

Walker 661

Chapter 661 - Entering The Hidden Fen Clan

Lin Mu started to find the nodes of the Formation array and managed to do so in about two minutes. Once that was done, he found the linking runes that connected it to the lower layers of the array.

Since this was a formation array, there were multiple layers that worked together and if one wanted to stop it, they would need to deal with the layers that either functioned as the connective layer, or the layer that supplied the spirit Qi to the formation array.

This was the basic method of dismantling a formation array and was the two pronged approach that was used often. Either one removes the power supply, or the circuitry to stop it from working.

Of course, Lin Mu could go the direct and more crude route by using an attack to break the formation array. But they were here for an alliance with the Fen clan and not a war. Plus, Lin Mu didn't want to break the formation array either and only wanted to open a path for him and the other two to enter.

'Hmm... this is true of a higher level than the one before. The number of layers is also higher and the complexity is increasing.' Lin Mu thought.

After spending about ten minutes prodding with the formation array, Lin Mu found the linking layer and another layer that actually functioned as the identification formation.

"There it is..." Lin Mu muttered as he injected some spirit Qi into the identification layer at a few specific nodes.

~shua~

In the next moment, the formation array flickered and some new runes appeared on top of it. Two such runes floated out from the formation and entered the bodies of Jingming Shang and Mu Tao.

The two of them were a bit surprised and were almost going to dodge. But seeing as Lin Mu had not done anything, they understood that this must have been intentional.

"What was that?" Mu Tao questioned.

"That is the identification tag of the formation array, it will allow you to enter without a problem now." Lin Mu, who had just opened his eyes said.

"Ah... I see senior. So should we proceed?" Mu Tao replied.

"Let's go," Lin Mu said with a nod.

~hua~

An opening appeared on the formation array opposite to where Lin Mu was standing, allowing them to proceed. Lin Mu and the other two walked in and saw the scenery in front of them change completely.

Previously, the place where the formation array was, they could only see some trees. But now that they had entered the formation array, they could see what was truly located here. There were multiple small hills spread around the area and the courtyard that surrounded them.

At the very center, they could see the largest courtyard that was decorated with some statues that were placed on the walls and paintings of guardian gods on the doors. In addition to that, the entire area was surrounded by a five meter tall wall, at the gate of which a large nameplate hung.

The nameplate read 'Fen' and was written in bold yet elegant strokes.

"So this is the Fen clan... they seem rather big." Lin Mu said upon seeing all the courtyards.

"There weren't these many courtyards the last time I saw this place... there was only a medium sized courtyard present." Jingming Shang furrowed his brows.

Upon hearing this, Lin Mu finally understood.

"Looks like the Fen clan has really been hiding themselves for far longer than we thought. The formation array has always been active, and just hid a specific part of the clan." Lin Mu explained.

"They can do this too, senior?" Mu Tao questioned.

"Yes, the formation array does have specific controls that allows one to adjust its range. Normally it's only used at its hundred percent or just turned off, but with a little more effort it can be used to hide a specific part as well." Lin Mu answered.

Mu Tao was awed by this and had not expected there to be this kind of a formation array. He himself was not proficient in either formations or other occupations of cultivators and had mostly been focused on just cultivation and running the clan for the past two years.

Though this would have to change soon if he wanted to bring his clan to the rise. After all, their clan's signature cultivation technique required puppets to use, which were made using a combination of several things.

There were not only forging techniques used to make the body parts of the puppets but the formations were also used a lot to make them function properly. In addition to that, even alchemy was used in it to give the puppets different effects, such as making their attacks toxic.

But while Mu Tao was lost in his thoughts, he suddenly saw a group of people coming out from the gate of the Fen clan.

"WHO ARE YOU?!" The voice of an old man came from the group that had just walked out.

Lin Mu looked at them and found them to be all at the core condensation realm.

"Hmm... wasn't Miss Fen at the mid stage of the core condensation realm? If they have peak stage core condensation realm elders, then why would they send her as the representative of the Fen clan to the merchant council?" Lin Mu wondered to himself.

"State your name and reason why you are here, or you shall be killed!" The old man warned again, this time spirit weapons appearing in the hands of everyone.

"I am Lin Mu and I'm here with the patriarch of the Mu clan Mu Tao to propose an alliance with the Fen clan." Lin Mu spoke up.

"Huh, what? Say truthfully, if you were here for that, why would you break out clan's formation array?" A middle aged man asked this time.

"I am stating the truth. As for the formation array..." Lin Mu said and turned to look at the back.

~shua~

He waved his hand and the formation array returned to the state it was originally in.

"There you go, it is back to how it was." Lin Mu said.

Chapter 662 - Adding The Fen Clan To The Alliance

Seeing their Formation array intact, the people of the Fen clan took a breath of relief.

"Patriarch Mu Tao?" The voice of a woman came from the back.

"Let me through," she spoke again and the group of men parted to give way to the woman that had just appeared.

The woman who had appeared was none other than Miss Fen.

"Greetings, Miss Fen." Mu Tao cupped his hands in greeting and came forward.

Miss Fen looked at him and nodded before looking at the other two people. Of those two, she only recognized Jingming Shang.

"Why are you here and... who's this?" Miss Fen asked, seeing Lin Mu.

He was the most eye catching person here, not only in looks but also the spirit Qi fluctuations that were coming from him. Even if Lin Mu was intentionally suppressing them, Miss Fen could sense it faintly.

'This man... he's not simple. Thankfully, they did not break out in conflict right away...' Miss Fen thought to herself.

"Miss Fen, we are here to propose an alliance with the Fen clan." Mu Tao answered first and then gestured towards Lin Mu. "As for him, he is senior Lin Mu." He introduced.

"Greetings, miss Fen. I believe your clan is in need of certain records." Lin Mu spoke.

Hearing this, Miss Fen was confused at first, but then it suddenly struck her.

