SOVEREIGN OF THE THREE REALMS

BOOK 01
JIANG CHEN AWAKENS:
A SHADOWY RISE

Plow Days

EPUB CREATED BY LISA HAYES

Sovereign of the Three Realms

(三界独尊)

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Synopsis

Jiang Chen, son of the Heavenly Emperor, unexpectedly reincarnated into the body of a despised young noble, thus embarking on the path of the underdog trouncing all comers.

No one has the right to call himself a genius in front of Jiang Chen, as no one has a better understanding of the heavens than the son of the Heavenly Emperor.

Genius?

He who adheres to me shall ascend, those who oppose me can find solace in hell!

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Book 01: Jiang Chen Awakens: A Shadowy Rise

Chapter 1: Son Of The Celestial Emperor, Reincarnation And Rebirth

Jiang Chen felt like his brains were made of mush – as if he was in a dream, but this felt much more real than that. Every inch of skin, every bone in his body, cried out in agony.

"Am I dead? Am I suffering through the fires of purgatory that lie in hell?"

Jiang Chen's first instinct was also that he was dead, but that tenuous hint of breath in his body seemed to remind him otherwise – that he was still alive.

After who knew how long, Jiang Chen suddenly forced his eyes open with a struggle, but found himself in a coffin.

In a coffin? Then, I'm really dead? Jiang Chen became depressed.

"How laughable. I, Jiang Chen, son of the Celestial Emperor, was born with a yin constitution and thus could not practice martial dao. Even when father refined the Sun Moon Pill so that I could enjoy life as long as the heavens exist, I still became father's burden and succumbed to my death when the cataclysm descended from the heavens…."

"Eh? What's going on with my meridians? There's true qi flowing through them?! It's quite weak… wait! This… this isn't my body, this is definitely not my body! I was born with a yin

constitution, so how could I have true qi present in my body?”

“And, if I was truly dead, how could there be true qi flowing through my body?”

It was as if an electrical jolt passed through Jiang Chen’s brain as he laid in the coffin. At the same time, he realized that the body lying in the coffin didn’t belong to him.

“This… what is this? Whose body is this?” This unexpected discovery brought both surprise and joy to him.

He quickly discovered a few fragments of memory in the body.

“This body’s owner was also named Jiang Chen? The son of the duke of the Jiang Han province in the Eastern Kingdom? The name is right, but this is obviously not me! I am the son of the almighty Celestial Emperor – how did I become the scion of such a mundane kingdom?” Jiang Chen’s mind was filled with questions.

“Did I really die in the cataclysm? Is this the reincarnation referred to in legends? The heavens were shattered and the wheel of life smashed… I should’ve been annihilated in the cataclysm with no hope of traveling along the wheel of life! So this means… I’ve really been reincarnated?” Jiang Chen finally confirmed this new reality after perusing the fragments from the past Jiang Chen’s consciousness.

“To think that I was the exalted son of the Celestial Emperor in

my past life, yet was barred from cultivating due to my yin constitution. Yet, now that I've reincarnated into the son of the duke of such a humdrum kingdom, I've gained the potential to train... Oh the irony!"

"The heavens were shattered and order crumbled... I, Jiang Chen, lived a million years in vain in my past life. Although I died with the sun and moon, I couldn't offer any help when the cataclysm arrived. A yin constitution cannot train, and thus is doomed to always be at the mercy of others. My fate was like that of a floating speck of dust – easily dispelled as the wind blew."

Jiang Chen grew somber, lost in his thoughts as he thought of the treatment he'd suffered in his past life, and of his father who had developed the Sun Moon Pill at such a great cost, so that his son's mortal body could enjoy life as long as the sun and moon's.

He knew that this life and death separation was possibly an eternal farewell!

Even though he had lived a million years, even though he possessed great intelligence – when he thought of his father the Celestial Emperor painstakingly taking care of him, hot tears still spilled out of his eyes.

He knew, the heavens were shattered. Even if one were as almighty as the Celestial Emperor, it was almost impossible to survive the cataclysm.

Jiang Chen became upset as his thoughts traveled to the end of

this path.

However, it was as if a bolt of thunder crashed into his soul when his soul touched upon his body's meridians. It was like a man dying of thirst finding a sweet spring!

The slowly moving true qi was so weak, weak to the point of almost flickering out. But it was this fragile hint of true qi that stoked his flames of life and swept away those depressing thoughts.

"Practice? Heh, train! This was once a ludicrous thought for someone with a yin constitution like mine. I couldn't train in my past life, but never acceded to fate. Now that I have gained the potential to train due to reincarnation, is this not an opening that the door of fate has cracked open for me?"

"I was the exalted son of the Celestial Emperor, and held charge of the Tianlang Library for millions of years. I have perused countless books and scrolls. I was familiar with all disciplines and methods of training. I was unparalleled and renowned for the accomplishments in my dao of alchemy, but my knowledge was forever halted and just theoretical; at an abstract level. Now that I have gained the ability to train thanks to reincarnation, what cause have I to fear? For what reason would I, Jiang Chen, bow my head in defeat?" Jiang Chen felt a weight lift off his shoulders as he explored this line of reasoning.

Those negative emotions he had slowly disappeared. He felt that this reincarnation was a turning point that would interminably change his life!

Indeed, from the perspective of Jiang Chen's past life, the identity of the son of an ordinary noble was completely inconsequential.

But even the lowliest person possessed one quality that he did not in his past life, and that was the qualification to train!

The qualification to train was like the starting line of a race.

Although he was an eminent person in his past life, as lofty as dragons and phoenixes, he could only watch on the sidelines.

Now, despite his commonness in his current life, despite being like an ant, he had the qualification to step up to the starting line and take his place.

The path of training was ceaseless and boundless. As long as one had good fortune, one could transform and become all powerful. Even wings could be stuck onto ants for them to soar in the heavens!

And now, an opportunity had come!

Son of the Celestial Emperor, Keeper of the Tianlang Library. He had devoted his millions years of life almost entirely to studying. It would be no exaggeration to say that he was a walking encyclopedia and grasped the world's knowledge.

His belly full of theories spanning from the divine heavens to common dirt, there was no topic that Jiang Chen was unfamiliar with.

Although Jiang Chen could not train in the many boring years in his past life, he loved to take in disciples and conduct experiments with them, testing out one theory or another.

He'd lost track of how many prodigies he'd created in his lifetime.

What was opportunity?

He had reincarnated with the memories of the son of the Celestial Emperor, and had gained the body of the unfortunate dukedom heir Jiang Chen.

Those experiments he had conducted on his disciples could finally now be acted out with his own hands!

This was opportunity!

Jiang Chen could hardly contain himself.

At this moment, a striking crash sounded, as if something had slipped and cracked.

Crash!

“Jiang Ying, figure it out! Find out at all costs!” Jiang Feng, the duke of Jiang Han, furiously smashed a vase, almost wishing to burn down the kingdom in his rage.

“Your Lordship, we already have a clue.” Jiang Ying spoke respectfully, dressed from head to toe in black. “Although the young master was not diligent in training, he was still a fighter of the true qi level. His control over his body would be absolute. In the face of such an important occasion, he would not have lost control and passed gas.”

“Then, someone is behind all this? Someone intentionally wanted to embarrass Chen’er during the Rites of Heavenly Worship, so that he would enrage the king and be executed?” Jiang Feng’s tone had descended to a dangerous point.

“The young master ate breakfast with friends at the Autumn Crane this morning. I did not discover anything when I investigated Autumn Crane, but found traces of “Three Laugh Powder” in the young master’s body.”

Three Laugh Powder?

Jiang Feng’s face darkened, how could he not know “Three Laugh Powder”? This item cleared up a person’s internal passages. While it did not have any side effects, it would cause a person’s qi to sink through their body, and be emitted from all parts of the body.

His son's damnable gas expulsion that enraged the king during the Rites of Heavenly Worship was not out of nowhere, it was definitely due to this "three laugh powder".

"It seems that instead of being a coincidence, this was a devious, premeditated plot!" Jiang Feng easily came to this conclusion after connecting the dots.

"Your Lordship, here is a list of whom the young master had breakfast with. However, they are all sons of other dukes, so it will be difficult to find out who is responsible." Jiang Ying was Jiang Feng's right hand man, and his most valued and loyal vassal.

"Go, go thoroughly investigate this matter! Even if I lose my dukedom, even if I am torn asunder, I will not idly sit by when my son has been killed!"

Jiang Feng didn't believe the crap of absolute obedience to one's overlord. Utter drivel!

Generations of the Jiang family had been loyal, but not stupidly loyal.

The Jiang family had toiled ceaselessly for the Eastern Kingdom royal family for generations, defending the land, fighting in wars and steadfastly holding their stations. They had won their sole dukedom at high cost, but now his only son was unceremoniously caned to death?

A vassal had no need to be loyal if the overlord was not kind. If it came down to it, rebellion then!

It felt as if a volcano was on the verge of erupting in his chest whenever Jiang Feng thought of King Eastern Lu's cold expression as he gave the order to kill; the sight of his enemies gloating in that moment, or the son that had been beaten beyond recognition as he lay in his coffin.

He itched to immediately return to his territory and stampede into the capital with hundreds of thousands under his banner. To let rivers of blood flow in the streets!

Upon hearing these words, combined with the vague memories left in the body, Jiang Chen roughly understood what had happened.

It turned out that the original owner of this body had the unfortunate timing to fart during the Rites of Heavenly Worship!

These rites were hosted by the most sacred temple in the country, and attended by the king and all 108 Eastern Kingdom nobles in order to pray for King Eastern Lu's beloved daughter.

The king and his nobles had commenced many preparations before the rites were held, such as forgoing meat, bathing, and changing into fresh clothes, as well as burning lavender incense.

In other words – everyone had cleaned up nicely, and was

striving for perfection in order to convince the heavens of their sincerity to succeed in obtaining blessings.

Everything was proceeding smoothly at first.

But just as the king and his nobles had kowtowed on the temple steps in prayer, Jiang Chen let out an earsplitting fart.

One had to know that kowtowing in prayer was the most important part of the entire rite. Absolute silence needed to be maintained during this part. This was how one could communicate with the gods and demonstrate their devotion.

However, Jiang Chen's fart rudely broke this silence and shattered this dignified gathering.

Everyone knew that farts were comprised of unhealthy gas and were extremely unsound. If this had happened during a regular occasion, it would have been simply passed over as everyone else held their breath.

However, Jiang Chen's regrettable fart was smelly and long. It was an affront to the gods! The high priest in charge of the rite's proceedings was appalled and started cursing loudly, as if the fart had destroyed the pillar of the world and was causing the sky to cave in.

This aroused the great wrath of King Eastern Lu, as he doted on his beloved daughter so, and he called for the guards to drag Jiang

Chen away and beat him to death!

Even then, his anger was not abated and he gave the order to hang Jiang Chen's corpse on the city wall for vultures and scavengers to pick out.

Jiang Chen wouldn't even have had a body left if the kingdom's nobles didn't persuade the king otherwise, pointing out that openly displaying a corpse was vulgar and uncivilized, and would adversely impact the kingdom's luck.

Chapter 2: Supportive Father, Loyal Friends

Jiang Chen had finally figured out the who, why, when, where and how of the entire situation after some careful organization of the facts. He also knew why the previous Jiang Chen died.

"Alright! Looks like this past Jiang Chen died quite a luckless death. Death because of farting? This king of the Eastern Kingdom is quite a character. Rites of Heavenly Worship? Heh. I, the vaunted son of the Celestial Emperor, have encountered many rituals in my time, but never have I heard of obtaining heaven's blessing via a fresh shower, new clothes, and a few sticks of incense. There is at least order under heaven. Those who are benevolent are rewarded in kind, and those who are not are punished. Ah, forget it. I have been handed this opportunity thanks to this tyrant killing Jiang Chen."

Jiang Chen sighed as he lay in the coffin, feeling a multitude of feelings. While he was outraged on the past Jiang Chen's behalf, he couldn't help but be secretly delighted that he himself had reincarnated.

Except, he had also clearly heard the conversation between the two. One of them was the past Jiang Chen's father, or rather, his current father.

Seeing this life's father flying into an awe inspiring rage, ready to erupt into full blown rebellion at any second, warmed Jiang Chen's heart. It gave him a sense of déjà vu to witness this kind of fatherly love and doting.

“Who would have thought that I would be so lucky to have an unconditionally supportive father in both my past and present lives. Although this duke of Jiang Han is a pillar of the kingdom, he is willing to rebel for a son unjustly killed. He is a man of courage and uprightness.”

Perhaps it was due to the blood ties between this body and Jiang Feng. Whatever it was, Jiang Chen felt very warmly disposed towards Jiang Feng as a father at first glance.

At least he wasn’t a timid, stupidly loyal subject.

And of course Jiang Chen wouldn’t let the situation get out of hand and develop towards rebellion.

Although it could be deeply satisfying to rebel against one’s overlord for a noble cause, it was a quick way to die when one considered the big picture. Not to mention that Jiang Feng wasn’t on home ground at the moment.

And even if he was, even if he rallied a million troops, it was hopelessly futile to think of a duke prevailing against an entire kingdom.

Jiang Chen was the son of the Celestial Emperor in his past life and widely educated. He understood well the meaning of “those with noble morals need not rush brashly into seeking revenge”, and would definitely prevent the father of his current life from committing such a brainless action.

It was true that he was the son of the Celestial Emperor in his past life.

But in this life, the identity of his past life was nothing but hot air!

If his father Jiang Feng rebelled and the royal family reacted accordingly, how could anyone escape unscathed? Jiang Chen had finally taken control of a new body when he reincarnated, he didn't want to croak after he woke up.

Therefore, when he saw that his father was ready to leave behind a trail of blood at a moment's notice, Jiang Chen couldn't resist the urge to give a quiet "eurgh". It was a sound that promptly froze Jiang Feng where he stood.

Jiang Feng had become completely petrified as he stared unblinkingly at Jiang Chen's body lying in the coffin. The fierce rage in his eyes transformed into strong fatherly love in a blink of an eye.

A father's love is like a mountain, and Jiang Feng almost launched himself into a flying leap like a tiger as he rushed to grab Jiang Chen's hand. "Chen'er, you... you're not dead?"

Although the face was a stranger's face, this fatherly love was so akin to the one he'd experienced in his past life that Jiang Chen was no stranger to it.

“Father, I have dragged you down with me.”

At that moment, Jiang Feng was wholly immersed in the joy of regaining the son he’d lost. Who gave a crap about the flood of great changes following his son?

“Nonsense! You are my son, the son of Jiang Feng, how could you have dragged me down? Everything is so wonderful because you have not died Chen’er! So what if you farted? The daughter of that Eastern Lu contracted an incurable disease, as if holding some rites would cure that? If worshipping the heavens would heal all terminal illnesses, what use are doctors then?”

“And, his precious daughter’s life is important, but is my son’s life not equally so? Just because he held rites to beg mercy from heaven means that my son is to be caned to death for an accidental fart?”

