

Walker 691

Chapter 691 - Search For Hong Lin Trees

Hearing that Lin Mu had gifts for him, Little Shrubby was really excited.

"What did you get?" Little Shrubby questioned.

"Well, let me show you." Lin Mu said before taking out all the ingredients and condiments that he had bought.

The more Little Shrubby saw, the wider his eyes got.

"This is awesome! I can try so many things now!" Little Shrubby said before he went to check each of the items.

He smelled them and tasted them before deciding what things they could be used for. Lin Mu let it happen and the beast enjoyed it. By the time Little Shrubby was done checking all things, an entire hour had passed.

"I think you should store them away for now. We need to go someplace else now." Lin Mu spoke.

"Okay," Little Shrubby replied before quickly getting to storing all of the items in the many spatial storage treasures he now had.

In a minute, he was done and the two of them were ready to leave.

"So where are we going?" Little Shrubby questioned.

"We are going to test out a new technique that I got. But for this, I need Hong Lin trees that are at least a hundred years old." Lin Mu answered.

"These trees? Hmm..." Little Shrubby muttered.

"Come on, let's leave." Lin Mu said as he flew up.

He didn't get onto Little Shrubby as their aim, wasn't to travel a long distance in a short time but rather to find specific kinds of trees. Lin Mu knew a little about the Hong Lin Trees and knew that the hundred years old trees didn't really look much different from the other trees with the exception that their roots would be far more deeper and longer.

Just from the outward appearance it was often hard to find one and even when someone used spirit sense to find the right kind of a tree there was still a chance that the tree might not be a hundred years old and it was just their roots that had reached a length long enough to look like that.

Since the Hong Lin trees were plants, ultimately they could have different growing styles and uniqueness that animals often could not. Not only that, but their lifespan was also naturally longer with some trees even immortal despite not needing to cultivate.

As long as trees got the nutrition and ideal conditions, they would keep on growing and stay alive for years and years to come. But cultivation often came with time. Every item in the world absorbed spirit Qi passively even if they wanted it or not.

It didn't matter what kind of objects they were either, they could be living beings or even inanimate objects like rocks, stones, lakes or even something like clouds. The longer something existed the more spirit Qi they would have absorbed.

Living creatures had an advantage here and they could naturally absorb far more spirit Qi passively than what inanimate objects like rocks could. And thus plants coming under this category could also cultivate after a certain age.

There were often times cases when a plant that had reached over a thousand years old would gather enough spirit Qi to naturally breakthrough to the Qi refining realm and become a spirit herb.

But if one compared this to a human, the very same human might not even live for one tenth the entire lifespan of the plant. And the more ironic part was the fact that even if a human did cultivate and reached the Nascent Soul realm, they would at most be able to live for a thousand years, whereas the plant would have already lived for that long.

This was also the reason why, while there were variations in sizes of the Hong Lin Trees, a bigger tree might not necessarily be hundred years old or even a thousand years old. There were many more factors to them and one could only depend on their luck to find one.

Of course, hundred year old Hong Lin trees weren't something that were too hard to find either. Even commoners could find them on their own, given that they searched hard enough and long enough as well.

From what Lin Mu knew, the entire Hong Lin forest had at least ten percent trees that were at the age of hundred years old or more. As for the thousand year old trees, the people had no idea and neither did the King.

Lin Mu and little Shrubby traveled over the forest for about an hour, with Lin Mu having his spirit sense extended fully and checking the earth for the roots of the Hong Lin trees. Even if the roots might not necessarily indicate if a tree was hundred years old, it still had a greater chance of being a hundred years old than a tree with shorter roots.

"There," Lin Mu suddenly said while pointing to one of the areas below.

Him and Little Shrubby then descended to the ground and reached the tree, which Lin Mu suspected was a hundred years old Hong Lin tree. He checked the method that was described in his mind and placed his hand onto the trunk of the tree.

Closing his eyes, Lin Mu sensed the condition of the Hong Lin tree. At first, he didn't sense anything but after five seconds, Lin Mu could feel the vibrant energy that was only hidden within a hundred year old Hong Lin tree.

Lin Mu opened his eyes that shined with content.

"This is it!" Lin Mu said.

"What do we do now?" Little Shrubby questioned.

"Now I'm gonna try and cultivate using the new method. You can try and find other trees similar to them. I don't know if your senses will work with this or not though." Lin Mu said.

He knew that the method would not be something that Little Shrubby would be able to use, but Lin Mu hoped that Little Shrubby's animal senses would triumph here instead.

Chapter 692 - Embrace Of Hong Lin

Hearing Lin Mu's words, Little Shrubby approached the hundred year old Hong Lin tree and probed it with his spirit sense. He then touched the tree and smelled it before scratching the tree and tasting it as well.

Lin Mu watched on and let the beast do its thing.

"Hmm... I can tell that something is different about this tree than the other ones here. I think I may be able to find more of them." Little Shrubby spoke.

"Alright, please go ahead and find them. I'll try to cultivate in the meantime." Lin Mu stated.

Little Shrubby nodded his head and flew away in search of more hundred year old Hong Lin trees. Lin Mu, on the other hand, followed the methodology that was described in the technique he got from the repository and sat down with his back facing the Hong Lin tree.

While it was a bit uncomfortable at first, Lin Mu managed to find a position in which his back made maximum contact with the tree trunk as it could. Once that was done, Lin Mu closed his eyes and tried to sense the energy within the Hong Lin Trees once again.

After about a minute, he was able to sense them again, this time without even touching with his hand. The main use of this step was to let the cultivator get used to the Hong Lin tree and learn about the energy within it.

Even if Lin Mu had his back to the tree, he wasn't actually using his back to sense the energy within the Hong Lin Tree, as that was not how the technique worked. He could only sense it directly with his hands as they worked through his hands' meridians and not his back's.

This step was to see if the cultivator could still sense the energy within the Hong Lin trees without a direct link. Now that Lin Mu had sensed the energy hidden within the tree, the next step was to pull the energy towards him.

This was the 'Embracing the heart of Hong Lin' part of the mnemonic.

