

Walker 681

Chapter 681 - The Law Enforcement Records

For Lin Mu, entering the place was a piece of cake. No security was enough for him and even the formation arrays couldn't do much since he was able to just go around them. Quickly bypassing them with Phase and Fade, Lin Mu appeared underneath the second ring of the royal palace.

"Hmm... now which one is the law enforcement building?" Lin Mu wondered as he spread his spirit sense around.

A minute later he found the place he was looking for and moved towards there. He checked to see for people and saw that there were easily over a hundred people working in there currently.

Lin Mu thought for a bit and picked his tactic so that he would not be seen. The tactic was one that he had used many times before. He would appear from solid objects and just store the records he wanted before taking a look through them.

He would do this until he found the right record.

"Though it might be better to just ask someone where they were... but that has its own share of different problems." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He began his search and ended up spending six hours in it. Despite his spirit sense, the number of records in the law enforcement record room were simply massive. He reckoned that these were all records from a long time ago and thus had reached such a number.

Lin Mu even found several records that dated back to over three hundred years ago. There were records for petty crimes such as unruly behavior and public nuisance all the way to murder and treason.

Though the area where the records for treason or high crimes were stored was under extra security. Lin Mu had to spend some extra time unraveling the formation so that he could enter it. That was where he finally found the record he was looking for.

Lin Mu took one of the scrolls that had a stamp imprinted on its seams that read 'Treason'. He opened it up and read its contents, but was then shocked.

'All official correspondence and documents related to the Hei corps and their reports are to be stored in the royal repository.

—By the order of Minister of Law, Fu Delun'

"Why would they need to move it there? Is there something more to it?" Lin Mu couldn't help but wonder.

According to what Lin Mu knew, the orders to keep watch on the activities of Hei corps were issued to every sect and kingdom on the continent. Which meant that it wasn't a secret and even public knew about it.

Thus, this extra secrecy increased Lin Mu's wariness for it.

"If they have done this for the Hei corps they should have done the same for me too, shouldn't they?" Lin Mu guessed. "Let's see if I can find anything on myself."

He then searched for any documents or records related to him and found them rather quickly. They were stored in the same section as well, and there was only one single scroll there. Seeing it, Lin Mu had a bad feeling.

'All official correspondence and documents related to the person 'Lin Mu' and his reports are to be stored in the royal repository.

—By the order of Minister of Law, Fu Delun'

"The same... this minister of law Fu Delun seems suspicious... according to what the merchant's informants provided us, there were public reports about the Hei corps. The latest report was from eight months ago as well.

This must mean they added this new order between that time. Is there perhaps any date here?" Lin Mu wondered.

He checked the scrolls and the shelf they were stored, but there were no dates mentioned there.

"There should be a separate register for this, you'll need to find that." Xukong suggested Lin Mu.

"Ah, I'll do that then, senior." Lin Mu replied.

Lin Mu took another half an hour to search and found the register. But he also encountered a problem. The register was being used by several people right now. It was kept with the head of the department, and he was currently doing work with the registry involved.

"Taking it from him would be possible, but would only cause an alarm. I'll need to wait till he is done..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He wondered if he could find it just by looking from above, but that was a far fetched possibility. The register was several thousand pages thick and was over two meters long. Not to mention finding it like this, even a person who had the registry in his hand would take a while to sift through the pages and find the correct entry.

"Sigh, isn't this too inefficient? Can't they just put the registry in a jade slip?" Lin Mu couldn't hold but say.

"Well that is how it is done in sects, but here since there are commoners who are not cultivators working, you can understand how that method might not work." Xukong replied.

"Oh, yeah. That's true as well." Lin Mu nodded his head in understanding.

'Hmm... I guess I'll keep an eye on this with my spirit sense while I go check other documents. Maybe I'll find something useful.' Lin Mu thought.

He then split a separate spirit sense tendril that kept a watch on the head of the department who had the register and went to check other documents. He ended up spending over seven hours like this and it was the afternoon of the next day by the time the man was done.

The head of the department was also a cultivator, thus it made sense that night time didn't really matter to him as much, plus seeing the work that needed to be done, he was portably compelled to finish it as well.

"The man definitely looks tired..." Lin Mu said upon seeing the eye bags on the man's face.

The man was in the mid stage of the Qi refining realm, which was probably quite high for an official of this level. And despite that, he had been tired out working just a single night.

Chapter 682 - Entering The Hong Lin Royal Palace

Once the head of the department was done with his work, he picked up the long register and put it in a safe before locking it. He also locked his office before he left the building.

"Finally..." Lin Mu said with relief.

He simply put his hand through the walls of the safe and touched the register, storing it into his ring before taking a look. After about five minutes of spirit sense assisted search, Lin Mu finally found the two entries he was looking for.

"Huh... both of the orders in regards to me and the Hei corpse were issued about six months ago. That would be just two months after the last sighting of the Hei corps..." Lin Mu read.

He didn't know what to make of this as it gave little context and Lin Mu understood that if he wanted to find out more, he will need to go to the royal palace itself.

~Sigh~

"Why can't all this be more simple?..." Lin Mu shook his head.

He then left the law enforcement building and made his way to the main palace. He was in the second ring and needed to cross the third ring to enter the final ring in which the actual royal place was built.

While going through the third ring, Lin Mu even saw the ministry of law there. He wondered if he should go and check up on the Minister of law Fu Delun but then decided to do it later if the need arose.

For now, it would be much easier for him if he just found the intended records in the royal palace.

"So this is the royal place, huh... it does have a rather different design than the one in the Shuang Qian kingdom's capital." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Unlike other palaces, the place of the Hong Lin Kingdom was a single circular building that towered around two hundred meters. Lin Mu could feel that the palace was not only extended above the ground but also below it.