Jiang Feng didn’t bother to hide from his son the fires of bitter anger in his belly. He even dared to call the king of the Eastern Kingdom by his name.

It would seem that this duke of Jiang Han was truly angered. Jiang Chen was certain that if he had truly died, Jiang Feng would have certainly rebelled.

This was a man who was willing to blast holes in the sky for his son.

“It’s not a bad thing to have this kind of father.” Jiang Chen’s positive impression towards this father had increased even more.

“Don’t be afraid Chen’er. Now that you’ve woken up, you will never suffer again for as long as I have breath in my body. I will contact the nobles that we are friendly with and petition that Eastern Lu to pardon those random, absurd crimes you were charged with.”

Defilement of the sacred altar, debasement of the holy temple, blasphemy against the gods, destroyer of the Rites of Heavenly Worship!

If these crimes were not cleared, they would cause no end of trouble for Jiang Chen, even if he’d come back from the dead.

At the same time, Jiang Chen knew that he could not have crimes hanging over his head if he was to live in this Eastern Kingdom in the future.

“Father, let’s not be in a rush to clear my name. The Eastern family is thoroughly enraged at the moment. We can visit after a few days when his anger has abated. I’ve already been caned once, surely he won’t forget his dignity as a king and cane me again?” Jiang Chen had a lot of ways to handle the situation at hand. He was in no rush as he needed time to get used to this new identity and feel at home in this new body.

Jiang Feng was about to respond when some sounds registered in his ears. “Chen’er, lie down, someone’s coming,” he said quietly.

Jiang Chen did so with resignation as his revival from death was simply too abrupt. This would be heaven shaking news if anyone saw him. His father was asking him to keep up the being dead cover for now.

Alright, with this coffin as a cover, playing dead was the easiest thing in this world.

“Brother Chen, you died so needlessly!” The footsteps were far away, but this wailing cry had quite a strong piercing quality to it.

The rolling sound of footsteps accompanied this mournful howl.

Yes, rolling.

The person who was arriving – well, it would be more apt to call the person a meatball. The fleshy figure was almost the same width in all directions, and his body presented perfect curves, forming a meaty meatball.

The meatball had never been ashamed of his body, but was rather proud of it instead. He had once proclaimed that out of all 108 nobles, he was neither the most bravehearted and loyal nor the most intellectual and strategic, but that no one could rob his number one ranking for weight.

It was quite a feat for someone to have such a unique body, but his father had taken it one step further and given him an

exceedingly feminine name – Xuan Xuan.

Two young men, roughly the same age, followed closely behind the meatball. Both of them wore tragic expressions of grief; it was apparent that they had come to pay their respects to Jiang Chen.

The meatball was out in front and strode quickly to the side of the coffin. With his bulk planted so firmly, no one else could even come close and could only hover in the background.

The meatball wiped away tears with one hand and continuously fished out things with his other, tossing them into the brazier already burning paper money as he did so.

“Brother Chen, this was your favorite, illustrated version of the Carnal Prayer Mat. I was self-centered before and refused to lend it to you. Now that you are gone and I have lost a fellow hobbyist, what use is this to me? I’m burning this to you so that you can read it down below if you’re bored. Remember, don’t be selfish like me. Sharing is caring.”

“And, this is a note for ten thousand silver. You were the one who resolved things with ten thousand silver the last time I gave in to my urges and accidentally got that girl pregnant. My dad would have immediately beaten me to death if he found out, but I never even got the chance to return this money to you…”

The meatball cried buckets of tears and snot as he grew even more broken hearted as he cried. He lay there on the floor, pounding the floor in great sorrow after burning the items.

Jiang Chen laid at ease in the coffin and made no sound. He also wanted to use this opportunity to observe these best friends.

Fatty Xuan Xuan was undoubtedly the most loyal, staunchest supporter of them all.

“Ah brother Chen, I am fine. However, that old Eastern Lu caned you to death. I do hereby swear that if I, fatty, ever inherit my old man’s Jinshan dukedom, I will never send a single soldier or horse to fight for that Eastern family’s cause for the rest of my life!”

At this moment the fatty turned around to glare at those behind him, heckling at them, “You there, are you best friends with brother Chen? Do you view brother Chen as a brother? Come swear before his memorial tablet if you do!”

The stalwart, dependable looking young man retorted back, “Fatty, do you think you’re the only one with loyalty? That I, the heir to Hubing dukedom, is lesser than you?”

With that, the young man also rushed to the altar and swore, “Brother Chen, I, Hubing Yue, do so swear that if I inherit the Hubing dukedom in the future, I will never send a single soldier or horse to fight for the Eastern family’s cause for the rest of my life!”

Seeing that the two had already sworn a solemn oath, that left the remaining splendidly dressed youth at a bit of loose ends.

“Yang Zong, is brother Chen your brother or not?” The meatball started to grow angry as he saw the richly dressed youth hesitate.

“Have you forgotten that it was brother Chen who stood up for you when you were bullied by Yan Yiming, the heir to the Yanmen dukedom, after arriving at the capital?”

“And that time when you failed to complete your mission to cultivate spirit level medicine ingredients, it was brother Chen who used his extra portion to fill in the gap for you. Did you know that because he gave part of his portion to you, his grade of excellent was changed to average?” The fatty’s anger grew as he spoke, until he was about ready to spring up, grab the richly dress youth’s collar and punch him.

Memories started fleshing out for Jiang Chen as fatty Xuan spoke. He was able to gradually reconcile the people before him with those in his memories.

Just as fatty Xuan started haranguing the other, quick footsteps sounded as the Jiang family butler came to the door. “Master Jiang, His Majesty the King has arrived with other nobles in order to pay his respects to the young master.”

“Pay his respects?” Fatty Xuan was livid. “Is he shedding crocodile tears? Does he think burning a few sticks of incense will cover up the fact that he beat someone to death?”

Fatty Xuan could afford to be so brash. After all, Jiang Feng was a duke of the kingdom and could not engage in the same theatrics.

Given that his son was not dead, he too was deliberating how to handle the aftermath.

His son's life and position must be protected at all costs. This was Jiang Feng's bottom line.

Jiang Feng was quite aware that as king, Eastern Lu would not feel apologetic about killing a noble's son. One had to be coldhearted in order to reign as a monarch.

What he meant by paying his respects was undoubtedly a complete sham. An act that, on a deeper level, was to sound out Jiang Feng and warn him not to act rashly.

Obviously, Eastern Lu had no fear of Jiang Feng hating him, or even rebelling. However, as the ruler of a kingdom, he did not wish for such a thing to happen.

After all, who knew what other situations may develop if civil unrest began. And in fact, Jiang Feng had a few connections in the Eastern Kingdom.

Chapter 3: Can't Take A Hint, Thrash Them Brutally

The duke's manor had become quite lively with this development.

King Eastern Lu had arrived in person with an entourage accompanying him. Although there weren't that many, only seven or eight people, they included other dukes as well as royal officials. The most surprising fact was that the king had brought his sickly daughter with him, Eastern Zhiruo.

One had to give it to them, these dukes and officials were top of the line actors. From the king to the dukes, each one bore an expression more tragic than the last.

As if the Jiang Chen lying in the coffin was a child of their family.

Jiang Feng was expressionless as he woodenly returned the visitors' greetings. If playacting was what they wanted, then playacting they would receive.

However, when Eastern Zhiruo stepped up to light her incense sticks, the sickly girl said in a quiet voice, "Big brother Jiang Chen, I'm sorry, you were drawn into this situation because Zhiruo is so useless. But don't worry, Zhiruo will personally apologize to you if there is another world after death. When we are there you are free to hit me, yell at me, or do whatever. Father held the Rites to pray for me, so your death is Zhiruo's fault. I hope the heavens can understand and blame Zhiruo alone; not my royal father, nor my

kingdom's citizens..."

Although the little girl spoke in halting bursts, even while she lacked the proper amount of breath to do so, she was sincere and quite serious. These words caused the nobles who were acting up a storm to feel slightly ashamed at their actions.

Even fatty Xuan found it hard to hate her, and he hated the Eastern royals with a passion.

"I say Princess Zhiruo, the guy's dead already, there's no point in saying all this. If you really feel guilty, then marry my brother Chen when you're down there. He was not qualified to be your consort when alive, but dead...! Heh! Oh yes, my brother Chen loves a nice butt. In terms of body, he..."

No one could shut fatty Xuan's mouth once he'd started speaking. His words completely incensed Eastern Lu. You damn fatty, are you cursing my daughter to die as soon as possible?

Meanwhile, the dukes were striving mightily to control their facial expressions. They were desperately afraid of being amused by the buffoon that was fatty Xuan, and of revealing a smile at inappropriate timing.

Jiang Chen had been lying quite comfortably in the coffin when he heard fatty Xuan start to lose control of the situation. How could one continue to lie down when such a thing was happening? He sprang into a sitting position and scowled, "Damn fatty, can't you even let me die in peace?"

With the exception of his father, Jiang Chen's action froze everyone solid for a good couple of seconds.

Fatty Xuan was the closest to him and was absolutely overjoyed, "Brother Jiang, are you pretending to be a corpse or playing dead?"

"Pretending my ass. Playing dead is extremely tiring, why don't you try it?"

Eastern Lu's face stilled when he saw Jiang Chen suddenly sit up. A follower beside him immediately proclaimed, "Jiang Chen, how dare you pretend to be dead! You have misled your king and committed treason! You and your family clan should be executed!"

A king never failed to be short of these sycophants.

Jiang Chen was too lazy to pay him any attention, and slowly pulled himself out of the coffin. He asked Eastern Lu with a calm gaze, "Your Majesty, Jiang Chen was lucky and did not die. I merely wish to ask, do you intend to cane me to death once again, or will you forgive your subject's unintentional crimes?"

Eastern Lu was the king of a nation but his strong heart skipped a beat when Jiang Chen swept his gaze over him. This youth that had climbed out of a coffin had a mysterious, indefinable quality about him that made even Eastern Lu a bit wary.

"Hmph! I am the king of a nation! Why on earth would I dignify

your impudent question with a response? You will be spared since you had the great luck to survive."

Eastern Lu actually really wanted to choke Jiang Chen to death, but reason told him that he needed to conduct himself in a manner befitting a king.

If he made a move against Jiang Chen now, his underlings would think he was not acting as a king should, not to mention that the duke of Jiang Han would rebel without a doubt

"Your Majesty, this devious rat was playing dead to avoid being executed. This treacherous intention is worthy of a death sentence! This duke petitions your majesty to judge harshly and exact justice."

It was that sycophant again.

However, Jiang Han's duke, Jiang Feng, wasn't playing along this time. He leapt up and bawled, "What is the meaning of this, duke of Tianshiu? His Majesty has said he won't be pursuing the matter further, just what are you trying to accomplish here with your jumping up and down?"

It wasn't exactly a harmonious picture between the 108 dukes of the Eastern Kingdom. This duke of Tianshui and Jiang Feng, the duke of Jiang Han, were notorious rivals.

The duke of Tianshui laughed coldly, "Jiang Feng, don't you find

it odd that your son has arisen from the dead? I suspect you were also involved in misleading his majesty. I petition His Majesty to thoroughly investigate the Jiang father and son. If I speak the truth, then the entire Jiang family clan should be executed."

Jiang Chen gave a quiet chuckle as he saw his father was about to erupt into full-blown anger, and swept his eyes in an interested gaze between Eastern Lu and Eastern Zhiruo.

He then casually spoke, "Your Majesty, it would be simple to execute the entire Jiang family clan, but it wouldn't be as easy to save her Highness' life, now would it?

Eastern Lu's expression froze, "What do you mean by that Jiang Chen?"

"Nothing much, just that when I was being beaten to death in the temple just now, I seemed to hear a divine voice whispering next to my ear. It conveyed a great deal of words that seemed to have something to do with the princess' illness. I found the will to live again when I thought of the princess' illness, so I clawed my way back to life. If Your Majesty thinks I should die, then please give the order to cane me to death again!"

Jiang Chen was a smart fellow; he knew what to say in order to whet someone's appetite. What he just said had precisely struck Eastern Lu's weak spot.

As the ruler of a kingdom, Eastern Lu was tyrannical and paranoid. But as a father, Eastern Zhiruo was the apple of his eye.

He was tempted upon hearing that a divine being had taken an interest in his daughter's illness. What were the Rites for? Who else if not his daughter?

An illness that no elixir or medicine could cure was in the hands of the gods.

"Jiang Chen, do you mean what you say?" Although Eastern Lu was a king, he still felt a bit of apprehension in that moment. After all, he had ordered this fellow to be caned to death.

"How would a subject dare lie to Your Majesty?"

"Alright! Jiang Chen, any request you make will be granted. All the riches, splendor and power in the Eastern Kingdom shall be yours if you can cure Zhiruo's sickness."

Now it was Jiang Feng's turn to be nervous. He was afraid that his son had gotten it in his mind to play games with the king since he had been beaten. If this was the case, they would be in a lot of trouble later on.

"Chen'er, your knowledge of medicine is not strong. Many of the esteemed doctors in the royal hospital have been stumped by the princess' illness, yet you speak of it lightly?

"Be at peace father. Although your son does not profess deep knowledge of medicine, I believe there should be no room for error

given that I have received divine guidance.”

Eastern Lu spoke hurriedly, “Yes, yes. Jiang Chen feel free to speak your mind. You will be pardoned even if you are wrong, but will be rewarded with endless honors if you can help.”

Honors? That wasn’t important to Jiang Chen. It wasn’t as if he would really play this out to the end. Haggling over titles, trumpeting one’s abilities, or making various demands – that was the path to death.

The Jiang Chen of today understood the idea of the situation being more important than the person. He knew that being as humble as possible now would result in the greatest amount of protection, while wrangling over honors would one, earn the Eastern royal family’s enmity and secondly, jealousy from the other dukes.

Jiang Chen spoke as he thought of this, “Your humble subject is a criminal and dare not ask for any honors. Your subject will be able to carry out his duties without fear of others only if Your Majesty pardons my crimes.”

Dukes friendly with Jiang Feng snickered inwardly when they heard Jiang Chen’s words. This kid was quite a talker; he handled things even more smoothly than his old man.

Pardon Jiang Chen of his crimes, this was something Eastern Lu could easily accomplish with a single word.

“Alright, as We stand before our nobles today, We do hereby pardon you of all your crimes. From this moment on, you are still the heir of Jiang Han dukedom, with all your titles and accomplishments unchanged. If anyone brings up the past again, they will have the Eastern royal family to contend with.”

Eastern Lu’s words were quite magnanimous; he had not only pardoned all of Jiang Chen’s crimes, but had forbidden anyone from bringing them up again. This was obviously the mark of a generous heart, as the Jiang family could now avoid worrying about these crimes resurfacing in the future.

Jiang Chen flashed a dazzling smile accordingly and delivered shocking words, “Actually, Her Highness is not sick.”

These words stunned all those present.

Did Jiang Chen want to die? He dared to say that the princess was not sick after all that hoopla? Why would she be like this if not sick?

Eastern Lu had an overwhelming urge to stomp on Jiang Chen’s face, but the reasoning of a king told him to be calm, be calm. He had to let this brat finish even if he was full of hot air.