This was also a far harder step than before, and it took Lin Mu over an hour before he was able to even make the energy move a millimeter. But once that happened, he found the next parts easier.

As minutes passed by, Lin Mu was able to pull the energy within the Hong Lin trees closer and closer. And when the energy finally reached close to his body, Lin Mu realized something.

"This... this is vital essence?" Lin Mu muttered. "No, wait... there's is some difference between this vital essence and my own. I guess this is what makes it possible to cultivate..."

Lin Mu thought to himself that this technique really did work as was said and continued the process. With this step completed, it became far easier for him to do the next step. The vital essence from within the Hong Lin tree entered his back and then spread over the skin.

Little by little, it trickled into his body before passing through the muscles, bones, and sinews. The strange thing was this vital essence didn't merge into his cells directly like his own vital essence did.

'This separation might be one of the factors that make this technique possible...' Lin Mu thought to himself.

The transmission of vital essence was rather slow within his body, and it took over an hour before it reached his internal organs. Once it was there, it didn't go to any other organ and started moving towards the Heart.

It was as if the other organs were repulsive to it and only when it reached his heart did the vital essence start getting absorbed into it. The moment it did, Lin Mu could feel the cells of his heart starting to strengthen.

Normally, since a heart was involved in the pumping of blood, it came in contact with a lot of vital essences that Lin Mu's body normally produced. But even then, it only stored a certain amount of vital essence in its cells.

It did not actually absorb the vital essence directly to refine itself. The process was a bit strange and hard to understand. If one were to compare it to something, they could think of it as using a jug of water to pour a glass and then using that very water to fill the jug back up.

Overall there was no net change of energy, and thus it would stay the same. This was where the cultivation techniques came and the need for external resources and requirements.

One needed something of 'high potential' to increase their own 'low potential'.

Lin Mu calmly continued to cultivate using the method and kept on absorbing the vital essence of the Hong Lin tree. Eventually, the cells stopped absorbing the vital essence and started to divide.

'My Five Treasures Realm cultivation... it's increasing!' Lin Mu detected.

Seeing this, hope lit up in Lin Mu's eyes and he focused even more in the absorption. Once the replication of cells stopped, his heart could absorb more vital essence from the Hong Lin Tree.

Just like this another three hours passed before the Hong Lin Tree had run out of all Vital essence.

~hoo~

Lin Mu opened his eyes and checked his condition.

"That... this is at least two percent increase!" Lin Mu exclaimed.

While this increase seemed minuscule, one must remember that even this was a great progress compared to before. His heart was now 32% refined and Lin Mu was assured that as long as he kept this up, he will surely reach 100% completion and also break through to the Third Stage of the Five Treasures realm.

Lin Mu stood up and took a look at the Hong Lin tree finding it to be the same as before. But when he placed his hand on it, he could see that it was now fully drained of the energy that was present in it.

"No wonder the first king liked the Hong Lin trees so much. They were the ones that helped him cultivate and he wanted to increase their numbers while protecting them.." Lin Mu said.

Chapter 693 - An Intelligent Herb

With the increase in his Five Treasures realm cultivation, Lin Mu felt incredibly pleased.

"This will work! I just need to find more Hundred year old Hong Lin trees." Lin Mu said with excitement.

He looked around to see if Little Shrubby had returned yet or not but did not see him there. He closed his eyes and sensed his connection, only to find that Little Shrubby was fifty kilometers away from him in the southern direction.

"Did he find something there?" Lin Mu wondered.

He then flew towards little Shrubby's direction and reached it after a few minutes. There Lin Mu saw Little Shrubby fighting another creature.

"Huh? What is that?" Lin Mu wondered.

The creature Little Shrubby was fighting was not a beast but rather a plant. The plant was moving around underground and popping up to attack Little Shrubby. Little Shrubby was chasing the plant around trying to catch him.

Lin Mu could tell that Little Shrubby didn't intend to kill the plant otherwise with his speed he would have done it rather easily.

"What are you doing little Shrubby?" Lin Mu questioned.

Little Shrubby who was in the middle of a jump, missed his target and the plant moved away quickly. Lin Mu didn't really get to take a good look at the plant and from what he could see it was just a brown root.

Little Shrubby looked up at Lin Mu who had just appeared and spoke "Catch it, its good ingredient!"

Hearing this Lin Mu didn't know if he should laugh or not.

'No wonder...' Lin Mu thought to himself.

He extended his spirit sense and let it penetrate the ground. There he finally got to see the real appearance of the plant. Just as he had thought it was a spirit herb and was in the form of an onion like bulb.

It had long roots that were several tens of meters long, while at its top it had flat green leaves that numbered eleven. Lin Mu did not immediately realize what spirit herb this was but since it was able to move around like this, Lin Mu knew it was no common spirit herb.

"Oh?" Xukong's surprised voice was heard in Lin Mu's mind.

"What happened senior?" Lin Mu questioned.

"It's a peak grade herb that has managed to gain intelligence," Xukong spoke.

"Peak grade herb?" Lin Mu repeated as a smile appeared in his mind.

He quickly extended his hand in the direction of the spirit herb which was now trying to run away. Since Lin Mu had also appeared and he was quite strong which the spirit herb could perceive, it decided it was no longer worth it to fight and started to run away.

Alas, it was Lin Mu he was trying to escape from which was very difficult now.

"Meld," Lin Mu said as the entire area around the spirit herb was frozen.

The spirit herb also stopped moving and it looked it had turned into a normal spirit herb that was inanimate. Lin Mu raised his hand along with which the entire chunk of soil was lifted up as well.

He then waved his fingers, making the soil split apart till the spirit herb's side was revealed. Lin Mu didn't go too much in deep as that may end up harming the spirit herb. He wanted the spirit herb intact as a spirit herb with intelligence was far more valuable than just a dead one.

With that one, Lin Mu pulled the chunk with the spirit herb towards him and he held onto it with his other hand and finally deactivated meld.

~thud~thud~thud~

All the chunks of soil fell to the ground as the spirit herb was now firmly clasped in his left hand.