Once he got past the formation arrays, it became easy for Lin Mu to take a look around. He spread his spirit sense around and checked for all the people that were in the place. Most of them were commoners with no cultivation base, but around thirty percent were those with cultivation.

This included the guards that protected the place and the royal family, along with the royal family itself. After a bit of looking around, Lin Mu even found the king of the Hong Lin kingdom.

Lin Mu checked his cultivation base and found him to be at the peak stage of the core condensation realm. Though he could also tell that the man was actually a bit ahead of that, possibly being at the Pseudo Nascent soul realm.

"He might actually have a heavenly tribulation later." Lin Mu muttered to himself and squinted his eyes while using spatial perception.

"Oh? There are actually spatial disturbances around him. His heavenly tribulation is not far... another month perhaps." Lin Mu estimated.

After observing the king who was evidently cultivating by himself, Lin Mu had a strange thought.

"Killing him would be rather easy now, wouldn't it? With the level of access I have, nearly anyone should be able to kill him. This security seems a bit weak..." Lin Mu spoke to himself.

"You have to remember that there may not be a single other person, who is able to manipulate space as you are doing right now. Even cultivators who are proficient with the spatial element are unable to pass through objects like you are unless they have a very high cultivation base." Xukong reminded.

Lin Mu looked at the ring on his hand and knew that all this was only possible due to this. It was his biggest fortune that he had been able to come across this ring and grow to this point.

'But what is the use of it all... once I get avenge my parents and satisfy the world, what do I do? With such great power I can do anything... but what exactly do I pursue?' Lin Mu couldn't help but wonder.

There was a flood of thoughts that would fill his mind, but he forcibly supersede them for now and decided to focus on the mission.

'I'll need to think of all that later once I'm done. I can't be making mistakes just because I was distracted...' Lin Mu thought.

With determination in his eyes, he checked the other areas of the palace. But just when he was checking the underground areas of the palace, Lin Mu sensed spirit Qi fluctuations that were stronger than normal.

"Huh, four Nascent soul realm cultivators?" Lin Mu was able to sense the presence of some people on the lower floors.

Going a bit closer but ensuring that he was not detected by them, Lin Mu observed the said four Nascent soul realm cultivators. From the spirit Qi fluctuations, he could tell that they had varied cultivation stages even if they were all in the Nascent Soul realm.

"Hmm... the one at the bottom has the strongest fluctuations, even if they are a bit suppressed. The three that are in the middle have nearly the same fluctuations, with one of them being lower than the other two." Lin Mu analyzed.

He first decided to check the one cultivation who was alone at the bottom as there would be fewer chances of him being detected.

'Since he has suppressed his spirit Qi fluctuations, he might be in seclusion perhaps...' Lin Mu guessed.

Lin Mu this descended to the very bottom of the palace at the lowest underground floor and arrived at what looked very clearly like a cultivator's abode. There were spirit herbs planted here and even a spirit Qi gathering formation that circulated the spirit Qi while also concentrating it.

Going past a few smaller halls, Lin Mu reached the inner area where the cultivator was actually located.

Seeing his appearance, Lin Mu was rather astounded.

"Is he... dead?"

Chapter 683 - Strange Whispers

The man in front of Lin Mu was extremely emaciated and thin. Veins popped on his skin like the ridges on the bark of an old tree. What little hair he had was white and a long white beard accompanied it.

His fingers were long and bony, with nary a bit of flesh on it. His back was crooked, and he was sitting cross legged. No matter which angle Lin Mu looked from, the man looked no less than dead.

And yet, the spirit Qi fluctuations coming from his body showed him that the man was at the Nascent Soul realm. Though Lin Mu could not fully estimate which stage he was at as doing, that would probably disturb the old man.

"If he's not dead, then he's extremely close to death." Xukong spoke.

Seeing this, Lin Mu was reminded of the reality of what happened when a cultivator reached the end of their lifespan. They would start to rapidly age and years would turn into months for them.

The man in front of Lin Mu easily looked like he was over a hundred years old if compared to a common mortal human.

"Seems like he is the ancestor of this kingdom, perhaps one of the former kings?" Lin Mu guessed.

"Hmm, that could be it. Such experts usually enter seclusion and stay there, guarding the younger generation against any trouble that they can't handle. Of course, there is a limit to how many times they can do so and also how long they can perform this duty.

Seeing this old man, I doubt he has more than a month or two left." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu observed the unmoving man for a few minutes, while he was given a harsh reminder of what could be his eventual future.

'I can't let that happen... I don't want to be like this in the future!' Lin Mu thought to himself.

~huh~

Lin Mu took a deep breath and opened his eyes that were filled with newfound determination; determination to never let himself reach this point. Even if he was going to die, he would die with dignity and not like this.

At the same time, within the Mysterious ring, the Ethereal altar flickered before a few runes came out of it. The runes were different from the ones on it and were written in a rather fierce style.

They looked like they had been carved out by claws rather than written or drawn. The color of the runes was also dark grey, almost bordering on black. The runes spun around the altar before trying to move away from it.

But when they tried to do so, they were blocked by the barrier that surrounded the ethereal altar. This was the same barrier that prevented Xukong from getting close and was extremely strong, according to him.

The runes tried to go through the barrier but were unable to do so. It was at this point that they seemed to have noticed the Grey egg that was kept near the barrier. They approached that part of the barrier and tapped against it.

The runes vibrated and let out a strange hum. These vibrations were able to pass through the barrier and reached the Grey egg. Upon hitting the egg, they made the egg tremble.

The egg kept on trembling and was moved from its position. It rolled slightly towards the barrier but then suddenly stopped. This time, the sound of heartbeats came from the egg and it stopped responding to the vibrations created by the runes.

The runes kept on sending more vibrations, but the egg stayed in its place, not moving at all. It was as if the heartbeats were matching the vibrations of the runes and countering them.