“I say, what’s with all your expressions? Do you actually want the princess to be sick?”

The duke of Tianshui could hold it in no longer, “Brat Jiang, this

is making fun of the king. You are asking for death!”

Jiang Chen rubbed his nose self consciously and said, “Your Majesty, I’ve already said that I received divine guidance to shed light on the princess’ illness. Someone might anger the gods if they continue to jump up and down and make a fuss here.”

Under any other circumstances, Eastern Lu would have definitely thought Jiang Chen was full of nonsense about the entire matter.

However, he couldn’t afford to not believe him at this moment. Firstly, this matter had to do with his beloved daughter’s life and secondly, the kid was caned to death, but not really. Even he didn’t believe that this wasn’t proof of divine intervention. He was well aware of the efficiency of those in charge of carrying out executions, how was it possible to mess up torturing someone to death?

Eastern Lu had no choice but to believe in Jiang Chen due to those two points. He sternly commanded, “Duke of Tianshui, you are dismissed.”

“Your Majesty, this rat is spreading wild rumors…” The Tianshui duke hastily spoke.

“Dismissed!” His king was quite angry.

The duke of Tianshui backed meekly into the crowd. Despite wanting to bring the Jiang family down a notch, he didn’t have the

courage to butt heads with his king.

"Your Majesty, the divine being is quite angry. He will not speak until the witless person who spoke out of turn slaps himself three times. But the duke of Tianshui is a mighty duke, wouldn't it be difficult for him to slap himself?"

"Not to mention considering Your Majesty's dignity and grace, how could you possibly command a duke to slap himself? It seems that it comes down to a matter of if the duke of Tianshui is truly self aware and loyal to the kingdom. If it was me, I would not hesitate to slap myself 30 times, not just a mere three times."

The nobles who had come with Eastern Lu started whispering amongst themselves after Jiang Chen had spoken. Some thought Jiang Chen was making it all up, while others thought there was a great deal of truth in the situation.

Of course, they weren't the ones who needed to slap themselves. They were all audience members and thus felt no pressure. They cast their eyes as one to the duke of Tianshui in the middle of the crowd.

Those around the duke consciously vacated the vicinity and consciously maintained a certain distance from him, highlighting the duke's location.

The duke of Tianshui suddenly felt a cold breeze wash over him. He realized with despair in that moment that out of all his peers, not a single person was willing to stand up for him. It was as if the

whole world was ostracizing him.

Chapter 4: Go Thrash Yourself

Many of the nobles were present because they had accompanied the duke of Tianshui to fuel momentum; they all wanted to take the Jiang family down a notch.

But at this moment, who would dare speak up?

If someone stood up for the duke of Tianshui, that would mean defying the gods. If they argued with the king instead, that would mean they didn't want the princess to recover.

It was at this moment that fatty Xuan mind connected the dots as well. He was always someone who loved creating a ruckus and immediately joined in, "Duke of Tianshui, you're always shooting your mouth off about how if you're ranked number two for fealty and valor out of all the nobles, then no one else would dare claim number one. Now that the moment to prove your loyalty has arrived, you make excuses and avoid doing anything. What's going on here?"

"Duke of Tianshui, you waxed eloquent about executing the entire Jiang family clan earlier. Now, no such demands have been made on you, and yet you shrink from merely slapping yourself three times?"

Jiang Chen would definitely not let this opportunity pass him by; he tutted as he took another jab at an already downed enemy, "It looks like this so-called fealty and valor that is ranked first under the heavens is just a joke that the duke of Tianshui trotted out to

amuse others. Best not to put too much stock in it."

The duke of Tianshui had originally come to laugh at the duke of Jiang Han, but who would have thought the tables would turn on him and he'd become the target of everyone's attacks instead?

However, the duke of Tianshui was an old hat at these political games and quickly found his footing again. He spoke with a self righteous air, "This old duke would not even furrow his brow if his Majesty commanded me to take my own life, not to mention a mere three slappings. If it would benefit our country and homeland, I would willingly help shoulder part of His Majesty's burden. Little Chen'er, I could easily slap myself three times and disperse some of His Majesty's worries, but if you are playing a game with us, then what?"

Indeed, if this brat was just joking, then he'd be making a fool out of all the nobles and the king!

Jiang Chen's voice grew colder, "Duke of Tianshui, you can insult me, but you cannot blaspheme against the gods! Your Majesty, this man has not only once, but on multiple occasions, spoken gravely out of turn. The gods are enraged and I am afraid I can no longer help with her Highness' sickness..."

Eastern Lu was appalled by these words and inwardly furious. You damn duke of Tianshui, what are you dragging your heels for? If you're that loyal and patriotic, then slap yourself three times already! Make it easy for yourself and find a way out. Must I really command it, and be seen as the king who bullies his subjects?

As his thoughts traveled down this path, Eastern Lu grew irate and cocked his eyebrow. The duke of Tianshui was an expert at observing expressions and had spent much time studying the king's emotions. He knew that the king was truly incensed and without any warning, hastily slapped himself eight times.

Each slap was heavy handed and resonant, he knew that the harder he slapped himself, the more it would placate his king's anger.

His face began to swell up and almost resembled a pig's head after this round of slapping.

After that round of slaps, all eyes focused on Jiang Chen again.

Jiang Chen said unhurriedly, "You were told to slap yourself three times, what is the meaning of slapping yourself eight times? Feeling mutinous? Are you disgruntled with the will of the gods? Or disloyal to his Majesty? Ah, forget it. You will be grudgingly forgiven this one time regarding this matter."

Although he indicated that he would pursue the matter no further, the same couldn't be said for the duke of Tianshui's friends. They could only sit idly by and watch while the duke of Tianshui slapped himself, but they could no longer contain themselves after the slapping had happened. It was alright to stand up for him now, right? His slaps couldn't be in vain, right?

A fellow immediately jumped out, "Jiang Chen, how long are you

going to keep that act up? The duke of Tianshui has already slapped himself. You will be adding to your list of crimes if you can't offer a full explanation."

"Yes, if you can't say anything then you would be misleading the king and mocking the country's nobles. The entire Jiang family clan should be executed in that case."

These fellows were definitely cut from the same cloth, they even shared the same mantra of executing someone's entire family clan.

On the other hand, Jiang Chen gave a lazy yawn and said carelessly, "Your Majesty, the manifestation of the gods is an exceedingly sacred matter. These fellows can't stop going on about executing an entire family's clans. Are they not afraid of endangering the princess' health if they enrage the gods? Do they want their family's clans to be executed?"

Jiang Chen took a few steps forward after he'd finished and and stood in front of the crowd of old fellows, lecturing them in a righteous anger.

"All of you make a lot of fuss but have you ever really thought about the princess' illness?"

"What has the holy task of curing Her Highness become in your eyes? A tool with which to persecute political enemies and oppress the kindhearted?"

“Duke of Tianshui, you keep calling for the execution of the entire Jiang family clan. If I had not had the great fortune to survive and was instead truly caned to death, then how could I have carried this message regarding the princess’ sickness to His Majesty? Is your so-called loyalty nothing more than forcing your king to a cliff’s edge and ending the princess’ life?”

“You’re awesome, you’re powerful, yet which one of you can step forward and tell me what is the matter with Her Highness? You don’t have the ability to do so but envy those who can, and even forbid me to relay the message from the gods? And at the heart of it, I only received this divine vision after being nearly caned to death. Was this easy for me? What if the gods are infuriated and thus depart, can you bear the responsibility?”

“I have one final question for you, what if the gods are truly angered and require the execution of your family clans in order to save Her Highness? You speak of fealty and valor, would you be willing to erase your family clans in order to ease some of His Majesty’s burdens?”

Jiang Chen gave voice to a variety of frustrations and took great pleasure in these questions that descended like a barrage of arrows. He used this excuse to wax eloquent and hovered stiflingly over these nobles like black clouds over a city. They were at a loss for words and could only stare in disbelief!

Particularly that last question, that one caused each of their expression to drastically shift and shudder in horror and fright.

They had originally come to help the duke of Tianshui suppress

the Jiang family and kick a defeated enemy when it was down. But now, Tianshui's supporters couldn't find the courage to even if they tried.

If this brat really used the will of the gods as an excuse to convince His Majesty to execute their family clans...

Considering His Majesty's unconditional love for the princess, it was a legitimate possibility!

Jiang Chen had only one thought as he looked at the faces pale with terror around him —

Who knew it would be such a satisfying thing to heckle these morally lacking old guys.

Especially since these old geezers actually thought they were something, simply because they held power and prestige.

"Alright, alright. Young duke Jiang you've said your piece, and those at fault have punished themselves. The real issue at stake here is the matter of the princess' illness."

It was at this moment that a neutral third party stepped forward and smoothed things over. Logically speaking, neutral bystanders were only along for the ride and even less worried about the situation getting out of hand. But things heating up more would not help the king, and the king's heart was very anxious indeed.

“The princess’ illness?” Jiang Chen paused in surprise. “Who said the princess in sick? Didn’t I say earlier that the princess isn’t sick?”

This again! Eastern Lu raked his gaze over Jiang Feng, causing cold shivers to travel up the latter’s neck. He grumbled inside, darn kid, finish your thought and stop talking in cliffhangers.

“Your Majesty, your humble subject has one question. When her Highness was born, was it a day of a solar eclipse?” Traces of a calm smile could be found in the curve of Jiang Chen’s lips.

Eastern Lu inwardly started in shock. How did he know that? Had he really had a dream from the gods? Society regarded the solar eclipse as an unlucky omen.

Thus, Eastern Lu had always avoided this topic.

“Not only Her Highness, but when the princess’ mother was born, the day must have also seen a solar eclipse. This phenomenon had continued for nine generations of girls, and as this heritage continued, yin and yang became out of balance. The body slowly lacked yang, and upon the ninth generation, a body with a yin constitution was born!”

When Jiang Chen spoke the words “a body with a yin constitution”, he did so with a heavy heart. This had plagued his past life for many, many years. Even his old man the Celestial Emperor could not fully resolve this problem.

Therefore, he had felt an immediate kinship born out of shared misery when he saw Eastern Zhiruo, and had immediately diagnosed the source of the problem.

It was due to this pain of shared misery that he stopped playing dead, because he saw in the princess a way to settle the Jiang family's current crisis.

How else had he offended the royal family, if not by farting during the Rites? And why had the Rites been held? Were they not to obtain blessings for Eastern Zhiruo?

If he could solve Eastern Zhiruo's problem, was that not the best way to clean up after his mess?

Who would have thought that Eastern Zhiruo would be born with a yin body; these kinds of people were one in hundreds of millions. Who could have foreseen that the wheel of reincarnation had brought Jiang Chen in contact with one.

One had to say, fortune was a mysterious thing.

Eastern Zhiruo did not have the same birth as the past Jiang Chen, and thus her fortunes were much more unlucky. Without the Celestial Emperor for a father and lacking the Sun Moon dan to prolong her life, her lifespan would naturally be much shorter.

She was 13 at the moment and all diagnoses indicated that it would be difficult for Eastern Zhiruo to live past 14.

This was why Eastern Lu, a father who loved his daughter more than anything, had held the Rites of Heavenly Worship in order to pray for his daughter.

“A body with a yin constitution?” The assembled nobles started whispering to each other. It was apparent that none of them had heard the term before. If it wasn’t for the fact that Jiang Chen spoke with such self assurance and specifics, they would have all loudly denounced Jiang Chen as a pathological liar.

It took a while for Eastern Lu to recover from his shock. Jiang Chen was at least correct with regards to the solar eclipse.

Eastern Zhirou and her mother had both been born under a solar eclipse.

At the moment, Eastern Lu became a believer. It would seem that this Jiang kid had truly received guidance from the gods and was conveying their messages.

“Is it possible that we have moved the heavens and gods with our sincerity?” Eastern Lu asked in excited agitation, his posture as humble as could be. “Then, Jiang Chen, is it possible to cure this yin constitution?”

“A yin constitution itself is not a sickness, it is a disability. If her Highness had never practiced martial dao or attempted to train her qi, then there would be no problem for her to live thirty or fifty years. It was wrong to force her to train, this weakened her already

fragile middle qi. Therefore, if there is no outside intervention, then it would be difficult for her Highness to live beyond the age of sixteen."

This diagnoses was actually similar to the ones from the royal doctors.

After hearing these words, more and more starting wondering, had this Jiang Chen really received divine guidance from above? How else could he talk in such specifics?

Eastern Lu hurriedly asked, "Outside intervention? Does this mean that there are still some methods to deal with a yin constitution?"

"It's not an illness to begin with, so naturally there are methods. The first step is to halt all martial dao practice, and to discontinue taking the pills that improve the body's inner energy passages, the meridians. Otherwise, even if divine intervention happens, we would not be able to do much in half a year."

These words caused Eastern Lu's heart to race as he felt that he had narrowly escaped death. He had always thought that Eastern Zhiruo had a weak body and thus had been a strong champion of her training. Even if she did not succeed in her training, it would not be a bad thing to strengthen her body.

But who would have known that the training would completely backfire, and those pills would become fatal poison.

“What should we do next?” It was as if Eastern Lu had become a devout, knowledge seeking student as he asked in disgrace.

“Pardon my candor, the princess will never be able to train in this life. A body with a yin constitution does not live long. The most pressing issue is to prolong her life. This process will be lengthy as there is no quick fix. If your Majesty trusts your humble subject, then please give the princess’ life into my keeping. If your Majesty does not trust me, then please give the orders to haul me off to the dungeons…”

“Speak not this way minister Jiang. It is as if the sun has broken through clouds and we have been enlightened after we have spoken with you. Zhiruo’s matters are in your hands now. Whatever you ask for will be granted. In addition, we are granting you the royal engraved dragon medallion. You can freely enter and exit the palace with this token, and do not have to kowtow when you see our royal presence.”

Eastern Lu was definitely the ruler of a kingdom. No ordinary person could match up to his generosity and shrewdness. He had been calling for Jiang Chen’s head a second ago, but had awarded the engraved dragon medallion the next. Jiang Chen would not even have to bow when he saw his liege, this was an honor that not even the three excellencies in the palace enjoyed.

The duke of Tianshui desperately wished a hole in the ground would swallow him up. Although the king had not deliberately caused him to lose face; but to reward Jiang Chen so richly was worse than slapping the duke across the face.

Chapter 5: If I Can't Cure You, Then I'll Go Down With You

What did it mean to receive the engraved dragon medallion from the supreme ruler of a kingdom?

This meant Jiang Chen could freely enter and exit the palace.

If this kid really did cure the princess, then he would be the king's favorite and harbinger of fortune. He would enjoy the king's love and goodwill. Who in the kingdom wouldn't treat him with all due respect then?

Jiang Chen merely went along with the situation and the assembled crowd's expectations when he genuflected and accepted the engraved dragon medallion. To be honest, as the venerated son of the Celestial Emperor in his past life, he really could not bring himself to bend his knee to a common king.

He naturally would not decline something that waived the need to kowtow to a king.

