"We'll do as Jingming Shang suggested." The old man said with a straight expression.

Chapter 633 - A Hidden Backer

Lin Mu was surprised that the other council members had accepted Jingming Shang's words so quickly.

'So the saying merchants will sell their mothers and children if it bring them fortune is true, huh...' Lin Mu thought to himself.

Putting these thoughts aside for now, Lin Mu focused on the task at hand and continued to observe the council.

"Well, then who wants to start first?" Jingming Shang questioned.

He gazed around at the council and finally settled on the old man who had spoken the first time.

"Why doesn't senior Shantung start first? You are the oldest of us all, so this honor should go to you," Jingming Shang said with a thin smile.

The old man who was named Shantung didn't mind Jingming Shang pushing him at the front and took it with ease.

"So I'll reveal to you all that we have a backer currently willing to get a seat in the merchant council. While we could add another seat while keeping the Mu clan in there, getting the approval from the royal family will be difficult." Shantung said.

"Is that why you want to remove the Mu clan from the council?" One of the middle aged men who wore a single earring on his right ear asked.

"If it was like that, I would have long since done it. But no... the backer wants something else... they want the seat of the Mu clan specifically. In simple words, they do not want the Mu Clan to exist." Shantung revealed.

A few of the members of the council had surprised expressions on their faces, but it didn't seem like they were truly genuine.

"How many of the council members knew about this already, senior Shantung?" Jingming Shang asked with a straight face.

He then saw four members out of the nine, raising their hand, among them, Gun Kai was included, and so were two more older men of the council. The ones that were not included in it were Miss Fen, the man with the earring, and the remaining members.

'As expected...' Jingming Shang thought to himself.

"Let's say we go according to the wishes of this backer of yours and boot off the Mu clan from the council. What will be the aftereffects of that, have you thought of that?" Jingming Shang questioned. "I mean... won't the royal family be concerned about this? From what I've seen and heard till now, they try to keep tabs on the council." He added.

Shantung nodded his head and looked at Gun Kai for a second before speaking.

"This backer of ours... he doesn't really care for the opinion of the royal family... but of course they did try to come in his way and now... the royal family is in turmoil," Shantung spoke in a serious tone.

At first, the other council members didn't pick it up, but a second later they understood the meaning behind Shantung's words. Jingming Shang also raised his eyes upon hearing the revelation.

"I see... so the royal family has invited trouble by interfering with the backer's plans. But if this backer really is this powerful and influential as to affect even the royal family... why does he want a seat at our merchant council? Frankly speaking... we shouldn't even be in his eyes." Jingming Shang spoke.

"That is exactly why I don't dare question him. If he can cause the royal family troubles like this without even appearing, then what would he be able to do to us... to our clans and our businesses..." Shantung said in a cold tone.

Hearing his explanation, the other members, who did not know of the backer originally, felt chills going down their spines, except for Jingming Shang. The man instead had a calm expression on his face that could not be fazed by anything.

The council members went silent for a couple of minutes before Jingming Shang finally broke the silence.

"Miss Fen... you must have had a reason to act in favor of the Mu clan, right? What was it? We know Senior Shantung's side and now let's see yours." Jingming Shang questioned.

Miss Fen, who had a slightly lost look on her face, looked at Jingming Shang and the rest of the council before taking a deep breath.

"The reason why I acted in favor of the Mu clan was because of a rumor..." Miss Fen stated.

"A rumor? What kind of a rumor?" the council members asked.

"A few years ago, I heard a rumor about the Mu clan. It is said that their clan is actually an offshoot of an ancient clan of the continent. I don't know how much you all know about the history of the world... about the five great continents." Miss Fen replied.

"The five great continents... You mean before the unification of the Great Zhou Empire?" Jingming Shang questioned.

"YES!" Miss Fen responded. "As the history goes, there were once five great continents in this world of ours, the northern, the eastern, the western, the southern and the central continent. Among these five continents, the great Zhou empire is currently composed of only three of them.

Namely, the southern continent, the eastern continent and the central continent. The northern continent is the territory of the Northern tribes while the western continent... it doesn't exist anymore." Miss Fen revealed.

"What?! Is this really true? I've never heard of this before." The middle aged man with the earring said feeling shocked.

Jingming Shang didn't say anything and sat in silence. Nobody knew what was going on in his mind right now. Lin Mu was intrigued by hearing this all as well and wondered what else he would find out.

'This is the first time I'm seeing someone else other than Jing Wei speaking about the history of this world. So far no other person I met knows much about the existence of the five continents...' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu was even more intrigued due to the fact that the Mu clan was rumored to be the offshoot of an ancient clan. He wanted to know what kind of a clan could they be from that Miss Fen was willing to help them.

