

Walker 431

Chapter 431 - The Fifth Skill

Lin Mu felt surprised at this and wondered if he could do the same. If he could, then his power would skyrocket again.

Lin Mu closed his eyes and willed for a Nascent soul to be born.

...

....

.....

~Sigh~

"I knew it was too much to wish for something this big." Lin Mu said after seeing no results.

"Do not worry, you will just need more time. You are bound to reach the Nascent Soul realm, eventually." Xukong assured.

Lin Mu nodded his head and checked for any other changes that he may have had. It was now that he remembered something.

"Wait, every time I progressed my cultivation base the ring gave me a new skill. Why hasn't it done yet?" Lin Mu wondered.

"Well, you've been dormant for a long time so that could be the reason behind it." Xukong guessed,

"I'll try to see if I can get it to activate..." Lin Mu said.

He focused on the ring and suddenly disappeared from the cave. He appeared inside the ring and saw the Silvery Grey streaks of spatial energy that flickered in the sky. In the distance, he could see a vortex of them that was swirling above who could only be senior Xukong.

~shua~

The vortex dissipated, and Xukong came flying towards Lin Mu.

"Ah, seems like you were able to pull yourself into the ring consciously now," Xukong said.

"Yes senior. When trying it, I felt that I could finally do it and thus entered the ring." Lin Mu said.

"Good... and can you estimate how long you can stay here without problems?" Xukong questioned.

"Hmm... I have this gut feeling that I can stay for thirty minutes." Lin Mu said.

"That's great, actually. If it were a Dao Shell cultivator, even he would have a hard time staying here for more than ten minutes. Your compatibility with the spatial attribute has definitely increased." Xukong praised.

"Thank you, senior." Lin Mu said in a grateful voice.

He looked towards the faint glow that was coming from the distance and started walking toward it. About two minutes later, he reached the barrier that surrounded the Ethereal altar.

Lin Mu looked towards Xukong and asked, "have you managed to get past the barrier yet senior?"

"No..." Xukong replied as he shook his head, which looked a bit comical. "This is the farthest I've come, and even now I can't go past it. Only you can." Xukong added.

"I see... I guess the key to getting past the barrier is the key itself." Lin Mu hypothesized.

He touched the barrier, and it split apart for him to pass. He could feel the calling from the Altar and knew that his previous hypothesis was right.

The reason the ring had not summoned him directly was because he could enter here on his own now and didn't need to force him to come. This was better for Lin Mu, as he didn't know if there would come a time in the future when he would be accidentally pulled into the ring while he was doing something important.

He saw the altar as it started to get brighter and new runes started appearing from it. Lin Mu placed his hand on the altar's surface and triggered it. The runes turned into streaks of light that entered his head one by one at a great speed.

Lin Mu felt a sharp pain in his head, but bore through it. About five minutes passed before it stopped and the transmission of information had been completed. A new memory had appeared in Lin Mu's mind, and he could tell that it was the new skill that the altar had bestowed upon him.

"So... what did you get this time?" Xukong questioned.

"I got the fifth skill from the altar. It is called... Meld." Lin Mu revealed.

"Meld? Do you know what it does?" Xukong questioned.

"It can basically allow me to alter the fabric of space, up to what level I do not know that." Lin Mu answered.

"That is... rather strong. This is not something that can be done by anyone. Though why do you seem apprehensive?" Xukong spoke.

"Umm... this skill. It seems complex... I feel like while I know the working of it, I do not know if I'll be able to use it. This skill is... quite different from the other four which directly worked; this one seems to require manual control from me." Lin Mu revealed.

"Hmm... I see. Well, manipulation of the spatial fabric is no joke and thus it is understandable that it would be difficult. Your previous four skills focused on a particular aspect of spatial manipulation and thus could be used automatically I think, but this one had more functions than just one." Xukong explained.

~Sigh~

"I'll have to use and see it myself. I cannot do it here, I must return to the real world." Lin Mu stated.

"Let's go back then, I'll observe," Xukong replied.

"Alright senior," Lin Mu said, and willed himself to leave the ring.

~shua~

Lin Mu appeared in the real world and felt a bit disoriented for a second before recovering.

'Will take a few tries to get used to that...' he thought.

He then focused his mind on the fifth skill Meld and triggered it while targeting the wall in front of him. Suddenly a large chunk of his spirit Qi got drained in an instant, which made him flinch.

~Rip~

~Crack~

Lin Mu held his head, which was spinning now, and tried to calm himself down before looking at the wall that he had targeted.

"Huh? What is this?" Lin Mu muttered in confusion.

The part which he had particularity targeted was now popping out of the wall. It was as if a brick had been moved from a large wall and that's what it looked like to him, except it was a large part of the rock wall instead of a brick.

The part of the wall was about two meters wide and was poking out of the wall halfway. Looking at its depth, Lin Mu could tell it was half a meter wide as well.

Chapter 432 - Complex Skill

Lin Mu walked closer to check what had exactly happened and spread his spirit sense.

'It got cut off from the wall and pushed out?' Lin Mu thought observing the internal part of the wall.

He held onto the rock and pulled it out.

~Thud~

The rock fell to the floor and made a loud sound, spreading vibrations through the ground. Lin Mu looked at the edges and sides of the rock and found them to be smooth. In fact, the entire rock was a perfect rectangle that had been cut out of the wall.

"I think I can explain what the skill did." Xukong suddenly spoke.

"Oh, you do? Please explain to me senior," Lin Mu requested.

"The fifth skill allows you to manipulate the fabric of space, right? What it did here is it displaced the fabric in the place around the rock, which caused it to move out. But in reality, it did not move out, just that the 'space' it was located in was shifted.

This led to it being completely being cut out from the wall when the skill deactivated." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu thought for a bit and understood it, even reaching a few conclusions of his own.

"Wait senior, this means that as long as the skill is active, I can move parts of such objects around and then put them back without them breaking?" Lin Mu asked for clarity.