The runes continued their effort for a few seconds, but once they realized that it was not working, they returned to hover above the ethereal altar. There, they kept on spinning as if lost at what to do.

They stayed like this for about a minute before finally, they started to shrink. The more they shrunk, the darker their color got, and when they reached a size that was less than ten times than the original, they had turned fully pitch black.

At this time, they looked no less than a needle and let out a thin beam of black light straight up. The light traveled at a great speed and disappeared. Xukong who was also in the ring, suddenly turned around and looked in the direction of the ethereal altar.

"Huh? Did something happen? Why did the space tremble?" Xukong wondered.

He moved to see the altar and saw that nothing had changed. He even saw the egg, which was lying in a tilted position but did not put much thought to it. Lin Mu withdrew the egg nearly every day and thus its position would change often.

Of course, Xukong did not pay any extra attention to how the egg looked or moved. He observed the barrier and the altar within, confirming that everything was fine.

At the same time as this, Lin Mu was also having a different experience.

While he was thinking about his own lifespan, and how it would end, Lin Mu suddenly heard a whisper. It was extremely strange to him as he didn't hear it from his ears but rather directly in his head.

"Kill... Kill forever... live... live forever..."

Lin Mu could only hear a few words and even if he tried to focus on it a bit more, he was unable to hear anything more.

"What the hell are these whispers?" Lin Mu said in his mind, pulling Xukong's attention as well.

"What happened?" Xukong questioned.

"I heard some strange whispers, but they weren't from outside, rather directly in my mind." Lin Mu answered.

"Whispers? What did they say?" Xukong asked, now feeling a bit concerned.

"They said... They said... I... can't remember them? I can't remember them!" Lin Mu exclaimed in his mind.

Xukong was now officially concerned and wondered if what he felt before was linked to this.

Chapter 684 - The King's Uncle

"Senior?" Lin Mu called out, seeing that Xukong had gone silent all of a sudden.

"Ah, yes. I can't tell what exactly happened, but I did feel the space within the ring tremble for a moment there as well." Xukong informed.

"You did?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yes. At first, I thought it was probably just a minor anomaly in space. The ring is a strange space that even I cannot fully understand and just thought that it might have been a normal occurrence, albeit rare.

But now... now I don't think that was normal." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu narrowed his eyes upon hearing this and wondered what it could have been.

"Should we check the ring?" Lin Mu asked.

"I've already taken a look around the altar, there's no change there. As for any other places, it would be impossible to find a source with how vast this place is." Xukong replied.

"I see... we'll think about this later, I guess. For now, we'll focus on the task at hand." Lin Mu replied.

"Agreed, I'll keep a close eye on the situation in the ring in the meantime." Xukong stated.

Lin Mu nodded his head and decided to leave this place.

He had already seen enough of the old man and the longer he stayed here while observing him, the more uncomfortable he became.

'At least we know what the peak power of this kingdom is...'
Lin Mu thought to himself as he ascended to the floors above.

His location was none other than the floor where he had detected the three other Nascent soul realm cultivators. He had to be a bit more careful in this part and ensured that his spirit sense did not accidentally come into their sensory range.

This floor was three levels up from the floor on which the old man was and looked like a study room instead. There were several bookshelves along with tens of chests kept along the walls. There were also some paintings hung on the wall.

In here, Lin Mu saw three Nascent soul realm cultivators talking. Since he was closer to them, Lin Mu could now tell their cultivation bases far more clearly.

"One Infant Soul stage Nascent soul realm cultivator and two Child Soul stage Nascent soul realm cultivators." Lin Mu observed.

One of the Child Soul stage Nascent Soul realm cultivators was sitting behind a desk talking to the other two, who were evidently together. There was of course, a sound isolating formation around the floor, but that was already a piece of cake for Lin Mu to unravel.

Once inside the formation, Lin Mu took his position at a closer and convenient location so that he could hear the three men talk.

"... As I stated before, we do not have the location of a thousand year old Hong Lin tree." The man sitting behind the desk said and took a pause. "But since my brother had a favorable relationship with the sect master, I'm willing to compromise and let the kingdom's reserve stores be given." The man continued.

"What is it that you want?" The Infant soul stage Nascent soul realm cultivator asked.

"I want you two to assist my nephew in a breakthrough to the Nascent Soul realm. He's close to it and will have it sometime this month." The man behind the desk spoke.

Hearing this, Lin Mu instantly realized who they were talking about. After all, there was only one person that was close to a breakthrough right now in the Hong Lin Kingdom's royal place.

"The king? This man is his uncle?" Lin Mu observed the man.

He could soon match several of the features of the man. Though both this man and the king seemed to be of the same age if he compared just the appearance; They were both middle aged.

"This is not what we were told, sect mater told us to only go to you and that you will fulfill your end of the bargain." The Infant Soul stage Nascent Soul realms cultivator said, looking a bit upset.

"And we would have helped if we knew of the location of a tree like that. But we don't and thus don't have a compulsion to tell you anymore. I am going out of my way to give you a way to complete the mission you were given." The king's uncle stated firmly.

"Fine... if we do agree, how do you propose we help?" The other Child Soul stage Nascent soul realm cultivator questioned.

"You can make a tribulation attenuation platform so that my nephew can breakthrough safely and can also act as the Dharma protectors along with me then. Even though I'm sure nothing would happen and no one would dare to interfere, it would still be best for the safety of my nephew." The King's uncle answered.

"Senior brother this!" The Infant soul stages Nascent soul realm cultivator seemed agitated upon hearing this and was about to stand up when he felt a hand on his arm.

"Be calm, Junior brother. Let me handle this." The senior brother spoke.

"Humph, you should listen to your senior brother. Even if you are from a Top sect, you can't act without decorum in the royal place of an official vassal of the Great Zhou Empire." The King's uncle stated without a hint of fear on his face.