Chapter 634 - An Ancient Clan?

After hearing the doubt of the middle aged man with the earring, some of the other council members were interested in it too.

"I'd like to know more as well." Gun Kai, who was on the side of Shantung asked.

~Sigh~

"I guess I can explain this to you all... this is not something that is known to the people of the recent few generations..." Shantung said.

"Why is that so?" Jingming Shang suddenly asked.

"There are many reasons for it, but the biggest one is that... it has simply been far too long. In fact, even I don't know when all this exactly happened." Shantung replied.

"I see... please do explain it to us." Jingming Shang stated.

"As I said before, I don't really know when this all happened, but it's safe to assume that it's been thousands of years. As of now, I think only a few of the cultivation sects including the top cultivation sects, the different aristocrats of the kingdoms and a few old clans, know about all this.

Even I myself only know about this because I once traded a few old documents in exchange for a lot of money. Originally, I had thought that these documents maybe some kind of a cultivation technique or a Qi skill that was found from a ruin.

But it turned out to be something far more shocking." Shantung said, and took a pause.

"As miss Fen said previously, there used to be five continents in the world. There were many conflicts between them and a great war happened. After that war, the five continents were joined up by some peerless cultivators.

But then the northern continent, which was the biggest enemy back then and even is now, did something. They destroyed the entire western continent and made it sink into the ocean. The people of that time managed to stop the northern continent from fully merging with the Great Zhou continent, but it came at a great cost.

It is said that ever since then, the powers of the world fell considerably such that were are not even half as compared to then. The area that we live in right now, the Fenlong Kingdom... it was once part of the Eastern continent." Shantung explained.

"This... I can't believe it..." The middle aged man with the earring commented.

The others were finding it hard to believe it as well and didn't know what to say. For about five minutes, silence descended in the hall and no one spoke as they tried to internalize this shocking information.

But Lin Mu on the other hand, furrowed his brows.

'So they don't have a proper record of the history as well... the record that this man Shantung saw only mentions a war but doesn't mention the invaders? What stupidity...' Lin Mu thought to himself as he shook his head.

Seeing that one of the most important parts of the history being removed from the records made him feel disappointed.

'Perhaps if the people of this world had proper records and knew about what had all happened, they would have been far more alert...' Lin Mu reckoned.

"About this link of Mu clan to an Ancient Clan... whats the rest of the story behind it?" Jingming Shang questioned.

"Ah yes! As Senior Shantung said, there were five continents in the past. I found out that the ancient clan that the Current Mu clan is an offshoot of belonged to the now destroyed Western continent." Miss Fen answered.

"How sure are you of this?" It was Shantung that questioned the woman this time.

"See it for yourself..." Miss Fen said as she withdrew an old scroll from her spatial storage treasures, which was a hair pin.

The scroll had a metallic stamp imprinted on one of its edges while golden tassels hung from its corners. Shantung took the ancient scroll carefully and observed it with his spirit sense.

"This... I've never seen paper like this before... it's woven with formations..." Shantung said as he continued to observe it.

"Exactly! I've never seen those kinds of runes and scriptures before other than in some of the extremely old ruins. But even then they only had a few of those scriptures and charterers, not hundreds like on this scroll." Miss Fen stated.

'What is in that scroll?' Lin Mu wondered and tried to focus on it.

'Oh? Dao Script?' Lin Mu recognized the characters.

"This looks like the primordial script that some of the formations masters use." Shantung suddenly said.

"Primordial script? But isn't that a lost language? Even the formation masters only know how to write them but don't know their meaning." Another old man suddenly said.

Lin Mu's ears perked up as he remembered that Old Man Jing Wei had also called Dao Script as the primordial script before. He had also seen some Dao Script characters being used in the formations Jing Wei had made.

While Lin Mu could not fully read the scroll from this angle, he decided to use his spirit sense to see what it exactly was. Since it had Dao Script written in it, Lin Mu was sure that there would be traces of spirit Qi that would allow him to read without directly interacting with Shantung's spirit sense.

"What's written in it?" Jingming Shang asked the question that everyone else had been wanting to ask.

"The scroll states that during the ancient war, a lot of clans that survived the collapse of the western continent moved to the great Zhou continent. These clans eventually joined other cultivation sects or created their own. While many faded away to the annals of time, a few still managed to survive.

But when the clans were escaping the western continent, not all of their people evacuated. There were still the main powerhouses of those clans that needed to stay back to fight the war. The few that were sent out were either younger members of the clans or even some of the branches.

The Mu clan of Fenlong kingdom is from one such Ancient Clan of the western continent... The Mulong Clan!" Shantung read.