"Yes, it should be possible. As the object self is complete and connected, what you are doing is creating a 'gap' between the particles of the objects. As long as the skill is active the gap is maintained while keeping the object connected.

But when the skill deactivates, the gap returns to its original size, leaving behind the object as it could not be reconnected autocratically." Xukong answered.

"I see..." Lin Mu muttered.

He could think of many ideas and uses for the skill, but then his mind went back to the consumption of the skill.

~Sigh~

"Just as I expected..." Lin Mu muttered, seeing his Dantian.

"What's the problem?" Xukong asked.

"Take a look senior," Lin Mu replied, sharing his vision with Xukong.

"Ah... of course if its consuming attribute less spirit Qi the consumption would be great." Xukong stated.

A single activation of the fifth skill Meld had consumed about one thousand drops of Lin Mu's spirit Qi. Thankfully he had plenty of liquid spirit Qi in his Dantian for now thus it didn't affect him as much.

But this alone had put the skill at the highest consumption skill in Lin Mu's list of skills. Lin Mu could think of a lot of prospects in which he could use this skill offensively, but he would have to consider this to be a trump card rather than a regular use skill.

Besides, Lin Mu knew that he had to gain better control over the skill if he wanted to use it in a battle. This skill was likely to hurt even himself if he made a mistake during its use. The great drain on his spirit Qi could also become a shackle for him in a prolonged battle.

"The practice for it will be a bit strenuous and the consumption great. Had it not been for the Great Slumber bear's bloodline it would become quite difficult for me..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

The bloodline ability 'well of slumber' would activate even when Lin Mu was sleeping normally. The 'long slumber' that Lin Mu had fallen into after assimilating the bloodline was not likely to happen for a while and he would know when it would happen again. This way Lin Mu could increase his efficiency by making his sleep time his cultivation time.

Another thing was that he had not checked the difference between the efficiency of the Severing heart sutra and the Bloodline's capacity to absorb spirit Qi. At first glance, the bloodline ability seemed to be much faster, but it also had the additional cost of requirement Vital energy to maintain its operation.

Whereas the severing heart sutra could continually absorb spirit Qi without any additional cost. The Basic Qi pills could even be used to speed the process, and as long as he had an uninterrupted supply, the speed of absorption could be even faster than the bloodline.

'Hmm, I need to find a balance between both the methods...' Lin Mu thought.

With that out of the way, Lin Mu's mind finally freed up for other things and he realized that he was forgetting something. His eyes wandered to an empty bowl that was lying on a flat rock some distance away from him. The bowl was covered with dust and some water could also be seen within it.

"Little Shrubby! I almost forgot about him!" Lin Mu exclaimed.

Lin Mu closed his eyes as he focused on his connection with Little Shrubby. For the entire period that he was in the Sleepscape, he couldn't really sense the connection and thus had lost the attention of it.

But now that he was awake, he had to consciously find the connection which was still within his mind, just that it had gotten a bit weaker over the time.

"How did the connection get weaker?" Lin Mu wondered.

"Hmm... normally the connection between a master and a tamed beast gets broken when one of them dies. Seeing as you were in a dormant condition that was similar to that of death, there is a chance that the connection may have gotten weaker because of that." Xukong explained.

Hearing the answer, Lin Mu became anxious and spread his spirit sense around. It pierced the rocks and went all around the caves, but there was no result. The caves were empty and there was no one there.

Lin Mu tried to see if he could feel Little Shrubby's position from the connection, but he couldn't. All that could be felt from the connection currently was that Little Shrubby was alive and nothing more.

He couldn't even communicate with it after trying a few times.

Chapter 433 - Not So Little Shrubby?

Lin Mu went to the entrance of the cave and saw something that surprised him. The rock that he had placed before going to sleep, it had been moved. He had placed two rocks at the entrance, one big that covered half of it and one small that covered a quarter.

The small one was the one that had been moved. It was not set against the side of the wall and Lin Mu could see moss covering it.

"Hmm... it hasn't been moved in a long time." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He saw the faint drag marks on the floor and found them to be peculiar.

"These marks... they can't be created in a single push. Someone moved this rock in the same manner multiple times for it to create marks like this." Lin Mu hypothesized.

But then when he considered the moss growing on it, he didn't know when it had occurred. Putting the thought at the back of his mind for now Lin Mu left the cave and looked outside for the first time.

Everything seemed to be the same as before he slept, except some trees that seemed to have grown. There was also a rather unnerving silence in the area which was not how Lin Mu remembered the forest being.

"Did something happen? A strong beast's presence, perhaps?" Lin Mu wondered.

His spirit sense spread around but he still couldn't find anything of importance. The ground was still covered in a thin snow and Lin Mu could tell that it was summer time.

'It should be the peak of summer, or the snow wouldn't be this thin.' Lin Mu thought and summoned the short sword before jumping on it and flying to the sky.

~Zoom~

He almost fell off the short sword due to the speed at which he flew. Lin Mu had not used it for a long time and now that his cultivation base had greatly increased his control over the short sword had gotten a bit worse.

'Need to get used to it again. The power output is much higher than before...' Lin Mu thought to himself.

Lin Mu's sharp eyes wandered around the northern forest, and his presence peaked. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, concentrating spirit Qi in him.

~huu~

"LITTLE SHRUBBY!" He shouted.

His voice that had been amplified by the spirit Qi echoed throughout the forest and in the mountains at the back.

~chirp~chirp~chirp~

~growl~

~howl~

The beasts of the forest became shocked by his voice and the power contained within it, causing them to panic and run around. For a minute, only the sounds of the beasts escaping could be heard, but after that silence descended in the forest again.

Seeing that there was no result, Lin Mu was about to give up and manually search for Little Shrubby but then he heard the sounds of footsteps coming from afar.