Lin Mu found this to be strange because if it were any other Nascent soul realm cultivators, they would think twice before acting like this in front of other Nascent soul realm cultivators, especially when they were alone.

Numbers could overwhelm power at a certain point, and Lin Mu was sure that he wasn't someone who could find multiple experts at the same level as him without any trouble.

'Hmm... they are here for the thousand year old Hong Lin trees as well. Perhaps this might be useful to us too...' Lin Mu thought and decided to listen more while waiting here.

"So what have you finally decided?" The king's uncle asked.

Chapter 685 - Two Conversations

The two disciples looked at each other and the senior disciple finally decided to speak.

"Fine, we shall do as you ask. We'll make a tribulation attenuation platform for the King to safely breakthrough." The senior brother answered the king's uncle.

"Excellent! I hope you can prepare for this as soon as possible." The King's uncle urge.

The junior brother furrowed his eyes in doubt and looked at his senior brother. But before he could say anything, he was signaled by his senior brother to stay silent and not to do anything.

With that done, the senior brother suddenly stood up.

"We shall take our leave then and prepare for it, Senior Kou." The senior brother stated.

"Of course, please do. The suites are available for you and you can stay there if you so please." The King's uncle, who was evidently named Kou spoke.

Having said that, the two disciples took their leave and so did Kou after a few minutes. Lin Mu observed both parties with his spirit sense and saw that Kou went to talk with the king about the meeting he just had while the two brothers went to the room that they were assigned.

Since the entire palace was a single large building, they didn't have a separate courtyard like in many other places. Instead of that, there were large suits assigned to people within which there were more rooms.

The suite was rather luxurious and of high quality. There were several decorations in it, along with many plants. There were even miniature Hong Lin trees that had evidently been grown especially for indoor areas like this.

Overall, it gave a rather comfortable vibe despite not being as big as a courtyard. There were now two conversations going on at the same time, and Lin Mu didn't know which party to listen to first.

But after hearing the two disciples for a few seconds, Lin Mu took a breath of relief.

"Why did you accept it, senior brother?" The Junior brother questioned.

"Stay quiet for now. There can be people listening in more ways than just one. We shall talk later outside, for now just cultivate and wait." The senior brother stated, not letting the junior protest.

The junior brother had an uneasy expression on his face, but he didn't protest and simply accepted it for now.

Lin Mu nodded upon hearing the senior brother's words and knew that it was actually true. There were formations that could listen to people that were located in the royal palace.

The formation was directly integrated into the entire fomentation array of the palace and thus would be hard to discover unless a formation master came by and decided to investigate it thoroughly.

Even then, it might take that master a long time to do so and they might not even be successful. For Lin Mu though, he could simply use the ring to look past the layers without a problem.

Normally for formation masters, solving a formation array was like solving a puzzle, but the puzzle was hidden behind a wall and they could not see it. In addition to that touching, any wrong part might collapse the wall and hurt, if not damage them.

All in all, it was a complex process and needed quite a lot of skill to learn and master. Lin Mu had discovered them and didn't really care for them as they couldn't affect him anyway when he was in Phase.

After this short conversation, the two disciples went silent and continued to calmly cultivate.

"Hmm... I'll come to them later." Lin Mu muttered to himself and focused his attention on the King and his uncle.

The King was sitting on the throne and the entire throne room was currently empty. It was evident that the members of the royal court had been asked to give the king time to breakthrough while not being disturbed.

Nearly every cultivator knew how difficult it was to overcome a heavenly tribulation and thus they took to their duties seriously while the king was busy with his own breakthrough preparations.

Of course, the normal public did not know about this as it could be a troublesome event in the case that the King fails his tribulation and gets hurt, if not dies. Plus, it would also give the enemies of the king and the royal court information about this, letting them have a chance to plot against them.

If the news about the king being close to a breakthrough was heard, it was bound to cause waves in the entire Hong Lin kingdom. It would thus invite attention from the enemies, who would be worried about the increasing power of the king and try to kill him.

By keeping a secret, the king would be safer and perhaps even have a better chance at surviving this without the stress of people watching his every move. Plus, if he successfully broke through and stabilized his cultivation base, the announcement after that would only be that much better.

It would increase the veneration for the king that was felt by the citizens of the Hong Lin country and it would also increase the fear that these enemies felt from them. Overall it was a plan that focused more on safety and stability rather than temporary publicity.

"I have managed to convince the two disciples of sect master Hua to help in your tribulation." Kou spoke.

"You didn't have to, uncle Kou. I know that I can accomplish this on my own as well. Plus, taking the help of others would only put us in debt with them." The King replied.

"Hahaha, you don't need to worry about that. Those two came here to actually ask for our help, thus when they take care of this task, that debt their master owed your father will be written off.

That way, no one will be in each other's debt and you won't have to worry about it either." Kou spoke with a laugh.

"Hmm... if you say so, uncle Kou." The King replied in a low voice.

Chapter 686 - Hong Lin Kingdom's Secrets

Lin Mu continued to listen to the conversation of the royal nephew, and uncle as they talked.

"But what is it that they wanted with us, Uncle Kou?" The king questioned.

"Oh, it was the same old, people needing thousand year old Hong Lin trees. I told him that we don't have the location for any such trees as of now. Instead of that, we are willing to provide them some wood from our own reserve storage that they can take." Kou answered.

Hearing this, the king furrowed his brows.

"Hmm... the number of Hong Lin trees that reach a thousand years has greatly fallen over the years for us. I think it may be time to enact the measures father had chosen back then." The king spoke upon hearing Kou.

"Those measures were controversial and you know that. If we really do announce them, our trade will fall and so will the taxes we gain from our people." Kou replied.