Chapter 635 - The Fen Clan And The Fenlong Clan

Upon hearing the words written on the scroll, the council members were shocked. They had not thought that some average merchant clan in a small kingdom like the Fenlong Kingdom would be related to some ancient clan.

But while they were having thoughts about the ancient clan, Lin Mu was thinking about something else.

'Mulong... Fenlong... Mu Clan... Fen Clan...' Lin Mu couldn't help but repeat.

They seemed to be significantly similar to him and he wondered if there was some relation to all of them.

'This Miss Fen... is she related to the Royal Family too?' Lin Mu wondered.

Jingming Shang furrowed his brows and came to the crux of the matter.

"Miss Fen... I understand that the Mu Clan is related to the ancient Mulong Clan, but what is your particular interest in it? I mean, there are a lot of smaller clans that were once related to the ancient clans.

We can literally find tens of people with the Zhou surname, and they may even be related to the Imperial family, but just how far is the relation, that matters too." Jingming Shang questioned.

Miss Fen looked at Jingming Shang and hesitated a bit before speaking.

"As you might all know, my Fen clan is technically related to the Royal Family of our Fenlong Kingdom as well. My mother was a lower member of the royal family and married into the branch, which split apart a long time ago.

This branch chose to keep 'Fen' as their surname while letting go of the 'Long' from their name. They thought at that time that keeping an imposing name such as 'Long' might bring them trouble since they didn't actually have the true power to back it up.

Still, deep down, my clansmen still wanted to one day gain back the old surname. We had been striving on it by becoming merchants and amassing a fortune. Of course, our clansmen did as much as they could do, by pursuing the path of cultivation as well, yet there weren't really any people that had a good talent.

In my clan, I'm the only one that could be said to have a decent talent." Miss Fen explained.

Having heard her words the some of the council members nodded their heads while some of them just got more confused.

"I still don't understand how this links up with you speaking for the Mu clan," Gun Kai questioned.

~Sigh~

"I'm not done yet... it's just painful...

My elders pursued cultivation but couldn't achieve much and thus they tried to find other ways to get stronger. The way we sought was bloodline assimilation. Of course, doing so is a difficult task and finding a suitable bloodline for everyone would be close to impossible.

But even then, we found an alchemist that was an expert at bloodline refinement. He did an analysis for us and told us that no bloodline would be compatible with us because... we still have an innate bloodline hidden within us." Miss Fen revealed.

~gasp~

The council members were far more shocked upon hearing this revelation. They couldn't believe that the Fen Clan could have an innate bloodline. But what they were even more shocked about was that Miss Fen chose to reveal sensitive information like this.

Lin Mu was surprised by this too and felt like the more time he spent here, the deeper the web of mystery got for him. But while some of the members of the council were shocked, two of them were not convinced.

"Why would you say something like this, Miss Fen? No benefit comes to you by doing this." Shantung asked.

"I agree with senior Shantung this time." Jingming Shang added.

"That is why I said it was painful. The innate bloodline we have is the reason why our cultivation talent is not that good. The alchemist that we met told us that it is our own innate bloodline that suppresses our talent, and unless few fully awaken it we would not be able to reach our potential.

Of course, my elders were not convinced and tried to find a solution to this problem. One of them managed to get some of the ancestral scrolls from the Fenlong Kingdom's royal library. In there we discovered that the Fenlong Clan and thus the Fen clan in relation was said to have peerless experts thousands of years ago.

But then an evil cultivator came and cursed them to never be able to cultivate. The ancestors managed to resist the curse, but it still managed to suppress the innate bloodline that they had. Over the years, information about the bloodline was lost as well, and now we know nothing about it.

We still continued our search and eventually found out about the Mulong Clan. It was even said that the Fenlong Kingdom took their name from being inspired by the Mulong clan once upon a time. This was because both were clans that were based around the ocean and practice water attribute cultivation techniques and skills." Miss Fen explained further.

Jingming Shang and Shantung nodded their heads as they finally understood the woman's thinking. They understood that even if the information about the innate bloodline was revealed, it was not like they could take advantage of it.

'No wonder they seemed to be so different... the founders of the Fenlong Kingdom took inspiration from the Mulong clan.' Lin Mu thought.

"Wait! So the reason you wanted to support the Mu clan is because of their relation to the Mulong Clan?" Gun Kai asked.

"Not just that," Miss Fen shook her head. "I know for sure that the Mu Clan has some old records about the Mulong clan and my elders hoped that those records may contain something that may help us awaken our bloodline." She answered.

Lin Mu was a bit confused upon hearing her words, though.

'If they really wanted to find a way to awaken their bloodline, why would they pursue the records of the Mu clan. This is just hoping to find something. It is not even sure that they would have something like that.' Lin Mu thought.