And of course, one had to make some sort of statement when one had accepted such a gift. He slapped his chest and proclaimed, "Your Majesty, your humble subject does not make empty boasts. I will say only this, if any accident befalls her Highness due to my incompetency in curing her, then your humble subject will join the princess in death."

There existed many beautiful words and sentences to express loyalty, but none were more straightforward than that sentence. Can't cure her? Then I'll die with her!

This was a grand gesture that involved the lives of one's own family!

Out of all the nobles under heaven, who would have this kind of spirit; this amount of loyalty?

In that moment, even Jiang Chen was almost moved by his mesmerizing performance.

A performance that could touch even the performer's heart naturally conquered others.

The nobles and high ranking officials who had accompanied Eastern Lu were also secretly surprised. Who would have thought the heir of Jiang Han would have such spirit. Like father, like son. A tiger father would not beget a dog son.

Even the crowd with the duke of Tianshui felt that, if their positions were reversed, they would not have this strength of character.

Jiang Chen's performance was not yet over. He continued, "Your Majesty, the gods have further guidance. The events of today must remain a secret, with not a single word leaking out. This is to firstly avoid dishonoring the gods, and secondly to preserve your

Majesty's reputation."

If word got out, the comical events of tonight might actually harm Eastern Lu's reputation. After all, watching his duke slap himself was not exactly a dignified thing to witness.

And of course, the most important thing was to avoid dishonoring the gods. If someone leaked the secret and angered the gods, who in turn blamed it on Eastern Zhiruo, then the situation would be very grave indeed.

Eastern Lu commanded without hesitation, "Not a single word regarding the events of today shall be discussed after leaving this room. Whoever does so defies the Eastern royal family!"

It was a good thing not that many people were present. Excluding those associated with the duke of Jiang Han, those who had accompanied the king numbered only six or seven.

They were all crafty foxes in politics and knew that the king was deadly serious. If even a hint of this matter got out, then all of their lives would be at stake.

And not to mention that their performance today wasn't exactly the most ideal; their reputations would suffer along with the king's if any gossip circulated.

Jiang Chen scaring the nobles silly in the name of the gods, like a fox borrowing a tiger's fierceness, primarily had to do with his

desire to stay under the radar.

He didn't want the people of this country to view him as a freak of nature if this got out!

Eastern Lu was quite touched and spoke a rare sentence filled with emotion as he grasped Jiang Feng's hand, "Duke of Jian Han, your loyalty and your son's fealty are greatly moving."

Jiang Feng could only smile wryly. His son had courage enough for two people, and had, fortunately, handled the situation beautifully. If he protested otherwise, he would be creating needless trouble. He could only nag inwardly.

"You darn kid, you're having a ball of a time. You had better not mess it up. Ah whatever, you're my son after all. If it all goes south, your old man will step in and take the hits for you no matter how bad things get."

Jiang Feng's mental state had calmed down quite a bit after the emotional and situational rollercoaster he had just been on.

They said that a long suffering patient becomes a doctor for that ailment. The past Jiang Chen had been plagued by his yin constitution since birth, and thus had naturally committed quite a bit of study in this area.

Of course, with his current circumstances, it would be more than impossible to refine a Sun Moon pill like his past father had. It

would be idiotic nonsense to even think of doing so.

The Sun Moon pill was a medicine that violated the course of nature in granting the user more life. Even the Celestial Emperor had exhausted his spiritual energy and sacrificed some years of his life in order to successfully refine one.

It was possible that not even one of the ingredients needed to refine the Sun Moon pill existed in this world. Even if they did, there was absolutely no way anyone could expend the level of resources that the Celestial Emperor had to create the pill.

So the Sun Moon pill was out of the question, but medicines imitating the effects of the Sun Moon pill existed. Even if they could only offer one ten thousandth of what the Sun Moon pill could do, it was enough to prolong someone's life by a hundred years.

Remember, the past Jiang Chen had taken the Sun Moon pill and lived millions of years. He was nigh well immortal if it hadn't been for the cataclysm.

With Eastern Zhiruo's situation, there was no way she could live millions of years; even if the Celestial Emperor came back from the dead.

But to help her live another eighty or a hundred years...that Jiang Chen could do, and in more ways than one.

However, Jiang Chen had no intention of doing that in one fell swoop. If he quickly resolved Eastern Zhiruo's problem with minimal effort, then Eastern Lu's gratitude would fade away just as easily.

The hearts and minds of kings and emperors were constantly and easily changed. Long term peaceful coexistence never followed short term gratefulness.

Jiang Chen needed time, and given enough time, he wouldn't even deign to worry about the mere ruler of a common kingdom.

Thus, he decided to go slow and steady. After all, the only thing he needed to accomplish was to prolong the princess' life.

This way, not only would he win the extra time he needed, but also gain an invisible layer of protection as well.

Anyone who wanted to create trouble for her Highness' exclusive royal physician needed to first decide if they could afford the consequences of the king's wrath.

Jiang Chen held many profound and flowery conversations with the visitors before finally agreeing to treat the princess in three days. Only then did the crowd of people leave.

But then it was fatty Xuan who drifted closer with a mournful face, "Brother Chen you are too cruel. You should have given your brother a hint. That illustrated version of the Carnal Prayer Mat

was the last of its kind, and now it's gone up in flames. What am I going to do during those long and lonely nights now?"

"And that note for ten thousand silvers, that was an authentic..."

"Damn fatty, you dare say that note was authentic?" Jiang Chen watched the morally lacking fatty with a smile playing around his lips.

The fatty laughed and scratched his head, "I wasn't done yet. That was an authentic Hall of the Nine Underworlds production, I spent a solid five silvers on it."

Hall of the Nine Underworlds was a time honored store that specialized in printing paper money to burn for the dead.

The fatty's face jiggled twice in pain when he spoke of the five silvers.

All fatties were quite miserly, asking them to take money out of their pockets was as painful as bleeding for them.

"Brother Chen, I can put the note for ten thousand silvers behind us. But that copy of Carnal Prayer Mat was really the last..."

"Put it behind us? I'd forgotten before you brought it up. Damn fatty, when are you going to return that ten thousand silvers you borrowed?" Jiang Chen laughed as he spoke.

“Eh? Brother Chen what’s that you say? You were too convincing when you were playing dead, I completely believed you. I cried too hard because I was heartbroken and injured my eardrums. I can’t hear very well now. No no this will not do, I need to go find a doctor. Brother Chen, rest up and I’ll be back to see you....”

Fatty had already slipped out the door before his last sentence was delivered.

In addition to Xuan fatty, Hubing Yue and Yang Zong were steadfast friends with Jiang Chen.

Seeing that fatty Xuan had fled, Hubing Yue spoke briefly with Jiang Chen and took his leave as well.

Yang Zong had wanted to offer an explanation, but said nothing in the end after Jiang Chen clapped his shoulder. He left as well.

When all had left, only the Jiang father and son were left in the hall.

Jiang Feng drew his sword without a word. Brilliantly cold light flashed with a shake of his wrist, and the ebony coffin occupying the center of the hall promptly splintered away into wood fragments.

“Come, someone clean up and take that away to be burned. Clear out this unlucky air!” Mere words could not describe how elated

Jiang Feng was to regain a son he thought he'd lost.

On the other hand, Jiang Chen looked at his father with a small smile, "Father, do you not have anything to ask me?"

"Hahaha," Jiang Feng laughed heartily and patted Jiang Chen's shoulder. "You are my son, I will deal with the consequences no matter what you do!"

That left Jiang Chen speechless. This dad was seriously lacking in principles.

But one had to know that the prior Jiang Chen in this body was as close to an incorrigible rascal as one could get. If he had really died, then only one line needed to be written for his epitaph: Here lies a noble who did everything but his duty.

A small mishap every three days, a large calamity every five days.

Jiang Feng had almost forgotten how many times he'd cleaned up after his son.

Of course, that wasn't to say that this kid didn't have any positive traits about him. At least he was loyal and had that smallest amount of dependability. Otherwise he wouldn't have a crew of fellow ne'er-do-wells around him calling him their leader.

To sum up, it would have been difficult to find something positive to say about Jiang Chen. It would have been easier to find

a needle in a haystack. But to identify some of his cons... those were numerous and easy to pinpoint.

It would have been fine for the privileged children of noble households to have some character flaws. But this kid's greatest failing was that he was extremely lazy about training!

"Ai, what a fellow who didn't value what he had," Jiang Chen had to admit that much when he had finished sorting through the previous fellow's memories. That Jiang Chen had truly been a bit of a lost cause.

An unconditionally supportive old man, and not too shabby potential. He had been born with a gold spoon in his mouth in the Eastern Kingdom.

But amongst his peers, this fellow had fallen to the last in his class.

As the heir to each respective dukedom, they could not take up residence within the kingdom's capital. They should have actually been in their own territory.

The heirs and rulers of each dukedom had gathered in order to participate in the vicennial Hidden Dragon Trials.

There were 108 dukedoms in the Eastern Kingdom, but the rulers of these dukedoms were not carved in stone. The Hidden Dragon Trials that took place every twenty years were a test for the

designated heirs.

Only if the heir successfully passed the Hidden Dragon Trials was he allowed to retain command over the family's dukedom, territory and heritage.

If he failed, the family would have to relinquish command, have their lands seized and their title revoked. They would revert to being a wealthy family with no power or prestige.

If they became a family with no might or clout, then their collapse and eventual demise would be very likely. Just as monkeys scatter when a tree falls, it would be a foregone conclusion that their influence would be diminished, and that people would abandon the family.

After all, losing the dukedom meant that the family had lost all trappings of power and many sources of income. The family would have to subsist on their savings, and that was not enough to feed an army of underlings and guards.

The royal family would also not allow those who had lost their dukedoms to thrive and grow stronger than the current dukes.

The Hidden Dragon Trials were quite lengthy as they spanned over three years.

At the end of the three years, a ceremony of inheritance would be held in the capital for the heirs who had successfully passed the

tests. This meant that the power of a duchy and its lands were retained for another twenty years.

And after twenty years, a representative from the new generation must be sent to participate in the Hidden Dragon Trials.

The purpose of the Hidden Dragon Trials was to ensure that each dukedom maintained a situation of cultivating a plethora of talents, and to avoid halts on the path of self-improvement.

If you couldn’t pass, then you lost the family’s dukedom.

These were the rules of survival in this world.

Simple. Direct. Brutal. Violent!

Chapter 6: Steward Jiang Zheng's Worries

The Jiang duke's household was in dire straits in the face of such brutal competition.

There was only half a year left until the Hidden Dragon Trials, and the previous Jiang Chen's performance could only be summed up with one word, "disastrous". There were numerous examinations that needed to be completed prior to the trials, but quite a few hadn't even been started.

Even without the incident at the Rites of Heavenly Worship, Jiang Chen only had a thirty to forty percent chance of passing the trials. He was one of the hot contenders for family demotion.

However, the Jiang Chen now was not disheartened at all. In fact, he was rather excited.

"The strong reign supreme. It seems that this rule of survival applies from those in higher positions to the common masses down below with no exception. I could not train in my past life and thus did not have the opportunity to experience this, but now that I'm living in the most glorious years of life, I cannot miss this!"

In his past life, he held the exalted position of the son of the Celestial Emperor. No one dared offend him. However, his yin constitution prevented him from training. It was impossible to even consider concealing his identity and engaging others in combat incognito.

In this life, he could finally train to his heart's content and relish in the glories of ascending to the peak of the martial way. This was the stage he enjoyed!

"Since I've promised Eastern Lu that I will enter the palace in three days to diagnose the princess, I need to make good use of these three days, not to mention my current identity as one of the candidates for the Hidden Dragon Trials. There's still six months until the final examinations for the Trials. As the heir to Jiang Han dukedom, even though the position of duke doesn't mean much, I should at least gain some face for that 'cute' old dad of mine, shouldn't I? I can't let old dad lose something like the dukedom."

As he organized his thoughts, Jiang Chen realized that time was of the essence.

One had to give it to them, the people who had carried out the caning sure knew their stuff. Forget about the past Jiang Chen, even practitioners who were twice as strong would be hard pressed to survive that ordeal.

His misfortune was this Jiang Chen's good fortune and new body, but this body was quite severely injured. If he didn't get a grip on his injuries, forget about entering the palace in three days to cure the princess, he would miss even the Trials' small test at the end of the month.

The Hidden Dragon Trials held a small test every month and all the scores were cumulative. A lot of homework would descend if one missed the test in one month.

The prior Jiang Chen already owed a ton of homework. If this continued, he would probably be failed out of the Trials before the final examinations.

This was exactly what Jiang Chen didn't want to happen.

In his past life, as the son of the Celestial Emperor, he had spent millions of years researching and refining dao of alchemy. Although he was utterly worthless for martial cultivation, he was a renowned alchemy master in the world of alchemy. Many alchemy masters had solicited his teachings in the dao of alchemy. If this was his past life, any random pill would enable him to fully recover and be roaring with vitality.

But that was his past life, there was no way that this life could measure up to that.

It was a good thing that Jiang Chen had been in charge of the Tianlang Library for millions of years and read countless scrolls and books. His knowledge knew no bounds, spanning from common sense to the ways of the gods themselves.

Handling these types of injuries was a small thing.

After a night of rest, Jiang Chen thought briefly the next morning, took out his brush and ink, and wrote out a list.

"Jiang Zheng!" He yelled towards the door.

The duke of Jiang Hang had appointed Jiang Zheng to be Jiang Chen's personal steward, in charge of taking care of Jiang Chen's day to day life and fulfilling his daily needs. Jiang Zheng had received his due share of tongue lashings for the incident at the Autumn Crane.

He had been on tenterhooks all night long. They said that a servant would rather die than see his master humiliated, so by all accounts, Jiang Zheng should have died for neglecting his duties.

But he just couldn't bring himself to accept that fact. He had been quite diligent in serving this young master, but the young duke just really wouldn't shape up.

The servants and butlers of other dukedoms lived a good life whilst serving their masters, eating and drinking only the best and being feted wherever they went. But Jiang Zheng's master was an odd one, alternating between whiling the time away one day and throwing out crazy ideas the next.

To top it off, this young master always told Jiang Zheng to take the blame if anything went south.

Therefore, he had put out his fair share of fires and taken quite a bit of blame in the days that he had served Jiang Chen. Not only did Jiang Zheng feel a decided lack of increased status with his awarded position, but he rather felt that he was being worked to death.

Say for instance, money. This young master spent money as easily as breathing. If a friend were to get into a sticky situation today, he'd make it right with money. If another brother stirred up troubled tomorrow, he would again put it to rest with money.

Although the duke of Jiang Han was generous with his money, he could not keep up with the pace of the young master's spending. It was only mid month, yet the entire month's allowance had already been spent!

Thus, Jiang Zheng now only wanted to be left alone and count his blessings if it was peaceful and quiet. His head started to hurt as soon as he heard Jiang Chen's voice.

But he couldn't refuse his master's call.