"But if we really don't do anything, we will be losing our heritage, the Hong Lin trees. You of all people should know well uncle, there must always be at least ten thousand year old Hong Lin trees living, or the entire forest will start to die.

They are the mother trees that we protect, but if others cannot replace them later on, if some accident happens, we won't be able to do anything and it will be too late to regret it." The King said in a concerned voice.

~Sigh~

"This is a problem that has troubled us for a long time now. Many past ministers and kings tried to find some solution, but it was never suitable for the time period. Even now, we cannot do it.

It is unknown which trees have the potential to survive till a thousand years and become thousand year old Hong Lin trees. If we forcibly protect all trees and prevent them from being cut down, just for the fear that it might be the potential thousand year old tree, it will only cause an uproar." Kou explained.

The King shook his head and closed his eyes to focus on his cultivation back again.

Unknown to both of them, Lin Mu had heard their entire conversation, which could be considered to be very sensitive. Lin Mu had evidently gotten to learn several sensitive secrets of the Hong Lin kingdom.

The first was that there were ten mother Hong Lin trees being actively protected by the royal family somewhere and that not all Hong Lin trees had the potential of becoming a thousand year old.

Lin Mu knew that there were actually people that sold Hong Lin saplings to various people. The customers for this were both the citizens from the Hong Lin kingdom and also other kingdoms.

Several sects had bought them as well, just for the hope that the tree might reach thousand years and grow to become a thousand year old Hong Lin tree.

But what they did not know was that they had been intentionally misinformed. If they did find out about this, there was a great chance they would be offended, despite the fact that the natural survival chances of a Hong Lin tree only decreased once it lived past five hundred years.

In the entire Hong Lin kingdom, there were less than 5% of trees that were actually a hundred years or older. One could only imagine how difficult it would be for a Hong Lin tree to reach a thousand years.

Lin Mu thought about this all and wondered if there was a way he could take advantage of this somehow.

The King's uncle took his leave and went back to his own room to cultivate for now. Lin Mu observed both of them for a while and saw that they were not doing anything other than cultivating and thus decided to take his leave.

"I should get to the repository so I can see the records about me and the Hei corps..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

His spirit sense soon found the area where the repository was located. It was located right below where the king's court was and even had a direct entrance to it from the back. Its main entrance for others though was from the floor below it.

All of these, of course, were irrelevant to Lin Mu, and he directly descended into the repository. Luckily for him, there was no one in the hall for the time being and let him search it freely.

'It may be because the king is cultivating right above this that they decide to prevent others from coming here and accidentally disturbing the king.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

While the royal repository was large, it didn't have the same number of documents and records as that of the law enforcement hall. Plus, the documents and records that were kept here were rather varied and contained more than just crime reports and such.

There were official records of the Kingdom's daily expenditure and functioning that went all the way back to over three hundred years, its history and genealogy of all the king's and even several cultivation techniques.

While Lin Mu found several of these documents interesting, he put off reading them for the time being and focused on the task for which he came here. After about an hour's search, Lin Mu finally found the thing he came here for.

"There it is... Lin Mu and Hei corps." Lin Mu picked up the two scrolls that were kept together, along with several other scrolls with sensitive information.

Lin Mu first read his own scroll and then the scroll about the Hei corps.

In his own scroll, there wasn't anything that seemed out of the normal to him. It was just more and more orders about how to find and where to report the information about him.

It was all general instructions that would be issued for most wanted criminals. But when he finally got to the scroll about the Hei corps, his eyes narrowed.

Chapter 687 - Change Of Plans

Lin Mu read the scroll and furrowed his brows.

"They caught over ten members of the Hei corps of the sixteen that they had detected were in the kingdom. The remaining six are still missing and have been put at a high level of importance.

The ones that were caught were then sent to the empire itself, as was requested of them according to the orders." Lin Mu muttered after reading the entire scroll.

He knew that it wasn't fully the Hong Lin kingdom's fault either in catching and sending the members of the Hei corps off. From all that he knew, the kingdoms needed to follow the orders of the empire, especially for highly wanted criminals like this.

Plus, it was not like they would listen if the members of the Hei corps protested. They were simply doing what they were asked to and anyone else would do the same if they didn't know that the sects and empires were being manipulated, no less.

~Sigh~

"This doesn't help us much. There is no more information about the six members that managed to escape either." Lin Mu said while shaking his head.

Comparing the dates, Lin Mu was sure that it would be close to impossible if he wanted to find the members of the Hei corps here. The outpost that was located in the Hong Lin kingdom could be said to be as good as gone now.

'Perhaps they have left the kingdom a long time ago as well...' Lin Mu thought.

With these thoughts in his mind, Lin Mu didn't know if completing their mission here was even possible anymore.

"Things won't always go according to your plans. This is one of the very important things you need to learn. Fate is a fickle mistress and often likes to play without much rhyme or reason." Xukong said in a sagely tone.

"I understand senior." Lin Mu replied.

"Though... it's not like this is a complete failure for you, either. There are other things you can accomplish here from what I've been seeing till now." Xukong stated.

Lin Mu thought over it and indeed found it to be true. There were a lot of things he could do in the Hong Lin kingdom, plus it didn't seem like Gu Yao had a very strong control here... at least not for now.

"Mmm, I'll see what else I can do here. At the very least, we'll get the Hong Lin wood before we leave for the Long Cloud sect." Lin Mu stated.

With that done, Lin Mu felt a bit free now and felt like he could do some other things and didn't need to rush everything.

'I'll take a look at the other things here... might as well take the advantage of being here already.' Lin Mu thought before looking around.

Lin Mu read through many records and documents that were stored in the repository and even learned of the history of the Hong Lin kingdom.

It was said that the Hong Lin kingdom was founded over three thousand years ago by the first king of named Hong. He was an orphan as well, who was abandoned in the Hong Lin forest.