Chapter 636 - Temptation

Lin Mu thought a bit more about the Fen Clan's situation and got more confused.

'Rather than searching like this, why don't they go to actual ancient clans that still exist or even the cultivation sects that are far more likely to have a solution?' Lin Mu thought.

"You're forgetting something," Xukong suddenly spoke in Lin Mu's mind.

"What is it, senior?" Lin Mu asked.

"Do you think they can afford that? Or whether those ancient clans or the cultivation sects will entertain them?" Xukong replied.

Lin Mu heard senior Xukong's word and came to a realization.

"Of course... how did I miss that..." Lin Mu muttered.

"Often there are solutions to problems that one knows about, but those solutions are unreachable. And sometimes pursuing them can lead to further trouble. Thus, rather than doing that, people prefer to toil in the pursuit of another solution that is hard to find but still could be possible." Xukong stated.

"I understand, senior..." Lin Mu replied.

The situation of the Fen Clan was similar to a poor person that was sick. They knew that they could get cured rather quickly as long as they went to a physician. But doing that cost a lot more money than they could afford.

Thus, rather than doing that, they would try other solutions like home remedies, alternative medicine, herbs, prayer, exorcism, and other superstitious things like that. All they wanted was relief from their pain. They didn't care what solution led to that.

Having learned this, Lin Mu gained a different perspective on life and people.

"Hmm, so that is why..." Jingming Shang spoke.

"Still, even if you think of that Miss Fen, it might not be viable. You have no surety that you will be able to find a solution in the Mu clan and whether they would even be willing to give it to you.

After all, despite them being in debt, they have not sold the heirlooms and fortune that they had amassed over the years." Shantung said.

Miss Fen couldn't help but nod after hearing this. This was something that she had known already, but after hearing from the lips of others, it just became too real and painful as well.

"Though... if we do as our backer says, the Mu Clan might be eliminated and Miss Fen might be able to get access to the ancient records of the Mu Clan.

Also... if my backer is pleased, they might even be willing to search for a solution as they are far more powerful than us." Shantung spoke in a calm tone, as if devil voicing his wares into the ears of a desperate person.

As soon as Miss Fen heard this, her ears perked up and a new drive appeared in her eyes.

"Can you assure that I'll be able to get the records from the Mu clan?" Miss Fen asked directly.

"If Miss Fen supports us, then I assure you that you and only will get the records of the Mu clan." Shantung stated his deal.

Miss Fen thought for about a minute before making up her mind.

"I accept." She stated.

And just like that, another person was roped into the fold of Shantung.

"Will we get the resources from the Mu clan as well?" The remaining members that were not yet in the party of Shantung questioned.

"Of course, all those who take part will get a section of spoils to their names. Either they can get the resources that they want, or an equivalent value in coins." Shantung said with a smile.

The neutral members looked at each other before nodding their heads.

"We agree to it as well then," they spoke.

Lin Mu furrowed his brows upon hearing all this.

'In just a few minutes, they doomed a clan to extinction...' Lin Mu thought to himself, not finding it to be right.

He looked at Jingming Shang, wanting to know what the man would decide.

"And what about you Jingming Shang? Everyone else has joined and only you are left." Shantung questioned.

"Hmm... I think I'll pass on this. You all can split the spoil amongst yourself." Jingming Shang stated, causing Shantung and a few of the council members to furrow their brows. "But fear not... I won't interfere in your plan either and will stay a neutral party. After all... this brings me no benefit." He added.

Hearing his answer, the council members finally felt at ease and nodded their heads.

"That is fine, then. As long as you don't interfere, no problems will come your way." Shantung replied.

"Mmmhmm." Jingming Shang hummed in response and stood up from his seat. "I guess this meeting is coming to an end, then. I'll take my leave, I have places to be." Jingming Shang said and left the room.

Shantung and the rest of the members didn't care about him leaving and talked amongst themselves for a couple of minutes before splitting up as well.

"I'll talk with our backer tonight and inform him of our decision. Once that is done, I'll call another meeting to discuss the details." Shantung said.

"That is fine."

"Acceptable."

"We shall take our leave as well then."

The different council members spoke and left the council's building. Once they were gone, Lin Mu furrowed his brows and rose up to the roof of the building. From there he looked around and spread his spirit sense, searching for someone.

After searching for a few seconds, Lin Mu found his target.

"There he is..." Lin Mu said as he Blinked away to a different roof top.

He moved from roof top to roof top, hidden from the sights of people. He followed his target and waited for him to reach a suitable location that was secluded than the others. It took Lin Mu about two minutes of following, before the target reached a suitable place.