~rustle~rustle~rustle~

The trees moved around as if someone was moving on their branches. Lin Mu couldn't exactly tell what it was due to the thick leaves and the snow that fell from the trees, but he guessed that it was something big.

~grr~

A low growl could be heard coming from a distance of two hundred meters away, which suddenly disappeared.

"Huh? Where did it go?" Lin Mu wondered.

He could swear that he felt some faint spirit Qi fluctuations from that area, but they had suddenly faded away without a trace. Lin Mu was about to go look when he felt something at his back papering abruptly.

"Who!" He said and turned around, his spirit sense catching the appearance of the beast.

The speed of the beast was very fast, even with Lin Mu being at the peak stage of the core devastation realm, he couldn't do much as the beast slammed into his chest.

~thud~

Both Lin Mu and the beast fell from the sky to the ground with a muffled thud. Lin Mu had fallen in a pile of snow that had accumulated beneath a tree and thus didn't feel any pain. Beside his body was tough enough to tank hits like these with ease.

~nya~nya~nya~

Lin Mu found the beast rubbing its head on his chest while growling affectionately. He couldn't recognize the beast at first glance but soon felt the connection within him strengthen.

"Little Shrubby?" Lin Mu muttered.

"MASTER!" It replied through the connection.

"It really is you!" Lin Mu said with shock.

"I was waiting for you but you never woke up..." The beast said.

"I'm sorry, I didn't expect it would take so long," Lin Mu replied with a sad expression.

The beast kept on rubbing its head over Lin Mu and he took a closer look at it.

Little Shrubby was not small anymore and had grown ten times as big as before. Its brown fur had mostly darkened into a black color, and red markings had appeared all over its body. The markings formed a straight line over its spine, extending from its head, all the way to the tail. Then over its back the spread into multiple branches extending all the way to its belly. The red markings and the black fur interwove to form a 'M' shaped pattern over its forehead.

The eyes of Little Shrubby were still the same grayish yellow from before, but now tear lines had appeared along with its eyes that extended down to its nose. These tear lines looked rather sharp and gave it a fierce look.

Sharp canines could be seen from the edges of its lips, the tips of which glinted against the sunlight.

'It's less of a house cat and more of a big predatory now, like a tiger or a leopard...' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu curiously checked its cultivation base and was shocked once again.

"The mid stage of the core condensation realm?" Lin Mu muttered in shock.

He was now wondering what exactly happened in these past two years and how did Little Shrubby grow so big.

Chapter 434 - Little Shrubby's Bloodline?

Little Shrubby finally calmed down after a couple of minutes and Lin Mu was able to get up from the snow. He sat down and gazed at it for a bit before speaking.

"What happened while I was sleeping?" Lin Mu asked.

"I ate, I cooked, I hunted, I ate, I slept, I fought, and I grew." Little Shrubby answered simply.

'Why were there two ates?' Lin Mu wondered for a second before coming to the last part where it said it grew.

"How did you exactly grow?" Lin Mu questioned.

"One day I felt a lot of power in me after finishing the beast cores and I fell asleep. When I woke up I was bigger." Little Shrubby answered.

'Well, that was a straightforward and simple answer...' Lin Mu thought.

"Do you have any idea what happened senior Xukong?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm... check its core again. I think you'll find it yourself." Xukong suggested.

Lin Mu extended his spirit sense and probed the beast core of little shrubby. There he finally found the biggest change. Not only was its core big, but it also had patterns on it. Lin Mu knew right away that it was an awakened bloodline, but the strange thing was there was more than one pattern on it.

"It has awakened a bloodline, but it is incomplete and along with that it is also mutating." Xukong suddenly spoke after seeing it through the shared vision with Lin Mu.

"It's mutating? Will that be bad senior?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Not necessarily. Its core is relatively stable, and its body seems to be normal too. From what I can tell, it was gonna awaken one bloodline but due to the many beast cores it has eaten along with the aptitude increase due to the Dual circle ascension fruit, it has resulted in this." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu thought for a bit before asking again. "What's the main bloodline that it has awakened?"

"From what I can tell, it seems to be that of the Flash Fire Liger, but its physique is vastly different from that. While Flash Fire Liger's are fast, they are not as fast as it either and are much bigger in size.

Every beast can have multiple dormant bloodlines hidden in them and which one is awakened depends on their concentration and the influence of external factors such as resources and fortunate encounters.

In little Shrubby's case, if it underwent a normal awakening after breaking through to the core condensation realm it would have become a Flash Fire Liger. But now there are multiple bloodlines mixed with it.

Usually, this would either cause the beast an injury or cause it to die instantly due to the incompatibility. But they seem to be rather stable for him. In fact, his body is actively trying to adapt to the bloodlines and is mutating itself further." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu was lost in thought after thinking this all and was wondering more about the bloodlines. He had hunted a lot of beasts and thus had given little shrubby a lot of the beast cores to eat.

If what senior Xukong said was accurate, each of those cores could have tens of bloodlines, and any combination of them could be contributing to the mutation.

"So what will be the final bloodline that comes out on the top senior?" Lin Mu questioned, feeling a bit unsure.

"I'm thinking that it will not be any of the bloodlines that he has. Rather, the bloodlines would mutate together to form a completely new bloodline that has likely been never seen before." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu was intrigued by this and was now looking forward to the day when it happens. But for now, the changes in Little Shrubby seemed adequate to him. His strength had certainly grown by a lot.

"Wait senior, currently it has the main bloodline as the Flash Fire Liger, right? What does it do, what is its ability?" Lin Mu questioned.

During the time Lin Mu had spent in the Sleepscape, he had gone through the beast records multiple times and he was sure that there was no mention of a flash fire liger in it. He reckoned that the beast was probably not native to this world or was lost in time.

"The Flash Fire Ligers have great speed and they can control Fire attribute spirit Qi. They can create flames from their claws and mouth that burn at high temperatures. The only disadvantage they have is that their firepower cannot be maintained for long.