"How do you...?" She questioned, feeling a bit lost.

"This will be a long explanation. I believe it will be better if we find a good place to sit and talk." Lin Mu suggested.

"Yes, that will be good. Please... Miss Fen allow us." Mu Tao added.

"It will only benefit you, Miss Fen. You can take my word for that." Jingming Shang spoke up too.

Seeing that even Jingming Shang had spoken in favor, Miss Fen raised her brows.

'Jingming Shang does not dabble in matters that he is not sure of and brings problems... if he's saying this then it might be worth it.' Miss Fen thought to herself.

A few of her clansmen whispered something to her before she nodded.

"Alright, let's go in and talk." Miss Fen invited.

The other clansmen of the Fen clan went in first and spread around while Lin Mu and the other entered behind Miss Fen.

"The Fen clan is truly big. I never thought you all would be hiding something like this." Mu Tao spoken feeling surprised.

"Our Fen clan does not like to be in the limelight and prefers to stay low key. Standing out is only the call for trouble." Miss Fen replied.

"I see..." Mu Tao said.

Jingming Shang looked around and furrowed his brows. There were a lot of materials and people in the clan. Even their cultivation bases were not that bad, as around ninety percent of them were cultivators.

'Isn't this already on the level of a small sect?' Jingming Shang thought.

He did not voice out his doubts at this point though, and just continued on with Lin Mu. About two minutes later, Miss Fen brought them to a detached courtyard that was located on one of the hills that were within the formation array.

The courtyard was far better looking than the other ones, and there was even a verse written on its gateway.

"The cranes rise and fall over the years, yet the cicada stays hidden." They read the verse that was written on the gateway.

The verse did not look complete and seemed like had been taken out from a poem of some kind.

~Creak~

The gate opened up, letting them all enter. Miss Fen brought them to the outer hall and let them all take a seat.

"So what is it that you are here for patriarch Mu Tao?" Miss Fen questioned.

"I think it would be better if Senior Lin Mu explains." Mu Tao replied.

"Alright then, please do." Miss Fen replied, unsure if she should add the title of a senior as well.

The cultivation base of Lin Mu was still hidden to her plus looking at his face, he looked to be even younger than her thus it was hard for her to tell if it would be appropriate to use senior or not.

"It goes like this..." Lin Mu said before beginning his explanation.

He explained everything from the start and how Gu Yao had changed the face of this world secretly all the way to how he was the one behind the massacre of the Mu clan. It took Lin Mu over two hours to finish the explanation and by the end of it, Miss Fen was stunned.

"This... how could we be so blind?" Miss Fen couldn't help but say.

"It's not just you... its everyone. If even the Top sects can fall to the schemes of Gu Yao, then you are not to blame." Lin Mu replied.

It was now that Mu Tao suddenly spoke up.

"Wait if the Fen clan is also an ancient clan and changed their name from Fenlong to Fen because of attackers... then doesn't it mean that it was actually the invaders that made them do this?" Mu Tao questioned.

Hearing Mu Tao's words, Lin Mu nodded. Miss Fen on the other hand was stunned for a moment before anger appeared in her eyes.

"Damn them... first they suppress my ancestors and then come ask me to join them... NEVER!" Miss Fen said out loud.

"You will not need to worry anymore, miss Fen. We are here for that exactly." Jingming Shang who had been silent for a bit, chimed in.

"Yes, not only is senior Lin Mu here to oppose Gu Yao, but he is also willing to help restore the Fen clan's bloodline." Mu Tao stated.

Miss Fen couldn't help but look at Lin Mu with a mix of emotion in her eyes. It was as if hope and doubt swirled within her eyes, forming a complex tone.

"Are you really going to help with that?" Miss Fen couldn't help but ask for confirmation from Lin Mu himself.

"Yes, I am." Lin Mu said with a smile.

Chapter 663 - Matriarch And History

Hearing the words from Lin Mu himself, Miss Fen felt much better than before.

"And do you already have a way to do so?" Miss Fen questioned.

"We do actually." Lin Mu said before withdrawing the records that they had obtained from the inheritance vault of the Mu clan.

"There should be the records that you were intending to get from the Mu clan." Lin Mu stated.

Hearing this, Miss Fen felt a bit embarrassed. It was as if a secret had been revealed and that too, one that was not just humiliating but something that could cause a blood feud. But surprisingly, no one here was angry at her.

Seeing this, she took a breath of relief and felt much better about doing this.

"This is more than I thought there would be..." Miss Fen said after she saw the number of scrolls there were.

Not only the quantity, but their size was quite large too. She opened one of them and saw it spread for over twelve feet before being fully opened.

~shua~

Various letters and words swimmer across the surface of the scroll, changing ever so often.

"This... there is the basis for bloodline sealing theory, Bloodline collapse theory, Bloodline invocation... just how much information is there in it?" Miss Fen felt a bit overwhelmed seeing it all.

"Well, we didn't know what would exactly help you, so we got everything that seemed suitable or close to suitable." Lin Mu replied.

Miss Fen hurriedly opened the other scrolls and took a quick look through them as well, feeling even more amazed at it.

"If there is so much information and that too in this detail, we would be able to do this on our own!" Miss Fen said in an excited tone.

"You don't need my help?" Lin Mu asked, feeling doubtful.

"Senior need not spend his valuable time in this. You have already helped enough by giving this to us. If we can't even find a solution on our own, then it would be a shame to our clan.

We will not take up any more of your valuable time." Miss Fen answered.

'Huh... seems like this was way more effective than we thought...' Lin Mu thought to himself.

"At least it allows you to do other things till then." Xukong added.

"That's true," Lin Mu said before looking at the scrolls.

He had already gotten the Mu clan to make copies of all the records and documents there were in the vault, and thus he had them too. He kept them with him just in case he ever needed the information in the future.