"Young duke, your servant is incompetent and did not take care of you. Please punish your servant severely. Even if you withdrew your servant's job, your servant would not breath a single ill world." Jiang Zheng immediately fell to the floor in a bow as soon as he entered.

The fluff of "incompetence" and "please punish severely" were just empty words. The duke of Jiang Han was not pursuing the matter further, which meant Jiang Zheng had successfully absolved all responsibility.

Even though this young duke was a good for naught and had no desire to advance in life, he didn't have the bad habit of being cruel towards his underlings.

If it was the previous Jiang Chen, he most likely would not have discerned the true meaning behind Jiang Zheng's words. But the Jiang Chen of today had experienced millions of years, had a good grasp of most matters, and was well versed in social dynamics.

A song's meaning could be gleaned from its melody. One could tell that steward Jiang Zheng had suffered too much at the hands of the previous Jiang Chen, and wanted to throw it all down and quit.

Jiang Chen didn't reveal the steward's intention and chuckled, "Jiang Zheng ah, my father had meant to award you riches and honor when he appointed you to me. Alas, you enjoyed no riches and honor during this time and have toiled ceaselessly to clean up after me and put out fires. I have noted your loyal service."

Jiang Zheng stared dazedly, what direction was the wind blowing in from today? Where did the young duke learn these words of comfort and warmth?

"Jiang Zheng, we've already run out of this month's allowance, right?" Jiang Chen did not wait for Jiang Zheng to respond and asked with a smile that, at the same time didn't seem to be a smile.

"Eh... um..." Jiang Zheng had never enjoyed such a thoughtful conversation and didn't know how to respond. He almost wanted to beat his chest and promise, don't worry about this young duke! I, Jiang Zheng, will find a way.

But a thought struck him, wait a second! If I make this promise, where on earth am I going to find money to fill this hole? The young duke's mouth is as sweet as sugar today, is this a new prank he's playing on me?

Jiang Zheng's guard came up in the span of a second and his wariness increased tenfold.

Jiang Chen gave a loud laugh upon seeing Jiang Zheng hesitate with lingering fear, "Jiang Zheng, this is the situation. I have a list here with some medicinal ingredients on it. Go obtain a dosage for me from the Hall of Healing according to the amounts listed."

Jiang Zheng dumbly accepted the list but didn't move. He had the list alright, but what about the money? The ingredients at the Hall of Healing weren't free now, were they?

It's not like your family owned the Hall of Healing.

"Jiang Zheng, pretend that we aren't master and servant, but just two friends casually chatting. As a steward yourself, at what level of experience and accomplishment would you say makes for an ideal steward? Or how about, what makes someone the best steward to you?"

Best steward?

Forget about being the best, Jiang Zheng wanted to cry. Out of all the body servants to the 108 dukes, Jiang Zheng would be

enormously happy if he wasn't ranked last.

"Why the long face, tell me what you're thinking," Jiang Chen encouraged.

Jiang Zheng paused, swallowed and gathered his courage. "Do you really want me to say?"

"Speak. You will be rewarded if you speak well!"

Having been rewarded with too many bounced checks before, Jiang Zheng didn't dare put any stock in the thought of a reward. Jiang Chen actually handed out rewards quite often, but even more frequently did something like rewarding you with a thousand silver one second, but borrowing two thousand off you the next.

But the mention of the best, the most admired and the most ideal stewards caused Jiang Zheng's thoughts to race.

Frankly speaking, even though followers of the noble and powerful were not themselves noble or powerful, they still had dreams and career aspirations.

Some had even written it into a limerick...

Jiang Zheng drew courage from who knew where upon seeing Jiang Chen's serious expression and said, "Young duke, some limericks are quite popular in the capital. They describe people in

jobs like mine.”

“Oh? Tell me about it.” Jiang Chen grew curious.

“The limerick goes — Delicacies from land and sea, dressed in fine attire and riding well groomed horses, a manor and surrounding lands, home filled with gold and silver.

Conversing with the powerful, befriending the noble, wives coexisting in harmony, doting on sons and grandchildren.

Regulars at the Autumn Crane, financier of the Garden of Returning Spring, whoring with dukes and princes, drinking at the same table with esteemed officials…”

Jiang Chen applauded in hearty laughter as Jiang Zheng recited around four stanzas in one go. “Not bad, not bad. Quite interesting. Garden of the Returning Spring, that must be a land of temptation?”

Jiang Zheng joined his master in laughter but was secretly full of disdain. It’s not like you haven’t been to those places, what are you acting all innocent for!

“Jiang Zheng, I have observed you for a period of time and have confidence in your abilities. Now, if you can complete this mission, and it won’t take long, I will fulfill the dreams of wealth and honor you’ve had during this time. At that time, you will surely feel you are the most successful, most successful steward!”

“Mission? What mission?” Jiang Zheng gave a start. His first

thought was that he had to be on his guard as this young master had something up his sleeve again.

"Why, the list in your hand of course. Take good care of it, it's a treasure that money can't buy. Take it to the Hall of Healing and ask to speak to the person in charge."

"What do I want with the person in charge? I can ask anyone in the Hall to grab these ingredients for me. The person in charge of the Hall of Healing is an arrogant, stuck up type. It's not easy to get a meeting with him." Jiang Zheng growled in a low, muffled voice.

"Heh heh, just do as I say. If the person in charge won't see you, just tell them that they'll surely regret it later. Even if they cling to your legs and beg you in the future, they will only taste the bitterness of regret."

Jiang Zheng almost wanted to feel the young duke's forehead. Was the young duke burning up with a fever of idiocy because of his caning? Was he sleep talking?

Jiang Zheng was well acquainted with how high the minimum requirements were and how arrogant those at the Hall of Healing were. He was reminded every time he went to obtain medicine for his master. The people there simply didn't have the time to waste in idle chatter.

"Jiang Zheng, you must be inwardly cursing my name, thinking that I'm talking nonsense. You must think that I'm sending you on a fool's errand by telling you to fetch medicine ingredients without

giving you the silver to do so. Let me tell you something, the list you hold in your hands is no ordinary list. It's a pill recipe that has been lost since ancient times. Even ten million silver would not be enough to purchase this recipe at an auction house."

"Pill recipe?" Jiang Zheng's face morphed into a smile that was uglier than crying. "Young duke, please don't laugh at your humble servant's expense. Since when did our Jiang family possess an ancient pill remedy? Do you feel that your humble servant has not yet reached the limits of his emotional capacity and wish for him to know how it feels to be driven into a corner?"

Jiang Zheng laughed until his eyes were red. He really was about to cry.

Chapter 7: Jiang Zheng's Stage, Pride And Elation

Jiang Zheng seriously wanted to break down when faced with such a master.

This month's allowance had already run out, and the ingredients on this list were impossible to obtain without ten thousand silver. To use this single list and demand ten million silver in exchange — was this not a sign of sheer insanity?

"Go ahead, cry! A man crying is not a crime!" Jiang Chen chuckled, "But what if I were to tell you that this list came from the gods? Would you still that I was crazy?"

"I'm treating the princess' sickness? Do you also think I'm crazy?"

"Even if I were crazy, would I drag my father, my entire family into this? I may be a good for nothing, but I'm not that completely brainless, am I?"

Jiang Zheng was dumbfounded by the questions that flew like a hail of arrows. It was true, although this master had committed his fair share of ridiculous acts, he wouldn't go so far as to bring down the entire Jiang family, would he now?

Was it possible that the bit about a message from the gods was actually true?

“Jiang Zheng, I can truthfully tell you that we will not sell the list in your hand for all the silver in the world. You tell the person in charge of the Hall of Healing that they aren’t the only pharmacy in the Eastern Kingdom. If they don’t want it, then the Temple of the Farmer God or the Pill King Garden would break their heads to obtain it. They’ll drown in their own regret when the Hall of Healing is surpassed by others. As soon as pill goes into production, all the medicines out on the market will be taken off the shelves and dumped into the trash. They’ll be worthless!”

Jiang Chen gestured as he said this firmly with utmost confidence.

He wasn’t simply sprouting hogwash. Jiang Chen had already filtered through all the pill recipes in his mind an endless number of times, eliminated all the holy and divine level pill recipes and finally settled on one that wasn’t too out of the ordinary, but definitely quite rare.

And the most important thing was, given Eastern Kingdom’s level of medicine, the ingredients that this recipe needed weren’t outside their tolerance range.

Seeing as Jiang Zheng still wore a skeptical expression, Jiang Chen really wanted to storm over and stomp the man a few times. Like it was that easy for the wonderful me to select such a recipe!

One had to know that in his past life, Jiang Chen couldn’t train because of his yin constitution. Therefore, in the millions of years as caretaker of the Tianlang Library, his greatest hobby was to pursue the dao of alchemy.

One could say that those millions of years had seen him ascend to the pinnacle of the dao of alchemy, on the same standing as those undying alchemy legends who were renowned throughout the lands.

For the past Jiang Chen, finding a pill recipe was as easy as eating and drinking.

But —

For a small place like the Eastern Kingdom, a pill recipe that was too sophisticated might as well have been written in archaic hieroglyphics; no one would be able to understand it.

He didn't even want to waste brainpower on recipes that were too basic or pointless.

He had expended a considerable amount of thought and effort into picking this particular one out of a list of common pill recipes. But Jiang Chen firmly believed that if dropped into a place like the Eastern Kingdom, the recipe would still shock people to the core.

At the end of the day, Jiang Zheng still set on his way.

It wasn't like he had been convinced by Jiang Chen, he earnestly told himself along the way. As much of a layabout the young master was, he wouldn't make a joke out of the princess' illness or gamble with the lives of the entire family.

So, he resolutely tried to convince himself that maybe the gods did look upon the young master with favor, and maybe he did obtain a priceless pill recipe as a result.

Although he was still quite skeptical, especially after recalling the crazy antics that Jiang Chen would normally engage in, Jiang Zheng really had no choice.

Even though he knew this was ridiculous beyond belief, he still had to gird up his loins and give it a try.

Otherwise, although he could manage, by the skin of his teeth, to scrape enough money together and buy all the listed ingredients, he would go home to a different kind of disaster when he faced his wife.

“Ai, they say that to be a young duke’s steward is something to crow and strut around about, but why do I feel that my days have been so aggrieved?” He tragically wiped away at the corners of his eyes and walked listlessly to the Hall of Healing.

“If it really comes down to it, I’ll just let them mock and jeer at me for a while. It wouldn’t be the first time anyways.” Jiang Zheng felt a bit better after this thought struck him.

The Hall of Healing was a famed, influential power in the imperial city. Its very buildings were picturesque boardwalk.

When Jiang Zheng made it to the front steps of the Hall of Healing, he felt that both his legs were going numb. A sense of fear started growing in his heart as he thought about the haughty attitude and disdaining tones of the associates at the Hall of Healing.

“Uh… that… um… I need some medicine ingredients!”

Jiang Zheng gathered up his courage multiple times before finally making it through the front door and to the counter.

The associates at the Hall of Healing were all professionally trained before starting work. The first skill that was trained was the ability to remember faces. Which faces needed to be fawned on, which needed to be flattered, which faces were enough with a normal attitude, and which the associates could be a dick to.

Jiang Zheng’s face was an unfamiliar one, and thus was naturally someone who the associates could be a dick to.

“Ahem. Sir, buying medicine ingredients is fine. But let’s talk about the rules first. The Hall does not do business on credit, ingredients and money need to both be fully paid out.”

Jiang Zheng hurriedly said, “Cash, I have cash.”

The associate glanced at the list and flicked some beads on an abacus. “Eight types of spirit level ingredients in total, 9,800 silver according to the ingredients weight. Same as usual, pay first, then

you get the ingredients.”

Jiang Zheng flushed and coughed fakely twice. He lightly knocked on the counter and say, “Eh, erm, uh, I want to speak to the person in charge.”

“What?” The associate’s face darkened. “No money? How dare you ask for ingredients with no money?”

“You want to speak to the person in charge? Do you know how busy the head of the Hall is? Each of his minutes is worth tens of thousands of silver, how would he have time for you? Can you bear the responsibility and costs of wasting their time?”

“Go out the door and take a right. Read the Hall’s rules. Is is that easy to speak to the head? Are you a prince or minister, or an esteemed duke?

“If you want your ingredients then pay up, if not then get out of my way and don’t disturb us from doing business.”

The associate flapped his hands with an impatient expression on his face, his spittle almost spraying Jiang Zheng’s face. The level of apparent distaste was the same as if the associate was shooing away an annoying fly.

It wasn’t as if Jiang Zheng hadn’t received his fair share of contempt and derision at the Hall of Healing before. It wasn’t as if he was someone who couldn’t take that kind of treatment. The

truth was, he had endured far too much during this time!

Did they really have to be such snobs? Really have to be such dicks?

Jiang Zheng could bear it no longer, this associate's particular attitude was the straw that broke the camel's back, he erupted —

A metallic token of sorts was slapped hard onto the counter.

Jiang Zheng gave the associate a resounding slap across the face, "Open your worthless eyes and take a good look at what this is!"

"The person in charge is worth ten thousand silver is a minute? Would I have deigned to let you know that I'm worth several million silver a minute?"

"How dare you delay my business, I can make your Hall of Healing close up shop! Do your parents know how you're such a wonderful, such an all powerful employee? Does your head know?"

The associate was seeing stars from the force of that slap. He held his face, disbelief writ plain in his eyes.

This was the Hall of Healing! One of the most prominent places in the entire imperial capital!

In an ordinary day of work, even noble and powerful families had to be restrained, polite and accommodating when they came here.

But today, he had been hit!

And by someone who was dressed very plainly, someone who was obviously not the servant of a noble and powerful family!

Was the sky caving in?

He immediately screamed like a pig being slaughtered, “Someone’s come to cause trouble in the Hall, he’s beating people up!”

A crowd of fully armored warriors bristling with weaponry rushed out immediately as soon as the scream like a pig being slaughtered sounded out. Someone who seemed to hold a position of authority also walked out from the back.

He was about to thunder into a rage at the sight of the plainly dressed, ordinary looking instigator when the shiny engraved dragon medallion on the counter caught his eye. His expression immediately changed drastically.

“Administrator He, that’s the dog of a slave who dared to hit me. This wasn’t a beating just for me, but also one aimed towards the hallowed name of the Hall of Healing!” The associate who had been beaten immediately tattled like a child seeing their parents when he saw a familiar face.

As soon as he'd finished —

A cleaner, crueler slap landed nicely on his cheek. That slap flung him a few meters away from the counter.

But this time, it was administrator He who had slapped the associate.

"You worthless thing, did your eyes grow on your butt? How dare you retort against an esteemed guest? It was a well deserved slap, you'd deserve it if you were beaten to death!"

Having rebuked the associate, administrator He's menacing expression morphed into a face wreathed with smiles, as if spring had returned to the earth.

"Sir, my underlings were blind and have offended your noble self."

He turned his head to yell gruffly at the warriors, "What the hell are you all doing? Sitting around watching the paint peel? Scram!"

These warriors were plainly under the command of administrator He as they about faced and marched away after receiving their orders.