~rustle~ rustle~ rustle~

The spirit herb that looked like an onion couldn't really make any noise but its struggling in Lin Mu's hand made its leaves rustle. But no matter how hard it tried, the plant found it impossible to escape Lin Mu's grasp.

"You caught it!" Little Shrubby said with excitement.

"Yes, I did." Lin Mu said with a nod.

"Now let's cook it! I know it will be really good I can sense the spirit Qi in it!" Little Shrubby stated, his mouth almost dripping with drool.

~rustle~ rustle~ rustle~

Lin Mu didn't know if the onion like spirit herb could even understand Little Shrubby's cries or not and did it understood what he had meant, but it certainly did start to struggle even more. Though Lin Mu had to admit the spirit herb was strong.

'Its strength is almost comparable to someone in the Nascent soul realm.' Lin Mu thought.

Had it not been for Lin Mu's superior cultivation base and a strong body, he might have been forced to let go of the onion like herb.

"Hang on now," Lin Mu said to Little Shrubby. "We should first see what spirit herb this is." He added.

Little Shrubby nodded his head and slurped back his drool. Lin Mu looked back at the herb and saw it continue to struggle it was now whipping around its roots and hitting Lin Mu as well.

~slap~slap~whip~

Its roots were long and thin, and could cause a lot of damage to the average cultivator. In fact, Lin Mu estimated that if it really did use a little more force with its roots, it might just end up cutting apart the body of whatever it struck.

In Lin Mu's case though, the spirit herb was out of luck as the Mortal Strengthening scripture's armor had kept in impervious to damage.

'No wonder little Shrubby was acutely dodging its attack... they can actually cause him some damage.' Lin Mu understood.

Learning all this had only made him that much curious about the herb in his hand. Keeping his hand on the herb, Lin Mu held the jade slip with all the records in his right hand.. He then started to search through it, trying to find the identity of the herb.

Chapter 694 - Wood Spirit Tulip

Five minutes had passed since Lin Mu began his search through the jade slip but he was still unable to find anything in it.

"Hmm... it's not in this." Lin Mu said while furrowing his brows.

The record that he had just checked was the one that Jing Wei had given him and it had most of the information of spirit herbs that he could find. In fact, if the information was present in this record, Lin Mu would have already recognized the spirit herb with his eyes.

But since he didn't he thought that he had missed one of the herbs or forgotten about it.

"I'll need to check the other records. But keeping it in this manner is not viable." Lin Mu said.

"Send it into the ring. The spirit herb should be fine, unlike beasts. As long as it has a small source of spirit Qi it will stay calm." Xukong suggested.

"Ah yes! I'll do that." Lin Mu said before storing the onion like herb into the ring.

Little Shrubby had been watching Lin Mu's hand without moving and saw the herb suddenly disappear. His eyes went wide and he quickly snapped his neck around looking to see if the herb had escaped or something.

"Don't worry. I kept it in the ring. I'll take it out once we know what it really is." Lin Mu said seeing the lost little Shrubby.

"Okay~" Little Shrubby said before laying down on the ground.

Lin Mu took out the rest of the records and went through them one by one. But the more he looked the more confused he got as the herb was not present in any of them. Lin Mu finished the records he had obtained from the mercenary union and was now moving on to the records that the Tri Cauldron peony sect had.

"If it is anywhere then it should be in these records. After all the Tri cauldron peony sect was a sect focused on alchemy and grew a lot of herbs." Lin Mu muttered to himself. "And if it's not in this, then I'll just have to look elsewhere."

Since the records of the Tri cauldron peony sect were all divided into multiple jade slips, books, and scrolls, Lin Mu took several hours to look through them. This reminded him that he should compile all of these into one jade slip later.

'I need to get Jing Luo to make me a higher capacity jade slip as well so I can store all the information later on.' Lin Mu noted in his mind.

Finally when an entire day passed he was able to find out what the herb was. The book he found it in was also a bit astounding to him.

The name of the book was 'Theorized existence of cross habitat residing spirit herbs'.

The content of the book was actually quite interesting to Lin Mu and he only stopped when he had finished reading the entire book. It wasn't a rather large book either as it actually seemed to be incomplete.

Lin Mu saw the note at the end of the book, which stated that this was a work in progress and that all the theories were yet to be fully verified. In fact, of the plants that were mentioned in the book, only a handful of them had even been seen by the author ever in his life.

And those plants were not even seen clearly by the author as they were of a very high grade. But the author was not discouraged from this and went ahead doing as much as he could.

What the author wanted to say was that there were certain strong spirit herbs that were very weak to the element which was opposite to the element that they belonged to. And thus because of that, they resided in habitats that were rich in the element which was strong against their weak element.

For example, a herb of the fire element is weak to water and thus it would reside in a habitat that was strong against water which was nothing but earth. It was a rather unique phenomenon in which a herb chose to live and grown in an environment that wasn't actually its own element.

And all of this just because they had a great fear for the opposing element. While the author had been unable to gather any of such herbs he did theorize that if these herbs came into contact with objects or spirit Qi of the element they were weak to they would instantly die.

This would happen, no matter how strong those herbs really were or how high their rank was.

The onion like herb Lin Mu caught was alone one such herb and had been described in the book. It was one of the only handful of herbs that the author actually managed to find and observe enough to write it down.

Since he was the first one to find the herb, he named it the wood spirit tulip. It looked just the same as what Lin Mu had caught except that it also had a vibrant green flower at the top.

'The one I got should be an immature one which has not blossomed yet.' Lin Mu reckoned.

While there was no flower at its top, the herb matched all the features such as the onion like bulb, long brown roots that moved around like whips and green stalk and leaves.

But to confirm further, Lin Mu withdrew the spirit herb from his ring and held it back in his hand.

~rustle~ rustle~

It tried to escape again, but could not. Lin Mu used his spirit sense to probe the spirit herb and realized that it had wood attribute spirit Qi within it.

"Just as I thought. The Wood Spirit Tulip is of the wood element and is weak to the metal element, thus it is residing in an area rich in the fire element which is the Hong Lin forest.." Lin Mu analyzed.

