

Walker 81

Chapter 81 - A Temporary Alliance

The pungent smell of the blood had scattered a little bit, but the sharp noses of Lin Mu and the masked man were able to detect them rather easily. They followed the stench and soon found the origin of it.

They walked up to a large box that was partially covered with a tarp and checked it. The first thing they noticed was the bloodied paw prints nearby the box. The paw prints were similar to the stray dogs they had seen outside the warehouse.

Lin Mu took a breath before lifting the tarp that was covering the large box. A wave of foul stench assaulted his nose as the tarp blocking it was lifted. Lin Mu wrinkled his nose in disgust and steeled his senses.

Lin Mu went closer and looked at the source of the vile stench. It was a dead body that was lying inside the box. One of its arms was hanging out of the box and seemed to have been gnawed on, probably by the stray dogs.

The dead body was wearing some mangled clothes along with leather Armour that was nearly shredded. Lin Mu looked at the face of the dead body and could not identify it, as it was someone unknown to him.

"Why is this dead body here?" Lin Mu spoke.

"It's a mercenary from the Crimson Fang mercenary company." The masked man spoke.

Lin Mu turned to look at the masked man and spoke.

"How do you know this?"

"I can tell that from the symbol. Even though it's damaged, I can still recognize it." The masked man answered.

In response to Lin Mu's question, the masked man slightly lifted the dead body's arm and showed the damaged symbol that was present on the shredded armor. Since the leather armor was heavily damaged, the symbol of the Crimson Fang mercenary company was only partially visible.

Lin Mu looked at the symbol closely and recognized it, as he had also met some of the crimson fang mercenaries before. They all had the same symbol engraved on their armors. Though looking at the leather armor that this dead man was wearing, Lin Mu could tell that it was of higher quality. The armors that he had seen the other crimson fang mercenaries were of a lower quality than this.

"Use your spirit sense," Xukong ordered.

Lin Mu extended his spirit sense and scanned the body and found out a shocking thing.

"He was a cultivator." Lin Mu spoke out loud.

The masked man heard Lin Mu's words and did his own deduction. Coming to the same conclusion, he narrowed his eyes that were hidden behind the featureless mask.

"An elite member of the Crimson Fang mercenary team." The masked man informed.

"Could this be related to the disappearance of the mercenaries? But there haven't been any new reports about crimson Fang mercenaries." Lin Mu muttered.

"No, there have been more mercenaries disappearing, but because they are far from the town and separated, it takes a few days till someone discovers that they have gone missing." The masked man explained.

Lin Mu looked at the masked man with a curious expression and asked,

"How do you know of this?"

"Our lord has been keeping an eye on the recent events. There are other comrades of mine that have been investigating this as well." The masked man spoke honestly.

Lin Mu was rather surprised by the masked man's honesty. He did not know why he was telling him this, but there was probably some other reason behind it.

"Why are you telling me this?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Because it seems to me that our goals are the same, so it will be beneficial for both of us to cooperate." The masked man spoke.

"But weren't you ordered to attack me?" Lin Mu asked in a nonchalant tone.

"No, I was only ordered to observe you, I wasn't told to make contact." The masked man answered with a straight voice.

"It seems like we have an alliance on our hands. Well, at least a temporary one." Xukong spoke with a chuckle.

"You're fine with this senior?" Lin Mu spoke inside his mind.

"I am, at least for now. Besides, you need to learn to cooperate with people, or more accurately cultivators." Xukong Answered.

"If you say so, senior." Lin Mu replied.

Lin Mu always felt strange when senior Xukong used his chuckling tone of voice. Since he had seen his real body, it just didn't sit well with him. It was as if an imposing being was behaving like a child.

"Wait, there's something more here." The masked man spoke upon spotting something.

The masked man then went towards another box that was kept at the side. This box had another box that was kept over it and was blocking its opening. He lifted the upper box and moved it to the side.

Soon more bloody scent spread around. Though this time it was not foul and instead seemed like it was rather fresh. Lin Mu approached the box and saw what was lying inside it.

It was another corpse of a man that seemed to be freshly killed. Lin Mu looked at the wounds and saw that they were bandaged.

"They bandaged the wounds after death, the same as with Gan Ma." Lin Mu spoke.

The masked man also looked at the strange corpse and tried to find any other wounds, but could not. The only wound the corpse had seemed to be in his chest and was covered with bandages. The masked man heard Lin Mu's words and went back to check the other corpse for wounds.

Upon checking the corpse, he found out that the corpse actually didn't have any wounds that caused its death. Strangely enough, only the clothes and armor were destroyed. The cause of death was due to strangulation, as could be seen from the ligature marks on the neck. The cause of the bloody smell was actually because of the stray dogs.

"You say you've seen something similar before?" The masked man asked.

"Yes, Gan Ma the hunter was also killed and then his wound was bandaged." Lin Mu replied.

"You know the people that caused that?" The masked man questioned.

"Yes, they saw that I discovered them and tried to kill me." Lin Mu answered.

"And what happened to them after that?" The masked man asked, even though he already knew the answer.

"What do you think? They are dead." Lin Mu answered with a calm tone and then heard senior Xukong speak something in his mind.

"Repeat my words to him," Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu softly hummed in response and agreed.

The masked man was lost in thought for a moment as he seemed to have realized something.

"Then you must have seen their faces." The masked man suddenly spoke.

"Yes I did indeed, I also know the identity of one of the men." Lin Mu spoke with a straight expression.

"Do you have some evidence too?" The masked man couldn't help but ask.

The masked man was feeling a little excited as he knew that he had probably made a huge discovery. His comrades had been investigating the recent events for a while but did not have much success with it as the culprits were rather good at hiding their tracks.

He had never thought that he would be able to discover something like this by chance.

'I have to get the information and report it to the lord.' The masked man thought.

"Can you tell me about their identities and also the evidence?" The masked man asked with slight anxiousness in his voice.

"We got him," Xukong spoke in Lin Mu's mind.

Lin Mu was a little surprised by this as everything had gone according to senior Xukong's plan. Now he just had to do a little more, like senior had instructed.

"I could, but I won't." Lin Mu replied to the masked man.

The masked man felt his heart drop for a moment, but then calmed down. He understood that he had to do something in return and would not be able to get it easily.

"Okay, what do you want in return?" The masked man asked.

A sharp glint appeared in Lin Mu's eyes, and even a slight smirk could be seen at the edge of his mouth.

"I want to meet your lord." Lin Mu answered.

"That won't be possible." The masked man replied straight away.

The masked man knew how difficult it was to meet their lord. Even he himself had only met him three times until now. But even those three times were enough for him to develop undying loyalty and pledge his life to his lord.

The masked man went silent and thought for a minute before continuing.

"You can meet the lord's closest person, though. My lord is reclusive and does not meet people easily."

"This is better than I thought. A person close to this 'Lord' would work just fine." Xukong said.

Lin Mu knew that senior Xukong was never intending to meet the lord straight away. He just wanted him to have an advantage in bargaining the terms of this alliance and thus wanted to meet someone in a higher position.

The masked man was certainly a low-level person in his organization, thus he wanted someone who at least had some administrative authority. A person that was probably the right hand of this 'Lord' would work perfectly for them.

"That's fine with me. We are now..." Lin Mu spoke and extended his right hand.

The masked man extended his right reciprocation and shook Lin Mu's hand.

"Allies." Both men spoke in unison.

Chapter 82 - The Culprits Arrive

After shaking hands, both of the men developed an understanding. Lin Mu returned all of the masked man's weapons except for the poisoned needles. The masked man also tacitly understood and did not ask for them either.

"From the bandaged wounds, we can assume that this has been done by the same people who attacked you before. Now we only need to find some more clues here if we can." The masked man spoke.

Lin Mu nodded his head and went around to search for clues. It didn't take him long to find them either, as it was right in front of him. He looked at the first corpse and checked it. He soon found a small vial filled with some kind of colorless powder in it.

The vial was hidden in the sleeve of the corpse and was dangling by its tassel. When the masked man turned the corpse a little, it must have gotten loose. Lin Mu picked up the vial and saw that its cap was actually a little loose and some of the powder had actually spilled out onto the sleeve of the corpse.

The masked man saw the vial in Lin Mu's hand and suddenly exclaimed,

"The Beast Inciting powder!"

Lin Mu's eyes narrowed upon hearing the masked man's words, and he looked at the small vial.

"So this is what caused the stray dogs to attack Xiao Lu." Lin MU stated.

"The stray dogs came in contact with the powder that was spilled onto the sleeves while eating the hand and probably went insane." The masked man deduced.

Lin Mu nodded and then continued,

"Now the question is, why did this person have this powder? I originally thought that the culprits spread the poison, but now it seems otherwise."