It was a street filled with relatively empty shops and few people going about their way. Another difference was that there were no cultivators here, just commoners. Once he was here, Lin Mu blinked next to the man and put his hand around his mouth and another around his chest, before flying away.

Chapter 637 - Jingming Shang Is Kidnapped

Jingming Shang had been going about his day after having finished the tiresome merchant council meeting. He had to admit that while he had joined the merchant council for the benefits and prestige; it was now proving to be quite a hassle.

He had joined the merchant council so that he could get some power and also stay away from the bigger political dramas. But now that very drama had found him and infiltrated the council.

Of course, Jingming Shang wanted to know the entire situation before he actually rejected anything, but he had a hunch that it was not going to be according to his wishes. Thankfully, he had managed to stay in a neutral position in the end.

Right now, he just wanted to go to his residence in the city and relax while having some good wine that he had recently bought from the First Sun Kingdom. It was said to be a special one made from the coconuts that grew on the island nation and were their specialty.

Unlike the other members of the council, Jingming Shang didn't really have any extra security and he simply walked out alone. After all, security would only work if they were stronger than him.

Jingming Shang was at the mid stage of the Core condensation realm and thus didn't really need any protection. At least in the city itself. If there was anyone that was going to attack him, they would need to be many times stronger than him.

Even those at the late or peak stage of the Core condensation realm would be unable to attack him as he was confident in defending against them and even if he could not defeat them, he had the confidence to escape with his trump cards.

Perhaps only a Nascent Soul realm cultivator might be able to attack and harm him. But if it really came to that, then Jingming Shang was already doomed. He had already learned from the previous lessons a few decades ago and avoided stepping on the toes of people that were stronger than him by a large margin or too influential.

This had saved him from most problems, but there were still some people he would inadvertently offend. For people like these, he would show a genial demeanor on the front while plotting to get rid of them later.

After all, unlike a lot of other merchants and cultivators, Jingming Shang knew a lot of secrets about the world and the people. He even knew a few people that were at a very high cultivation base such that there were only a handful of other such cultivators on the continent.

Jingming Shang had the trust that they would be able to save him if he was ever truly in a pinch.

But he had never expected that he would be in danger today. He was kidnapped literally in the middle of a street like a toddler and he couldn't even do anything. He tried to scream, but the hand that was clamped on his mouth was like an iron vice.

The same could be said for the other hand that was wrapped around his waist. The strength of the person that was holding him was far stronger than him and no matter how much he resisted he couldn't do move.

But when he finally looked below him, he finally understood the kind of situation he was in... he was flying!

This meant that the cultivator that had just kidnapped him was at the very least a Nascent Soul realm cultivator, and a strong one at that. Jingming Shang had a couple of defensive talismans on his body that should have been able to defend against the cultivator for at least a second.

But they had never even activated or were perhaps stopped before they could ever reach the full activation. This confirmed the fact for him that he was in utter and absolute trouble. He tried to take a look at his attacker but could not due to his head being held in place.

They flew for about thirty seconds before landing. Jingming Shang felt the grip on his waist and hands loosen and the hand on his mouth being lifted. As soon as this happens, he threw out a spiked ball at his attacker and retreated.

~DENG~

Jingming Shang then saw the man who had kidnapped him slapping away the mid grade spirit weapon as if it was a rubber ball.

"Wh-what?! How?!" Jingming Shang couldn't help but say.

He finally took a proper look at his kidnapped and saw his appearance. The man had a mask on his face and was dressed in rather modest clothes. While they weren't particularly luxurious, they weren't bad either and looked to be new.

Other than this, the man had a gold ring with green patterns on his right hand and nothing else. He didn't even have any weapons on his body as of now. But Jingming Shang was sure that the ring on his hand was a spatial storage treasure.

Jingming Shang extended his spirit sense and tried to probe his attacker, but met with resistance. No matter how much his spirit sense tried to proceed, it was blocked by the attacker's own spirit sense, which was dense like mud.

"Have you had enough, Jingming Shang?" Lin Mu finally spoke.

"Who- who are you? And how much compensation do you want to let me go?" Jingming Shang questioned right away.

He had already understood that there was no way he would be able to fight against someone at this man's cultivation base and hoped that this man would be tempted by his riches.

"Ahahaha," Lin Mu couldn't help but laugh upon seeing Jingming Shang's response.

He had kept him restrained because he wanted to get away as soon as possible. But didn't expect this man to act like this.

"Did you forget me, Jingming Shang?" Lin Mu asked.

"Who-who are you?" Jingming Shang asked while trying to remember all the people he had offended till now.

Chapter 638 - Confusion And Clarification

Jingming Shang watched on as the man in front of him lifted his mask and revealed his face. He had not been able to recognize the voice and hoped that the face would be somewhat of a clue.