Jiang Zheng hadn't expected this turn of events. He'd actually

briefly lost his rationality just now and had erupted under the strain and goading.

To be honest, the young master had given him this gold medallion. He didn't even know what it was, just that the young master had said it may come in handy.

He had nothing to lose and everything to gain when he tried it.

Who knew, it really did come in handy! It was curiously useful!

...no shit it would come in handy! The king's engraved dragon medallion was the highest level token that could be awarded. How could it not be useful? One could behave with impunity in the Eastern Kingdom with this in hand!

"May I learn your noble name? Please, come this way. My underlings were idiots, please allow your humble servant to express his apologies."

Jiang Zheng hadn't lived under a rock his whole life. He knew that it was due to the gold medallion that the person in front of him was falling over himself to please Jiang Zheng. Damn, it felt good!

Good feelings aside, Jiang Zheng didn't lose his composure. He had fully grasped the situation by now. "It was originally just a small thing, but your associate... sigh. I will speak no more. Since the Hall of Healing does not welcome me, then I shall try my luck

at the Temple of the Farmer God or the Pill King Garden. Perhaps the people there will treat me like a human being?”

Administrator He shuddered inwardly upon hearing those words. It was obvious that this esteemed guest was still seething. He surreptitiously checked out Jiang Zheng, but couldn’t find any clues.

He was dressed plainly and didn’t look like a preeminent noble.

Unless, this esteemed guest had changed his attire on purpose? What a strategy, he is quite a character indeed. Administrator He was at a loss as he couldn’t get a read on the situation.

Administrator He’s thoughts drifted to the medallion upon seeing Jiang Zheng really preparing to leave. How would he dare let Jiang Zheng leave? The mysterious all powerful medallion holder was sure to make trouble for the Hall of Healing!

Although the Hall didn’t fear trouble knocking on its doors, it wished to avoid offending this level of character if possible!

“Please sir, hold your steps. My hall’s third hallmaster and several elders happen to be in residence. You are a noble and esteemed guest, I shall immediately notify the hallmaster and elders. Even if you have later appointments, please allow my hall to serve you a cup of tea in apology.”

Unlike ordinary associates, Deacon He was a man experienced in

the ways of life. He was flexible and adaptable, and had a knack of handling things properly.

Jiang Zheng's motion of leaving was actually a fake move. To be honest, he felt beyond damn good. This was the first time he had felt this way since he had become the young duke's steward.

Pride and elation!

During previous times, even mere associates in the Hall of Healing were high and mighty dicks, not to mention leader type folks. None of them had a civil word for him.

But today, this administrator He had to call himself "little He" before him, Jiang Zheng!

Regardless of whether or not he could become the best steward in the future, at least he felt really damn good and really strong today!

Suddenly, Jiang Zheng felt an unexpected bit of confidence in his household's young duke.

Chapter 8: Shocking The Hall Of Healing

One had to say, the engraved dragon medallion held quite a bit of influence. Whether it was the Hall of Healing's third hallmaster, or its elders, none of them dared to slight a holder of the dragon medallion.

It wasn't that they didn't dare to insult such a character; it was more that they didn't wish to.

Jiang Zheng was swiftly invited inside. Apart from the third hallmaster, there was a male and a female elder present as well, fully demonstrating the depths of the Hall's sincerity.

It wasn't the first time that Jiang Zheng had come to the Hall of Healing. The highest ranked person he'd seen before was an administrator, and that was only in passing. He hadn't even had the opportunity to start a conversation.

But, today, a hallmaster and two elders were standing in front of him and treating him as an honored guest.

Wasn't this a drastic change in fortunes?

Jiang Zheng felt really damn good inside, but didn't let it go to his head. He resolutely told himself to calm down and to avoid showing fear. He knew that these folks were not giving him face, but the medallion instead.

Since he had the medallion up his sleeve, what did he have to fear?

One had to give it to him, Jiang Zheng was something else alright. The three hallmaster still couldn't get a read on him after three rounds of tea. He chuckled and said, "This noble sir carries a medallion granted by the king himself. Sir must be an uncommon individual. May we glean a bit of your purpose here today?"

Granted by the king himself? Jiang Zheng almost flung the teacup from his hand in fright.

When Jiang Chen had given him this medallion, he'd only said that it would be useful, but hadn't breathed a hint that it had been bestowed by the king himself. He finally understood why the Hall of Healing was being so polite.

"To be honest, it wasn't any major thing. I had come to obtain some medicine ingredients, and to discuss a bit of business with your Hall."

Buying medicine ingredients was a small thing in the eyes of the hallmaster and elders, something they wouldn't inquire further about. They were much more interested in that 'spot of business.'

"May we know what business this might be?" The hallmaster inquired noncommittally. He wouldn't rashly agree to something before gaining a full understanding of this stranger's background.

“I have a pill recipe here, one that has been lost since ancient times.” Jiang Zheng didn’t bother with small talk and cut straight to the chase. “I won’t sell this recipe, only share the profits. 50/50: you’re in charge of the medicine ingredients, I’ll just hold ownership.”

Holding ownership and asking for a 50/50 split, this was asking for a lot.

Even if it was an exclusive pill recipe, it wasn’t as if the Hall of Healing had never seen it before. This fellow was really demanding far too much. A 50/50 split, this was sheer robbery!

“Heh, the Hall has seen our share of pill recipe trade before. We’ve always bought out the previous owner, and have no precedent for sharing profits. And not to mention the fact that we bear the costs. This 50/50 split is... it really is... Let’s put it this way: May I take a look at the recipe first?”

The third hallmaster didn’t shut down negotiations, but it was obvious that he wasn’t too enthused. As for perusing the recipe, he did so out of a sense of professional courtesy.

“You can took a look alright, I’m just afraid you won’t be able to understand it. Ah whatever, you can have a look. I have the refining method anyway, and I’ve left out some of the most important ingredients. Feel free to go through it, but don’t even think about stealing it.”

Jiang Zheng generously flung out the list and spoke with a

careless, indifferent manner. He was as serene as a mountain. It was obvious to see that he was fully comfortable with the situation by now and was interacting with the Hall's authority figures with ease.

The third hallmaster took the recipe, cast a glance and slightly creased his brow. How was this a pill recipe that had been lost for ages?

A regular piece of paper, ordinary handwriting... his first impression was that this was a scam.

If you wanted to counterfeit an ancient pill recipe, at least find a yellowed piece of paper and write in sagacious calligraphy.

What the heck was this?

This counterfeit seriously lacked effort. Did he intend to use the dragon medallion to swindle the Hall of Healing?

The two elders also looked at the recipe with odd expressions on their faces. Their gazes met, and both could read "fraud" in each other's eyes.

The third hallmaster took back the recipe and scrutinized it again. His brow furrowed, "The Heavenly Karma pill. I've never heard of this pill."

"It's a pill recipe from ancient times. Isn't it normal that you

haven't heard of it? If you have, would it still be a long lost recipe?" Jiang Zheng calmly wet his lips with a sip of tea.

He put the teacup and lid onto the table with one smooth movement. "You've seen the recipe now but can't recognize its true value. There will be others who can. I know your thoughts. You're thinking that this paper and handwriting looks too commonplace, and that its a fake. Ah, whatever. One cannot talk to summer insects about ice. If you understood, you wouldn't need any words of explanation. If you didn't, then it would make no difference if I talked until I was blue in the face. I won't bother you anymore. Good day."

Although Jiang Zheng spoke with a free and easy attitude, his heart was pounding like a drum. This was his final scheme: playing hard to get. Pretending to be a deep character, faking carefreeness.

If they didn't fall for it, then he was really out of ideas.

"Ai. I hope that the Temple of the Farmer God or the Pill King Garden recognizes value where it lies. Let us hope that there is not an abundance of pill amateurs and not a single master worthy of his title in this great capital."

Jiang Zheng displayed flagging interest as he carelessly stood up and prepared to leave.

The third hallmaster felt Jiang Zheng was a bit mysterious as the latter was quite inscrutable and inexplicably free and easy. If their guest left just like this, that meant the Hall of Healing had not

offered any insult. Logically speaking, they should be quite happy with this turn of events.

But for some reason, the third hallmaster felt that if they let this guest go like this, the Hall would be losing out on something.

His curiosity peaked, the third hallmaster called out, “Sir, please hold your steps! My Hall’s lord hallmaster and second hallmaster will return in just a few days. Although I do not know this pill, perhaps they…”

“Ah forget it forget it. Chance and luck wait for no one. I came to the Hall of Healing on a whim today. I don’t have the patience to wait a few days for you. Who would have thought that the great Hall of Healing would not have a single person who can recognize the value of this recipe. What a shame, what a pity.”

Jiang Zheng progressed through retreating, and stepped up his game of playing hard to get.

The third hallmaster and two elders had nothing to say in response and was about to happily send their guest along their way, when a cold snort pierced the hallway. A haughty voice penetrated strongly through the air, “What recipe? Such empty boasts, bring it in front of me.”

Jiang Zheng hesitated and was about to speak when the third hallmaster smiled, “That would be elder Shun. Elder Shun is a foreigner, but the Hall’s resident expert and a heavyweight in the pill medicine world. Even my Hall’s lord hallmaster would have to

pay his respects to Elder Shun.

“Can a resident expert make any decisions?” Jiang Zheng stuck his nose in the air.

“If it was elder Shun doing the appraisal, the Hall would trust elder Shun’s judgment.”

A resident expert could have such influence and sway? What kind of resident expert was this? Jiang Zheng thought it was exceedingly odd, but this wasn’t what he really cared about.

The pill recipe was passed over to another room, where a white haired old man, who had witnessed the passages of time, took possession of the paper. He glanced at it, and at first thought the same as the third hallmaster. But he then furrowed his brow and settled into deep thought.

His frown grew even deeper after a while, and he muttered to himself, “Can such a pill recipe exist on this earth? Can I have walked the paths of the dao of alchemy for two hundred years, yet still remained so ignorant?”

Elder Shun abruptly stood up and pushed open a door to step into a garden behind the room. There was a girl dressed in pale green silk in the middle of the garden, standing in the midst of a patch of jade green bamboo. She was feeding some birds as the morning mist illuminated her snow white skin, turning it as creamy as suet.

“Huang’er.” Elder Shun called.

The girl turned and displayed a stunning beauty that was as mesmerizing as the silver moon, the white of snow, the most exquisite scenery. A few traces of faint sorrow could be found in her brow, adding a hint of desolation to her otherwise enthralling beauty.

To find such beauty on earth, it was a match even for the fairies in the heavens.

“Yes, elder Shun?”

Elder Shun smiled, ”I’ve just received a pill recipe but am unable to place my finger on it. Huang’er, will you cast an eye over it?”

The girl smiled lightly. That smile smoothed her brow and dispersed the gloom, bringing her to life.

“If even elder Shun is unable to make it out, then Huang’er is unlikely to do any better. Let me take a look.”

When she handled the recipe, Huang’er did not comment on the paper or handwriting, but involuntarily gave a low gasp, “The Heavenly Karma pill? This is an ancient recipe.”

Her expression grew even more astonished the further she read. Finally, she read the recipe from top to bottom again, “I have once seen this pill recipe in a precious classic book, but it was not

complete. The ingredients that were listed however, were exactly the same as the ones listed here. The list in the classic book was not as comprehensive as the one here."

It was elder Shun's turn to be surprised, "So this means that the recipe for the Heavenly Karma pill is real?"

"Real or not, Huang'er has never seen the complete recipe before. But following this line of reasoning, it is highly likely that this recipe is real. Elder Shun, where did this pill recipe come from?"

Elder Shun's face suddenly came alive as an animated light shone out of his eyes. But he seemed to think of something sad, and the light slowly faded away again.

"Ai, even if this Heavenly Karma pill were real, it is only the gold standard for physical hurts. It is useless against your sickness, Huang'er."

Elder Shun's excitement abated greatly after he spoke.

However, Huang'er was the one who smiled and said, "Elder Shun, matters written in the stars cannot be forced. Leave it to fate."

The pill recipe made its way back to the third hallmaster and elders, along with a dispassionate sentence from elder Shun, "That recipe is most likely real, and if it goes into production, then all the healing pills of your Eastern Kingdom, and even those of the

neighboring sixteen kingdoms, are trash compared to it. Demand will dry up as the Heavenly Karma pill will take the market by the storm. You decide what to do next!”

It was apparent that although elder Shun was just a resident expert, his status was extremely high and even the Hall of Healing fawned on him.

The third hallmaster was gobsmacked. He hadn’t anticipated that, after elder Shun’s appraisal, that fake-beyond-words pill would turn out to be most likely real.

That was good and all, but elder Shun’s words were too frightening. This Heavenly Karma pill would cause all other similar products to be pulled from the shelves? This was simply too intimidating to contemplate.

This was cornering the market! To corner a market meant high profits and extremely high return on investment. Even the mere thought of it was enough to make someone shudder all over.

In complete contrast, Jiang Zheng was able to lay his heart to rest when he heard elder Shun’s appraisal. What a lifesaver; what an expert! He was truly family, someone who recognized the true value of things!

Jiang Zheng had been deathly afraid that elder Shun would conclude with “trash” as his judgement. If that was the case, then he, Jiang Zheng, would have been thrown out of the Hall in a dusty exodus.

But now, armed with elder Shun's appraisal and observing the third hallmaster's reaction, Jiang Zheng knew that the young duke had won this bet. He really did have help from the gods!

He had his reassurement and an ace up his sleeve, therefore Jiang Zheng's attitude grew even more superior. He smiled faintly, "Seeing as the Hall of Healing is not willing to express anything, then I shall not waste my time further then. Farewell."

"Sir, please wait!" The third hallmaster became a little stressed out.

He couldn't afford not to, if this Heavenly Karma pill wound up in the hands of the competition, then that would be an extremely bad development. In the future, not only would the Eastern Kingdom's market be dominated by this pill, so would the markets of the neighboring 16 countries.

It was a terrifying thought indeed.

Chapter 9: We're Seriously Rich

If this truly happened, the third hallmaster could almost imagine the type of punishment he would face when the lord hallmaster returned!

Although it was just a healing medicine, it was something that every practitioner needed. This size of this market was an astronomical figure.

Not to mention that this was an exclusive trade, available only at this store and no others. They would be able to corner the market with complete peace of mind.

This type of business opportunity happened less than once in ten lifetimes! If they missed out on it, they wouldn't even be able to find a place to cry.

"Sir, anything can be discussed! Our Hall offers complete sincerity in discussing this matter. How about this, the Hall first offers ten thousand silver as a token of our genuinity. Please treat it as a gesture of friendship, of our desire to be friends with the noble sir. I can also be so bold as to agree to the terms of a 50/50 split. We can sign the cooperation contract as soon as the lord hallmaster returns."

Jiang Zheng was so happy that flowers were almost blooming in his heart, yet he remembered Jiang Chen's words. Jiang Chen had said that the 50/50 split was the bottom line. If he could negotiate an even better split, then the additional profit would be his, Jiang

Zheng's!

Wasn't this opportunity knocking on his door?