They are more of a single hit attack type beasts that kill their prey instantly. Their fast speed and quick attacks ensure that their prey is surely killed." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu looked at little shrubby and spoke.

"You can use fire now?" Lin Mu asked.

"YES! I can make fire whenever I want now. When I grew, I learned how to use fire." Little Shrubby said.

It then flexed its claws and flames ignited on them. The flames were a bright white, and it seemed as if someone had ignited phosphorus. The flames must have only lasted for two seconds, but the snow in a two meter radius around them had directly evaporated.

Lin Mu felt hot on his skin and realized that his clothes had been ignited as well.

"Dammit!" Lin Mu cursed as he jumped into the snow, snuffing out the fire.

Half of his clothes had been burned and the parts that remained intact were now blackened with soot covering them.

~Sigh~

"They were new robes too... I should have expected something like this..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He looked back at Little Shrubby, who was gazing at him with a tilted head.

~chuckle~

Seeing the beast looking at him like that made Lin Mu chuckle, and he pushed the event of his clothes burning to the back of his mind.

"Okay, so you need to tell me if you're going to use fire near me again." Lin Mu stated.

"Okay," Little Shrubby spoke.

Chapter 435 - Northern Tribe And Elemental Affinity

Now that Little Shrubby's case was cleared with Lin Mu, all he had to do was wait and watch as his bloodline matured on its own.

"How long do you think it would take senior?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm... that is hard to answer. It can be anytime, to be honest. It can happen today itself or a hundred years from now. There are far too many possibilities that can affect it and the circumstance may change as well." Xukong answered.

"I see..." Lin Mu responded while nodding his head.

Lin Mu now wondered what his next course of action should be. He had awakened and even increased his cultivation by a great extent. Not only that, but even Little Shrubby was much stronger than before.

Lin Mu went over his goals and knew that killing Gu Yao was one that he needed to do definitely. But that also needed preparation as he couldn't just rush in blindly without any information.

Even if Lin Mu was at the peak stage of the core condensation realm, he dared not underestimate the man. Back then Gu Yao was at the pseudo Dao shell realm, who knows what level he was at today.

Lin Mu was still not clear about how much time had passed and asking Little Shrubby that was not a viable action. The beast had no proper sense of time either, as it had spent a while sleeping too while it was having a bloodline awakening.

"Looks like you will have to ask a human." Xukong said.

"Mmm, yeah." Lin Mu responded before looking at little shrubby. "Did you see any humans here while I was asleep?" Lin Mu asked.

Little Shrubby nodded its head and said, "yes, a few humans appeared in the forest sometime after you fell asleep. I only saw them from far and didn't catch their attention. After that a few more humans came, but they didn't stay in the area for long."

"Oh? Where did the second batch of humans go?" Lin Mu asked.

"They went there," Little Shrubby pointed in the southern direction.

"To the south? Wait! Where did they come from?" Lin Mu asked again, this time feeling that something was wrong.

"They came from the opposite direction. I saw them flying over the mountain there." Little Shrubby answered.

A serious expression appeared on Lin Mu's face as he thought of the most dangerous possibility.

"What kind of clothes were they wearing? Were they similar to what I'm wearing or the ones from the town?" Lin Mu asked in detail, knowing that the beast may not have a clear idea of clothes.

"Umm... they wore clothes that looked like the fur of other beasts. They were big clothes, and they looked small in it." Little Shrubby answered.

Lin Mu instantly realized who the humans were.

"The Northern Tribes... only they would wear clothes like that and come from the northern mountains." Lin Mu said, "looks like Gu Yao made his move. Seeing as they are allies of his." Lin Mu added.

"Seems like we need to get more intel on it," Xukong said.

"Indeed, we need to go to a nearby settlement. But going to the northern town would be risky who knows if they will be looking for me." Lin Mu stated, knowing that Gu Yao would have likely controlled everyone by now.

"Well, you shouldn't have much of a problem sneaking in with your skills. Besides, I doubt many people will even recognize you now." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu's gaze wandered into the water puddle in which he saw his reflection. He then realized that he looked vastly different from before and not only that, but his voice was different now too.

"It would be good if that happens. Still... I better be cautious." Lin Mu said.

"Speaking of cautious, I think it is time I finally give you the technique I was telling you about before," Xukong said.

"Technique? You mean the technique for Five treasures realm?" Lin Mu asked with excitement.

"Well... not exactly. While the technique can contribute to the progression of the Five Treasures realm too, it is not specifically made for it. It's more of a defensive technique you see." Xukong answered.

"Oh? That seems interesting. What's the technique called?" Lin Mu asked.

"The Technique is called as the Mortal Strengthening Scripture. This is a rather common body cultivation technique that can be found across multiple worlds. Its advantage is that nearly anyone can use it, but the disadvantage is that the resources needed to practice it increases exponentially as you go through its stages." Xukong replied.

"What does the technique exactly do?" Lin Mu asked further.

"The technique is actually an earth attribute technique. Like the earthen Qi pills, it increases your defense. But unlike the earthen Qi pills which create a temporary armor, this technique will directly toughen your skin instead. Theoretically, it has five stages, but the highest anyone has reached is the fourth stage. The resources needed for the fifth stage are so many that people would rather buy a better technique instead, rather than practice it further." Xukong explained.

"But senior if it's an earth attribute technique, won't I need to use earth attribute spirit Qi? We don't know if I have compatibility with it." Lin Mu said with apprehension.

"Actually, your natural affinity has always been with the earth element," Xukong stated.

"What? Why did you never tell me?" Lin Mu asked.

"I was unsure of it too. Because of the ring, your physique has changed beyond what should have normally been possible. I didn't know if it was influencing your affinity with the elements and if we tried to check it then, the results would have likely been inconsistent.

But when you used those Earthen Qi pills, it was confirmed that you had a proper affinity with the earth element. If it were not so, the armor would not have been able to bear the attack of Gu Yao so well back then.