Chapter 695 - Peculiarities Of The Hong Lin Trees

Having learned of the identity of the spirit herb, Lin Mu felt a bit satisfied. It was as if an itch he was unable to scratch for a long time was finally relieved. And it was not any normal itch, it was the itch of curiosity which could only be satisfied by knowledge.

"What do we do it now? Are we not going to eat it?" Little Shrubby questioned.

"Oh we will, but not so fast. It is still not fully grown, when it does it will have a flower on top of it." Lin Wu spoke.

"A flower? Then will it get a fruit too?" Little Shrubby questioned as drool started to drip from its mouth.

"Um... I don't know. The book doesn't mention it since the author never got to see a Wood Spirit Tulip that was beyond that stage. But perhaps it can grow beyond that and grow a fruit." Lin Mu spoke.

"Okay," Little Shrubby replied.

"We'll just have to wait and see." Lin Mu said before storing the Wood Spirit Tulip that was whipping around back into the ring.

"That was getting annoying..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

With that out of the way, Lin Mu decided to focus on the task at hand.

"Oh yeah, did you find anymore Hundred year old Hong Lin Trees?" Lin Mu questioned.

"YES! Yes, I did! I found two of them when I saw this spirit herb." Little Shrubby answered.

"Excellent," Lin Mu praised while patting his head, "where are they?" He asked.

"Follow me," Little Shrubby said and the two of them flew away.

Little Shrubby went back to the north and brought Lin Mu there to a tree that was hidden between tens of similar. If it were anyone that passed by, they would find it indistinguishable from the others.

But to Lin Mu who used his spirit sense, he could tell that it was hundred year old Hong Lin tree.

"Yup, this is a Hundred Year Old Hong Lin Tree alright." Lin Mu said as he placed his hand over the tree's trunk.

He could sense the vital essence deep within the tree and the warmth that was hidden in it as well.

'Is that fire attribute spirit Qi as well?' Lin Mu wondered, but didn't pay much attention to it.

He didn't have any particular skill that needed fire attribute spirit Qi and thus he didn't really care for it as much. Perhaps in the future when he got more of it he would, but at that point, Lin Mu reckoned he may as well refine the fire attribute spirit Qi himself.

Lin Mu had learned that once his Spleen was fully refined into a five treasured Organ, his rate of refining earth attribute spirit Qi had increased substantially. Thus, with that in mind, he reckoned that each organ that is refined would increase the rate with which elemental spirit Qi can be refined.

Overall it was a rather pleasant surprise to him and he knew that cultivating the Five Treasures realm was a truly good decision. Not only did it increase his body cultivation, but it also boosted his spirit Qi cultivation.

'Body cultivation really was the progenitor of cultivation methods for all humans...' Lin Mu thought to himself.

With that done, he sat down with his back against the Hong Lin Tree and used the cultivation technique to absorb the vital essence. The First King who had made this cultivation technique had named it the 'Embrace Of Hong Lin' and it really was like that.

Not only could the Hong Lin Trees help one in the body tempering realm by providing Vital energy and vital essence. From reading further ahead, Lin Mu knew that one could also cultivate using the fire attribute spirit Qi.

Although the spirit Qi aspect of this technique was far weaker than that of the body cultivation one. There were very few techniques in the world that covered both the body and Qi cultivation, and the 'Embrace Of Hong Lin' could be considered one of the rare few.

Though it wasn't fully efficient seeing as how the spirit Qi that could be obtained from it was less than 10% of the vital essence.

Time passed and when an hour was finally over, Lin Mu had finished absorbing the vital essence from the Hong Lin tree.

"Hmm... the amount this time is less. Barely above a percent taking it to a total of 33% now." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He then stood up and looked at Little Shrubby, who had been patiently waiting for him.

"Where's the next tree?" Lin Mu asked.

"Follow me," Little Shrubby replied, and took him to the next location.

This one wasn't that far from the previous tree and was at mere minutes' distance. This tree though, was different from before.

"Huh... seems like someone tried to cut this one before." Lin Mu said upon seeing the Axe marks on its branches and trunk.

Although whoever tried to cut it was not strong enough to do it since the tree was still here.

"Perhaps they gave up after being unable to cut it..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He then looked at little shrubby and spoke, "go ahead and find more of them. I'll continue here."

"Okay~" Little Shrubby said before flying away.

Following the same method as before, Lin Mu began his cultivation. This time it took him over two hours to finish absorbing all the vital essence. This wasn't because there was more vital essence in it, but rather because sucking the vital essence was harder.

It was like some debris was stuck in the pipe through which he was trying to pull it.

'Is this due to the damage? Doesn't seem like it could penetrate this deep...' Lin Mu thought to himself.

He stood up after absorbing it all and saw that the refinement had reached the 34% mark now.

"Hmm... if I keep this up, I'll need at least 66 more trees to do this. And that is if they all have the same amount of vital essence in them." Lin Mu said to himself.

He then sensed the location of Little Shrubby and went to find him. This time, Little Shrubby wasn't that far from him and he reached his location in about five minutes.

"Little Shrubby," Lin Mu called out.

~Grrr~

Lin Mu heard the growl of the beast and saw him hidden below the large crown of a Hong Lin tree.

"Here! It's this one." Little Shrubby spoke.

Lin Mu landed and saw that this Hong Lin Tree was far bigger than the ones he had seen till now.

"Is this the only one you found?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Yes, I looked around, but this one seems to be the only one in this area." Little Shrubby answered.

"I see..." Lin Mu said, wondering if it was something to do with the tree's size.

He placed his hand on it and sensed the vital energy within the tree.

"WHOA! That's a lot of vital essences." Lin Wu said upon feeling what looked like a lake of vital essence deep within the Hong Lin tree.

This Hong Lin Tree was about two and a half times as big as the normal Hong Lin Tree and contained a similar amount of vital essence.

"I'll go search for more." Little Shrubby stated, understating his part now.

Lin Mu nodded his head in response and got to work. Sitting down with his back to the large Hong Lin Tree, Lin Mu could feel the faint warmth on his back. This was strange to him since his body was protected by the armor of the Mortal Strengthening scripture.