He grew up in the harshness of the forest and survived it all, taking up the forest as his parents and thus naming himself 'Hong'. He alone managed to cultivate all the way to the peak of the Qi refining realm upon coming across a secret cultivator abode in the forest.

Using the cultivation technique he found in it, his cultivation continued to soar, and so did his status.

Back then, while the unification of the entire continent was already done, the area where the Hong Lin forest was located was still free. And since the nearby powers were still struggling in their own troubles after the war, they didn't have the chance to expand or take over more things than they could deal with back then.

This allowed there to be several small clans that settled in the Hong Lin forest. These were the natives of the forest and lived in large circular houses, much like the royal place itself.

Over time, the architecture style had changed and been influenced by the rest of the empire, but the Royal palace still kept up the tradition.

The first King, 'Hong' reached the Nascent soul realm and was said to be so talented that he was invited by many sects back then, even including several top sects. But he rejected all of them and instead chose to settle in the forest that had raised him and called it his home.

He established the Hong Lin Kingdom and united the smaller clans, making them his citizens and subjects. He dispelled opposition with an iron fist and decimated his opponents with ease.

But the one thing he loved dearly was the forest itself and the Hong Lin trees. He wrote countless poems and couplets about them, and praised them to no end. Many people said he was obsessed with the trees and that he would even marry them if one turned into a human.

His obsession even carried on after he became king. Becoming a king came with the duty of producing offspring and heirs, and thus he married several women. But the queen that he married never managed to truly win his heart, and he was often found cultivating in the forest instead.

Despite him having many heirs, his queen and concubines were always displeased with him. Over the years, this led to many conflicts among the heirs of the first king. Since he didn't pay much attention to his wives and the royal court, it ended up with them competing against each other.

With no attention from their husband, the wives fought and quarreled amongst themselves, redirecting their goals to gain more power in the kingdom for themselves, their children, and their families.

While the commoners lived in relative peace, the royal palace was almost always in some kind of internal trouble.

All of this only stopped when the King suddenly disappeared one day. Upon his departure, he only left a single letter from which mentioned that he was reaching the end of his lifespan and would not deal with the matters of the kingdom anymore.

As for who would be the next king?

He left that up to a quest that he assigned to his heirs.

Before leaving, the king had sealed the royal treasury and even the repository, basically leaving the entire royal place helpless. He stated that the next king will be the one who finds the oldest Hong Lin tree in the forest and takes the Royal Seal from it.

The king had hidden his Royal seal, which was his token of authority on the oldest tree of the Hong Lin forest. This tree was something that only the king knew, as he was the only one who had spent so much time in the forest.

It is said that due to the pressure from the potential fall of the royal family, the heirs actually worked together and eventually found the royal seal. One of the heirs was elected as the king, while the rest of them took different positions in the royal court.

Though half of them also chose to leave the kingdom and pursue the life of a cultivator, either in the sects or just as itinerant cultivators.

Over the years, the throne changed hands several times, and the king wasn't always someone who reached the Nascent Soul realm.

"That was one eccentric king... why did he even choose to become one when he didn't want to run his kingdom well?" Lin Mu couldn't help but wonder.

"People have many obsessions in their life and some of these make them want to protect it. The first king loved the forest like his own parents and thus took the only method he thought would be possible to protect it, becoming king." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu thought over it and found it to be reasonable. He then continued to read through more documents and spent several hours in the repository. He also kept checking the status of the king, his uncle Kou and the two disciples from the sect he didn't know about yet, but they were all still in their places and cultivated in silence.

Just as he was about to debate on whether to leave or not, he came across something that caught his attention.

It was a cultivation technique and was kept among the other cultivation techniques in the repository. They weren't particularly good and thus didn't catch Lin Mu's eyes, as he could cultivate far easily without them.

But this cultivation technique caught his attention, because of its description and method that it showed.

"This is a rather strange technique..." Lin Mu said upon reading its content.

'Embrace the heart of the Hong Lin, let its essence flow through you, and ignite the flame in your heart.'
Lin Mu read the mnemonic of the technique.

Chapter 688 - A Technique

The technique in front of Lin Mu was unlike the other ones he had seen. The more he read it, the more he found it to be strange. By the time he was done reading it, he understood that it was not a normal cultivation technique.

It was then that it hit him.

"Senior, could this be a body cultivation technique?" Lin Mu questioned.

Xukong quickly took a look through the recent memories and assessed the technique.

"Oh? This is actually a rudimentary body cultivation technique." Xukong spoke.

"It really is!?" Lin Mu was now excited.

"Indeed. Though this one is dependent mostly on a specific kind of resources and thus it can only be considered to be the lowest grade of body cultivation technique." Xukong replied.

Lin Wu was now excited upon hearing this. A body cultivation technique was what he was lacking, and now he finally had one. Even if it was a low quality one, Lin Wu reckoned it should be better than nothing.

"What's the difference between this body cultivation technique and others, senior?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm.... This one was evidently made by trial and error. And now that I observe it again, it seems like the creator of this technique originally wanted to make a Qi cultivation technique but ended up with something completely else." Xukong explained.

"I see... this essence of Hong Lin that the technique talk about... isn't this just Vital essence?" Lin Mu asked.

"That's probably it. This world probably does not have body cultivation techniques since those require vital essence to cultivate rather than just Vital energy. But in the case of this technique, it managed to find an alternative way of obtaining it which is from those Hong Lin trees." Xukong spoke.

"Seems like it. Though it also needs some specific kinds of trees, it looks like. Normal Hong Lin trees won't be enough. The tree needs to be one with a 'Heart'." Lin Mu stated.

Xukong thought over it for a bit and shook his head.

"You will have to investigate this on your own and see how it works. So far, you have managed to use elemental Qi instead of Vital essence to cultivate, but that only works for the initial stages.