"Third hallmaster, I've already given you a chance just now, but you did not grasp it. The 50/50 split is a thing of the past. Now, hmph! If we don't reach an agreement, it will be 70/30. I believe that the Temple of the Farmer God or the Pill King Garden would still be willing even with a 70/30 split."

This wasn't exhortation, but a simple fact. The Temple and Garden had always covetously eyed the Hall's position as the pill market leader in the kingdom. How would they pass up such an opportunity that had come knocking on their door?

The pill medicine's costs were roughly ten percent. Even with a 70/30 split, there was still room for twenty percent profit.

This twenty percent profit was no small thing. Twenty percent profit of a cornered market was still a showstopping figure. After all, this thing would be able to dominate the markets of all sixteen surrounding kingdoms!

Low profit margins were not a match for low margin and high volume!

"...draft the contract immediately! Attend to me! Immediately offer ten thousand gold to this gentleman as a sign of our sincerity!" The third hallmaster really wanted to slap himself now.

Why hadn't he been more enthusiastic earlier? Why hadn't he been more resolute?

A perfectly fine 50/50 split had turned into this in a blink of an eye.

But it was still a good deal. The third hallmaster decided to still go through with the deal as he thought of the future potential of this business. Best not to irk this gentleman further. The 70/30 split would become real if he changed his mind again. That would a loss of another ten percent of profit.

Jiang Zheng felt like he was surrounded by happiness and contentment after he'd accepted the ten thousand gold. He patted the third hallmaster's shoulder, "You are quite a likeable guy. Let's split, I'll do 60 and you do 40. We can happily settle on this!"

Jiang Zheng almost forgot how he got home. He felt like his entire body was floating and that he would drift away to the clouds as he walked on the street.

He was too happy, too excited.

So excited that he almost suspected that he was dreaming!

The ten thousand gold was nothing in his eyes now. The contract had been drafted, and he had reviewed it. He remembered that the young duke had promised that he, Jiang Zheng would be able to keep the profits of any split more favorable than the bottom line of

50/50.

But he hasn’t signed it. After all, the young master had to weigh in on this. He was just an underling, and didn’t dare overstep his place by signing a contract without the express orders of his master.

Jiang Zheng counted on his fingertips. If he converted this ten percent profit into silver, then the proceeds would be enough for him to live in style for a long while.

Delicacies from land and sea, dressed in fine attire and riding well groomed horses, a manor and surrounding lands, home filled with gold and silver.

At this moment, Jiang Zheng felt that this kind of life was already staring at him in the face.

Conversing with the powerful, befriending the noble, wives coexisting in harmony, doting on sons and grandchildren.

This kind of life was already waving to him from afar.

Regulars at the Autumn Crane, financier of the Garden of Returning Spring, whoring with dukes and princes, drinking at the same table with esteemed officials.

Naturally, these kinds of scenes wouldn’t be too far away!

He returned joyfully to the manor and was about to report the good news to the young duke, but was informed that the young duke had closed his doors for training. Any messages would have to wait.

Jiang Zheng didn't think too much about it as his entire being was enveloped by happiness. He simply decided not to leave, and sat down in front of the young duke's room, loyally filling in the role of a guard.

He still had not regained his calm after he'd sat down. He reminisced about the young duke's historical antics, and thought about the astonishing events of today.

Jiang Zheng couldn't help but suspect, "Has the young duke been a charlatan all along? Was he testing me with those nonsensical actions before? Was he pretending to be weak, when in fact he was quite strong?"

Whether it was being a charlatan or truly a visitation from the gods, Jiang Zheng clearly realized that his doubts from before were quite incorrect.

He knew that even if the young duke had no other redeeming qualities about him, this pill recipe alone represented unlimited potential!

As the young duke's personal body servant and steward, it would be a grave mistake if he didn't keep close to the young duke's

footsteps!

"I was being silly before in wanting to quit. Thank goodness the young duke still believes in me, Jiang Zheng. I've got to do a good job in the future. What does the gain and loss of a moment matter? The young duke hadn't made any moves before simply because he didn't want to. Now that he's made one, it's a grand gesture indeed! It looks like the young duke is no ordinary person!"

Many thoughts were running through Jiang Zheng's head, but the most resolute one was that in the future, he would steadfastly follow the young duke's footsteps. He would not even crease his brow if they scaled mountains made of knives, or dived into oceans of fire.

Wasn't the goal of a steward following a master to attain power and riches?

The more he thought, the more Jiang Zheng's blood thrummed. He would have more status now at home, and could lecture that yellow faced wife of his to not be so short sighted!

Why should I, Jiang Zheng, try to one up the other stewards? So they're momentarily wealthy and temporarily high placed, big freaking deal. Can all of them added together measure up to my haul today?

While Jiang Zheng was happily dreaming of his blueprints to a happy-ever-after, Jiang Chen was taking the first steps on the path of training in both his past and present lives.

One had to say, the past Jiang Chen was the epitome of laziness. His potential was in the top percentile amongst all 108 dukedom heirs, but the effort he put forth was without a doubt the lowest.

“This kid was seriously a ne’er-do-well. All this potential, wasted!” Jiang Chen was a bit dissatisfied with his past self.

The divisions of the martial dao mastery in this world were defined by the initial step of training true qi.

In this world, the basics of martial dao were — there were twelve major acupoints in a person’s body, and twelve meridians flowed through them. One could clear a meridian by clearing an acupoint, and coalesce the body’s energy into one current of true qi.

Altogether, there were twelve meridians true qi in the true qi realm.

But in the Eastern Kingdom, there existed no one who had been able to obtain twelve meridians true qi by clearing all twelve meridians, via clearing the twelve acupoints.

Therefore, a sentence existed in the world of training: Twelve levels of true qi separate snakes and dragons.

Whether a practitioner was a dragon or snake depended on how many acupoints he could clear in his body.

Generally speaking, clearing three meant passing. Three meridians true qi were called the realm of initial true qi. These types of people were a bit stronger than your average person. They were suitable for joining the military and fighting in wars, or guarding homes.

If one surpassed three and was within six levels, that counted as intermediate level true qi. This level of practitioner enjoyed higher status amongst martial dao practitioners. Whether it was joining the military or trying their hand in other professions, they would achieve good results.

As for surpassing six levels and staying with nine levels, then that was entering the advanced level of true qi.

There were exceedingly few within the advanced level. If one became an advanced level practitioner, then he would be quite a character in the Eastern Kingdom region.

Those above nine levels would be hailed as true qi masters, but those were as rare phoenix feathers or dragon scales.

They were few and far in between in the entire Eastern Kingdom. Anyone who could train to the ninth level or above would be respectfully titled a true qi master and genius of martial dao.

But of course, the twelve levels of true qi were still only a basic foundation at the end of the day. Within the realm of true qi, one was still only a true qi practitioner no matter how strong he was. If they could not transform their true qi to spirit qi, then their path

of martial dao was but an elusive and futile effort. All would be as ephemeral as the clouds at the end of two hundred years of life.

Thus, there was another sentence that existed as one ascended higher: if true qi does not transmute to spirit qi, then one is still a worm.

Adding the two sentences together gave rise to this saying: Twelve levels of true qi separate snakes and dragons. if true qi does not transmute to spirit qi, then one is still a worm.

What did it mean to transmute true qi to spirit qi?

It was the act of training true qi to an utmost level, perceiving the spirit sea, and transforming true qi to spirit qi. It was to borrow the powers of heaven and earth, and transforming to supreme spirit power.

Once true qi was converted to spirit qi, that was when one shook off the shackles of martial dao and entered the dao of spirit.

Spirit dao practitioners created clouds with the flip of a hand, and made it rain with another flip. They could summon forth the wind and rain, move mountains and frame the sea.

It was said that even the combined efforts of ten true qi masters would be unable to withstand a careless blow from a spirit dao practitioner.

It would not be hyperbole to say that if someone entered the spirit dao, then they were truly a golden scaled dragon soaring above the clouds!

There was a legend of a strong spirit dao warrior residing in the Eastern Kingdom. He was a recluse, hidden deeply, and mysterious beyond belief. Even the king would have to humble himself and pay his respects to this warrior.

The funny things was, in the world of martial cultivation, although those walking the paths of spirit dao rarely surfaced, there were still a few. However, there were none that numbered amongst the supreme true qi masters.

What did one mean by supreme true qi master?

It meant a genius martial dao practitioner who had cleared all twelve acupoints and meridians.

In the annals of its history, no one had ever given birth to such a genius in the Eastern Kingdom. Even the surrounding sixteen kingdoms very rarely boasted of one.

A twelve meridians true qi master was even more uncommon than a spirit dao practitioner.

As for the ten, eleven meridians — each kingdom had a small handful of those.

But for reasons unknown, there wasn't a single twelve meridians true qi master.

Logically speaking, once someone had trained to the eleven meridians true qi, they could absolutely continue the fight and clear the twelve acupoint as well. But the rules of training were just that harsh.

Some geniuses arduously sought after the twelve meridians paragon after training to the eleven meridians true qi, but ended up with nothing in the end, and even missed out on the best timing to attempt to ascend to spirit dao.

According to the laws of martial dao, those under 30 had the greatest chance of transmuting true qi to spirit qi. The probability would shrink by one half if under 40, with no chance at all after 50.

Therefore, if one didn't make good use of time in transforming true qi after training to the eleven levels of true qi, they would forever lose this chance if their age exceeded the appropriate range.

Training to the twelve meridians paragon still meant staying within the true qi realm, and one's lifespan would not exceed 300 years.

But once a practitioner transmuted their true qi, their lifespan would immediately jump to 700 or 800, even 1000 years, giving rise to many more opportunities on the path of martial dao.

Therefore, ten and eleven meridians true qi masters were always faced with this dilemma. Do they continue to explore twelve meridians true qi? Or make the best use of their time and transform true qi to spirit qi?

This was a difficult decision, but reason would win out over impulse for most true qi masters, and they would choose to transform their true qi.

Although the success rate of transmuting was also low, at least it was better than the fleeting gesture of pursuing the twelve meridians paragon, right?

The additional years of life granted from successfully transmuting to spirit qi were the greatest temptation of all.

Of course, the Jiang Chen of today had no time to muse on these matters.

With his current abilities, this was all too abstract and unattainable for him right now. It was something he did not need to think about, for now.

The problem he faced today was to increase his strength as much as possible in order to face the oncoming Hidden Dragon Trials. If he couldn’t even pass the basic exams and obtain the right to compete in the Trials, then his first steps in this newly reincarnated life would be truly too depressing.

Chapter 10: Breakthrough, Four Meridians True Qi

The previous Jiang Chen had started training his body from the age of six. Seeing as he was fifteen this year, he had spent seven or eight years clearing three acupoints, and coalescing three meridians true qi.

Achieving three meridians true qi would have been quite an accomplishment if he had been a child of any other ordinary family.

But he was the son of a duke, and had been born with a golden spoon in his mouth. His bloodlines were good, resources abundant, and potential excellent. To achieve only three meridians true qi after that many years of training was quite the failure amongst failures.

“To be honest, the duke of Jiang Han is a father who unconditionally takes his son’s side, and is quite forgiving.” Jiang Chen sighed lightly amongst laughter, but was not depressed.

“Twelve levels of true qi. Heh, if I remember correctly, these is a type of foundational training, merely a minor cycle of the path of cultivation. It is the lowest level of existence amongst all types of training. In my past life, I was the caretaker of the Tianlang Library, and was well versed in all aspects of divine and common knowledge. Now that I have reincarnated, how can I train in such an inconsequential path?”

Although he thought this way, reality was cruel and hash. Despite being full of wisdom and theories, he could only resign himself to walking these negligible paths of cultivation with the current condition of his body.

With his current body, he would probably train to death and still have nothing to show for it if he started off immediately practicing numerous grand methods.

Jiang Chen was a bit depressed. This was like sitting down to a spread of delicacies from land and sea, but he was limited to pairing only pickled roots with his rice.

However, Jiang Chen was not overly downcast as he knew —

“The path of cultivation is the same for all. Many geniuses have emerged from ordinary commoners to ascend to legendary positions. But did not they all start with practicing the same minor methods of martial dao? I will observe the customs of this place and shall even improve on these minor methods.”

Jiang Chen was quite confident.

Once he had thought through this point, his entire being became spontaneously happy.

“Haha, I was thinking too much just now. Isn’t it such a huge joke that I want to upend the laws of cultivation as soon as I’ve arrived in this world? Although I can’t practice the numerous

grand methods, don't I have numerous ways to hasten my progress in this paltry true qi realm, and catch up to the greats?"

Jiang Chen was really fresh out of ideas if he'd wanted to use this body to practice grand methods. But practicing the minor methods in the realm of true qi — he had ideas aplenty then.

"This idiot, no wonder his true qi is so frail. How is his true qi supposed to improve when he fishes for three days and casts nets for two?"

"And, the way he's using to circulate qi is completely incorrect. This method of breathing is complete nonsense."

"My dear heavens, did this brat even spend an ounce of effort on training? How could he even get the order of true qi circulation wrong? What a character!"

"This is laughable. One needs to clear the twelve acupoints, but the practitioners of this world have no method of mapping their acupoints. Exploration is even needed?"

Jiang Chen discovered quite a few issues after a few random circulations of qi.

The most hysterical thing was that it was an exceedingly arduous trial each time a practitioner cleared an acupoint. A great deal of trial and error was involved.

It was apparent to see that acupoints were scattered randomly in each practitioner's body, with no rhyme or reason.

But, didn't this world have a method to locate acupoints?

Jiang Chen identified a handful of methods to locate acupoints just by randomly searching through his memories. But what he didn't know was that if these methods he'd randomly plucked from memories were disseminated into the world, they would cause great fever and upheaval.

"Ai, it would seem that the ordinary circumstances I've reincarnated into are quite weak indeed, weak to the point of being in the bottom of the ranks." Jiang Chen had gained a further understanding of the specifics of his current life.

At least, it was exceedingly poor in the area of training methods.

"Maybe, Eastern Kingdom lacks resources merely in the realm of training? Are they stronger in other fields?" Jiang Chen had no intention of discounting anyone. He had no right to look down on even Eastern Kingdom.

After all, although he was full of the universe's secrets, with his current level of training, any random practitioner on the capital's streets could crush him as easily as stepping on an ant.

Jiang Chen corrected and improved on each of the problems he had found earlier. He tapped into his three meridians and started

circulating three meridians qi in his body.

In the beginning, due to his inexperience, Jiang Chen found controlling qi to be a bit difficult.

He became much more adept, and controlling the three meridians qi was more effortless after a few cycles.

At first, the qi movement was exceedingly slow, as if worms moving through dirt. Its movement became faster and faster over the course of the few hours. Suddenly, the three meridians qi thundered towards some part within the body.

They were like three floodwaters flooding the plains, utterly collapsing and submerging a dam.

A feeling of comfort that almost made one wish to cry out in satisfaction saturated Jiang Chen's body, and a rush of blood went straight to his brain.

His entire being felt incredibly comfortable, as if it was about to take flight.