Thus for now you have the affinity with two elements; the spatial element bestowed upon you by the ring and your natural affinity with earth." Xukong explained.

Chapter 436 - Mortal Strengthening Scripture

Lin Mu was now excited to learn the new technique and also wanted to see its effects. But there were also some questions that he had.

"Senior, if it requires a lot of resources will I be able to cultivate it right now?" Lin Mu questioned.

"The first two stages shouldn't be much of a problem, as all you need is spirit Qi for them. The ones after that need earth attribute herbs to progress it. The good thing about the technique is that it has no specific requirement for the herbs and any would work.

No matter how low quality they are they can still be used, the only problem would be that they would need an even greater quantity to compensate for the quality." Xukong answered.

"Ah, I understand senior." Lin Mu responded.

"Now then, I'll transfer the technique to your mind," Xukong said.

Lin Mu nodded his head and felt a slight prick in his mind. It lasted for a couple of seconds before new knowledge appeared in his memories.

"So this is the Mortal Strengthening scripture..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

The overall method of practicing the technique was rather simple. The technique would convert his spirit Qi into earth element spirit Qi and then use that to strengthen his skin. There were five stages to this skill, and each level increased the defensive ability exponentially.

According to the instructions, the first two stages only needed spirit Qi to progress while the others would need herbs. But the exact requirement for them was not set and depending on the person's affinity to the earth element it would be more or less.

For Lin Mu who had an innate affinity to the earth element, it wasn't going to be much. He followed the method and circulated his spirit Qi. The spirit Qi reached a different meridian, which he had not used before.

This meridian went to his Spleen, which was one of the five treasured organs. It was also the organ that represented the earth element. Lin Mu had already learned of the theories behind the different meridians and organs back in the Sleepscape.

This was something he was lacking in compared to the disciples of a cultivation sect, as they were taught this as preliminarily knowledge. But now Lin Mu knew it too, and had thoroughly memorized it.

Being in the Sleepscape had been really useful for him, as it had allowed him to narrow the gap he had compared to the sect disciple. And now it could be said that Lin Mu had far exceeded most of them. He was already at the peak stage of the core condensation realm and was close to the Nascent Soul stage as well.

As soon as he gets acclimated to his new cultivation base, it wouldn't take him long to reach the pseudo nascent soul realm. Most of the disciples who reached this point were already considered as the core disciples of a sect. And if it were a weaker sect, they would already be elders.

Lin Mu's spirit Qi flowed to his spleen and slowly started being converted into earth attribute spirit Qi. The conversion was not a hundred percent efficient and there was a loss of spirit Qi too. Though overall, he was able to convert around sixty percent of his spirit Qi into earth attribute spirit Qi.

Lin Mu knew that this was only because of his lack of practice and once he gets more proficient in it the ratio would only increase and he wouldn't have to waste any of the spirit Qi.

After the earth element spirit Qi was refined, it flowed back to his Dantian. In his Dantian it formed a separate pool that was brown colored. This pool was much smaller than the ocean of spirit Qi of course but was slowly growing, the more Lin Mu refined the spirit Qi.

About an hour passed like this, and Lin Mu had refined about a thousand drops of liquid spirit Qi. The pool of earth attribute spirit Qi had now become a lake and contrasted with the transparent ocean of the attributeless spirit Qi.

~huu~

Lin Mu opened his eyes and let out a breath.

"This should be enough for now. On to the next step now..." Lin Mu muttered before closing his eyes again.

The earth attribute spirit Qi flowed out from his Dantian and reached his arms first. There it seeped out of his skin and started covering it in a thin layer. Little by little, it spread from his arms to his shoulders and then onto his back, from there it finally reached his legs.

Now his entire body leaving his head was covered in a thin brown layer that looked like mud. Lin Mu continued pouring more earth attribute spirit Qi into it, and the layer started to get thicker. When the layer reached a thickness of one centimeter, a wave of spirit Qi was released from his body and his skin glowed for a few seconds before calming down.

The brown layer that was covering his skin disappeared, and Lin Mu opened his eyes. He looked at his arms and wondered if it was successful. According to the technique, he should have completed the first stage now.

"You should test it out," Xukong suggested.

"Yes senior, I'll try." Lin Mu said before looking for Little Shrubby.

Little shrubby had become bored while Lin Mu was practicing and had gotten a beast to eat till then. It had already set up a small camp fire and was grilling the meat on it. He was even using his own claws as skewers, unafraid of the fire.

"When did he get this?" Lin Mu wondered and called out. "Little Shrubby, come help me."

The beast looked at Lin Mu and stuffed the meat he was grilling on its claws into its mouth, before going towards Lin Mu.

"What do you need help with Master?" He asked.

"I need to test out a new technique, so I want you to attack me."

Chapter 437 - Test And Hunt

Little Shrubby was reluctant to say the least, but after a little bit of explaining, it finally agreed to Lin Mu's request.

"I'm gonna attack now, master." Little shrubby said.

Lin Mu extended his hand and Little Shrubby clawed at it.

~Shing~

A brown glow appeared on Lin Mu's arm and the thin mud like layer appeared on his skin, blocking the attack. After blocking it, the layer faded away and Lin Mu's arm returned to normal.

"Again, this time with more strength." Lin Mu ordered.

"Alright," Little Shrubby responded before attacking him with more power.

~Shing~

The brown light appeared again, but this time it seemed to be a bit dull.

'Hmm... looks like the first stage can only handle an attack up to this strength.' Lin Mu thought.

"Do it once more." Lin Mu spoke.

~Crack~

This time, as soon as Little Shrubby's claws hit his skin, the brown layer cracked and disappeared. This showed Lin Mu that two attacks were the current limit for the first stage and if he wanted it to last more, he would need to progress the technique further.

Lin Mu looked at his arm and felt the drain on the earthen spirit Qi he had refined in his Dantian. It was being consumed to repair the defensive layer on his arm. It took a minute before the layer returned to its previous state.