Besides, Lin Mu was intending to learn some of it as well when he was free. These past few days he has been to the Sleepscape a few times as he had been working on some doubts about formations that he had.

His understanding of the formations was increasing once again, which was a good thing for him. Since Lin Mu had two teachers now, Jing Luo and senior Xukong to clarify his doubts, his progress was even faster.

Lin Mu, Mu Tao and Miss Fen discussed a few more plans with Jingming Shang for about six hours before they were done finalizing everything. Jingming Shang asked her for help in determining the flow of goods to find out the location where Gu Yao was hiding, along with getting access to their trade routes.

Miss Fen also had a rather expansive trade circle and it would fill in the missing gaps in the information that Jingming Shang had. The trade circles of the Hui, Fei and Shu clans had already expanded their scope of surveillance, and this was only making it better.

While Jingming Shang did not have an estimate on how fast they would be able to find some clues, he did say that it would take less than a year for it. Since the long distance trades usually happened in the cycles of several months, it was normal to take that long to find the patterns.

"We shall take our leave then, Miss Fen." Lin Mu spoke.

"Please, stay assured that we will do our best to assist senior in the alliance" Miss Fen said simply, knowing that the best way to show her gratitude would be through actions rather than just words.

Lin Mu nodded his head and then left along with Jingming Shang and Mu Tao.

"That went well, much better than I expected. I was sure that the elders would have opposed us." Mu Tao said.

"Well, if Miss Fen gave the word, they would not dare oppose her. After all, she is the matriarch of the Fen clan." Jingming Shang spoke.

"Matriarch?" Lin Mu said, feeling a bit confused.

"Ah yes, I guess not many people know this. The Fen clan is a Matriarchal clan and women are the ones who take care of the administrative matters of the clan while the men take care of the business part outside the clan." Jingming Shang expanded.

"Huh... even I didn't know that. I thought Miss Fen only became the council member because she was the one with the highest cultivation base in her clan." Mu Tao stated.

"Yes, that is something that might be confusing to others. And I don't think the Fen clan clarifies this for others either. Even I only know about it in detail because I had the Fen clan investigated before." Jingming Shang replied.

Lin Mu raised his brows upon hearing this and felt a bit curious.

"And why did you do something like that?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Well... before I actually joined the merchant council of Jiao Long city, I was looking around the entire empire for a suitable place to settle down. One fine day, I was sitting in a tavern when I heard some gossip about the Fen clan that had come to trade a lot of herbs for a low price.

After investigating a deal like that, I got more curious and eventually found out more. In reality, it was the fact that something as unorthodox as a matriarchal clan like the Fen clan could establish itself in the Jiao Long city that caught my attention.

I thought that if someone like that could be stable here, then it should not be a problem for someone like me with a troubled past." Jingming Shang bared his history.

"I see... that does seem like fate." Lin Mu muttered.

Chapter 664 - Breaking Under Stress

About five days had passed since the day when the Fen clan agreed to join the alliance.

The overall progress had been steady, and everything had been going well. Even the other members of the merchant council seemed to have stabilized by now and the initial panic after the massacre of the three clans was now mostly gone.

Though Shantung still seemed to be at a loss for what to do next. He had exhausted every means of contacting his backer but had gotten no response. At this point, he was close to believing that it might be his own backer that had massacred the three clans and was now refusing to answer him.

Shantung sat in his clan's mansion while nervously drinking some wine.

"Patriarch, you need to mediate. So much worrying is not good for you." A man spoke to Shantung.

~tap~

Shantung put the cup of wine on the table with a clack before rubbing his forehead.

"Even if I want to, I can't... if it really is as everyone is expecting, then our troubles would increase many folds. With the backer changing the stance, we are left between a cliff and a ravine.

If we still decide to stick with them, while we might have a chance to survive, we would also be excommunicated from the merchant council. Not to mention the final intentions of the backer are still unknown to us." Shantung said to the man.

"Then what are we supposed to do, patriarch? As you said, the backer is very powerful, so what does he even want with a place like the Jiao Long city? Even if the merchant council members are based here, that is only because of the safety.

Our actual businesses are all spread across the empire. We don't even keep our wealth here." The man asked, feeling confused.

Shantung had cold sweat appear on his forehead after hearing the words of the man. For about five minutes, Shantung went silent before letting out a sigh.

~Sigh~

"My son... you might be right. When I was asked to support him, I wasn't 'asked' exactly... more like threatened." Shantung answered.

"THREATENED? Why didn't you tell us so patriarch?" The man, who was evidently the son of Shantung questioned.

~Sigh~

Letting out another sigh, Shantung shook his head.

"If I could, I would have, but the danger was simply too much. The backer said that he would exterminate me and our clan if I opposed him. And look now, the three clans Hui, Fei and Shu, who had shown neutrality first, were directly eliminated.

If the backer had waited just one more day, he would have gotten the news that the three clans had joined us." Shantung explained.

"What?! So we could have had the same fate as that of those clans?" The son of Shantung said in shock.

"Yes..." Shantung nodded his head in a fatigued manner.

~thud~

The son of Shantung couldn't help but fall on the ground from the shock.

"No wonder you had been worried so much... this is just our worst fears coming true..." he spoke while trembling himself.

Silence descended in the room for about ten minutes before the son of Shantung moved again.

~pata~

He picked up the other cup of wine and drank it all in one go before putting it back on the table. The heat from the wine roused him and the buzz of the alcohol calmed his nerves.

"We need to find a solution to this, father. We can't just be on the passive any more." He said, changing the title being used.

Seeing his son being a bit more mature than him, Shantung couldn't help but feel emotional. The mix of wine and stress was sending him into a tizzy.

"You are right. Do you have any suggestions? I don't think I can do this alone anymore..." Shantung admitted.

"I think the first course of action should be to reverse our stance. We cannot associate with the backer anymore... whoever they are. We need to consolidate support from the other council members and denounce the actions of the backer.