I doubt your body will be that responsive to it as you increase it further. Even when you absorbed the fire elemental Qi, that was a great luck. I don't think fire elemental Qi will work for you anymore." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu thought over it and found it to be reasonable. He knew that even if he had managed to refine some fire attributive spirit Qi and his heart had been refined due to the first influence, it was not something that could be repeated over and over again.

~Sigh~

"Seems like we will be focusing on Hong Lin trees even more than I thought. Though having obtained this technique is more than enough reason to come to the Hong Lin kingdom. I can't say we've wasted our time here now, despite the fact that we have basically failed with the Hei corps." Lin Mu said while shaking his head.

"Indeed. Like I said before, there are opportunities everywhere and all you need to do is search for them." Xukong spoke.

"I understand now, senior." Lin Mu said before putting the technique's scroll back where he found it.

He had already memorized it and had even made a copy of its contents in another jade slip. Thus, he no longer needed it, plus he didn't want to steal it from its rightful owners. The Hong Lin kingdom had not directly harmed him yet and thus he didn't want to harm them either.

Even if they did end up harming the Hei corps, it was not something Lin Wu could blame them for. With that said and done, Lin Mu swept through the rest of the repository, reading and gathering information that was of use to him.

There were some minor pieces of information that came to his use and cleared some of the doubts that he had about the empire as well and thus he felt that this was all useful to him.

Once he was done, Lin Mu checked the entire repository to make sure that no one would find that he was here and left it. He observed the king, his uncle Kou and also the two disciples only to find them cultivating now as well.

"Hmm... this makes it easier. I'll go check up on Jing Luo and see how he's doing before doing other things." Lin Mu muttered to himself and quickly left the royal palace.

In a few minutes, Lin Mu was already in the courtyard, which he had rented for the month. He used his spirit sense and saw that Jing Luo was still deep in assimilating the knowledge. He had also set up a barrier around his room to prevent any sound or someone from disturbing him.

"Hmm, guess I'll leave him alone for now and go do other tasks." Lin Mu said before leaving the hall.

It was now nighttime and the streets were filled with people going about their tasks. Some were walking around, enjoying their time and eating at the various restaurants and food stalls that were located in the city.

There were children playing around while their parents looked after them. There were also several cultivators that were selling things here.

"I may as well check out the market and see how things fare." Lin Mu said before he wandered through the streets.

There were many areas in the capital city, and they were divided according to their purpose. There was the food street that was filled with restaurants, the entertainment street that had brothels, pleasure pavilions, taverns and gambling houses, and finally shopping streets where various goods and items were sold.

Lin Mu of course, decided to visit the food street first and partake in the unique cuisine of the Hong Lin kingdom.

"This will be fun..."

Chapter 689 - An Exhausted Official

The people of the food street had a rather unique and a bit overwhelming experience today. For the first time in their lives, all of their stock had been finished and even their reserves were all sold off.

A rather handsome man as described by the female vendors, went to shop by shop, stall by stall, and either ate all the food they had or bought it all. In some shops, he tasted some and bought the rest.

The other people who had come to visit the street were left stunned, unable to even complain. All they could see was a man, eating food like he had been starving for who knows how long.

Of course, this person was none other than Lin Mu, who was having the time of his life. There were many kinds of dishes to taste and even more ingredients to buy.

There were special herbs that were cooked in jungle fowl fat to make a stir-fry. There was one of the specialties of the Hong Lin kingdom, which was the Leave wrapped rice and meat cakes.

These were made by covering beast meat in rice first before it was wrapped in the broad leaves of the Hong Lin trees and then steamed. The leaves of the Hong Lin Trees gave it a rather unique armor and a tinge of flavor that seeped into the rice.

Even the water that was used to steam it all was flavored with the flowers of the Hong Lin trees, adding a scent that mesmerized everyone that passed by. This was also one of the most expensive dishes that could be bought here, but Lin Mu simply spent several tens of gold coins and bought the entire shop's supply.

In total, he had bought around twenty steamers full of this dish. Once he stored them in the ring, they would stay good for a long time and Lin Mu would be able to enjoy them later.

In addition to the food street, Lin Mu even went to the street where they sent the ingredients for those dishes and emptied out other stores as well. Some of the other customers protested, of course, but they couldn't really do much in the face of money.

After all, no sane shopkeeper would deny Lin Mu, who was paying everything upfront. The other customers could only sigh to themselves and curse their bad luck that they met a whale today.

The thing was, they didn't even know why Lin Mu was buying all this. At the start, the customers thought he owned a restaurant or something like that and thus he was buying in bulk, but when Lin Mu started to empty out other shops as well, they started to find it really strange.

No restaurant would buy these many ingredients. Even if they wanted to keep some in the reserve storage, they wouldn't keep such a massive amount. Doing so was just asking to make a loss as the ingredients would go bad on their own after a while, even if they tried to use as many as possible.

Of course, how could they know that Lin Mu had a spatial storage treasure that had a massive capacity that was not even a fraction of one percent filled? And the food and ingredients that were kept in it would not go bad for years to come, which was enough for him to finish it all of.

Though to be honest, that situation would never arrive, as even after eating so much food, Lin Mu didn't feel full at all. The only reason he bought it for later was that he knew it would probably cause an even bigger commotion if he went around eating their entire stocks instead of just buying it.

Another reason why the people didn't question Lin Mu much was because of his identity as a cultivator. Since he was able to store all of it in spatial storage treasures they knew that not only was he a cultivator, he was also a very rich cultivator.

Some of the women and girls couldn't help but send flirtatious glances towards him but unfortunately for them, Lin Mu only had eyes for the food.

While Lin Mu continued to go from one store to the next, buying stuff, the news about the commotion had already reached the law enforcement office. In there, a few guards were standing in front of a man who seemed to be exhausted and had eye bags.