"Still, it is not easy to get this poison. It is a mystery how this mercenary came upon it. Even an elite mercenary doesn't have the capabilities or the reach to obtain a poison such as this." The masked man spoke.

"It's also a little strange that the attackers didn't search his corpse." The masked man added.

"That is true, but we still don't know what their objective is." Lin Mu replied.

"That's not all, Lin Mu, you're forgetting something." Xukong interrupted.

"What senior?" Lin Mu asked.

"The effect of the Beast Inciting powder is to send the beasts into a mindless rage, but when the stray dogs encountered you they ran away," Xukong answered.

Lin Mu realized the meaning of senior Xukong's words and spoke to the masked man.

"Was there an abnormality in the Beast Inciting powder or the stray dogs? Because they ran away after encountering me."

The masked man felt confused upon hearing Lin Mu's words, but tried to think over it. He had not paid attention to the occurrence at first, but now that he was remembering it, something like this shouldn't happen according to his knowledge. Beasts affected by the Beast Inciting powder don't even fear death and plunge in headfirst into conflict, them being afraid of Lin Mu was extremely strange.

"You are right, but I don't know what the abnormality could be." The masked man spoke.

Lin Mu suddenly realized something as his eyes went wide,

"It couldn't be because of your imprint, could it senior?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm, that should not be possible as the imprint is only detectable by cultivators or beasts of a higher cultivation," Xukong spoke and took a pause.

"But if it was detected by the stray dogs then that vial of Beast Inciting powder is certainly abnormal. If it was also able to increase the sensing capabilities of a normal animal, then it's probably not simple." Xukong explained.

After hearing senior Xukong's explanation, Lin Mu thought of something before looking at the masked man.

"Do you know anyone that is more knowledgeable about this Beast Inciting powder?" Lin Mu asked.

The masked man snapped out of his thoughts after hearing Lin Mu speak and looked up at him.

"I myself don't know, but there should be someone my comrades know." The masked man answered.

"Well then, I would like to meet them as well." Lin Mu stated.

"That can be arranged." The masked man simply replied.

Lin Mu turned to look at the corpses and spoke.

"Now that we have that behind us, what do we do with the corpses?" We can't leave them here."

"Yes, that is a problem. I'll have to inform my superiors about this." The masked man spoke.

"Though if these corpses are left here and the entire neighborhood is asleep, then I think that they may be coming here to collect them or do something else." Lin Mu replied after thinking for a bit.

"Also, if the culprits find you, I doubt you will be able to fight against them alone." Lin Mu added.

The masked man realized the severity of Lin Mu's words and understood that it will indeed be pretty difficult and may even result in his death. He then grasped a small necklace on his neck with his hand for a second for a moment before releasing it.

'Not now at least.' The masked man thought.

But suddenly as if to prove Lin Mu's words, the main door of the warehouse suddenly opened. A group of eight men dressed in black clothes walked in and saw both of them standing near the corpses.

The men were covered from head to toe and could not be identified. They were all equipped with similar looking swords on their waists and seemed to have armor hidden beneath their clothes.

The Eight men looked at the duo with wide eyes before one of the man shouted,

"KILL! Don't let them escape."

"Heaven's tongue, it really happened!" Lin Mu spoke with shock.

"Focus now. You have to defeat them first." Xukong sternly warned.

The masked man drew his sword and muttered to himself,

"Shouldn't have hesitated."

Lin Mu drew his short sword and extend his spirit sense. He quickly detected the strength of the eight men and informed the masked man.

"Four of them are Spirit Qi cultivators, the rest are Body Tempering realm experts. Two of the cultivators are at the mid-stage of the Qi refining realm while the other two are at the early stage."

The masked man narrowed his eyes and tightened his grip on the handle of the sword.

"I'll have to reveal a few of my skills, I'm afraid." Lin Mu spoke to senior Xukong.

"It's fine. Better to kill them now and deal with the situation later. You can't hesitate in moments like these." Xukong advised.

Lin Mu nodded and spoke, "So be it."

In the next instant a fierce expression appeared on Lin Mu's face, as he started chanting the severing heart sutra.

All of the eight darkly dressed men were approaching the duo at once, so Lin Mu chose to target one of the mid-stage Qi refining realm cultivators. The masked man heard the strange chants that were being uttered by Lin Mu and felt a chill in his spine.

Suddenly Lin Mu disappeared in front of the eyes of the eight men, surprising them. Even the masked man was rather surprised at this occurrence, after he could not see Lin Mu beside him. The masked man then turned to face the attackers and saw Lin Mu standing behind them.

Lin Mu triggered the second skill Blink and appeared right behind the eight men. He slashed his short sword at the neck of the mid-stage Qi refining realm cultivator and instantly decapitated him. Because his companion was under the effect of the Severing heart sutra, he didn't react fast enough.

Taking this opportunity, Lin Mu strengthened the short sword with spirit qi wisps and waved his blade again, severing the heads of the three Body tempering realm experts. Now there were only four attackers left, three qi cultivators and one measly body tempering realm expert.

The first person to react was the masked man as he threw one of his daggers at an early stage qi cultivator and then slashed at another. The early stage qi cultivator could not dodge in time as the dagger was buried in his throat, killing him.

This reduced the number of attacker to only three, relieving most of the burden on the Duo. The remaining Mid stage qi refining realm cultivator finally reacted and cut at Lin Mu with his own sword while shouting curses at him.

Lin Mu dodged the sudden attack by using the first skill Flicker and let the attack pass through him effortlessly. Spinning around, Lin Mu seamlessly withdrew a spear from his ring and impaled it into the one remaining body tempering realm expert.

The masked man had also clashed with the early stage qi refining realm cultivator and was crossing his sword with him. They exchanged a few blows and seem to be at nearly the same strength. Lin Mu was still fighting with the other cultivator and was dodging one cut after the other.

Lin Mu's superior speed and agility were proving advantageous here.

Chapter 83 - The Masked Man's Misunderstanding

Flitting around in the warehouse, Lin Mu dodged each and every blow. He glanced at the masked man every few seconds to check how the fight was going. Seeing that the masked man would not be able to defeat his opponent quickly, Lin Mu decided to give him a little helping hand.

The Fierce look reappeared on Lin Mu's face and sent a chill down the spine of the Mid-stage Qi refining realm cultivator that was fighting him. He then started chanting the Severing heart sutra again and targeted the early stage qi cultivator that was fighting the masked man.

A dull look suddenly appeared on the face of the early stage qi cultivator as he faltered for a moment. Talking grasp of this opportunity, the masked man ended his life and accomplished his task. Having done this, he looked at Lin Mu and his opponent.

But he was shocked as soon as he looked at them. The Mid-stage Qi cultivator was no longer alive. Lin Mu had used this short time period when the cultivator was distracted by his companion's death to split him in half.

Lin Mu looked at the short sword in his hand and marveled at its effectiveness.

'Truly an excellent specimen of a blade.' He praised.

Unlike Lin Mu, who was marveling at his blade, the masked man was rather shocked and a little fearful at his display. He was surprised at Lin Mu's sudden disappearance at the start but attributed to some kind of speed skill, but when he produced weapons out of thin air, he understood that the boy also had a spatial treasure.

The masked man was no stranger to spatial treasures and had seen many of them, but in the case of Lin Mu, he was truly shocked. The first point was that how would he get a spatial treasure in such a backward place, even in Wu Lim city only influential or rich people had spatial treasures.

The second point which was more shocking was that the spatial treasure was unlike anything he had seen. The speed at which Lin Mu was able to withdraw a weapon was instant. Even the best spatial treasure he knew of couldn't do a feat like this. And even if he had the highest quality of spatial treasure, just the cost to get one forged would be sky-high.

That's Right, the highest quality spatial treasures couldn't just be bought. There was a big demand for it, but no supply. One could only commission an expert to forge a spatial treasure, and that too only top-grade spirit tool refiners could actually make spatial treasures.

Even from them, only a master grade spirit tool refiner could do it, thus making a high-quality spatial treasure no small feat and would require months if not years of work.

Just the basic ingredients required to forge a spatial treasure would be worth a huge fortune and needed a long time to gather. This reduced the supply of spatial treasures in the Great Zhou Empire. Besides, there were only a handful of master spirit tool refiners currently in the entire Great Zhou empire.

This resulted in the highest quality spatial treasures being monopolized by the powerful sects and the nobles of the empire and the residing kingdoms. It was in fact considered a sign of authority and influence. If someone saw a person with a spatial tool of this quality anywhere, one would have to be careful with their words and had to avoid offending them.

This entire thought train of the masked man led him to misunderstand Lin Mu's status and made him think that he was the disciple of a hidden expert or the heir of a Noble clan.

'This... this... I need to Inform the lord quickly. I can't let him make a mistake and offend someone he can't afford to.' The masked man thought.