"Huh? Who are you?" Jingming Shang questioned, still unable to recognize him.

Lin Mu raised his brows upon seeing Jingming Shang's reaction.

"Hmm... guess this is actually good. At least Gu Yao and the rest would not be able to recognize me easily if Jingming Shang can't do it." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

"Who are you and why did you kidnap me?" Jingming Shang asked, seeing that the kidnapper was mumbling to himself.

'Who is this guy? If I knew someone with a face as handsome and a demeanor like him, I would have definitely remembered him. Wait it minute... could it perhaps be the elder of someone I offended?' Jingming Shang wondered, getting even more nervous than before.

Seeing that Jingming Shang was clearly in the dark about who he was, Lin Mu decided to say it himself.

"It's me, Lin Mu."

"Lin Mu?" Jingming Shang repeated the name and tried to match it in his memories.

The only names that came up that he knew about were a few small merchants, commoners and a boy wanted by every cultivation sect in the world. He was sure that the man in front of him was none of those.

"Old Man Jing Wei and Duan Ke... do you remember now?" Lin Mu stated.

As soon as Jingming Shang heard those two names, his eyes went wide.

"How do you... wait, you're that boy! That boy in that shop back then." Jingming Shang finally recognized.

It was hard for him to match the features of that boy to the man in front of him, but once he considered the years that had passed since then, he understood. But then fear filled him after that.

"No... not just that boy... you're THE Lin Mu, aren't you? The most wanted person in the world." Jingming Shang said.

"What? I'm the most wanted person? I don't think I really saw any posters about me recently." Lin Mu said, feeling confused. "Though yes, I am the same person you saw in the shop with Jing Wei and Duan Ke back then."

Jingming Shang calmed down a bit after hearing that. Originally, he had been confused about the identity of Lin Mu but now that it had been established he truly was the one linked to Jing Wei and Duan Ke, he felt relieved.

~pew~

"So they really didn't exaggerate back then, you really are quite strong." Jingming Shang said.

"What do you mean?" Lin Mu questioned, feeling a bit disconnected.

Jingming Shang sighed to himself before explaining all that had happened since Lin Mu fought Gu Yao.

Apparently, Jingming Shang had learned about Lin Mu from the many warnings the sects had spread around. They had called him a threat to the people and that he had invited an invader into the world with the help of the northern tribes.

At first, Jingming Shang didn't believe the boy that he had seen in the shop was the same as those in the wanted posters that were spread everywhere. But after hearing the many accounts of it, he started to believe it to.

The hardest thing for him to believe was that such a person could be linked to Jing Wei and Duan Ke. While Jingming Shang didn't exactly know the true identities of the two people, he knew that they were very powerful.

He knew they were hiding from the sects and now wondered if Lin Mu was involved in this plan with them. Then later on Jingming Shang had found them to have disappeared completely from the face of the earth.

This only affirmed his belief that they must have been involved in it. Jingming Shang knew that he could not let others know that he knew them and thus distanced himself from all the other people that knew about it or had an idea.

Even if the others didn't know about Jing Wei and Duan Ke, Jingming Shang wasn't sure if it would come out in the future. Thus to be on the safe side, he moved away from the Shuang Qian Kingdom and came to the south, eventually settling in the Fenlong Kingdom.

Jingming Shang reckoned that even if something happened, it would not reach a small kingdom like the Fenlong Kingdom. But it was proven to be wrong just today.

~Sigh~

"That Gu Yao... he really dared to vilify me that much, huh..." Lin Mu muttered.

"Who's this Gu Yao you're talking about and where are Jing Wei and Duan Ke?" Jingming Shang questioned.

"Gu Yao is the actual culprit behind all of this. All the things that they said I did, it is Gu Yao who did it in reality. He is the brother of former mayor Wu Xun and an ally of the northern tribes. As for Jing Wei and Duan Ke, they are safe. They are just in seclusion... I think." Lin Mu answered.

Jingming Shang obviously didn't believe Lin Mu fully, but after hearing his side of the story and linking it up with the information that he himself had dug out, the inconsistencies started to come up.

An hour later Jingming Shang was finally convinced.

"I... I can't believe all this has been happening. This Gu Yao... he's far dangerous than any other person I've ever heard about." Jingming Shang said.

"Exactly. He has been planning all this for a long time and is behind the suffering of a lot of people. In fact... back at the Merchant council, I think the secret backer is none other than Gu Yao or someone working beneath him." Jingming Shang replied.

"Wait! How do you know about the meeting?" Jingming Shang asked in shock.

"Well... I was spying on it. Originally I came to find you, but ended up listening to what was basically a plan to exterminate the Mu clan." Lin Mu replied.