"Hmm... at least the repair doesn't take much of the earth attribute spirit Qi." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He checked his Dantian and saw that he had about six hundred drops of earth attribute spirit Qi left. It had taken him four hundred drops to reach the first stage and now needed to see how much would be needed for the second stage.

'I think I'll need to refine more of the spirit Qi...' Lin Mu thought.

He followed the method for the second stage of the mortal strengthening scripture and poured the earth attribute spirit Qi into it. The layer on his skin became slightly thicker, and now it didn't look like mud. Instead, it was starting to look like stone instead.

But before it could be completed, his earth attribute spirit Qi ran out.

~Sigh~

"I'll just complete it later," Lin Mu muttered to himself as he felt a little hungry.

He looked at little Shrubby who was back to cooking and smiled.

"Show me how much you've improved in the time I was asleep." Lin Mu said.

"Yes, master!" Little Shrubby said happily, but then looked at the meat it had with a little lost expression.

"We will need more meat," Little shrubby said.

"Oh, yeah... we definitely will..." Lin Mu agreed and spread his spirit sense around.

There were a few smaller spirit beasts in the range, but nothing that would be worth his time.

"What are you doing, master? The beasts are there," Little Shrubby said.

"Oh wait, you can just smell them out!" Lin Mu realized.

"Yes I can, let's go get some." Little Shrubby nodded its head and ran in the direction it had pointed towards.

Lin Mu brought out his short sword and flew on it, following behind little shrubby. It didn't even take a minute before little shrubby dug its claws into the neck of a late stage Qi refining realm beast. It then threw it towards Lin Mu, who quickly stored it before continuing onwards.

A minute later little shrubby found another beast that was at the peak stage of the Qi refining realm. Lin Mu also learned another thing during all this, nearly every beast was scared of little Shrubby.

It was especially proved when they came across a mid stage core condensation realm beast that looked like a wolf that had the horns on its head. There were four of them, one pair that came from behind its ears and went up and the second pair that went downwards below its chin.

"A horn helmed Wolf!" Lin Mu muttered, recognizing the beast.

The four horns formed a sort of a helmet around its head, hence the name. Usually, a beast like this would not have backed down without a fight, but as soon as it saw little shrubby it started running.

Lin Mu could hear the scared growls of the beast, but couldn't exactly tell what it was saying. Still, Lin Mu could understand the words of Little Shrubby and guessed the condition of the wolf from it.

"Where are you running? Come here, my master is hungry!" Little Shrubby spoke.

"Uhh... I don't think it will stop just because you say that..." Lin Mu muttered to himself, feeling a bit awkward.

He could tell that if little Shrubby wanted to catch the beast, it would be easy with his speed. Right now it was merely playing with the beast.

"Why don't you catch it now?" Lin Mu asked little shrubby.

"If I let them run for a bit like this, their meat tastes better later when I cook it." Little Shrubby said.

"Umm... okay..." Lin Mu replied.

"Looks like it has been focusing on cooking too, Ahahaha." Xukong laughed.

Lin Mu watched as Little shrubby chased the wolf for about five more minutes before moving with a burst of speed.

A bright light flashed as its claws shined and heat exuded from them. The claws came close to the wolf's neck and started burning its flesh before they were even touched. The wolf let out a pain filled cry but was soon silenced as its neck was lopped off.

~thud~

~sizzle~

The head of the wolf rolled on the ground and no blood could be seen coming off from it or the body. The flesh had been burned by the claws of little shrubby and the cut had been cauterized which prevented the blood from spilling out.

The snow around the area evaporated too, and the fur of the wolf was singed from the heat as well. Lin Mu looked at the damage and thought that it was good he stayed behind or he would have lost another pair of robes.

"Well... lunch time."

Chapter 438 - Second Stage Of The Mortal Strengthening Scripture

Lin Mu was currently sprawled on the ground in the soft snow, while rubbing his bulging belly. He had eaten for the first time in a quite a long while because of which the food only tasted that much delicious.

He had also gotten to taste Little Shrubby's cooking which was acceptable to say the least. Without any spices or condiments, the beast had done well. Lin Mu had eaten a little from what Little Shrubby had cooked and the rest he had made himself.

He still had plenty of spices and condiments left in his ring and they would probably last him for a month or two if he kept the same rate of consumption. Little Shrubby was also lying on the side in the snow but

the snow kept on melting under its body heat. Eventually, he just broke a few pine branches and laid on them.

Lin Mu laid like this for a while and thought of his plans. The first step was to get the Mortal Strengthening Scripture to the second stage and then to go and gather information from the nearby settlements.

Another thing that Lin Mu was a bit surprised about was that not a single beast dared to come near the area that they were in. Except for a few small animals, Lin Mu couldn't see any other beasts.

"That is because of Little Shrubby. With his strength, he is already a dominant beast that others will not challenge. Even a peak stage core condensation realm beast is not likely to come out on top due to Little Shrubby's speed and abilities." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu nodded his head and wondered how much fast Little Shrubby had gotten. He knew that while hunting the Horn Helmed Wolf, it had not used its full speed and it could go even beyond that.

Even when little shrubby was at the late stage of the Qi refining realm it was already faster than most Core condensation realm beasts. But now it has only increased by a lot more and Lin Mu was looking forward to seeing it.

'Wait a minute... can I do that?' Lin Mu suddenly had an idea that appeared in his mind that excited him a bit.

He temporarily put this idea at the back of his mind and sat down to cultivate. He needed to refine more spirit Qi and then further refine it into earth attribute spirit Qi. He took out the box of basic Qi pills and popped in five of them in his mouth all at once.

With his current cultivation, five pills were easy for him to handle and in less than ten minutes he had already assimilated the spirit Qi wisps and was now converting them into liquid form.

His speed had certainly increased by quite a lot and his core would passively convert the wisps into drops as well. While the speed could not be compared to when Well of Slumber was active, it was still three times as fast as before.