The masked man actually had a method of contacting his superiors rather quickly, but it was only meant for the most extreme of the extreme emergencies. Even the arrival and the attack of the culprits was not worth using it according to him, but this demonstration of strength that Lin Mu had just done completely turned his viewpoint and sent his caution reeling.

Lin Mu was thinking that revealing his skills had put him at a disadvantage, but unknown to him, it had actually given him a huge advantage.

After all the attackers were dead, Lin Mu used his spirit sense to scan their bodies for any hidden weapons and other dangers. Senior Xukong had informed him beforehand of certain tactics that cultivators used in order to eliminate their enemies even after their death.

Lin Mu's caution turned out to be beneficial, as he did end up finding something dangerous. There were tiny packets of poison placed behind the face covers of the black-clothed men, which would burst and spread to the person trying to uncover them.

A simple yet effective mechanism made it so that the packets of poison did not break from impact and only burst when the face covers were pulled apart.

Even the masked man was shocked by this as he exclaimed,

"These are no normal cultivators, they are death warriors."

Lin Mu turned his head and looked at the masked man with a little confusion.

"What are death warriors?" he asked.

The masked man gulped before speaking,

"Death warriors are a special kind of warriors trained by certain clans and organizations for committing highly illegal acts. Just the mere existence of a death warrior is deemed forbidden in the Shuang Qian kingdom, as they don't have true identities and only live to die for their owners."

"Is this true senior Xukong?" Lin Mu asked in his mind.

"It is indeed true, death warriors are a unique breed of warriors in many of the worlds. Though the standard may greatly vary. These dead men can barely even be considered cultivators not to say about true death warriors." Xukong spoke with disdain in his voice.

Lin Mu was rather surprised, as this was the first time he had heard senior Xukong talk in such a disdainful tone. It was as if he felt offended by the mediocrity of these death warriors and did not deem them worthy of their title.

Unwilling to question senior Xukong, Lin Mu just accepted his words calmly. Lin Mu then carefully removed the packets of poison that were hidden in the face covers of the attackers. There was a small clasp hidden near the back of the neck which when released would allow one to remove the face cover without breaking the poison packets.

After removing the face covers of the eight men, Lin Mu tried to identify them. But he did not find anyone familiar and could not find any common points between them either. They had no identification marks such as tattoos or brands either. Neither did they carry any piece of intelligence such as the letter Lin Mu obtained last time.

The masked man also observed the faces of the culprits and did not find them familiar. His eyes then went towards the swords of the eight culprits. He picked them and observed them closely. He then disassembled the handle of the sword and revealed the base of the sword.

There were a few words carved on the base of the sword. They read: Xiangwei Jin Armaments.

Lin Mu curiously looked at what the masked man was doing and paid attention to it. After the words that were carved on the base of the sword were revealed, he was a little surprised.

"What is that?" Lin Mu asked.

"This should be the marking of the manufacturer." The masked man replied.

"Xiangwei Jin Armaments? Wait, are these from Xiangwei city?" Lin Mu questioned.

"They are indeed. They are from one of the biggest armament producers of Xiangwei." The masked man answered.

"Then does this mean that the culprits are from Xiangwei city?" Lin Mu wondered.

"Not exactly. The Xiangwei Jin armaments produce so many weapons that they can be found all over the Shuang Qian kingdom. This won't help us much." The masked man replied while shaking his head.

The masked man then stood up and spoke,

"I need to immediately contact my superiors."

"So you'll leave now?" Lin Mu asked.

The masked man sighed before replying,

"No, I have another method."

"What?" Lin Mu asked curiously.

The masked man did not answer, but instead removed his necklace from his neck and held it in his hand. The necklace looked like a small and thin tube that was hollow. Its thickness was about the same as a chopstick.

The man gently lifted the bask of his mask and revealed the bottom part of his face. He then brought the tube-shaped necklace up to his lips and blew on it.

No sound was produced after the masked man blew on the tube, but a small disk shaped hole opened on the tube and started spinning.

The man kept on blowing on it for a few minutes without stopping. Only when he was completely out of breath did he stop.

Chapter 84 - A Friendly Offering

The masked man seemed completely out of breath and it was as if this little task took him more effort than the entire Battle that he had just gone through. The masked man could not bear it anymore and collapsed down onto the ground while breathing heavily.

'What happened to him?' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu then extended his spirit sense and checked the condition of the masked man. When he saw the spirit qi of the masked man, he got shocked as it was completely depleted. Not a single wisp of it was left remaining inside his dantian.

"He's in a severe state of qi exhaustion," Xukong spoke.

"How did he deplete it all, though? It didn't look like he used much of it during the Battle either." Lin Mu wondered.

"Hmm, it seems like that small tube he's holding is not simple," Xukong replied.

"Was that perhaps his method of contacting his superiors?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hey! Are you alright?" Lin Mu asked with concern.

The masked man did not reply and only continued to pant. It seems that the qi exhaustion was much severe than he thought.

"Why is he so severely affected by this senior? When I had qi exhaustion before I was tired but not this bad." Lin Mu questioned.

'Of course, you would not be tired. With how vastly that ring is modifying your constitution, it would be a feat to become that exhausted.' Xukong thought but did not express it.

"You are at a higher stage of Body tempering realm than him, and you practically also have a superior method of cultivating qi. Your standards are greatly different, so you can't really compare it." Xukong answered Lin Mu.

Silently nodding to senior Xukong, Lin Mu decided to wait for the man to rest a bit.

"You know, you can give the masked man one of your spirit apples. It will help him recover faster and you will also be able to observe its effects on him." Xukong suggested after waiting a minute.

Lin Mu had eaten a couple of spirit apples that grew on the spirit apple tree that was inside the garden of karma. It tasted good to him and also helped him restore a small amount of spirit qi. The last time he ate a spirit apple, it restored about twenty-five wisps of spirit qi for him.

Senior Xukong had told him that it would not be the same for another person as everyone's constitutions varied and even their metabolism was different. Lin Mu had wanted to try feeding a spirit apple to a normal beast, but senior Xukong told him that it would not do much except for killing them, perhaps.

Lin Mu would have to capture an eighth stage body tempering beast in order to be able to test it. But senior Xukong then told him that, for him to analyze a beast's constitution would be difficult, as their

physiologies were vastly different than humans. He would have to have a higher cultivation level as well as better spirit sense to even attempt that.

Now that Lin Mu had this chance to test it on a different person, he wanted to take it. As for whether the masked man would suspect where he got a spirit apple from, that would be rather useless as he had already revealed much more shocking secrets.

Something as simple as this would not matter at all, besides there was an entire orchard of spirit apples in the Northern town, he may as well have bought it normally. He did have the sufficient capital for it.

Having made up his mind, Lin Mu withdrew a spirit apple from his ring and put it towards the masked man. The masked man turned to look up and saw the spirit apple in Lin Mu's hand.

"Go on, take it. It will help you restore your spirit qi." Lin Mu spoke.

The man slightly nodded while panting and took the spirit apple from Lin Mu's hand. His mask was already lifted from his mouth, thus he did not have to make the effort again. He placed the spirit apple at his mouth and took a bite.

The sweet and tangy juices from the spirit apple spread in his mouth and gave him a little taste of heaven. He chewed for a little bit before swallowing it. As soon as the morsel of the spirit apple reached his stomach, it instantly started releasing the spirit qi stored within it.

The wisps of spirit qi started being absorbed from the masked man's stomach and were being pulled into his meridians. The spirit qi wisps traveled through the man's meridians while nourishing his body and relieving his fatigue bit by bit.

Feeling the effects of the spirit apple taking place, the masked man no longer hesitated and started devouring the rest of the spirit apple. Bite by bite, the entire spirit apple disappeared into the masked man's stomach. He did not even leave behind the core and ate it all without wasting anything.

Soon the spirit qi wisps that were circulating inside the masked man's meridians started settling inside his dantian. A few minutes later the spirit qi had calmed down and the man's dantian was replenished with spirit qi once again.

While all this was happening Lin Mu was closely observing the masked man's condition. Right from the moment when the masked man had taken the first bite of the spirit apple, Lin Mu had started studying it. His spirit sense was sensing every single wisp of spirit qi that spread inside the masked man's body.

Lin Mu learned multiple things from this test. Firstly, he saw the difference between his own dantian and another person's dantian. The difference he found was extremely vast. He found out that the capacity of his dantian was nearly thrice that of the masked man's.

The second thing he learned was the meridians of the masked man. He was able to learn the masked man's qi cycle pattern. Lin Mu knew that a cultivator's qi cycle pattern varied depending on the kind of the qi cultivation technique that cultivator was using. This meant that if Lin Mu was able to obtain the breathing technique of the masked man, he may be able to replicate his entire qi cultivation technique.