If we are the ones to admit it first, while the council members may vilify us at first, they will still have some semblance of trust. Even if we are merchants, we should aim for the target that brings us profit, and associating with the backer is no longer good for us." The son of Shantung advised.

Shantung pondered over his words for a few seconds and found them to be reasonable. While they may have to pay some penalties to overcome the initial problems of mistrust with the council members, it will still be better in the long term.

"Good, we shall do that then." Shantung agreed.

~clap~clap~clap~

Just as Shantung said that he was shocked by the sound of someone clapping. He and his son became alert and turned to the source of the sound.

"Who's there!?" they said in unison.

~shua~

Shantung then saw a handsome man descending from the sky in a nonchalant manner. Seeing this, his eyes went wide as he understood what this meant.

"This... Nascent Soul realm..." Shantung muttered.

"Could it be the backer? Have they come to kill us?" the son of Shantung wondered in shock.

"I have to say Shantung, your son is way smarter than you are... Smart enough that he has saved your clan from being exterminated." Said Lin Mu, who just descended from the sky.

"W-Who are you?" Shantung questioned, feeling unsure.

"Me? I'm here to offer you help... your clan help." Lin Mu answered.

"You'll help us? But how?" The Son of Shantung questioned.

Lin Mu smiled upon seeing this and gestured to the table, "why don't we all take a seat? This will take a while..."

Lin Mu's choice of waiting and watching had gone well, and the Shantung had broken under stress. The added pressure from the loss of their spies and no replies from Gu Yao had also made it more problematic for Shantung.

Eventually taking advantage of this, Lin Mu managed to add them to the alliance as well.

Chapter 665 - Propositions And Discussions

A small group of people sat in a hall in the Mu clan.

This was the small alliance that Lin Mu had created and they were the very first members of it. In the center sat Lin Mu, and opposite to him was Jing Luo. On the right of Lin Mu sat Jingming Shang and Mu Tao, while on his left there were Miss Fen and Mu Niu.

"I still can't believe how senior managed to get Shantung to join us as well." Mu Tao said.

"It was actually a surprise to me as well. Never thought that the day I would go to kill them, he would have a change of heart... or rather his son would." Lin Mu replied.

Miss Fen had her hand on her chin as she thought about it for a bit.

"But is it really fine to trust him? He can change at any time." Miss Fen said in a concerned tone.

"I know. That's why we will be keeping him on a short leash. His son is far smarter than him and knows how to adapt. He seems to be the better person to interact with. And seeing from how Shantung has voluntarily taken to a more passive position in this situation, it makes sense that he's letting his son handle it." Lin Mu replied.

"Wait... how old is Shantung?" Jingming Shang questioned as a thought suddenly popped up in his mind.

Miss Fen and Mu Tao seemed to be unable to answer this, and so did Lin Mu and Jing Luo. After all, there was no specific reason for them to find out the age of the man back then and thus they didn't know.

"Shantung has been alive since the time of Uncle Di... so that would put him at... just over two hundred and fifty years, I think." Mu Niu calculated.

Hearing that the man was over two hundred and fifty years old, Jing Luo and Jingming Shang understood the situation.

"No wonder... he's running out of his lifespan and wants to pass on his position now." Jingming Shang spoke.

"That might actually be the reason why he gave in to the threat of Gu Yao so fast as well. He was simply fearful of his clan's existence after he was gone. I know Shantung would not back down from a fight, but if he was gone, his clan would not have anyone to rely on.

But now that his son is showing potential, he might be intending to pass on the position quicker. Besides, he also showed a willingness to fight against Gu Yao now too, right? That might be his last attempt at glory before he runs out of lifespan." Miss Fen analyzed.

Hearing all this, Lin Mu thought for a bit and wondered what could be the best outcome for them and the alliance.

"Shantung has been at the Peak stage of the Core condensation realm for a long time now, and the only reason he has been unable to break through to the Nascent Soul realm is because of the lack of talent." Lin Mu assessed.

"Not only that, but he also suffered some injuries when he was younger and ended up falling into the life of debauchery for nearly a century. It was not until his father died that Shantung matured and took the mantle of the patriarch. That is also the reason why he had a son so late in his life. Even if he has multiple children right now, only his eldest son is competent and old enough to run things." Mu Niu added.

"I see... so what if we help him break through to the Nascent Soul realm?" Lin Mu proposed.

"Won't that backfire on us?" Mu Tao asked, feeling a bit concerned.

"It could, but we will take precautions. A bloodline oath should be enough to force him if it is taken along with his son. He definitely won't dare to try anything after that." Lin Mu replied. "Plus, we don't have many people at the peak stage of the core condensation realm as of now and if Shantung is able to breakthrough, we will have another Nascent Soul realm cultivator in our alliance." He added.

The members of the alliance thought over the proposition for a bit before nodding their heads.

"We can do it then." Jing Luo agreed as well.

Since he had spoken, the others agreed to the proposition, too.

"But... do we have the necessary resources to make him breakthrough?" Mu Tao asked.

"Yes, we have plenty." Lin Mu replied, remembering the sheer amount of pills that were lying in his ring.

He had raided the Vaults of the Tri Cauldron Peony sect and had gained a lot of pills from them. Even if a majority of them were of mid and low quality, it didn't mean they had no valuable pills.

As for a pill that helped cultivators breakthrough to the Nascent Soul realm, Lin Mu had a whole bottle of them. These pills were hard to make and were considered to be the last resort method when all other routes had been exhausted.

Not only would these pills forcefully push a cultivator into the nascent soul realm, but it would also use up all of their latent cultivation talent in doing so. This meant that they would have no chance of ever breaking through to the Dao Shell realm.

But for people who were on the edge of death, this was the perfect pill and was a sacrifice they were obviously willing to make.