Chapter 639 - Recruiting Jingming Shang

Jingming Shang was still confused about how Lin Mu actually managed to get in despite the barriers. He could have understood if Lin Mu broke or dismantled the formations, but when he left the building, he was sure that all of the barriers were intact and unaffected.

After thinking for a bit, Jingming Shang decided to let it go and just attributed it to some skill that Lin Mu might have. After all, he had reached the Nascent Soul realm in such a small time. It would be less shocking that he would have some method like this.

Lin Mu and Jingming Shang discussed a bit more and Lin Mu explained his end of the things and how Gu Yao's plan was working. The alliances, the conflicts, the emperor's sickness, everything was an intricate plan made by Gu Yao with the assistance of the Northern tribes.

"Hmm... now that I think about it, there have been a lot of rumors about the northern tribes in the past few years." Jingming Shang suddenly spoke.

"There are? Surprisingly I haven't heard them at all till now." Lin Mu spoke.

"They are mostly rumors that plague the commoners. They fear that the Northern tribe has already entered the Great Zhou continent and is secretly planning things to destroy it. The sects and cultivators though, think of it as a joke and don't think they would ever be able to enter the continent.

There are even stories of people spotting the spies of northern tribes in various places. But they were easily dismissed and not taken seriously." Jingming Shang said.

Lin Mu furrowed his brows upon hearing this.

"And what did these rumored spies of the northern tribes look like, according to these commoners?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm... all the accounts say that they were wearing thick animal furs on their bodies and had pale complexions." Jingming Shang explained.

A complex expression appeared on Lin Mu's face upon hearing this.

"I'm afraid those are not rumors..." Lin Mu replied.

"Why? Do you know something more?" Jingming Shang questioned.

"I know for sure that they are from the northern tribes... someone I know, someone I trust, has seen them as well. And this was two years ago." Lin Mu answered.

Jingming Shang's face went pale upon hearing it. Unlike the rumors, he would much rather trust Lin Mu about something like this and now that he heard that the northern tribes had truly entered the continent, he was stunned.

"But how can this be possible? The Pear's Belt is very difficult to cross and even then there is the Vermillion legion that guards the passes that allows one to cross over the waist." Jingming Shang questioned, feeling a bit lost.

"If Gu Yao can control the elders and patriarch of the top sects, then controlling some commanders from the Vermillion legion would be far easier. Plus, I think that might have been one of the first things they must have done.

Once they secure their entry, the rest of the plan would be far easier to do." Lin Mu spoke.

"This Gu Yao... if he can control such strong people, then isn't everything lost already?" Jingming Shang said, feeling hopeless.

"No, there are still things restricting him. After seeing the technique that he uses, I was able to devise certain limitations that he must have. The very first one that I know is that he can only control a limited amount of people at once and if he wants to let them free from his control, he needs to kill them.

The use of his technique is not instant and needs a lot of preparation. Then there is the fact that it can actually be resisted and people can free themselves from it if they have certain beast bloodlines and cultivation techniques." Lin Mu explained.

Jingming Shang seemed far better after hearing the words of Lin Mu. He at least felt a bit of hope that something could be done and not all was lost.

"So what is it that you want from me?" Jingming Shang questioned.

"You know about Gu Yao and the danger he poses to everyone in this world. I want your help in defeating him and freeing the people under his control. I know this is something I can't do alone and need a lot of allies.

I know you are someone approved by Old Man Jing Wei and Duan Ke. They are two people I trust the most in this world and if they approve of you; I approve of you as well. Are you willing to join us in resisting and defeating Gu Yao?" Lin Mu questioned.

"I..." Jingming Shang seemed to hesitate and didn't know what to say.

"I'm not too strong to do many things. I won't be able to fight against that many people if it comes to it." Jingming Shang voiced his concern.

"You won't have to. The purpose of the alliance is not to fight Gu Yao head on, rather we need to fight him on all fronts. We need a variety of people that can do different tasks and I believe you can excel at one of them." Lin Mu replied.

"And what task is that?" Jingming Shang questioned.

"One of the basic steps in defeating Gu Yao would be to dismantle his support system. He gets these supplies that help him in his cultivation and increasing the number of people he has under his control.

I know by now that Gu Yao uses various means to transport them to the place that he resides in and also to the other places that need these supplies. If we take away these supplies, he won't be able to do a lot of things.

I've heard from Jing Wei and Duan Ke that you are a talented merchant. And if you are one, you should be able to see where a certain amount of goods could be heading to and changes in the trade patterns. This is all I want from you." Lin Mu explained, "... and one other thing."

Chapter 640 - Jing Luo In Trouble?

Having heard Lin Mu, Jingming Shang deliberated over his words for a few minutes before nodding his head.