The third thing he learned was the actual effect of the spirit apple itself. While a spirit apple was able to restore around 25 wisps of spirit qi for Lin Mu, it was much more different for the masked man. The

spirit apple restored around 80 wisps of spirit qi for the masked man. This difference also surprised Lin Mu.

Having learned all this, Lin Mu felt rather satisfied and did not think that he had wasted the spirit apple.

The masked man also seemed to be a little surprised by the effect of the spirit apple. He sensed his dantian and found that his store of spirit qi had been replenished by eighty wisps. It had only been ten minutes, and he had restored such a large amount.

If he cultivated normally, it would take him nearly two hours to replenish the same amount on his own. The effectiveness of this spirit apple was surprising to the masked man. He had eaten a spirit apple before and had experienced its effect.

'This does not seem like a normal spirit apple. It has more than double the amount of spirit qi in it.' The masked man thought.

The masked man then looked up at Lin Mu with a strange expression that was hidden beneath his mask.

~sigh~ 'A person with such a distinguished identity as his was bound to be different. Even a normal spirit apple is so much more potent.' The masked man spoke to himself.

"Thank you." The masked man said after taking a deep breath.

"It's fine, the quicker you recover, the better it will be. We don't know if more of those men would come." Lin Mu replied.

The masked man remembered the severity of the current situation and nodded.

"You're right. Though we may not have to worry as much, my companions should be here soon." The masked man spoke while looking outside the warehouse.

Lin Mu then looked at the strange tube-shaped necklace hanging in the masked man's neck and thought about it.

"Is that necklace a spirit tool that's used to contact your companions?" Lin Mu curiously asked.

The masked man turned around after hearing Lin Mu's question and sighed again.

"No, it's not a spirit tool... Well, not completely. But it does allow me to contact my companions." The masked man answered.

Seeing that the masked man was unwilling to explain further, Lin Mu did not probe either. But he did ask senior Xukong about it.

"It may be some kind of primitive spirit tool, seeing as it did consume his entire store of spirit qi," Xukong answered.

Hearing about a new term, the curiosity within Lin Mu was ignited once again. Xukong instantly understood this and started explaining it before Lin Mu even had the chance to ask. Xukong was rather satisfied by the curiosity Lin Mu showed. It was good that he had a penchant for learning.

"A primitive spirit tool can simply be considered to be an incomplete spirit tool. While a primitive tool may have the structure of a spirit tool, it does not have the necessary formations and the qi circuits placed on it." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu nodded after hearing senior Xukong's words and walked ahead to stand with the masked man. He joined the masked man in looking out of the door of the old warehouse.

The night sky was lit up with the moon and the stars, spreading their luminance all across the town. Lin Mu soon observed a group of masked figures running across the roofs of the buildings.

Chapter 85 - The Masked Man's Companions Arrive

Thirty minutes ago,

Somewhere in a silent and decrepit alley located inside the Northern town. An individual dressed in dark blue clothes and a featureless mask knocked on the door of a shop. The individual knocked in a certain pattern and on different places on the door.

A minute later the door silently opened, and the individual walked inside. The door immediately closed, revealing an old woman behind it. The old woman did not speak anything and just gestured for the masked individual to follow her. She brought him to another room inside the shop before closing down the door of that room as well.

The old woman then looked at the masked individual and spoke,

"Show me the crest."

The masked individual then pulled out a small metallic plate that was hexagonal in shape from their pocket. The masked individual handed the hexagonal metal plate to the old woman, who quickly snatched it from him. After taking it, the old woman glanced at it for a second before inserting it into a small opening that was hidden in the seam of the wall behind her.

As soon as she inserted the hexagonal plate, a clicking sound was heard and then the sound of gears moving could be heard. Soon a rectangular outline appeared on the wall. A wooden panel then shifted to reveal the passage behind it.

The old woman then looked at the masked individual and spoke again.

"They're waiting for you."

The masked individual silently nodded before walking through the new opening in the wall. After the masked individual was gone, the wooden panel automatically shifted and closed the entrance of the passage.

The masked individual walked for a few meters straight before reaching a staircase that descended deeper into the ground. The staircase was dark, unlike the dimly lit passage. Thus the masked individual picked up a lamp that was hanging on the wall and walked downstairs.

The masked individual must have walked for five minutes before reaching the end of the staircase. One could only imagine how deep the stairs went into the ground. At the end of the staircase, there was

another door. The masked individual held the handle of the door and pushed it open, revealing the brightly lit room behind it. Quickly closing the door, the individual walked inside.

"You're late." A voice spoke inside the brightly lit room.

The masked individual turned towards the source of the voice and replied,

"I found a few more clues of those people."

The voice of the masked individual was feminine and cold, making one feel the chill on their skin. The masked individual then removed their mask, which revealed a beautiful face that was marred by a scar that extended from the left temple to the chin.

The masked individual was actually a woman.

"And what kind of clues did you notice?" The voice asked.

"Whoever they are, they have been going to the northern forest every day. I also found a few traces of blood on the route towards the northern forest." The unmasked woman replied.

"Hmm, we'll investigate it then." The voice spoke as it got closer.

Soon a man appeared in front of the woman. The man had short hair and was wearing dark blue clothes similar to that of the woman's. He had an average face that one did not find peculiar.

"Any new information?" The woman asked.

"Nothing in particular. Most of our companions are still out doing their task, while the rest returned an hour ago to report. You're the only one who was late." The man replied and took a pause.

"Well not just you, Hei Wen has not returned yet either." The man added.

"Why is he late? He's the most punctual of us all." The woman asked.

"Hei Wen was assigned a tailing mission recently. He's been on it for a few days now." The man answered.

"Tailing mission? Did they find a potential suspect?" The woman questioned.

"We do not know. He was directly informed by the leader." The man answered.

"We'll just have to wait for him then, I guess." The woman replied while walking towards a chair.

"Perhaps." The masked man spoke with an uneasy voice.

The woman noticed the man's unease but did not question it, rather choosing to rest on the chair for a bit. The man also sat down on a chair nearby and closed his eyes.

A few minutes passed until a very high-pitched sound could be heard in the room. The pair of man and woman abruptly stood up with their eyes wide open. Five more people came out from a door that was to the left of the room.

"Someone has triggered the emergency signal." They all spoke in unison.

"Follow me." The short-haired man ordered.

The man then lead the six people to a room that was situated across the hall. He pulled out a key from his pocket and opened the door. Inside this room multiple tables were placed and on these tables, tens of rectangular plates were kept.

Currently, one of these rectangular plates seemed to be making the high-pitched sound. A disk-shaped opening had appeared on the rectangular plate, and the circular plate that was cut out from it was spinning rapidly.

The circular plate spun for about two minutes before stopping. Tense expressions could be seen on the faces of each and every person in the room.

"Whose plate is it?" One of the persons asked.

The woman walked forward to check the name that was written below the rectangular plate.

"It's Hei Wen!" The woman exclaimed.

"His target! Hei Wen is on a tailing mission, he must've been compromised." The short-haired man spoke.

"Quick, we can still save him if we reach there now." The woman spoke.

"But we don't have everyone here. Hei Wen signaled the highest level of emergency. It rung for two whole minutes. He must've depleted all his spirit qi." One of the men spoke.

"No, if he's out of spirit qi, we need to be even more quick or he won't survive for long." The woman protested.

"That's it. We leave right this moment." The short-haired man declared.

None of the people dared to question the short-haired man's words as they all got ready. A minute later everyone was equipped with their featureless masks and had their swords at their backs. They started leaving the underground room one by one and reached the shop that was located at the top.

The wooden panel in the wall opened, and all of the masked individuals walked out. The old woman that was sitting in the shop noticed this and came out to see them.

"An emergency? Who?" The old woman asked with a grim voice.

"Hei Wen." The short-haired man replied.

"I'll inform the leader." The old woman said before walking aside and bringing out a cage that had a Grey pigeon perched within.

"We'll leave first." The short-haired man uttered before leaving the shop along with the others.

The old woman quickly wrote something on a small piece of paper before rolling it up and inserting it into a small tube that was tied to the pigeon's leg. She then picked up the pigeon and released it outside. The pigeon swiftly flew away to the south.

The seven masked individuals were running across the roofs of the buildings silently. From their speed, one could tell that they were all qi cultivators. The seven masked individuals ran for about five minutes before they reached the residential district.

"His target was located in the residential district, so he should be nearby." The short-haired man spoke before taking out a small compass.

The compass did not have any markings and only had a pointer. The masked man looked at the compass for a second before turning towards the eastern direction.

"We are in the range, follow me." The short-haired man ordered.

They ran for two more minutes before an old warehouse appeared in front of them in the distance.

"There he is!" The masked woman exclaimed.