Even when he had touched the Grey Egg, he was unable to tell if it was cold and hot. This meant that even now he should have been unable to tell the temperature correctly.

"This is peculiar..." Lin Mu muttered.

He was curious about it, but decided to finish absorbing vital essence first. Lin Mu spent five hours in absorbing the vital essence from this Hong Lin Tree. Unlike the other trees, he realized that this one had the vital essence distributed in multiple small and separate pockets throughout the tree.

Getting to them one by one took a little more effort than normal and he had to make routes to them individually. But when he was finally done, he realized that he had obtained far more vital essence than before.

"39%... this one had enough vital essence to increase my refinement progress by over five percent. If I can find more trees like this, I'll be able to reach full refinement very quick." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Lin Mu opened his eyes and flew towards the direction of Little Shrubby, hoping that he had found more trees such as this.. And even if they weren't like this, Lin Mu was fine with it as he knew that him reaching the peak of Heart Refinement was inevitable.

Chapter 696 - Dinner Night

A crescent moon was painted in the sky as clouds floated by. Crimson leaves blew with the wind and a faint fragrance of Hong Lin blossoms could be felt. But along with this fragrance, one could also smell the aroma of something cooking.

In the middle of a forest, a few fires were burning and on top of those fires, several pots and grills. One of the pots was filled with bones to the top and boiled continuously emanating a rich aroma.

The second pot was filled with shredded meat that was cooking with several colorful vegetables. But if one looked at the vegetables, they would realize that they were not normal vegetables at all, but rather spirit herbs and fruits.

In the third pot, a thick stew was brewing. It bubbled, letting out a tantalizing aroma. The aroma was like a seductive lover, pulling one into the bed, asking them to roll in the sheets.

Then there was a large flat grill set on a pile of flaming red coals. On the grill, deboned fillets of fish were being grilled. A nice sear could be seen on the orange-pink meat, which had been drizzled with flavored oils.

Each of the ingredients used in all this were expensive being either spirit beast meat or spirit herbs.

The bones that were boiling in the first pot belonged to the Green tailed howler monkeys that were all at the Core Condensation realm. The second pot filled with the shredded meats contained the mixed flesh from several Beasts that Lin Mu had hunted that spanned all the way from Qi refining realm to the Nascent Soul realm.

The third pot with the thick stew had the spirit herbs from the Tri Cauldron peony sect, along with organ meat from several spirit beasts. And on the grill, the fish meat that was being grilled belonged to the Nascent Soul realm Saw toothed Tuna.

While the flavored oil that was drizzled on it was made from the essence oil extracted from Plume wisp Olives mixed with several spirit flower petals. Then there was the dipping sauce kept at the side with was made with the honey of Iron Sting bees and pollen from spirit flowers.

The entire spread of dishes was something that even an emperor would rarely eat, not to mention an average cultivator. One would think that a spread like this would be found in an exquisite restaurant with gilded tables and golden utensils, or perhaps in the royal palace of an empire.

But it was not so. Rather than all that luxury, this was all being made in the middle of a forest, on fires that were being fueled by Hong Lin wood and that too on top of soil. No matter what way one looked at this, they would find it highly unusual to say the least.

But that was not all, as the one cooking it was even more strange. There were several metal hands floating around that were doing the cooking. Some stirred the pots, some drizzled and sprinkled the condiments, and some flipped the fillets on the grill.

And controlling all these metal hands was a large feline beast that observed each change with a close eye, adjusting the temperature of the flames with a few puffs of breath. Each breath would be like a stream of fire, thin and straight, allowing very precise control of temperature.

The one cooking was none other Little Shrubby of course, and he was doing his best.

'This will be the best meal I've cooked till now. I've got all the ingredients and condiments and master finally got free time... I have to make the best meal he has eaten till now.' Little Shrubby thought to himself with determination.

And while he was doing this, Lin Mu laid on top of a Hong Lin tree while watching the sky. A myriad of thoughts floated through his mind as if they were clouds in the sky mirroring his mind.

An hour passed like this in silence, with only the sound of wind, the fire crackling and the oil sizzling being heard.

"Master, the food is ready!" Little Shrubby called out.

Lin Mu whose eyes were a bit lost finally gained back their focus, and he floated down from the tree.

'Being able to fly is really convenient...' Lin Mu thought to himself.

Upon getting down, he saw all of the dishes ready and an amazing aroma that accompanied them.

Lin Mu couldn't help but gulp his saliva upon seeing all the food. He could almost imagine the taste of it on his tongue and couldn't wait to test it out.

"Well, what are we waiting for? Let's get to it," Lin Mu spoke.

"ALRIGHT!" Little Shrubby said before the hands flew out with a whoosh.

They all picked up various utensils like plates and bowls before filling them up with the food and bringing them to Lin Mu, who had just set up a table. At this point, Lin Mu had several sets of furniture in the ring and if he wanted to, he could probably make an entire house out of them.

~thud~thud~thud~

The plates and bowls landed on the table and out came the chopsticks as well.

"Let's begin," Lin Mu said before starting to eat.

Each and every sip and bite filled his mouth with flavor and a warmth that filled his body. The dense spirit Qi and vital energy from the food improved the experience by multiple folds as a wave of pleasure filled him.

The pair of Master and beast didn't even realize when all of the good was emptied out and they were left wanting for more.

Lin Mu looked at Little Shrubby with an awkward smile.

"Do we have more?" Lin Mu questioned.

"More? We have tons!" Little Shrubby answered.

With a smile on his face Lin Mu said, "Cook more then, we're gonna eat all the food we've missed all this time."

And just like that, Lin Mu and Little Shrubby spent the entire night eating food.

Chapter 697 - Talking With Jing Luo

"Huh, it's already morning." Lin Mu spoke as he saw the sky starting to redden.

"It is morning." Little Shrubby replied.

All around them, one could see bones and utensils lying around. It was evident that they had eaten a lot and had spent a lot of time in that as well. But despite the large amount of food the two of them had eaten, neither of them looked to be stuffed.