These kinds of pills were not something Lin Mu was going to give away easily, though. Not only because of their value but also because of their effects. It was also the reason why Lin Mu had not given any to the Fen clan despite there being several Peak stage core condensation realm elders among them.

Even Miss Fen had rejected any more help from Lin Mu and had said that once their bloodline's problem was resolved, they would have no need for resources for a long time. Just their own talent should be enough to progress quite quickly.

Chapter 666 - Potential Expansion Of The Alliance

"It is decided then..." Lin Mu said while looking at everyone.

"Shantung will be given one Core Hatching pill to break through to the Nascent Soul realm." He continued.

All the members of the alliance nodded their heads, and this matter was passed.

"I'll write a message to Shantung right now and ask a servant to send it there. He should respond quickly." Mu Niu responded.

"Yes, please do that." Lin Mu replied.

Mu Niu took his leave to do the task that was assigned to him and came back within five minutes.

"Once Shantung comes, we will ask him to take the oath and then give him the Core Hatching Pill." Lin Mu stated.

The Core Hatching Pill was a high grade alchemical pill whose sole function was to help a core condensation realm cultivator breakthrough. It did exactly what its name said and helped in the hatching of the core of the cultivator.

This was the part that most people had trouble in doing and their talent greatly dictated whether they would be able to do it without killing themselves. One could, of course, force their cores to hatch, but there was a great chance it might just end up cracking and exploding instead.

"Now then, till Shantung comes, we have the next matter to discuss. How will we be progressing from now?" Jing Luo was the one who spoke this time.

"We definitely need a lot more allies than just us. We do have some big ones already, like the Hei corps, but we need to establish contact with them. And I do not know if we can do that right now with the chaos in the Shuang Qian kingdom." Lin Mu spoke.

"The Hei corps... Young master Wu Hei... I remember when he came to visit us back then. He was merely seventeen years old, I think." Mu Niu spoke.

This caught Lin Mu's attention and his ears perked up.

"Oh? You met him?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Yes, a few of the Mu clan members met him. He even stayed in our clan for two days before continuing on his journey. I remember Uncle Di had a great time discussing business and politics with him back then." Mu Niu said with a hint of nostalgia in his voice.

"Who's Uncle Di?" Lin Mu asked. He had heard the name twice now and was wondering who that person was.

"Uncle Di is Mu Tao's grandfather. The patriarch before his father." Mu Niu spoke.

Mu Tao had moist eyes upon hearing the mention of it all but tried to keep a calm expression.

"I see." Lin Mu muttered.

"I never would have thought that the boy from back then would be linked to something this huge now." Mu Niu said with a sigh.

"Fate and destiny are favorite toys of the heavens. Who knows when they will become twisted." Lin Mu said, reciting one of the favorite quotes of the Lost immortal.

Lin Mu had read the man reciting these lines at least a few hundred times till now in the memoirs of the Lost immortal. Since the Lost immortal had the Broken Fate Physique, he often had misfortunes and tragedies.

Things would be going well for a while before he would end up with a set back suddenly. But even then, as much as he wanted to hate his luck, he could not. But he also didn't know that he had something called the Broken Fate physique, or he would have surely cursed the heavens all day and night.

"Didn't you say that the Hei corps had their outposts in several places all over the empire?" Jing Luo suddenly asked.

"Oh, yes there are. But there are not many in the southern part of the empire and I don't know if the one closest to us is even active or not. One of the last orders Wu Hei passed was to send all of Hei corps members into hiding." Lin Mu replied.

"If we are already grasping at straws, then we may as well try this out anyway." Jing Luo suggested.

Lin Mu thought over it and found it to be reasonable.

"True, but we should also get some information about the situation of Wu Hei and even Wu Xun at the capital city first. We don't know fully what happened after the incident with the Tri Cauldron Peony sect either." Lin Mu replied after thinking for a bit.

"I'll try to see if there is any updated information from the Northern lands." Jingming Shang spoke.

"I'll see if there are any suspected leads on the Hei corps. Since Gu Yao made them out to be the criminals, there are open bounties on them. If there are any suspected sightings, we might be able to find them.

Besides, they would never suspect that we are trying to find them to help them and not kill them." Miss Fen spoke up.

"Alright. Once we have some information, we will be able to proceed further. Till then we need to consolidate and increase our own strengths." Lin Mu replied.

They knew that the Fen clan and the Mu clan needed to grow a lot stronger to even be able to fight against Gu Yao and then the Northern Alliance. Right now, Lin Mu's presence had merely given them the opportunity to grow till that point.

Just when all of them had finished the discussion, a servant knocked on the door.

"Council member Shantung has arrived." The servant spoke from the outside.

"Just in time." Jing Luo commented.

"Come in," Lin Mu called out.

~Creak~

The door of the room opened and in walked Shantung with his son. The two of them seemed to be quite nervous and didn't know fully what they were called here for. Mu Niu had merely mentioned that they had been called by Lin Mu.

They had already seen the strength of Lin Mu and dared not to make him wait any longer.

"What have you called us for, senior?" Shantung questioned.

"I have called you here so that you can break through to the Nascent Soul realm." Lin Mu said with a straight face.

Chapter 667 - Taking Their Oaths

Hearing Lin Mu's words, Shantung didn't believe them at first.

"Wh-what?" Shantung couldn't help but say.

His son was the same but didn't speak anything, first wanting to observe the situation lest they make a mistake. He had become really careful since the appearance of Lin Mu and knew that they were being watched at all times now.

Not to mention they were shocked by the progress of the other people such as Mu Niu and Mu Tao. Both of them had broken through the next stages in just a few days of Lin Mu's appearance.

He knew that the tide of change had arrived and if they tried to swim against it, they would only drown. It was better for them to go along with the flow and have a chance of flourishing.