"But who's that person with him?" One of the masked men questioned.

"We'll know soon. Get your weapons ready." The short-haired man spoke.

Lin Mu was looking at the masked individuals that were running on the roofs of the buildings and coming towards him. The masked man beside him noticed this as well and looked at them.

"They're finally here." The masked man spoke while sighing with relief.

Lin Mu watched as the seven masked individuals soon reached them with their weapons drawn. The masked individual that was standing at the front came forward and pointed at him with his sword.

"Get away from him." The short-haired man spoke.

The masked man that was standing beside Lin Mu suddenly felt alarmed upon hearing the man's words and walked forward to stand in front of Lin Mu.

"Lower your sword, captain. He means no harm." The masked man hurriedly informed.

The short-haired man stared at him for a few seconds before speaking,

"Fine. Now tell me why did you use the emergency signal when you are completely fine here."

"Come see." The masked man spoke shortly while gesturing to the other men.

Chapter 86 - Reaching The Safe House

Lin Mu narrowed his eyes upon seeing the forceful attitude of the masked man's companions. He felt a little annoyed having swords pointed at him, but did not mind it as he understood their caution. He then watched them as they walked inside the old warehouse.

The masked man's companions seemed visibly shocked upon seeing the many corpses that were lying around in the warehouse. At least that's what Lin Mu was able to perceive from whatever he got from the masked individuals.

A minute later, the masked men seemed to have grasped the situation.

"Are they the culprits?" The captain of the masked individuals asked.

"Yes, they are." The masked man that was accompanying Lin Mu informed.

One of the masked man's companion was about to check one of the corpses when Lin Mu suddenly shouted,

"Careful! There's poison on their bodies."

The captain of the masked individuals turned towards the masked man in question.

"They are death warriors." The masked man informed.

An audible gasp could be heard coming from one of the masked individuals. Lin Mu felt a little strange upon hearing the gasp and could swear that it was a woman's. The masked man who had been accompanying Lin Mu sensed everyone's shock and then spoke.

"Let me explain from the start."

A few minutes passed as the masked man explained the entire series of events that happened. From Lin Mu detecting him and fighting him, to them finding the two mercenary corpses in the old warehouse and then the assault of the death warriors.

During the entire explanation, all of the men kept silent and listened intently. A few more minutes passed and the explanation finally ended. After ending the explanation, the masked man gestured the captain of the masked individuals to come close to him.

He then whispered something in his ears that made the captain's breathing audibly disturbed.

"This boy is now considered as our ally." The captain of the masked individuals declared.

None of the people protested as they all nodded in acceptance. They all had heard the strength and the skills of the boy in front of them, thus they certainly did not want to fight him. Besides, having an additional ally that was this strong was only beneficial to them.

"Now that we have this at our back, can you please tell me your names? I'm getting confused at this point." Lin Mu asked in a friendly tone.

"Yes, I believe introductions are in order. My name is Hei Wen." The masked man who had been accompanying Lin Mu answered.

"My name is Hei Bao." The captain of masked individuals who had short hair answered.

"My name is Hei Shi." The masked woman replied.

One by one, the rest of the masked men reported their names. Lin Mu was a little surprised upon hearing that all of their surnames were the same.

"Why do you all have the same surname?" Lin Mu curiously asked.

"We all took up the surname when we joined our lord." Hei Wen spoke.

"We are called as the Hei Corps." Hei Bao added.

"Is this all of you or are there more?" Lin Mu questioned.

"There are more of us, of course, but I can't tell you how many." Hei Bao answered.

"That's fine. Now, what do we do about this situation?" Lin Mu replied while gesturing towards the multiple corpses.

"We will take them away and have them looked at. The higher-ups should be able to find some Clues from them hopefully." Hei Bao replied.

A few of the masked men started gathering the corpses together.

"We still have a huge problem on our hands, though. The people from the neighborhood they're not awakening." Hei Wen spoke.

"I think I know what happened to them." Hei Shi replied.

"You do?" Lin Mu probed.

"I don't know the exact cause for this, but I know that they should wake up after a few hours." Hei Shi answered.

"How do you know this?" Hei Wen and Lin Mu questioned together.

"I've seen it happen before in another town." Hei Shi answered with a cold voice.

Hei Wen and Hei Bao instantly understood Hei Shi's tone and did not ask further. Lin Mu too saw the hint of anger in her voice, hence did not ask to clarify.

"Though captain, we have found a major piece of evidence." Hei Wen spoke with a little enthusiasm in his voice.

Hei Bao nodded and gestured for Hei Wen to stop.

"Not here. We'll talk after getting to the safe house." Hei Bao spoke.

"We need to transport these bodies quickly before the guards come here." One of the other masked men spoke.

"Yes, we can't let them find out. The guards are involved in this too." Lin Mu suddenly spoke.

"Is this true?" Hei Bao asked.

"Unfortunately, it is. But it's better if we discuss it later." Hei Wen answered.

"I would be willing to show you the proof as well." Lin Mu added.

"Very well, we shall be leaving now then. Everyone grab a body... or whatever parts there are." Hei Bao ordered after looking at the dismembered and decapitated corpses.

Lin Mu could have very well just stored all the corpses in his ring and made the work easier, but senior Xukong advised him to wait and not reveal this yet. While the Hei corps knew that he had a spatial storage treasure, they did not know the capacity of it.

Lin Mu took up senior Xukong's advice and decided against storing the corpses in the ring. Besides, for cultivators such as them, bearing the weight of a corpse would be no trouble. It indeed proved to be true as everyone picked up a corpse and started running without any restraint on them.

Hei Bao guided them towards the safe house while keeping an eye out for guards or any other people. They did end up seeing some guards rushing towards the residential district.

While it was Lin Mu who had chosen to go inform the guards before, he had met and fought Hei Wen. Hence he did not reach the barracks and did not have the chance to inform the guards.

"This is strange. I never informed the guards." Lin Mu spoke.

"It must've been your companions from the Night Vigil, probably." Hei Wen guessed.

"I hope so." Lin Mu replied with an unsure tone.

Fifteen minutes later, Lin Mu and the rest of the Hei corps reached the Dark and decrepit Alley in which their safe house was located. Hei Bao seemed to be a little nervous upon reaching the safe house, and seemed to be looking around a lot while swiveling his neck.

'Looks like he hasn't refined his spirit sense yet either.' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu wanted to probe the Hei corps with his spirit sense to find out their cultivation bases but did not do that as it could be considered to be an offense. Wanting to maintain his allied relations for now, he chooses to avoid that.

Lin Mu then saw Hei Bao knocking on the door of a shop in a particular pattern. He himself had seen this shop before a long time ago, but had never bothered to go in and check what they sold. There was no signboard hanging over it either, thus it made it harder for one to know its purpose.

After Hei Bao knocked on the door of the shop, it opened and the face of an old woman was revealed. She glanced at everyone carrying corpses on their backs for a second before finally settling on Lin Mu's face. She just threw a questioning gaze on to Hei Bao and did not speak. Hei Bao just nodded in response.

The old woman then gestured for everyone to come inside. Lin Mu and the rest walked in with Hei Bao leading them. Lin Mu then saw the inside of the old shop. While it was not explicitly dusty or dirty, the items kept in the room did seem to be mottled due to age.

There were mostly paper scrolls, brushes, inkstones, inkwells, parchment paper, sheepskin, silk scrolls, and a variety of other materials that may be used in writing and literary arts present in the shop.

Lin Mu was a little surprised by this shop. He did not think a shop like this ever existed in the northern town. Literary supplies like these weren't really needed as much in a small town like the Northern town.

There were indeed other shops that sold writing materials in the town, but they did not sell them exclusively as this shop did, instead, they sold them in addition to other sundries.

Especially for high-end supplies such as the silk scrolls and the inkstones, there was a very small demand. People preferred to use normal paper scrolls and lamp black for writing instead.

The old woman then took them to another room at the side and took out a hexagonal metal plate. She then inserted it into a small opening in the wall. Soon the wooden panel of the wall shifted, and an opening was revealed.

The old woman went to another room and left them on their own. Hei Bao then picked a lamp with his free hand and took them to the actual safe house that was located at the bottom of the shop.

Chapter 87 - Showing The Evidence

Lin Mu and the rest of the Hei Corps were currently walking on the stairs that led to the entrance of the safe house. The stairs were dark, but the lamp that Hei Bao was holding helped to dispel the darkness, allowing them to watch their steps.

"We must be at least fifty meters deep underground," Xukong spoke.

"We are? How much time must've been needed to build this passage!" Lin Mu internally exclaimed.

"Use your spirit sense to check the walls, I'm finding them to be a little strange," Xukong spoke.

"Yes, Senior." Lin Mu responded.