His eyes were bloodshot, and it was apparent he had not had much sleep these few days.

"And you woke me up because this man was buying things?" The man asked.

"Yes, office head." The guards spoke.

"And he brought everything legitimately?" The man asked.

"Yes, office head." The guard replied again.

"No stealing?"

"No, office head."

"The coins were real?"

"Yes, office head.

"Did he cause any conflict or a fight?"

"The other customers were upset and displeased that all of the stock was bought off by him, not only in one or two shops but the entire streets." The guard replied.

"And they were the ones that reported him to you all?" The office head questioned.

"Yes, office head. They said that he is intentionally causing trouble and strife in the business. They say he is attempting to run them out of business and make them bankrupt." The guards answered.

Hearing all this, the office head rubbed his forehead and eyes.

~Sigh~

The man let out a sigh as he raised his head. His exhausted expression contorted and fear filled the eyes of the guards.

"YOU IMBECILES! DID YOU EVEN CHECK THE LAWS AND REGULATIONS BEFORE YOU CAME TO ME?" The office head thundered.

"Umm..." the guards were unable to reply anymore.

"SPEAK!" The office head yelled again.

"Uh... he didn't really break any laws or regulations. But since the merchants and all complained, we had no choice but to come to you, office head." The guards replied with difficulty.

"I swear I'll flip the ministry of trade someday... just because someone outbid them, they think they can just force work onto us..." the office head cursed.

Chapter 690 - Nice

~gulp~

The guards couldn't help but swallow their saliva in fear as they worried about their office head. They didn't know if he would have a breakdown and start beating them up or if he would really go ahead with his words and cause an upheaval in the ministry of trade.

They didn't even know how their office head caught onto the fact that a majority of the people who had complained to them were influential supporters of the ministry of trade. With their money and power, the guards dared not offend them and directly came to report to their superior.

But now they were getting yelled at here as well and all they could do was bear it silently. They knew that if they voiced out or protested, the office head would not hesitate in beating them up.

After a few minutes of cursing, the office head calmed down and took a deep breath.

~huh~

"Tell the merchants if they complain again for things like these, that are clearly not against the rules, they will be the ones getting punished. And if they really don't like running out of things to buy, they are free to approach the ministry of trade to appeal a new law specifically for that.

Tell them that they can have their 'fair' purchase power as much as they can if they do that. Whatever the backlash they get from that though will not be on us." The office head declared.

~gulp~

The guards swallowed down their saliva and nodded their heads.

"We'll do as you said, Office head." The guards said in a meek voice.

"Now then... GET OUT!" The office head replied before kicking them out of his office.

~BANG~

The door was slammed shut behind the backs of the guards, and they could only smile wryly.

While all this happened, Lin Mu was blissfully unaware of it all and kept on shopping. And even if he did know that this happened, he wouldn't really care, as it was not like he had broken any rules.

Lin Mu was now sitting in a tea house, calmly sipping some tea made from Hong Lin Blossoms. He reckoned that after having eaten so many things, it only made sense to cleanse his palate and relax while drinking some tea.

"The Hong Lin trees truly are the life blood of this kingdom." Lin Mu muttered after thinking for a bit.

He had seen so many products and items that all used Hong Lin trees or involved them, making him feel a bit awed at it all.

"No wonder the first king of the kingdom was so obsessed about the trees. They definitely have a lot of uses and his obsession was even passed down among his citizens." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He looked around the tea shop and saw the other patrons talking and enjoying their tea. Some were gossiping about the rumors they had had while some were just talking about their day and how their boss had yelled at them.

Some married men complained about their wives and how they complained to them and pestered them. Then there were the youngsters who talked about who had the best and trendy things.

Lin Mu even saw a few cultivators among them all and they were also talking amongst themselves.

Seeing all of this made Lin Mu feel a strange sense of detachment. He felt that he was far apart from them, gazing from the outlines while these people went about their daily lives.

~Sigh~

"Is this what the Lost Immortal meant by the flavor of life of the mortals?" Lin Mu muttered to himself, recalling one of the lines that the Lost immortal had written in his memoirs.

Pondering over it for an hour, Lin Mu finished the pot of tea that he had ordered. Once he was done, he decided to take his leave and head out of the city.

'This tea is quite good... thankfully I bought plenty of it and can make it later on.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

This was one of the reasons why he had come here. Even if Lin Mu had bought the tea, he had not tasted it and decided that going to a tea house that specialized in it might be the best choice.

And now that it was confirmed that the tea was truly excellent, Lin Mu felt pleased about his purchase.

"Hmm... little shrubby will probably like the new ingredients. He'll have a lot more to try out now." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Little Shrubby actually had more than just one spatial storage treasure now, and Jing Luo had modified a few of the ones they had gotten as spoils from other enemies. Little Shrubby was using those to store the food ingredients and all other things that he liked.

"Now that I think of it... we haven't tried that Saw tooth Tuna either..." Lin Mu said to himself as he flew towards the hill where Little Shrubby was hidden.

The hill was located about ten kilometers from the capital city and gave a really good view of the city from the distance. And like many other hills, it was also covered with the Hong Lin trees hiding whatever beasts that were living on it.

This was the reason why Lin Mu and Jing Luo had picked this place to halt beforehand and also why they let Little Shrubby stay there.

The beast in question opened his eyes when he sensed his master appraising from the distance.

~Grrr~

Little Shrubby lightly growled and stretched his body before getting up from the curled up position he was in before. Lin Mu also saw him and couldn't help but smile upon seeing it.

"Even if he has grown many times bigger than before, he still sleeps in the same manner when he was a small cat." Lin Mu muttered to himself and landed on the hill.

"You're back!" Little Shrubby spoke.

"Yes... and I brought some things you might like."