Lin Mu watched as the spirit Qi accumulated into his Dantian again. He spent the rest of the day doing this and by night he had enough earth attribute spirit Qi for him to use for the mortal strengthening scripture.

"Master, I brought food!" Little Shrubby announced.

While Lin Mu was busy in cultivation, little shrubby had taken the responsibility of procuring food. A pile of beast corpses could be seen kept near a side and a bloody scent that was mixed with burning was wafting from it. Lin Mu could see the scorch marks on the corpses, evidently the work of Little Shrubby's claws.

"Thank you," Lin Mu said with a smile and quickly cooked some food for him and little Shrubby to eat.

The beast was also enjoying the added flavor of the spices and watched closely when Lin Mu applied it to the meat. Lin Mu would have given it some spices to use as well, but they would have to figure out a method for him to use them.

"Wait, senior! Can beasts use spirit tools as well?" Lin Mu questioned.

Xukong who had been busy in his cultivation, woke up due to the question and replied, "yes they can, of course. It is just that not all spirit tools are compatible with them and they would need some special ones made."

"Hmm... I guess we can get something made that will help little shrubby in cooking." Lin Mu muttered.

Xukong looked on in awkwardness as he imagined a large cat cooking while using an expensive spirit tool that was the form of a spatula. 'Hmm... that would be a first. I don't think anyone has gotten a spirit tool made for a beast, that too for cooking.'

Xukong left Lin Mu in his thoughts and returned back to his own cultivation. It had spent most of the time teaching while in the Sleepscape and thus hadn't had enough time to cultivate himself.

He had already restored his cultivation back to the state it was in before dealing with Gu Yao and had even exceeded it a little bit. Currently, he just hoped to reach a stage where he would be ready for anything that was thrown at them.

"That strange feeling I've been having... is it a premonition perhaps..." Xukong muttered to himself.

Lin Mu meanwhile was now practicing the Mortal Strengthening scripture. He had already covered a certain part of the second stage and only needed to finish it now. He started pouring the earth attribute spirit Qi he had refined before and its amount in the Dantian started reducing.

The brown layer appeared on Lin Mu's skin again and stone like patterns started appearing on it. They kept on getting more and more clear until a glowing light was emitted by it. This signified that the second stage was now complete, and it had taken about half of the entire store of earth element spirit Qi Lin Mu had refined.

~huu~

"Let's test it again..."

Chapter 439 - Affinity With Space

~shua~

Lin Mu slid back on the ground as he bore the impact from Little Shrubby's attack.

He had asked little Shrubby to attack him again to test the defensive ability of the Mortal Strengthening Scripture to see its effects, but not a single difference could be seen on the brown layer, which had stone like patterns on it.

This was already the third attack of Little Shrubby and Lin Mu could now consider it to decent for defending against most attacks below the Nascent Soul realm. This combined with Lin Mu's own body's toughness, should protect him from quite a bit of harm.

~pew~

"This is pretty good. I'm looking forward to the next stage of the technique now. But I'll need resources for that." Lin Mu said.

'Hmm... resources... can those pills work, maybe?' Lin Mu wondered.

"Senior can I use the earthen Qi pills for furthering the Mortal Strengthening scripture. You said that it has no minimum requirement right? So this can work too?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm... they should work. You may as well try it out, the pills won't be worth much to you now anyway with the mortal strengthening scriptures defenses." Xukong replied.

"Alright, I'll try it." Lin Mu said, before withdrawing the bottle that contained the earthen Qi pills.

He ate one of them and practiced the method for the third stage of the Mortal Strengthening scripture. The medicinal properties of the pill spread in his body but instead of forming an armor, they started being absorbed into the brown layer instead.

In less than ten seconds, it was completely absorbed and Lin Mu could not see any difference.

"Need more, I guess..." He muttered and ate another earthen Qi pill.

There was still no effect and only when he ate a total of six pills did he see some change on the brown layer. The stone like pattern on it had become a little fainter and instead a set of lines were now appearing on it.

Lin Mu felt like he needed to supply it earth attribute spirit Qi and thus he did. He poured all the remaining earth attribute spirit Qi he had before the lines on his skin became more apparent.

~hoo~

"Seems like I will need much more than just this... but this change is still good." Lin Mu spoke.

"Indeed. The Mortal Strengthening scripture takes an average person who has no affinity with the earth element about a year to reach the same level as you are right now. While you only took a day, this is extremely good." Xukong praised.

"Really senior? It's that much of a difference?" Lin Mu asked feeling shocked.

"Yes... the difference in elemental affinity can be a great game changer. That is why sects do affinity exams for their more talented disciples before they start to cultivate. This way the most appropriate cultivation technique can be chosen for them.

In your case, we didn't have the right tools to check you and I could not use the power of my main body either or it would have been easy. Thankfully, the earthen Qi pill helped a lot and showed your affinity with the earth element." Xukong spoke.

"I have two affinities right, senior? Space and earth?" Lin Mu asked for clarity.

"Yes. Though there is a slight difference between them. Your affinity with earth is something you were innately born with, while your affinity with the spatial element is something that has been bestowed upon you by the ring.

Another part is that your affinity with the spatial element is still growing and currently it cannot be said to be at an acceptable level." Xukong replied.

"It's not at an acceptable level?" Lin Mu said with confusion.

"Indeed. Cultivators who have an innate affinity for the spatial element would also have spatial sensing abilities. If I were to give an example, I guess we can just consider the ring itself.

If it was a cultivator with a proper spatial affinity that obtained the ring instead of you, I reckon he would have already been able to manipulate space just on his own without depending on the skills provided by ring." Xukong explained.

"Hmm... I understand." Lin Mu nodded his head but did not feel bad, as it was the truth.

"Though I think the reason why the ring gives you the skills at certain points may be related to this," Xukong added.

"Why is that so senior?" Lin Mu asked.