Lin Mu then used his spirit sense to probe the walls and found out the walls were a little hollow and there was an empty pocket behind the plain wall. The brick walls of the passage seemed to have been added later to make it look much more smoother. The actual walls of the passage were hidden behind these walls and seemed to be made out of completely solid rocks.

"This place does not seem dug out, senior. It's actually a cave." Lin Mu reported his findings.

"Indeed, digging such a deep tunnel would have been immensely difficult, especially in a town. This cave should have existed here for a long time." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu nodded in response and continued following Hei Bao. Soon they reached the end of the staircase and came upon a door. The door was plain and did not seem to have a lock or a latch. Hei Bao pushed it open and walked inside. The others too walked in and then closed the door.

The room was brightly lit up and Lin Mu felt a little uncomfortable after traveling in dim light for a while. A minute later his eyes adjusted and he no longer felt any discomfort. He looked around in the room and found that its walls were also made up of bricks.

There were three doors in the room, with one being the one they came from. The other two were located to the left and right of the entrance door. The room was a little large and seemed more like a hallway than an actual room. Except for a few chairs and a table placed in the room, it was relatively empty.

"Let's go, we need to store these corpses in the storage or they will start decaying soon." Hei Bao spoke to everyone while gesturing them to follow.

He then went towards the room that was at the left and swung open the door. Another room came into their sights, but this one was different. This room had weapons and other pieces of equipment set up on stands. In this room, he opened another door and showed them in.

This was the room intended for storage. The room was much more colder than the other rooms and had stone walls, unlike the brick ones. There were a few miscellaneous items placed around the room, but nothing valuable.

Hei Bao then placed down the corpse he was carrying to the side. The others too placed them down in a single file, allowing them to view them with ease. After everyone was done with this small task, Hei Bao looked at Lin Mu and spoke.

"So what's this evidence you were speaking about earlier?" Hei Bao questioned.

Lin Mu withdrew the small blood-stained letter he had obtained from his attackers and presented it to Hei Bao.

"This is what I was talking about. I obtained this from the men who attacked me earlier." Lin Mu answered.

Hei Bao looked at the message written on the letter and read it out loud for everyone to hear. Strained expressions appeared on everyone's face except for Lin Mu, after hearing the message that was written on the letter.

"So it seems there are more of these death warriors out there." Hei Wen spoke.

"Not exactly. The ones that I found were not death warriors." Lin Mu replied.

A complex expression could be seen on Hei Bao's face as he was lost in his thoughts for a minute.

"How did you reach the conclusion that the men that attacked you previously and the ones you fought today are the same?" Hei Bao asked.

"It was because of the way they dealt with the corpse. They tied their wounds after their death." Lin Mu answered.

"Indeed, their target was Gan Ma the hunter before this." Hei Wen added.

"You mean one of the two hunters that are cultivators?" Hei Shi asked.

"Yes, that Gan Ma. Let me just show you." Lin Mu replied.

Lin Mu then withdrew Gan Ma's corpse from his ring and placed it on the ground for everyone to look at. Hei Bao nodded after looking at the corpse for a moment before speaking again.

"You also said that the guards were involved in this. What did you mean by that?" Hei Bao questioned.

"Yes, the vice-captain of the town's guards Han Xu was one of the persons that attacked me." Lin Mu answered.

Seeing that the people were still a little reluctant, Lin Mu decided to just show them all of the corpses of the attackers. If Lin Mu withdrawing the corpse of Gan Ma did not move the Hei corps at the start, him bringing out six more corpses definitely shocked them.

Before this only Hei Wen and Hei Bao knew about Lin Mu's spatial treasure, but now with him withdrawing the corpses, everyone here knew that he had a high-quality spatial treasure. Their looks towards him seemed to be filled with a mix of shock, awe, and fear.

Lin Mu could understand the shock, but not the awe and fear.

"It seems they fear your status," Xukong spoke.

"My status?" Lin Mu questioned.

"They probably developed a misunderstanding after seeing you have a spatial treasure. They should be pretty rare in a low-level world like this after all." Xukong answered.

"Use this misunderstanding to your advantage," Xukong added before going silent again.

"As you wish, senior." Lin Mu responded in his mind.

Though after seeing the condition of the corpses Lin Mu withdrew, the expressions of the people became more dreadful. Especially after seeing the corpse that had a huge hole in his chest, which was caused by Lin Mu using the boulder collapsing fist.

'What did this kid do to inflict such a huge hole. It was as if it exploded from the inside.' Hei Wen thought.

The members of the Hei Corps had seen a lot of gruesome sights, but even for them, the level of carnage Lin Mu inflicted was a little too much to digest.

'If what Hei Wen said is true, then this kid should already be at the Peak stage of the Qi refining realm.' Hei Bao thought as he swallowed his saliva.

Forcibly calming himself down, Hei Bao spoke again.

"Okay, so what more do we know? Does anyone else have something to add?" Hei Bao asked.

Hei Shi then reported the clues that she had found outside the town, on the route towards the northern forest.

"Umm... I think that was caused by me. That's the place where I fought these men." Lin Mu Spoke with an awkward tone.

A fallen expression could be seen on Hei Shi's face as she sighed but did not speak anything. The other members also reported their findings, but none of them were considered to be significant or useful for Hei Bao.

Though Lin Mu caught onto some words that one of the members of Hei Corps had said. He had reported that a black market shipment that was being smuggled recently disappeared. He said that the contents of it were likely to be some kind of prohibited substances.

"Could it be the Memory Confounding poison?" Lin Mu muttered.

Hei Shi who was standing beside Lin Mu, heard his words and spoke,

"Wait, Memory confounding poison. Why do you think it is that?"

"Oh, I found a vial on one of the attackers." Lin Mu replied casually while withdrawing the said vial from his ring.

Everyone took a step back in sync upon seeing the vial in Lin Mu's hand.

"Of course! The disappearance of them mercenaries from their camp. They were affected by the memory confounding poison." One of the men of the Hei corpse exclaimed.

"Well, that solves some part of the mystery for us at least." Hei Bao spoke with a slightly relieved tone.

"We should wait till the morning. The higher-ups should be coming soon." Hei Bao spoke.

"Yeah, they should be able to find something on these corpses, something that we missed." Wei Shi added.

Seeing that everyone was agreeing, Lin Mu went with the flow.

"So what do I do now? I still want some answers from your superiors." Lin Mu spoke with a straight tone.

"I already know that. After the higher-ups come in the morning, I'll inform them of your request." Hei Bao replied.

'Though I think the lord will be personally interested in you now.' Hei Bao spoke internally.

Hei Bao then gestured for everyone to disperse. Hei Wen looked at Lin Mu and spoke,

"Follow me. I'll show you a place to rest."

Lin Mu nodded and followed Hei Wen to another room.

"Seems like someone is targeting the cultivators in the town." Lin Mu casually spoke while walking with Hei Wen.

"We suspected that too initially, but seeing the evidence, I guess we confirmed it. Nearly all of the cultivators of northern town are gone now." Hei Wen replied.

"Oh no, not all. There's still Old man Jing Wei." Lin Mu subconsciously spoke.

"WHO?!!"

Chapter 88 - Hei Wen's Curiosity

The surprised shout of Hei Wen attracted the attention of a few people, including Hei Bao who was following from the back and was apparently heading towards the same location as them.

"What did you say?" Hei Wen asked with a perplexed expression.

Lin Mu had thought that the Hei Corpse must have known about old man Jing as well, since they had information about all of the cultivators that were in the town.

By now Hei Bao had also come close and seemed to be interested in their conversation.

"What happened here?" Hei Bao questioned.

"Captain, I think we missed some intelligence about another cultivator that lives in the town and Lin Mu here knows about him." Hei Wen replied.

Hei Wen was wondering if their intelligence collection ability had really fallen so far behind that even a kid knew more about things now.

"What cultivator are you talking about?" Hei Bao asked again.

"Old Man Jing." Lin Mu stated.

Hei Bao's expression suddenly fell upon hearing the name, and cold sweat appeared on his forehead. Hei Wen saw the changes on Hei Bao's face and wondered if something wrong had happened.

"Is there something wrong, captain?" Hei Wen asked with concern.

"No, nothing. As for the cultivator Lin Mu's talking about, I know about it." Hei Bao answered after taking a deep breath.

"You do?!" Hei Wen questioned in surprise.

"Yes, I've known about it and so does the lord as well." Hei Bao answered.

"Why did we not know about this then?" Hei Wen asked curiously.

"Well... He... He's in the same category as Lin Mu. We were strictly warned not to be involved him." Hei Bao answered while wiping the sweat off his brow.

"We've been having so many difficult scenarios lately, don't you think that we should have been informed. Who knows if this cultivator could have been involved in it." Hei Wen protested.