Rather, they looked normal and could even eat more. But Lin Mu knew it was enough for today and that he should get back to work.

"Well, that was a great night. We'll do it again sometime later. But now we need to find more Hong Lin trees..." But just as Lin Mu said this, he felt the Jade slip hum in the ring. "Or not..."

Lin Mu took out the jade slip and saw that it was Jing Luo who had messaged him.

"Where are you?" Jing Luo questioned.

"I'm in the forest." Lin Mu answered.

"Why are you in the forest? Weren't you looking for the clues to the Hei corps?" Jing Luo asked feeling a bit confused.

"It's a long story..." Lin Mu said. "It'll be better if I explain to you in person." He added.

"Alright, I'll wait for you." Jing Luo replied.

Lin Mu then looked at Little Shrubby and spoke, "seems like I'm gonna have to pause this excursion for a bit."

Little Shrubby nodded and spoke, "I'll continue searching for more Hong Lin trees then."

"Yes, that'll be good." Lin Mu said before flying away in the direction of the Hong Lin capital.

In about an hour, he reached the city and directly went to the courtyard they had rented for the time being. Since they had not taken any servants for service, the courtyard was empty.

~Creak~

The door of the room Jing Luo was staying in opened, and Lin Mu walked in. In there, he could see Jing Luo sitting on a mat on the ground while meditating. It was evident that he was still comprehending the information that Lin Mu had passed on to him.

'I'll wait till he is done...' Lin Mu thought to himself and sat down as well.

While doing this, he spread his spirit sense around and checked the city for any changes or anything interesting that may have happened. An hour passed like this and Jing Luo finally woke up, prompting Lin Mu to withdraw his spirit sense.

"Are you done?" Lin Mu asked.

"Not even close. Now that I got a better look at the knowledge, I understand just how vast it is. It'll take me months to fully even go through it not to mention comprehend it. The more I learn the more I feel that it gets complex and I feel like the path in front of me which was nearly completed, extends further." Jing Luo replied.

"No wonders, Jing Wei and Duan Ke preferred going to the Ancestral ground." Lin Mu replied.

"Indeed. This is something that I think will take me years to fully comprehend." Jing Luo stated.

"I see... so you are taking a break I guess?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yes, I wanted to see how your investigation was going." Jing Luo replied.

~Sigh~

Lin Mu sighed to himself before he began his explanation about all that had happened till now. He spoke about the missing Hei Corps, the situation with the King of the Hong Lin Kingdom, his uncle and the two Nascent Soul disciples that had come in the search for the thousand year old Hong Lin wood.

After Lin Mu finished explaining everything, Jing Luo furrowed his brows and thought to himself. Lin Mu also let him think on his own and after five minutes Jing Luo spoke again.

"So I'm guessing you want to take advantage of this?" Jing Luo asked.

"Indeed. This will be the perfect opportunity for us to gain an ally not only in the Hong Lin kingdom but those two Nascent Soul disciples too. I don't know what sect they are from, but they are certainly from a top ten sect.

Plus I can confirm that they are not under the influence of Gu Yao either. They don't have the same aura as the people who are controlled." Lin Mu replied.

"Hmm... those two disciples... can you describe them to me?" Jing Luo questioned.

"Alright," Lin Mu said before telling Jing Luo the appearance of the two disciples and how they all conversed.

"Wait did you just say they talked about Sect Master Hua?" Jing Luo questioned.

"Yes, they did." Lin Mu confirmed.

"Huh... if I recall correctly there is only one person named Hua that is also a sect master in all of the top sects... the sect master of the Noon Grass sect." Jing Luo replied.

"The Noon Grass sect! Really?" Lin Mu questioned.

"It should be. I doubt any other sect changed their sect master over the past fifty or so years. And even if they did, I doubt they would have the same name too." Jing Luo answered.

"Hmm... this is an even better opportunity than I thought. Actually... this might even be better than meeting up with the Hei corps." Lin Mu spoke.

Jing Luo thought for a bit before replying.

"Depending on how we play this out, we can spread a rather wide net and gain multiple Allies I think. If we satisfy the two disciples and the King as well, we may get to inquire more about the Hei Corps's disappearance.

Even if they are not on the record, I'm sure the people who actually did the investigation should know better." Jing Luo stated.

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

"I guess so... but we will have to play our cards right. I'm pretty sure they will find it suspicious if we directly go and talk to the two disciples about helping them, especially since I have literally spied on them.." Lin Mu replied.

Chapter 698 - The Two Disciples Leave The City

Having heard Lin Mu's words, Jing Luo nodded his head. Talking directly with the two disciples of the Noon Grass sect might not really be good.

"Hmm... how do we go about this?" Jing Luo muttered as he started to think.

Lin Mu did the same and the two of them discussed several points on how they could be made to work. A few minutes passed like this when Lin Mu suddenly sensed something. He had his spirit sense spread around almost always and suddenly felt a few familiar people.

"Oh? Speak of the devils..." Lin Mu said.

"What happened?" Jing Luo questioned.

"The two disciples, they are nearby." Lin Mu answered.

"Hmm... let's take a look. Perhaps we'll get to know something that might help us in figuring this out." Jing Luo suggested.

"Alright," Lin Mu said and flew out of the courtyard.

The two of them made their way towards the two disciples who were heading towards one of the exits of the city. The Hong Lin city had multiple exits, both large main ones, and smaller unofficial ones.

The two disciples were using one of the smaller ones which went from the neighborhood where Lin Mu and Jing Luo had gotten into the courtyard. They had picked this neighborhood for its relative remoteness and fewer people and it seemed like the two disciples were taking this route for that very same reason.

Thankfully, the two disciples were not using their spirit sense or they would have detected Lin Mu rather quickly. It was evident that they were following the aim of staying low-key to the maximum such that they didn't want to accidentally alert someone else with their spirit sense.

While they could, of course sense someone else's spirit sense if it came near them, Lin Mu's spirit sense was far more refined than most people such that they couldn't even detect it. It was the same with his cultivation base which could not be perceived unless he displayed it himself.