"If you take a bloodline oath that you and your clan shall never harm me, and the alliance ever in the future, I'll give you a chance to break through to the Nascent Soul realm. I know your lifespan is coming to an end and you want to set your clan's future.

I'll give you a chance to live longer and let your son gain a better grasp over the functioning of the clan. I'm sure you know the coming few years will be turbulent and without you being there, your clan will not survive.

Do you want that to happen?" Lin Mu expanded.

With the carrot and the stick presented to the Shantung, there was little he could do. He feared for his clan and his own life as well. Over the years he had come to accept that he would have no chance at breakthrough.

It was not merely a case of resources since with his clan's fortune, they could definitely buy enough to nurture another Nascent soul realm cultivator, eventually. But his problem was due to a lack of talent and injuries as well.

In the long term though, the specific resources needed to increase his cultivation base were way more than what their clan might be able to afford. In the same amount, perhaps two more Nascent soul realm cultivators might be nurtured.

"We accept!" Shantung's son was the one to answer for them this time.

Shantung looked at his son's determined expression and sighed to himself.

"Yes, we accept," Shantung said before closing his eyes.

When his eyes opened, they had a staunch look and determination filled them.

"I Shantung Sang, swear upon my bloodline that neither I nor my clan will ever hurt senior Lin Mu and the Alliance. If I break this oath, may my bloodline perish and my life be crippled." He declared.

"I Shantung Bucao swear upon my bloodline that neither I nor my clan will ever hurt senior Lin Mu and the Alliance. If I break this oath, may my bloodline perish and my life be crippled." The son declared.

With the combined oath of the father and son, the sound of rumbling could be heard within the room. The sound was none other than that of their hearts. Lin Mu and the rest could feel a strange presence in the room other than them.

Lin Mu narrowed his eyes and looked at Shantung Sang and his son. He could faintly feel that there was more than was being shown there.

'What is this...?' Lin Mu thought.

He himself had the bloodline of the Great Slumber Bear, which was a very high grade bloodline not seen in a world like this. It was sensitive to the other bloodlines and allowed Lin Mu to sense all this.

He curiously ended up using spatial perception and ended up seeing a different view than what was seen by the naked eyes. It was as if a gate was opened up behind Shantung Sang and his son. The gate extended into a long tunnel and in that tunnel, hundreds of silhouettes could be sensed standing.

Each of these silhouettes was blood red in color and had similar features to the Shantung patriarch and son.

'Are those... their ancestors?' Lin Mu couldn't help but wonder.

While Lin Mu had known about the effects of the Bloodline Oath, he did not think it would literally summon the specters of their ancestors.

"They should be the bloodline imprints of all their ancestors," Xukong replied.

"Huh... does this happen always? And I could only see it because of spatial perception?" Lin Mu questioned.

"No. Even if someone else had spatial perception and tried to see it, they would not be able to. The main reason behind it is the bloodline of the Great Slumber Bear that is within you. Since the bloodline Oath of the Shantungs included you specifically in their oath, it invoked the pressure of the Great Slumber Bear.

This caused resonance between the two bloodlines and allowed you to see the ancestral imprints. Other people who have bloodlines strong as you would be able to see the same in a situation like this too." Xukong explained.

"Ah, I understand now senior." Lin Mu replied, before focusing on the task at hand.

The presence stayed for about thirty seconds before fading away. The heartbeats of the father and son went to normal again, and they had rather red faces after that, as if they had done a lot of work.

Lin Mu nodded his head and took out a small pill vial.

"Very good. Take this," Lin Mu spoke and handed the pill vial to Shantung Sang.

Shantung Sang looked at the pill feeling a bit confused as he could not recognize it right away.

"It's a Core Hatching pill." Lin Mu spoke, seeing that they didn't even understand what he got.

A lot of raised brows could be seen upon hearing the name of the pill.

"Heavens! I never would have thought I would ever get to hold this pill." Shantung Shang exclaimed.

The only other person who was calm was Jing Luo, but it was only because he knew what kind of a pill this was.

Chapter 668 - Secrets And Breakthroughs

Once Shantung Sang had been given the pill, he left the Mu clan mansion hurriedly so that he could go back and breakthrough. This was a matter of the utmost importance and involved the future of the Shantung clan.

With the Shantung duo gone, Lin Mu dismissed the alliance meeting, leaving only him and Jing Luo in the room.

"That was smart of you. That pill will both raise his cultivation and shackle him." Jing Luo spoke.

"Hmm... better than blindly trusting them." Lin Mu replied in a low voice before turning to look at Jing Luo.

"Are you going to look for your grandfather?" Lin Mu questioned.

This was something Lin Mu had been intending to ask for a long time now. The only person that knew more in detail about the past was none other than someone who was alive at that time.

Jing Wei knew everything that had happened and had experienced it himself. Not to mention he himself was a victim of the Gu clan and would not let them go. In that way, both the royal family and the Gu clan had deep enmity with the Jing clan and it was not something that would be easily resolved.

"Hmm... I've been intending to go but our ancestral land is not close." Jing Luo spoke.

Lin Mu had already informed Jing Luo where Jing Luo and Duan Ke had gone to; the ancestral land of the Jing clan.

"Where exactly is it? Jing Wei never told me." Lin Mu questioned.

"It is far to the north west." Jing Luo replied.

"North? Is it also at the border of the pear's belt?" Lin Mu questioned.

"No, no. The pear's belt is more towards the central border of the great Zhou continent. Since it tapers out, there are parts in the north east and west that directly touch the ocean. On the eastern part there is the Eastern Ming Dynasty, while on the west there is the Black Dawn Kingdom.

The ancestral land of the Jing Clan is located beyond the limits of the black Dawn kingdom, inside a minor plane." Jing Luo answered.

Lin Mu was a bit stunned upon hearing this, but nodded his head.

"So will you be going there?" Lin Mu continued.