"I guess I can do the part you were telling me about, but what's the other thing you want from me?" Jingming Shang questioned.

"I think it would be better if I talk to you about it along with another ally of ours." Lin Mu replied.

"Another ally? Who?" Jingming Shang asked feeling curious.

"Grandson of old man Jing Wei," Lin Mu said with a smile.

Jingming Shang was surprised to say the least upon hearing that the man had another grandchild.

"Let's go meet up with him and then we can talk further about the plans." Lin Mu added.

"Alright... but where is he?" Jingming Shang questioned.

"Hmm, let me check." Lin Mu said and took out the communication jade slip before contacting Jing Luo.

After a few seconds, Lin Mu put away the jade slip and had a wry smile on his face before he looked at the city.

"He's waiting for us at a certain restaurant at the south of the city." Lin Mu stated.

"Why do you look like that? Did something happen?" Jingming Shang asked.

"Yes... a little trouble. We'll see it once we get there." Lin Mu said.

Jingming Shang nodded his head and then the two men went to the restaurant where Jing Luo was previously. Since the two of them were already out of the city, they could directly fly around the outer area of the city and speed their way to the southern part.

Having reached there, Lin Mu and Jingming Shang got down at one of the smaller hills and then walked to the city gate. Upon seeing Jingming Shang the guards simply cupped their hands and let the two men in.

They didn't even question who they were, which showed that Jingming Shang was quite a bit influential and famous in the city.

"Just some perks of being in the merchant council." Jingming Shang chuckled.

The two of them then went to the street where the restaurant was located and spotted it rather easily. It was the biggest building on that street and seemed to be far more luxurious than the other restaurants Lin Mu had seen.

Lin Mu spread his spirit sense and soon spotted Jing Luo inside the restaurant. He was at the top floor of the building and was currently standing over five men and a collapsed table. There were empty plates laying around in fragments and food platters bent.

~Sigh~

"What did he do..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

The two of them climbed to the top floor and saw Jing Luo arguing with a man.

"You dare make trouble in my restaurant!" The man who seemed to be the owner of the place shouted.

"You are the ones who offended me first! How dare you say the spirit stones I have are fake!" Jing Luo shouted back.

As soon as Lin Mu heard this, he instantly understood what must have happened.

"Is that him?" Jingming Shang asked.

"Yup. That's him alright." Lin Mu replied.

Currently there were barely any spirit Qi fluctuations coming from the body of Jing Luo and it was evident that he was hiding his cultivation base. This was decided by Lin Mu and him beforehand so as to hide their identities and avoid trouble.

"I'll take care of this. Best we leave this place soon..." Jingming Shang whispered to Lin Mu. "What's going on here?" he then asked out loud.

Jingming Shang's voice attracted the attention of everyone in the room and they looked at him. The owner of the restaurant who spotted him felt like he had found a companion and his eyes lit up.

Jing Luo saw Lin Mu as well and kept his expression intact.

"Senior Shang! You came at the right time. This person is a fraud that dares to cheat me. He first ate a lot of food, all of them being the most expensive dishes of my place. Then when it came time to pay the bill, he didn't have any coins!

He did say that he had spirit stones instead and then I got suspicious. You know there have been accounts of stammers using fake spirit stones to cheat people and he is the same. Look at this!" the owner shot out a series of sentences without stopping.

The owner held out a spirit stone that was the size of a index finger in front of him.

"Look at the size, it's not even close to that of a spirit stone. Does he really believe that he can fool us by showing such a big spirit stones? Everyone knows spirit stones are the size of fingernails, despite their grade." The owner said smugly.

Lin Mu and Jingming Shang couldn't help but face palm upon hearing this.

"You hearing this man? Look how ridiculous he sounds. Can't one just probe a spirit stone and check if its real?" Jing Luo stated.

"Humph! You think I don't know the fraudsters tricks? You guys make fake stones and inject a certain amount of spirit Qi into them to make them seem authentic. But then they deteriorate automatically after a while.

You don't even know how to cheat people correctly and made a wrong sized spirit stone." The owner accused.

The other customers in the room looked on in interest. To them this was free entertainment that was a lot more interesting than what they got to see at the drama houses. Lin Mu didn't know what to do and shook his head.

He looked at Jing Luo's face and the anger that was suppressed beneath it.

"You better take care of this soon, or this restaurant will be flattened soon." Lin Mu whispered to Jingming Shang. "He is no less powerful than me." He added.

~gulp~

Jingming Shang instantly straightened his back upon hearing this and walked to the owner.

~SLAP~

"YOU FOOL!" Jingming Shang yelled at the man.

The owner who didn't have a good cultivation base being at the mid stage of the Qi refining realm was knocked all the way to the wall.