Jing Luo on the other hand, didn't use his spirit sense and also used a spirit tool to hide his spirit Qi fluctuations. Since the presence of any Nascent soul realm cultivator could be met with interest and even suspicion, it was best for them to hide it.

Lin Mu and Jing Luo watched as the two disciples left the city and went in the northern direction after changing their path.

"Oh?" Lin Mu recognized where they were going.

"They're going to the place where we rested at first." Jing Luo also identified.

"Hmm... perhaps they are investigating us as well." Lin Mu spoke while furrowing his brows.

After a few minutes, the two disciples came to a stop at the hill where Lin Mu and Jing Luo had paused.

"Just as we thought... you wait here, I'll see what they are talking about from underground." Lin Mu said before he sank into the ground using Phase.

Jing Luo looked at the disappearing Lin Mu and muttered to himself, "I can never get used to seeing that..."

Lin Mu quickly approached the two disciples and hid within one of the trees behind them. This distance was enough for Lin Mu to hear what they were talking about clearly.

"Are you sure this is the place where the spirit Qi fluctuations came from senior brother?" The junior brother questioned.

The senior brother knelt on the ground and touched the grass that had some imprints on it. He closed his eyes and spread his spirit sense around, which Lin Mu felt, and quickly blinked away to a place deeper underground.

'Close!' Lin Mu thought to himself.

After about a minute, the senior brother withdrew his spirit sense and opened his eyes.

"Mmmhmm, they were here. There were in fact three cultivators here, two humans and one beast." The senior brother stated.

"Huh? A beast as well?" The junior brother asked.

"Indeed. And from the traces of spirit Qi I can feel... all of them were at the Nascent Soul realm." The senior brother replied.

"That... how can that be? It would make sense if it was two human cultivators at the Nascent Soul realm but a beast as well? Normally, this should have been met with a conflict between them.

I don't think it can be a tamed beast either. No Nascent Soul realm cultivator can tame a Nascent Soul realm beast." The junior brother expressed his doubts.

The senior brother nodded his head in response to his junior brother's analysis.

"You're right, junior brother. I don't think the beast was free. Perhaps it was restrained and the two Nascent soul realm cultivators were transporting it somewhere. The spirit Qi fluctuation we felt might not even be a breakthrough but rather the signs of a struggle." The senior brother spoke.

"A struggle? But there are no signs of a battle or fight here." The Junior brother stated.

"Don't forget, a struggle need not be a direct fight. What if the struggle was due to the beast trying to escape whatever restrictive formations were placed on it and the humans trying to stop that or add more formations?" The Senior brother replied.

"I see..." The junior brother said in an understanding tone.

Lin Mu who listened to everything, shook his head.

"They got no idea whatsoever... the only thing they got right is the two humans and one beast part, right. Still... that's good since we have the advantage due to being in the dark." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He switched his focus back to the two disciples as he heard them talk again.

"Now that we have checked this place, at least we know that the Nascent Soul realm cultivators are not here anymore. We can talk further about the situation with the King, senior brother.

How are we going to get a tribulation platform made? Neither of us is proficient in formations enough to be able to make one." The Junior brother stated.

"Hmm... I fear we may have to look for external help for that.." The senior brother replied.

Chapter 699 - Dilemma Of The Two Disciples

Hearing what the two disciples said, Lin Mu perked his ears.

"Who can we look for that senior brother? I don't think we know any formation master of that level." The junior brother asked.

"Hmm... our options are indeed limited. Plus, with the time limit we have, I don't know if we will be able to find one in time either." The senior brother said.

"But I don't want to fail the very first task Master gave me. If I fail this, who knows how many decades will pass before he will allow me to leave the sect." The junior brother said, feeling a bit unwilling.

"Master will understand. This was supposed to be a relatively easy task, but the current situation has made it complex. The thousand year old Hong Lin wood has suddenly become high in demand in the past year or so.

Even the empire and several sects asked for it, if I remember correctly." The senior brother replied.

"No senior, I at least want to try till we can't. Going back like this is not something I want to be remembered as by the master." The junior brother said, his tone firm.

The senior brother looked at his junior brother's face and sighed to himself.

~Sigh~

"Fine... we shall try." The senior brother replied.

"YES! I have faith that we will be able to find a way." The Junior brother said.

The senior brother sank into deep thought while the junior brother kept his silence so as to not disturb. Lin Mu on the other hand, was intrigued to learn the fact that it wasn't just him and Jing Luo that were looking for the thousand year old Hong Lin trees.

'This thing seems to be in a far higher demand than I thought... but why?' Lin Mu wondered.

Jing Luo wanted the resin of the Hong Lin trees and to get the resin they would need the trees, which also meant that there would be the wood to accompany it. While Jing Luo himself didn't have any particular need for the wood, the resin could only be obtained from a live tree.

To verify this, Lin Mu decided to contact Jing Luo using the communication jade slip.

"I just learned that we aren't the only ones looking for thousand year old Hong Lin trees. In addition to these disciples, apparently the empire and several sects also bought the thousand year old Hong Lin tree wood." Lin Mu said.

"Oh? That's rather strange. Even though the Hong Lin tree wood is useful for spirit weapons and tools, they aren't something that can't be substituted for other materials. I can't tell why this is suddenly so much in demand that even the empire and other sects want it." Jing Luo replied.

"Perhaps if we know exactly which sects bought it, we might get a better idea of it." Lin Mu stated.

"Guess we will need to talk to these two in the end." Jing Luo spoke.

"Indeed. But first I have to find the right excuse. I'm listening to them and hopefully, we get something." Lin Mu said.

"I'll leave you to it then." Jing Luo said before stopping the connection.

Lin Mu turned his attention back to the two disciples and saw that the two were still not talking. About ten minutes passed like this before the senior brother finally spoke.

"I... may know someone that can possibly assist us." The senior brother suddenly said.

"You do? Who are they?" The junior brother questioned.

"It's someone I met a long time ago when I was still a body tempering realm warrior. Both of us were recruited by the top sect, I went to the Noon grass sect, but he went to the Long Cloud sect." The senior brother answered.