"No... at least not yet. Even if I know the approximate location of the ancestral land, I don't know the exact coordinates of it. I might be standing right next to it and would not see it." Jing Luo spoke.

Hearing this, Lin Mu knew that he could definitely work it out.

"Do you need my help then?" Lin Mu asked. "Finding a minor plane's entrance won't be hard for me."

"No, that's not necessary. You have more important things to take care of here. I can go there myself, I just need to prepare the entry token first." Jing Luo spoke.

"An entry token?" Lin Mu asked, feeling confused.

"You see the ancestral land of the Jing clan is not a place that can be entered without a price. Only those that are talented in the clan were allowed to go there, kind of similar to the sacred grounds of the Ripple mist sect.

Except in the case of our clan, the proof of our talent would be the entrance token. It composes of multiple complex techniques and shows our skill and talent in weapon and spirit tool forging." Jing Luo replied.

"So you are lacking materials for that?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Not materials... I just need time to make it. At my level, the process itself is easy for me. It's just that a lot of the materials need long periods of tempering and will take up several months to be done. But after that, I should be able to enter it quickly.

I've actually begun making them already and should be done in a few months. I'll inform you when I'm ready." Jing Luo answered.

"Alright. Then I guess we'll be sticking together for a while." Lin Mu said with a chuckle.

"You're goddamn right!" Jing Luo replied with a smile.

"Besides... I won't go before killing a few of Gu Yao's cronies. I'll take a few heads as a tribute to my ancestors!" Jing Luo said, with flames of fury in his eyes.

About a month passed since the day Lin Mu had given the Core Hatching Pill to Shantung Sang.

The man in question had broken through successfully, and it was witnessed by nearly everyone in the city. Despite Shantung Sang leaving the city to undergo his tribulation, the effects of it could be felt all the way to the city.

The commoners were shocked by the strange thunderstorm, while the cultivators wondered who was it that was undergoing a heavenly tribulation. By the time news spread that it was actually the patriarch of the Shantung clan who had broken through, Lin Mu had already taken over all of the members of the merchant council.

They were either enticed into joining the alliance by some resources or threatened by the presence of Gu Yao. The fact that it was Lin Mu who had actually killed the three clans was kept secret from but a handful of people and was enough to scare the merchants into joining them.

But even after all this, there was no response from Gu Yao's end, and this had confused Lin Mu and Jing Luo to no end.

From what Lin Mu had assessed by now, while Gu Yao was a man with a lot of patience, he also knew when to act. It didn't make sense that he had not retaliated for taking over the merchant council and foiling his plans.

If not Gu Yao, then at least the subordinate of theirs that was working under him should have reacted.

While this was one of the worrying parts to Lin Mu, there were many other positives that had happened. Mu Niu had also broken through to the Nascent Soul realm and was the first Mu Clan member to reach that realm.

Chapter 669 - A Compiled Report

With Mu Niu's breakthrough, Lin Mu was assured that the Mu clan would be fine for the time being, even if he was not there. While Nascent soul realm cultivators were what Gu Yao had many, it was still not possible for him to just send any random one to target someone.

Especially in areas that were not fully under his control. If he did so carelessly, he would only invite the ire and attention of the ruling power of that region, which might spiral out into him getting revealed to the world.

After all, one must remember that even after the blood tide happened and he put the blame on Lin Mu the one who got the fame of repelling the blood tide was Wu Xun. Even then, Gu Yao did not want to reveal himself to the world and wanted to stay hidden.

Silently gaining power while controlling the great powers of the world, such was his plan. The emperor of the Great Zhou Empire was already sick and the court officials were now starting to get worried about it.

The emperor himself was a cultivator and was at the Nascent Soul realm, but despite this he had become sick. This troubled the official to no end, as an illness capable of making someone of this level sick wasn't something easily dealt with.

While the royal physicians were doing their best in finding a cure to this, the official had already been deliberating on other options. The Empress though, has been prodding the officials to ask the Rainbow pill sect for their help.

If there was a sect that was said to be the top in alchemical pills in this world, then it was none other than the Rainbow pill sect. The only reason why they were not the overall top sect in the world was that they focused more on the field of alchemy and pill refinement.

The Sky Precepts sect stayed at the top because they were a relatively balanced sect and dabbled in everything while still managing to stay at the top. They also had a deep background and had plenty of resources left by their ancestors to tide them through centuries and centuries of time.

The Centennial sword sect, on the other hand, was highly focused on increasing their own personal power and relied on the sword arts to do so. It was said that the patriarch of the centennial sword sect was strong enough to fight multiple Dao Treading realm experts on his own.

The fourth sect in the rankings was the Zither wind sect, which had risen to this position due to the alliance that they had formed. While on the surface the alliance was supposed to be an equal share of power, the Zither wind sect being the first, had evidently given him a lot of benefits.

Below them at the fifth position, was none other than the Long Cloud sect, which was the creator of the Long cloud alliance. They were opposed to the Zither wind alliance and had joined up with the sixth and seventh ranked sects to form the Long cloud alliance.

It was only the tenth ranked sect which was now not in an alliance and was also independent, like the top three sects. They were fiercely competing to pull the tenth ranked sect, which was called as the Noon Grass Sect.

The Noon Grass Sect was perhaps the most low key sect of all top sects and was only in the top ten because they were old. People didn't know whether to call them lucky that their sect managed to survive for thousands of years or unlucky that they never managed one of their cultivators to break through to the Immortal Ascension stage.

It was even said that the Noon Grass was of the same seniority as that of the top three sects. But overall, their disciples just stayed average and never rose to become anything impressive in the cultivation world.

Currently, they were holding their position because of their Dao Treading realm patriarch, who was the only Dao Treading realm expert in their sect. People often wondered if they didn't manage to produce another Dao Treading realm expert will they fall from the top sects or not.