"I can guarantee that he's not." Lin Mu declared after hearing the conversation.

~sigh~ "Considering our current situation, I'll ask the leader to brief you about it in the morning when she comes." Hei Bao spoke.

Hei Wen still seemed dissatisfied, but then looked at the unwilling faces of Hei Bao and Lin Mu. Even if he could protest against his captain's orders a bit, he couldn't do the same for a person like Lin Mu. Hei Wen took a deep breath and calmed down before thinking for himself.

'If this person called old Man Jing is in the same category as Lin Mu, then his status must be nothing to scoff at. While we still don't know Lin Mu's exact background, it does not seem the same for Old Man Jing. Captain Hei Bao seemed rather alarmed, and he's unfazed by most things.' Hei Wen thought.

Lin Mu saw that Hei Wen had gone still for a few seconds, thus understood that he must be thinking. He let him be for a minute before interrupting him.

"Hei Wen?" Lin Mu called out.

Hei Wen then snapped out from his thoughts and looked at Lin Mu.

"Ah yes, let's go." Hei Wen replied.

Hei Wen then guided Lin Mu to the room used for resting. The room was very simple and only had a few beds along with some chairs and tables. Lin Mu looked around the room and assessed it. The room had the same brick walls as before, but when Lin Mu used his spirit sense to probe them he found that the walls were free standing and did not have anything behind them.

The back of the walls was completely hollow and was unlike the passage where there was a rock wall behind the brick wall. The brick walls themselves were only about a foot thick. Lin Mu could not gauge how far back the rock walls must be as his spirit sense was dampened after traveling through a foot of solid wall.

"Is this place a cave?" Lin Mu muttered.

Hei Wen was still a little involved in his thoughts thus could not hear what Lin Mu said properly.

"Did you say something?" Hei Wen asked.

"Oh no, nothing." Lin Mu answered, not wanting to bother with it for now.

Hei Wen just nodded and gestured towards the beds.

"You can take whichever bed you want for resting. The leader should be here in the morning, or if we're lucky before daybreak." Hei Wen answered.

Lin Mu nodded and then thought for a second before asking,

"What more can you tell me about this leader of yours?"

"Honestly, I don't know much other than that she's a woman and is the closest person to our lord. You can ask her yourself in the morning when she comes, until then just wait." Hei Wen asked while shrugging his shoulders.

Lin Mu nodded and just picked a bed randomly to rest on. He did not choose to sleep but instead just decided to cultivate till the morning. He sat down cross-legged on the bed and started chanting the severing heart sutra.

Over the few weeks, Lin Mu's control over his spirit Qi had increased, and now he could actually control it without the use of the severing heart sutra. But even so, chanting the severing heart sutra increased the efficiency by multiple times.

By now Lin Mu had also understood what kind of effect the severing heart sutra had on other people. It would erase their emotions instantly, which caused them to enter a dazed state. People needed time to adapt to this emotionless state, thus they kind of 'Shut down' when they were targeted by the severing heart sutra.

Though Lin Mu still thought that there were more methods to use the severing heart sutra than just this. He just had to figure them out. Lin Mu also thought that he needed to increase his proficiency with the sutras more.

He had also seen the effect of the Calming heart sutra on other people and knew that it was not as useful to use it on other people for now. It was just that he could not think of many situations that would warrant the use of the calming heart sutra.

He knew what had happened to the town when he entered the enlightened state, hence knew what the full potential of the calming heart sutra could be like.

While Lin Mu was chanting the severing heart sutra and cultivating, Hei Wen was observing him. He could hear some esoteric chants that were coming out of Lin Mu's lips and did not know what to make of it. The chants seemed mysterious to him, and he could not understand them at all. Instead, if he focused on the words that Lin Mu was chanting, Hei Wen himself started feeling very nervous.

It was as if he was forbidden from hearing the chants and something bad would happen to him. But Hei Wen was curious and wanted to know more about Lin Mu. He wanted to provide his lord with as much information as he could. Thus decided to try anyway and started to listen to Lin Mu's chants with full focus while closing his eyes.

At first, Hei Wen only felt uncomfortable, but soon the feeling started intensifying. Five minutes later he no longer just felt uncomfortable, but instead felt as if there were needles poking on his skin. He gritted his teeth and continued focusing on the chants while bearing the pain from the illusory needles.

Fifteen minutes passed and at this time, Hei Wen seemed to have lost himself in his mind. He was still feeling the needles on his skin, but could not open his eyes anymore. It was as if something had trapped him in his own mind. He tried to escape this state but could not.

Thirty more minutes passed and by now Hei Wen felt as if he was going insane. He wanted to end this state and was cursing himself for choosing to do this. The feeling of needles on his skin had long since disappeared, but now there was something much more worse.

Hei Wen's vision suddenly returned, and he could see again.

"What is this?" Hei Wen said as he looked around.

Hei Wen could tell that his eyes were actually still physically closed, and he was just imagining this. Though he was still hearing the esoteric chants in his ears as well. Hei Wen then saw a mystical fog appearing in front of him. The fog started moving in different ways and then congealed to form innumerable swords.

The swords danced in the air and moved to form various images. Hei Wen could see some vague figures in these images, but could not tell who they were. He tried to get closer so that he could see it clearly, but this seemed to have annoyed the swords. The swords danced and formed an image of a man with unrecognizable features.

This man formed by the sword images seemed to have noticed him and became angry. He then pointed at Hei Wen and shouted,

"SEVER!"

The swords that were dancing suddenly stopped and pointed at Hei Wen. Hei Wen saw this and got terrified.

"No!NO!NOO! Stop this." He shouted but to no avail.

The swords rushed towards him at the speed of light and split him into millions of pieces. These million pieces then were again split by the swords into billions of pieces. This kept on going till not even a single trace of Hei Wen was left behind.

Chapter 89 - The Confused Hei Corps

"Wake up! Hei Wen wake up!" Multiple voices shouted.

Hei Wen's eyes suddenly opened wide, and he sat up straight. He looked around and saw all of his companions surrounding him, while Hei Bao had his hands on his shoulders and was shaking him. Hei Wen's eyes were bloodshot and his nose was bleeding.

Lin Mu was woken up by the commotion that was happening in the room a while back. He had been cultivating the entire night and had been sitting in the same position. When he woke up, he saw one of the members of the Hei Corps trying to wake up Hei Wen, who had apparently fallen asleep on the bed near him.

Hei Wen was not responding and was bleeding from his nose as well. Lin Mu did not know what happened and guessed the worst.

'Was he perhaps affected by some kind of poison?' Lin Mu thought to himself.

"Hmm, that's difficult to say. Heavens know that you two came in contact with multiple poisons last night, it could have been one of them." Xukong replied.

By now, the frantic shouting of Hei Wen's companion had attracted the attention of other people as well. Even Hei Bao had reached there and had taken over the duty to try and wake Hei Wen up. Seeing that Hei Wen was still not responding to Hei Bao's and other attempts, Lin Mu decided to tell them.

"He may be affected by some kind of poison. Perhaps the same one that affected the town's residents." Lin Mu stated.

Hei Bao and the others listened to his words and turned around.

"Yes, of course, they did tell us that before." Hei Shi spoke.

"It could indeed be the same poison that's affecting the residents, but still, why is he bleeding from his nose?" Another member added.

"Whatever it may be, at least he's still breathing. Let's try a few other methods, Hei Fen go and get some of the smelling salts." Hei Bao ordered one of his companions.

The man named Hei Fen instantly left the room and rushed to get the smelling salts. He returned a minute later with a small vial of smelling salts in his hand. Hei Fen then handed the vial to Hei Bao, who popped its cork open and held it under the nose of Hei Wen, while the others shouted.

Suddenly Hei Wen shot up and sat upright. The others looked at his blood-shot eyes, which had a hint of madness mixed in them. Hei Shi gulped and looked at the distressed expression of Hei Wen.

"What happened to you, Hei Wen?" Hei Bao asked.

Hei Wen did not speak for a minute as it took him a while to return to his senses and determine where he was.

"I'm... I'm back? I'M BACK!" Hei Wen exclaimed in relief.

At this point, Hei Bao was getting seriously worried about Hei Wen's condition. He was really starting to think that Lin Mu's suggestion that Hei Wen got poisoned was true. Hei Bao nudged Hei Wen, prompting him to speak.

"I... I was in a different place. A nightmare perhaps." Hei Wen spoke between his breaths.

Hei Bao saw that Hei Wen was not in the right condition to talk, thus let him rest.

"Come talk to me later when you're fine. For now, just rest." Hei Bao ordered.

Hei Wen just nodded and did not speak anything. He laid down back on the bed and thought about what he had experienced.

'What was that? Was that just a dream? It certainly didn't feel like it. The pain, it was too real.' Hei Wen thought.