"The Long Cloud sect... but if we really do ask the Long Cloud sect for help, won't it be against the rules that our sect has set. We aren't supposed to have any contact or interaction with the two cultivation sect alliances unless we have concise instructions to do so." The junior brother said, feeling doubtful.

"I know... but we won't be talking to the Long Cloud sect itself, but rather one of the disciples on a private level. I think master should understand that might at least and forgive us." The senior brother said.

"Hmm... I don't know. It is risky, if master really takes offense to it, he will punish you, senior brother. I don't want to do this if you have to be punished." The Junior brother replied in a low voice.

"Foolish junior, this much punishment will be fine for me. Even if I have to stay in the sect for half a century, I don't mind. I prefer staying in seclusion any way." The Senior brother said with a chuckle.

"Senior brother..." The junior brother had a touched expression on his face upon hearing this.

"It is settled then. I'll try to contact the person I know and hopefully, they can help us out. While I haven't had much contact with them over the years, I do know that they became a core disciple a few years ago due to their talent in formations." The senior brother said.

Hearing all this, Lin Mu had an idea that he thought might just work.

"Let's see if showing a thirsty traveler in the desert an oasis would work or not. We don't have any better idea, anyway." Lin Mu muttered to himself and took out the communication jade slip.

"I have a plan..." Lin Mu said before explaining what they could do to pull the attention of the two disciples.

Jing Luo, who listened to the entire thing some distance away, furrowed his brows but found the plan to be relatively fine.

"I guess this could work. Though it will depend on how much they really 'want' this. If they are desperate enough, we can probably get through it." Jing Luo stated.

"It's worth a try. Let's get to it.." Lin Mu said before he blinked away.

Chapter 700 - A Display Of Formation Skills

About an hour had passed and the two disciples of the Noon Grass sect were still discussing their situation, and how to solve it when they suddenly felt a wave of spirit Qi coming from a certain location.

"Senior brother! That... that seems familiar." The junior brother said after sensing the spirit Qi wave.

The senior brother furrowed his brows and extended his spirit sense in the direction from where the spirit Qi fluctuation had come, but he realized that it was beyond the range till which he could reach.

"Hmm... it's much farther than I thought. If it can still have this strength at this distance, then it must be quite strong." The senior brother said.

"What should we do now? Do we check it out?" The junior brother questioned.

The senior brother didn't answer right away and waited to see if there would be any more changes. After about five minutes, he nodded his head and spoke again.

"We may as well check it out. But keep calm and stay alert. Better to be cautious than not." The senior brother stated.

"I understand." The junior brother said with a nod.

The two of them then flew in the direction of the spirit Qi wave and reached it after about ten minutes of travel. While they could have reached this much faster, they wanted to be careful to ensure that they wouldn't come across any trouble.

This way they would have enough distance to retreat if need be. But when they actually reached the location they were still shocked.

"That... What is that man doing?" The junior brother questioned in shock.

"An entire formation array? Is he making an abode here?" The senior brother couldn't help but mutter.

The two of them were standing on the top of a hill that was located at the side of a mountain. The mountain in front of them was densely covered in Hong Lin trees and the surface of it could barely be seen.

Though what they could perceive, there was a small cave at the entrance of which a beefy man was sitting. He had long hair that was tied into multiple strands that hung at his back.

He was wearing robes that were of a high quality and was decked in spirit tools and weapons from the top to bottom. No matter which way they looked at, he looked to be filthy rich in spirit tools.

While they couldn't perceive the fainter spirit Qi fluctuations that came off the spirit tools due to the formations that the man was making right now, just from the appearance of it they could tell that they must not be lower than mid grade spirit tools.

But the most shocking part was the man's cultivation base.

~gulp~

"Senior brother is he..." The Junior brother muttered, a little afraid to speak further.

"Indeed... he's at the Adolescent Soul stage of the Nascent Soul realm." The senior brother replied.

~shua~shua~shua~

And just as he said this, the senior brother saw hundreds of runes being created simultaneously at the flick of the man's fingers as they quickly arranged themselves into a formation which then entered the cave.

The beefy man then took out several formation components such as flags, nodes, and talismans, before sending them flying. The components flew around the mountain and settled into the appropriate palaces that were needed for them.

The formation flags planted themselves at the four points of the mountain, erecting a layer that made the spirit Qi fluctuation get fainter. The physical nodes that were made of several stones directly buried themselves into the ground and disappeared.

Finally, the talismans attached to the trees in a random pattern before fading away. The beefy man then brought his hands together in a mudra and flipped them, merging the ten layers of formations that he had made in front of him.

~HONG~

An audible hum could be heard as the formations completely merged into a formation array.

Once that was done, the man and the cave disappeared as if there was nothing there from the start. Instead of that, a plain ground surface could be seen where the cave was. In addition to that, if one looked at the Hong Lin trees for a while, they would find it as if they were moving, which would make them dazed.

The two disciples who had seen everything were now more than shocked.

"Did that man just... set up an entire formation array in a span of ten minutes?" The junior brother asked, finding all of it to be unbelievable.

"He did... not only did he do it in ten minutes, the formation array isn't something to take lightly either. I have no doubt I would be unable to break this even if I used all skill. Perhaps only a brute force attack might be able to do something to it.

But this is only because we saw the formation array being created. If it was someone else, they wouldn't even know that there is a formation here and even a cultivator's abode." The senior brother replied.

Seeing as how the beefy man had used that cave, the two were very sure that what the man had made was a cultivator's cave abode. It was one of the common kinds of residences a cultivator would make when they were out of their sects.

Though for most itinerant cultivators, a cave abode was probably the only kind of a residence, they would use. Actual physical residences were impractical since they often needed to move around a lot.

Plus, making a cave abode was much easier than making a proper residence. They could either just find a preexisting cave or carve out one for themselves. After all, there was no lack of mountains and hills in the world. And even if one didn't exist, they would always make a cave in the ground itself.

Having seen the beefy man make an entire cave abode along with a formation array, made an idea appear in the mind of the junior brother.