It had already been more than two thousand years since the patriarch of the Noon Grass Sect had reached his position. While his exact age was not known, he was said to be close to the end of his lifespan now.

This was the entire report that had been compiled by Jingming Shang and Miss Fen after collecting the information from their links.

Lin Mu had been reading it all day and had gathered these important points from this. And the reason why he had asked them to compile this was to see if they could pick allies from these powers.

With the current power they had, it would be impossible for them to resist Gu Yao for long.

"What do you think?" Lin Mu questioned the man sitting to his right.

"Hmm... the Long cloud alliance seems like the obvious choice since they are in direct opposition to the Zither Wind alliance. Any of the top three sects would be the best choice, but they are far too conceited to even believe the Gu clan can make a return and the Northern Tribes infiltration." Jing Luo answered.

"Indeed... plus, I am currently wanted by the top sects. While they might not recognize me at this moment, they definitely will once we actually go to them for the alliance proposal." Lin Mu replied.

Jing Luo was deep in thought after hearing this and wondered what might be the more reasonable choice.

"The top sects can be convinced, but to convince them it would need someone that can match their level and talk to them at the same strength." Jing Luo spoke after thinking for a bit.

"Indeed. If only we could get your grandfather to come out, all of it would work." Lin Mu spoke.

Chapter 670 - The Strong Cultivators And Beasts Of The World

Jing Wei and his family had a grudge with the Imperial family and the emperor, along with several of the top sects. Those were the sects that could be directly excluded from the choice of potential allies.

"Which sects participated in attacking you and your clan before?" Lin Mu questioned.

"The top three sects were mostly neutral, but it was their neutrality that gave the others free rein to act as they wished. But the ones that did not act at all were only two from among the top sects.

These are the Long Cloud sect and the Noon Grass sect." Jing Luo answered.

"Well then. That's our choice for the allies. We either go for the Long cloud sect and gain help of the entire Long Cloud alliance or go for the solitary Noon Grass sect." Lin Mu decided.

"Alright. Even if the other members of the Long cloud alliance were once involved in hunting us down, we can spare them, since they are under the leadership of the Long Cloud sect.

As for the Noon Grass sect, I don't really have anything much to say about them. Even back when the Jing clan was at its peak, we didn't have any transactions with the Noon Grass sect and they hadn't bought any peak grade spirit tools and weapons from us." Jing Luo explained.

"I see... we can choose who to go to depending on who's closer, then." Lin Mu spoke.

"Hmm... if we consider the distance then the Long Cloud Sect is the closest to us. It will take about a month or more to reach it though." Jing Luo replied.

"How far is the Noon Grass Sect?" Lin Mu questioned.

"It is to the extreme south, almost at the border of the previous southern continent. If we want to get there, it would take us over six months to do so." Jing Luo answered.

"Six months? Even at Little Shrubby's speed?" Lin Mu asked, feeling a bit surprised.

"Yeah, I considered his speed too. If it was a straight distance, it might have only taken two months to reach there, but the problem is the terrain obstacles that come up. Many of them can't just be passed directly and need to be crossed through safer paths.

Not to mention many of these areas are dangerous to pass through and are populated by numerous beasts some of which can even reach the Dao Shell realm. Plus, with the location that the Noon Grass sect is located, the danger increases even more.

The dense forests of the southern lands are home to the most resources in the world and also the most dangerous beasts. There are multiple Dao Treading beasts that live there as well.

Perhaps if the beasts had some ambitions, they might have already taken over the world as the number of Dao Treading realm beasts easily outnumbers that of the humans." Jing Luo explained.

"My... that's a lot. And what about the Immortal Ascension realm? Are there any cultivators or beasts of that level?" Lin Mu couldn't help but feel curious.

Even in the records that Lin Mu had obtained till now, there was no mention of details like these. Most of it was minor information that just prodded the surface and left one wanting more.

"The Immortal Ascension realm is a complex realm. From what I heard from my grandfather, it has no stages and is said to be a boundary realm. As for what that means, I do not know, and neither does my grandfather.

In the current world, perhaps only the ancestors of the top three sects are at the Immortal Ascension realm. But even then, they do haven't appeared in the world for thousands of years.

As for the beasts... there is no specific record of them. But there was a rumor that I read once. It is said that while beasts are inherently stronger than humans in the lower realms, their comprehension is far lower when it comes to higher realms.

Even when the unification of the five continents happened, there were no Immortal Ascension realm beasts that appeared. Though if we go by the common understanding, the majority of beasts of the world don't even live on land but rather the great ocean.

And going by that logic, it should have the strongest beasts too and thus Immortal Ascension realm beasts." Jing Luo further explained.

Lin Mu thought over his words and found them to be reasonable.

"Hmm... it makes sense that no Immortal Ascension realm beasts appeared back when the unification of the continents happened, since there were simply no beasts as strong as that living on the land.

As for the aquatic beasts that are at the Immortal Ascension realm, they never had a problem with the unification since they lived in the ocean in the first place. Hence having no conflict of interest." Lin Mu said, while nodding his head.

Lin Mu and Jing Wei discussed for a few more hours before finally deciding upon their plan of action.

"I guess this should be fine for now. First, we'll see if we can inform Wu Hei about our situation by finding an outpost of the Hei corps. Then we need to establish points of contact in multiple regions.

For that, we shall be taking the assistance of the merchants and have some of their cultivator employees stay in those locations full time so we have relay points." Lin Mu spoke.

"I'll also try to get some high grade communication jade slips ready. We have plenty of materials for it and I should be done in a couple of weeks. Then we can distribute them as needed.

Jingming Shang already took the responsibility of handling the information net for us. This will help us to obtain information as soon as possible when they find traces of Gu Yao." Jing Luo replied.

"Good. Once all that is done, we will head onwards to the Long Cloud sect to propose an alliance.

Hopefully, they are willing to listen to us..." Lin Mu stated.