"Hmm... it is like the ring is giving you skills that are usable at that specific cultivation base. It gave you skills that only manipulate one specific aspect of space at once. This allows you to gain a better understanding as you can observe it better.

This... may be the way the ring is teaching you and increasing your proficiency of the spatial element. I think the latter goal would be so that you are able to manipulate space on your own without depending on the ring.

Of course, this is just my hypothesis." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu was lost in thought after hearing senior Xukong's words and found them to be quite logical.

Lin Mu then remembered one of the abilities of the ring, which was not actually a skill.

"Wait, senior does this relate to how I can open the spatial rifts? I mean it is not actually a proper skill that was given to me by the ring. It's just something that I automatically knew." Lin Mu said feeling unsure.

"Yes, that is indeed a good example. If you can do that, you should be able to do a lot more things once your proficiency with the spatial manipulation increases. The fifth skill 'Meld' should help you in this aspect as it seems to have a lot of applications that I can think of." Xukong answered.

"I see..." Lin Mu spoke after hearing Xukong's words.

After a while, he laid down on the ground and slept, appearing in the Sleepscape while the Well of slumber activated automatically and spirit Qi started stirring in his body.

Chapter 440 - A Speedy Ride

Morning came and Lin Mu woke up with the prodding of Little Shrubby. The sky was rather gloomy today and thick clouds could be seen. Lin Mu stood up and stretched a bit before being pulled by little Shrubby to cook.

Little Shrubby had already gone out beforehand and hunted some beasts for them to eat.

"Well... this will save us some time." Lin Mu said before beginning to cook the meat.

Soon they finished the breakfast and Lin Mu got prepared to leave. Today would be the first time he would be returning to civilization in a long time. He had spent a lot of time in isolation and even with senior Xukong being there; he now desired to see some other humans.

Though he knew he would have to be a lot more cautious, as there was no saying what was going to happen out there.

Lin Mu was now sitting on the back of Little Shrubby and tightly holding onto his fur.

"You ready, master?" Little Shrubby asked.

"Yup, let's go." Lin Mu answered.

This was the idea that Lin Mu had gotten yesterday. He had seen now little shrubby was faster than the spirit sword and how it could carry heavy beast corpses in his mouth and run at the same pace with no problem.

This led Lin Mu to believe that he may be able to ride Little Shrubby and travel that way. He thus asked him about this a few minutes ago, and the beast agreed right away.

"Start a bit slower and speed up as I tell you." Lin Mu added.

He knew that if Little Shrubby started sprinting from the very start, he would be sent back flying due to the momentum. He needed to hold on tight so as to be safe. Lin Mu watched on as the trees around him became a blur and wind assaulted his face.

~WHOOSH~

His hair fluttered in the wind as Little Shrubby ran through the forest. It jumped from tree to tree, traveling in a straight line. Lin Mu leaned a bit forward so as to reduce the wind resistance and squinted his eyes to see ahead.

The incoming wind had made it hard for him to see, but soon he got used to it.

"WOOHOO! This is amazing!" Lin Mu cried out in joy.

A few minutes had passed and by now Lin Mu had gotten habituated to the current speed of little shrubby.

"You can go faster now," Lin Mu said.

"Okay," Little Shrubby replied before speeding up.

~Zoom~

The wind tore as little Shrubby leaped over the trees, its red fur shining under the rays of sunlight that escaped from the gaps of clouds. Beasts were scared as they felt him approach and made way for it.

While running like this little Shrubby's aura was in full display and waves of spirit Qi were emanating from his body as well. It was evident that it was now using spirit Qi to amplify its strength further. Even his spirit sense was extended out to catch the incoming obstacles before it could see them.

'His spirit sense is actually the same range as mine.' Lin Mu thought.

"You should refine your spirit sense further, I think you should be able to increase it by multiple folds by now." Xukong reminded.

"Ah yes, senior." Lin Mu responded.

He couldn't refine his spirit sense when he was in the Sleepscape and thus it had stayed the same length as it was before. Lin Mu knew it would be much easier than before to refine his spirit sense further due to the progress in his cultivation base.

Currently, Lin Mu was heading in the eastern direction and was not going to the Northern town directly. He didn't know what the situation would be like there and it also had a higher chance of having cultivators there.

Thus, the choice he had made right now was to head to the villages in the eastern part of the region. They were much smaller and mostly farmed for grains. Lin Mu knew there would be less security here, relatively speaking and the best choice for him right now.

If Lin Mu were traveling normally, even with his increased cultivation base, it would have taken him about three days to reach the village. But now, with Little Shrubby, the entire journey of hundreds of kilometers was reduced to a single day.

By the time night fell, Lin Mu could already see the farms on the horizon.

"You can stop here." Lin Mu said,

"Okay," Little Shrubby replied before slowing down and eventually coming to a halt.

Little Shrubby had learned to slow down and not abruptly stop when he was carrying Lin Mu, as when they had done this before in the afternoon, Lin Mu had been launched ahead into a tree.

He definitely did not want a repeat of that and thankfully Little Shrubby was able to stop properly. Lin Mu got down from his back and jumped on his short sword to fly up, so that he could get a clear look at the village.

It was night time, so the area was mostly dark and barely any lanterns could be seen. Because the grains had been planted, there was always a danger of the crops being burned due to an accident. Because of this, they would avoid keeping lanterns or any fire sources out near the farms.

At the center of the village where the houses were more densely packed, Lin Mu could see more light.

"I should start from there." Lin Mu muttered to himself and got down.

"You stay here for a bit, I'll call you if I need you." Lin Mu said.

"Alright." Little Shrubby replied.

Lin Mu was just about to leave, but then a thought made him stop.

He looked back at little Shrubby and spoke, "oh and no cooking. I don't want to give out our location to them."

"Okay..." Little Shrubby replied with a slightly disappointed face.

Lin Mu nodded his head and went to the village; with each step, he sank into the ground and then disappeared.