'It only happened because I kept on listening to the esoteric chants that Lin Mu was uttering. I need to inform the captain and the leader about this. He is potentially much more dangerous than we think.' Hei Wen determined.

The other members of the Hei corps except for Hei Shi had left the room along with Hei Bao. Hei Shi was currently standing beside Lin Mu and was talking to him.

"This thing about Hei Wen, do you really think it was caused due to some kind of poison?" Hei Shi asked.

"It seemed like it at first, but I don't know anymore. I thought he was also affected by the same kind of condition that the townsmen are suffering." Lin Mu replied.

"It is somewhat similar to it, but the bleeding that happened does not match and neither does him awakening because of the smelling salts." Hei Shi spoke.

"That's true. Oh yes, what's the time now? It should be nearly morning, I think." Lin Mu asked.

Lin Mu actually could not tell the time, as he was rather lost in his cultivation. He had felt that he progressed a little in his comprehension of the Severing heart sutra somehow. He could feel that his sensitivity has been enhanced by a certain amount.

"It will be morning in an hour, the sun has not risen yet." Hei Shi answered.

"Has your leader not arrived yet?" Lin Mu questioned.

"She should be arriving anytime now." Hei Shi answered.

While talking with Hei Shi, Lin Mu could not help but look at the scar on her face. When he originally came to the safe house, everyone was still wearing their masks, thus he had not seen anyone's faces then. Only when he was disturbed by the frantic shouting of the people and stopped his cultivation session, did he see some of their faces.

Though even now, except for Hei Wen, Hei Bao, and Hei Shi he still hadn't seen the other's faces. Hei Shi saw that Lin Mu kept on looking at her face and knew that it was because of the scar. She didn't mind it as she had already come to terms with it and was used to it. Though, wearing the mask still helped save her some time, as she didn't have to explain it to people every time.

"I got it when I was around your age." Hei Shi spoke.

Lin Mu snapped from his thought upon hearing Hei Shi speak.

"Uh, got what?" Lin Mu awkwardly spoke.

"The scar you've been looking at." Hei Shi spoke in a slightly mocking tone.

Lin Mu felt a little embarrassed at being caught, but did not deny it.

"How did you get it then? If you don't mind me asking." Lin Mu probed.

"My village was attacked by some unknown people a long time ago. I was the only survivor." Hei Shi replied with an emotionless tone.

"Oh, I'm sorry." Lin Mu apologized in sympathy.

"It doesn't matter now, it all happened a long time ago." Hei Shi replied while shaking her head.

"At least I met the lord because of it." Hei Shi added with respect in her eyes.

"Speaking of your lord, what kind of person is he?" Lin Mu asked curiously, while his eyes flickered with a strange gleam and his lips moved inaudibly.

Hei Shi was looking away from Lin Mu's face currently, thus did not notice the look in his eyes. She just felt strangely calm and relaxed, which made her wonder why.

"Our lord is a benevolent person who helped us in our most desperate times. He pulled us from the depths of despair and gave us our current standing. He taught us to cultivate, and we pledged to join him in fulfilling his goals. We owe our lives to him." Hei Shi spoke in a deeply respectful tone that bordered on obsession.

Hei Shi didn't even realize that what she was uttering in her current state. She just kept on uttering without stopping. Though most of what she spoke of was the praises of their 'Lord'.

She only stopped when she was called by one of her companions. She then nodded to Lin Mu absentmindedly and went to attend to her companion.

Only after she left the room, did she suddenly think,

"Why did I just say all that? That isn't like me." Hei Shi thought with alarm.

After Hei Shi was gone from the room, Lin Mu spoke in his mind.

"You were right, senior. They seem abnormally obsessed with this 'Lord' of theirs."

"Hmm, at least your Calming heart sutra helped us in determining this. Though I would say you should stay alert when meeting the leader of their group." Xukong replied.

Indeed, Lin Mu had just used the calming heart sutra to influence the mind of Hei Shi. Senior Xukong had just suggested him to try using it on people while asking them questions.

Lin Mu had seen the effects of the Calming heart sutra before, but this was another addition method that Senior Xukong had come up with. Xukong had been analyzing the effects of the sutras every time Lin Mu used them and had concluded that they could be used to influence the mind of a person.

Xukong knew that it won't be a hundred percent effective, but knew that if it was used in the right situation, while asking the right questions, it could be rather effective.

The first attempt had proved that the calming heart sutra could be used in this method as well.

Chapter 90 - The Leader's Arrival

At a certain distance away from the Northern Town, a carriage was traveling at great speed. It was moving towards the town and seemed to be coming from the direction of Wu Lim City.

The Carriage was being pulled by four black stallions that looked robust and hearty. Every step of theirs made a loud clapping sound that traveled far. The carriage was lightly decorated, yet still looked elegant. A man dressed in the clothes of an official was sitting at its helm and was driving it.

Four more men dressed in black clothes and large straw hats were following the carriage from behind. They were riding similar looking horses and seemed to be traveling at the same speed as the carriage so as to keep up with it.

Inside the carriage, four more people were currently sitting. Except for one person, all of them seemed to be extremely alert, and they were wearing featureless masks. Out of the four persons, only one person was a woman and she had a veil on her face that hid her features.

This Woman was currently sitting in a meditative posture and seemed to be cultivating. The carriage driver that was sitting at the front of the carriage turned to the back and knocked on the front window of the carriage.

One of the masked men sitting inside the carriage opened the window and looked at the carriage driver.

"We're about to enter the town." The carriage driver said.

"Anything abnormal?" The masked man asked.

"Fortunately, nothing. Except for the absence of the snow today, everything seems normal." The carriage driver answered.

The masked man nodded and closed the front window. The closed eyes of the veiled woman trembled for a moment before returning to normal.

The carriage soon reached the southern entrance of the Northern town and was halted by the guards. The four men that were following behind it also stopped in tandem. The guard who stopped the carriage came forward and looked at the carriage.

"All the people that are inside the carriage, come out and show us your faces." The guard ordered.

The man who was the carriage driver paid no heed to his words and simply withdrew a small bronze plate from his sleeves. He then held it out for the guards to see. The guard came close and used the lamp he was carrying to illuminate and observe the bronze plate.

The instant the guard saw the bronze plate, he tensed up and cupped his hands in salute.

"Greetings to the High officials. This lowly one could not recognize your magnificence thus made a mistake, please forgive this lowly guard." The guard spoke with the utmost respect while bowing his head.

The other guards that were standing around too joined him and greeted them with a salute.

"Greetings to the High officials!" The guards shouted in unison.

A single knock came from inside the carriage and the driver understood it. The carriage driver then just gestured with his hand for the guards to clear the road. The guards instantly understood this and opened the gate. They then moved to the side and bowed their head while saluting.

The carriage driver flicked the reins, and the carriage started moving again. The carriage moved at a slower speed than before, after entering the town, and continued on. While on their way, they saw multiple guards running around busily.

The men inside the carriage seemed to have noticed the sound as they opened the windows to look outside. They saw the abnormal amount of guards and became conceded.

"Is this what we are here for?" One of the masked spoke.

The closed eyes of the woman sitting inside the carriage trembled once again as her lips gently moved.

"Don't bother and just hurry for now." The veiled woman spoke with an indifferent tone.

All the masked men immediately nodded, and the driver seemed to have heard this as well. The driver then cracked the whip in his hand, urging the horses to run. The carriage picked up speed and rushed through the streets.

A couple of minutes later, the carriage once again slowed down as it entered a narrow alley. The alley was just wide enough to let the carriage barely pass. The carriage then came to a halt in front of an old shop that did not have a sign board.

The veiled woman sitting in the carriage opened her eyes and gestured to the masked men. The driver of the carriage jumped down from it and went to the side to open its door. One of the masked men first alighted from the carriage, looked around, and pointed with his hands to the exits of the alley. The other

four black-robed men that were following the carriage instantly understood the orders and split into two pairs and stood at the two ends of the alley, preventing anyone from entering.

Everyone then alighted from the carriage, with the veiled woman being the last person. They then walked up to the door of the shop and knocked on it in a certain pattern. Unlike before, there was no delay in opening the door, as it instantly opened.

The old woman who was in charge of the shop greeted the visitors by saluting with cupped hands and stood at the side as they walked inside. She did not speak anything, and the men did not expect anything either.

The Veiled woman walked into the shop and looked around for a second before walking into the next room immediately. Two of the masked men stayed in the shop while the other two followed her. They smoothly opened the hidden entrance of the safe house and walked downstairs.

They reached the bottom of the stairs soon and opened the door that was standing in their way. As soon as they opened it, a brightly lit room appeared in front of them. A few people were already waiting for them in two files.

They were all standing as they looked at the woman and shouted in unison.

"Greetings to the mistress!"