That rush of feeling formed a hot air current and flowed down a meridian like the gentle spring rains, spontaneously creating a new pathway within his body.

Fourth qi acupoint, cleared!

Four meridians true qi!

One had to say, this body possessed good potential to begin with. Jiang Chen had summarized the salient points of training from his memories and had corrected the mistakes of his past self. The results were instantaneous.

The original pathetic three meridians true qi had immediately ascended to four meridians true qi!

And him, Jiang Chen, had taken the step out of the realm of initial qi and joined the ranks of the intermediate realm of true qi!

“Hahaha, who would’ve thought training is such a wonderful feeling!” Jiang Chen’s mind was full of various thoughts at the successful completion of him taking this step. They all poured out and came to a head, momentarily overwhelming him with emotion.

It had not been an easy path. He was the exalted son of the Celestial Emperor in his past life, but was unable to train due to his yin constitution. He had waited millions of years; he’d waited until the cataclysm arrived and obtained the right to train due to his reincarnation.

How could Jiang Chen not have mixed feelings when thinking of all that had transpired before?

The Jiang Chen of now was like a ravenous glutton from ancient times: full of hunger and greed towards cultivation.

Once he had stabilized the fourth meridian true qi, he chose a “True Acupoint Resonance” method and easily pinpointed the location of the fifth acupoint.

Of course, Jiang Chen knew that it was an easy thing to find the fifth acupoint. But to clear this acupoint and receive a fifth level of true qi was not that simple.

True qi would not be pure if the foundations were not firm. He had just cleared the fourth meridian and had not yet built it up. There was no way it could withstand a strong impact. All would be for naught if he was impatient for progress and harmed his meridians.

Therefore, the next step was to temper the four meridians he already controlled, and make appropriate use of the four meridians true qi.

As for ways to temper meridians, he had an abundance of those, whether it was training methods or refining medicines. He would be able to proceed at ten or a hundred times the pace of others.

This was his advantage, an advantage that no genius could match!

Genius?

In this world, what genius could be more brilliant than the son of the Celestial Emperor?

“It looks like the “True Acupoint Resonance” method does actually locate the acupoints. I was worried that due to varying circumstances, this method may not be effective. It would seem that the path of martial dao all leads to the same result, despite the plethora of different ways.”

Jiang Chen was a bit self satisfied, as he knew that just the use of the “True Acupoint Resonance” method was enough to put him ahead of other young geniuses.

After all, the genius practitioners of this world needed to meditate, explore and reflect in order to find an acupoint and clear a meridian.

But he, he could directly locate an acupoint through a method that did not belong in his class. This meant that he could save quite a bit of time compared to others.

“Indeed, the deficiencies of training methods can directly restrict the progress of a region’s practitioners.” Jiang Chen lamented a bit.

In actuality, geniuses were not separated by class. But, there were different rankings of one’s potential to train.

How much time could be saved by the best resources and knowledge? How many windings paths could geniuses avoid as a result?

Jiang Chen had increased confidence in his future in martial dao thanks to these thoughts.

It was almost dusk when he left the training room. He had been in there for a full ten hours. This would undoubtedly become prime gossip in the duke's manor if word got out. One had to know that the most the previous Jiang Chen would train for was four hours.

"Eh? Jiang Zheng? What are you doing here?"

Upon pushing the door open, Jiang Chen was a bit surprised to see Jiang Zheng sitting at the doorstep.

"Young duke, joyous tidings!" Jiang Zheng wasn't the type to wear his heart on his sleeve, but he had been sitting here since early afternoon. It was now dusk; he had a belly full of good news but no one to share it with. He'd finally awaited the end of Jiang Chen's training, and was naturally overjoyed.

"Don't get worked up Jiang Zheng. So much excitement over such a little matter?" Jiang Chen chuckled knowingly. It looked like Jiang Chen had had a successful trip to the Hall of Healing.

"Young duke's plans were spot on. The Hall's people were first

arrogant, but then respectful. They ended up begging me in the end! And…" Jiang Zheng's features were quite animated as he was extremely excited.

"Jiang Zheng, let's talk about these small matters later. What about the ingredients I wanted?"

"Here, they're all here!" Jiang Zheng's respect for his master grew even further. You've got to hand it to the young master. He sees such a large business deal as a "small matter".

"Go see to it that the servants prepare a large wooden tub, and bring some additional vats of clear water to this secret room." Jiang Chen commanded.

"Your wish is my command."

One had to say, Jiang Zheng was a commendable steward. He had fulfilled Jiang Chen's orders in less than an hour.

"Alright, Jiang Zheng, why don't you go home. Come here and await my orders early next morning. Give me a report on the pill recipe then."

To be honest, the Heavenly Karma pill was just a means to an end in Jiang Chen's eyes. It was just a way to resolve the immediate economic crisis in front of him.

Frankly speaking, he had absolutely no interest in either the

Heavenly Karma pill or its resulting economic effects. His attention was not on these matters.

Things would be much easier now that he had these ingredients.

He would be able to mostly recover from the caning injuries after just a night's healing.

These spirit level herbs were all basic ingredients for the Heavenly Karma pill. Although Jiang Chen was unable to actually refine the pill with his current foundations, he would be able to achieve around thirty to forty percent of the pill's healing properties through the use of certain techniques to combine the ingredients.

That night, Jiang Chen seeped his body in the pill ingredients, and directed four meridians true qi to continuously repair internal damage.

Thus, a night quietly passed by...

Chapter 11: Medicine Buying Craze

When Jiang Chen opened his eyes the next day, there were a few traces of vitality that hadn't been present in his eyes before.

He sat up and stretched, his entire body filled with an explosive type of power.

Thirty to forty percent of the Heavenly Karma pill's effects were already amazing enough to pretty much heal eighty to ninety percent of Jiang Chen's injuries. Added to the fact that his four meridians true qi had spent the night repairing and strengthening his body after he had cleared his fourth meridian, his bodily functions had improved many levels throughout the course of one night.

Jiang Zheng had been there since early that morning, and was in fine fettle. He was delighted whenever he thought about how he'd lectured his wife and regained his pride as the man of the house last night after she'd apologized, as well as the resulting prowess he'd displayed between the bedsheets yesterday night.

But he was utterly flabbergasted when he saw Jiang Chen walk out of the room.

"Young duke, you... you..." Jiang Zheng was unable to find the appropriate words because he was so astonished. Jiang Chen had simply undergone too great of a change.

The previous Jiang Chen was a rascal and at times domineering,

and at times anxious and depressed. In other words, he really wasn't much of anything.

But today, the young duke had a brand new look about him. His entire presence and aura was like a newly forged sword straight from the furnace, with keen edges and light.

"Jiang Zheng, ready my horse. I'm going out."

"Yes!" Jiang Zheng would gladly endure hardships. He used to think that running errands for the young duke was a pain, but had been filled with the fires of passion since yesterday.

It was only after they'd left the manor that Jiang Zheng carefully asked, "Young duke, where are we going?"

"The Hall of Healing of course." Jiang Chen chuckled, snapped his whip, and sent his horse galloping. He was in an extremely good mood today, and a man rides a fast horse when he is proud!

"Eh? Young duke, please wait for your servant!" Jiang Chen had already disappeared off into the distance by the time Jiang Zheng had reacted.

The Hall of Healing's majestic buildings appeared in front of Jiang Chen after a short while.

When Jiang Chen arrived on the Hall's doorstep, the customers walking in and out of the hall acted as if they'd seen a ghost.

After all, Jiang Chen was still the son of a duke and had a bit of fame in the capital. That fart he'd let out at the holy temple was enough to make him headline news in the entire capital over the past two days.

Farting during the Rights of Heavenly Worship, this Jiang Chen was something else alright.

Therefore, Jiang Chen's name had been gossiped about extensively over the past two days, and was synonymous with being "unique".

Jiang Chen had farted during the Rites of Heavenly Worship and desecrated the gods. The king had commanded for him to be caned to death. This was news that the entire kingdom knew.

But very few knew that he had not died from his caning

Therefore, his emergence now was bound to set the rumor mill running again.

"Do you see that? Isn't that that good-for-nothing young duke from the Jiang Han province?"

"So what if he is? There are so many powers in the capital, do you want to suck up to that one?"

“Suck up your ass. I’m saying that that’s Jiang Chen! Wasn’t he caned to death for farting in the Rites of Heavenly Worship?”

“What? You’re talking about Jiang Chen? That farting weirdo? Where?”

Conversations like this were being held all around the Hall of Healing. People clustered in small groups and were almost all discussing the same matter.

As for the person in question, Jiang Chen, he paid no heed to these silly glances, and was even less inclined to engage with these people.

He had important matters to deal with at the Hall of Healing.

There were two more days before he had to enter the palace and treat the princess. He’d have to make some preparations no matter what. It wouldn’t be a very seemly thing to walk in empty handed, and he’d be hard pressed to explain himself.

Jiang Chen had sketched out a rough plan for dealing with Eastern Zhiruo’s problem, and he had come today to set some things in motion.

The attitude of the associates at the Hall of Healing had obviously been rectified after the events of yesterday. It was apparent that some internal restructuring had happened.

Jiang Chen placed a list on the counter. “Hello, I’d like the ingredients on this list.”

The associate took the list and nodded, but frowned slightly when he reached the last ingredient on the list. “A sixth rank spirit level ingredient? Sir… are you sure you want this ingredient?”

“Just prepare the ingredients according to the list.” Jiang Chen smiled slightly.

“But this ingredient…” The associate hesitated.

“What? Too low level? You don’t have it here? Then swap it out for a Nine Flame Aurora Fruit.”

It was as if the associate had been hit with a bolt of lightning that fried his insides and cooked his skin. He barely managed to squeeze out a smiling face. “Sir, what is a Nine Flame Aurora Fruit? The Hall doesn’t carry it. The Dragonbone Sun Grass is an item of utmost yang. It’s extremely rare, and one of our treasured spirit ingredients. The Hall only has one in stock and it’s extremely precious, the sales price…”

“What, think I can’t afford it?” Jiang Chen arched an eyebrow.

The associate gave a low chuckle and thought, at least you can read between my words. I truly am worried that you can’t afford it. But the beating that his colleague had suffered yesterday told them all to not judge a book by its cover.

“The thing is, this item is extremely precious and even administrators are unable to take it out. One of our elders has to give permission before we can make a deal.” He patiently explained while subconsciously retracting his head. Surely this gentleman wouldn’t also have an engraved dragon medallion and fling a slap my way?

“So much trouble for a mere Dragonbone Sun Grass? Where are your elders? Tell them to come out, I don’t have time to waste.” Jiang Chen truly didn’t wish to spend too much time in the Hall of Healing.

There was nothing the associate could do but send word inside. Jiang Chen was twiddling his thumbs when a great hubbub of noise came from outside the door, and a small crowd of people came inside.

The leader of the group looked about sixteen or seventeen and was richly dressed in silks and furs. He walked in proudly and closed the distance to the counter in three steps. He slammed his hand onto the counter: “Tell your supervisors to come out. I want a blade of Dragonbone Sun Grass and I’m in a hurry. Come on come on, none of you will be able to bear the consequences if you delay my business.”

The person’s tone was exceedingly cocky and he had no respect for anyone. He hadn’t even looked at any of the customers at the other counters.

The associates at the other counters however, were dumbfounded.

Ordinarily, no one would have a use for this Dragonbone Sun Grass, even over the course of three to five years. But today, two sets of customers had come in looking to buy it as soon as they'd opened for business.

Had the value for the Dragonbone Sun Grass increased?

Three people walked out from the back of the Hall of Healing after a short while. Aside from the associate, there was also administrator He and a female elder.

The female elder looked about forty years old and had drawn on slightly exaggerated eyebrows. She wore an extensive amount of jewelry, and projected a particularly awkward feeling with her fashion choices.

"Who wants to buy the Dragonbone Sun Grass?" The female elder asked.

"Me, me! Auntie Blue, do you remember me? I'm the son of the duke of White Tiger dukedom, Bai Zhanyun. Bai Xianling is my father! You held me when I was small." That cocky teenager started making nice to the female elder.

"Ah, it's the young White duke. Is this Dragonbone Sun Grass for you, or your father?"

The White Tiger dukedom was one of the most preeminent dukedoms in the Eastern Kingdom, it ranked amongst the top five. Therefore, even an elder from the Hall of Healing needed to show their respect.

“Auntie Blue, don’t ask more questions. Just know that your nephew needs this urgently. Quickly name a price, I will come back and thank you later.”

Elder Blue gave a coy smile. “You’re in a great hurry. Are you taking this spirit level ingredient and giving it to some girl?”

Bai Zhanyun “heh”ed in laughter, “Auntie Blue knows best.”

“Alright, I won’t make fun of you further. The Dragonbone Sun Grass is priced at two million silver. Did you bring enough money?”

“I did, I did. Would I have come without the money? Everyone knows that your Hall doesn’t do business on credit.” Bai Zhan Yun seemed to be worried.

Jiang Chen had borne their chatter and laughter for quite a while already. His eyebrows arched as he knocked on the counter. “I say, aren’t you missing something here? Business is first come first served.”

Both elder Blue and Bai Zhanyun seemed to have only just

noticed Jiang Chen. They both gave him a weird look.

Bai Zhanyun in particular had a very bratty expression on his face. It seemed to say, and who the hell are you?

“Whoever it was, fellow, I ask you. Wasn’t I the first to want to purchase the Dragonbone Sun Grass?” Jiang Chen asked lightly.

The associate would have never thought that another buyer would walk through the doors in such a short span of time. But the Hall’s golden store sign was hanging right there, and he didn’t dare lie.

He opened and closed his mouth, but was unable to make a sound. Bai Zhanyun seemed to understand something and gave a cold laugh, “You. You want to buy it too.”

Bai Zhanyun had ran here like the fires of hell were after him not to purchase the Dragonbone Sun Grass for himself, but because he had heard that the daughter of the most highly ranked duke, Long Teng, in the Eastern Kingdom, Long Juxue, had somehow fallen victim to a cold humours when training. She needed an item of utmost yang for a cure and thus he had immediately run to the Hall of Healing. He wanted to get a head start on the competition by purchasing the Dragonbone Sun Grass and present it to Long Juxue as a gallant gesture.

His first thought upon hearing that Jiang Chen also wanted to purchase the herb was that the person in front of him was a love rival!

Jiang Chen swept Bai Zhan Yun an indifferent glance, but didn't have the interest in talking to an idiot. He only talked to elder Blue, "Lady elder, I ask only one question. Does the Hall of Healing respect the order of priority?"

Elder Blue was an old hat who had seen her fair share of big scenes, and said with a charming smile. "Well, we definitely respect the order of priority. But some matters are more important than others. Brother Bai here wants to use the Dragonbone Sun Grass to save a life. It is said that saving one life is more noble than building a seven tiered temple for Buddha. He also happens to be the young duke of the White Tiger dukedom. Why don't you give him some face? Giving him face is the same as..."

Bai Zhanyun puffed his chest out and said proudly, "Right. You. You look a bit familiar. What's your name? If you give up the Dragonbone Sun Grass to me, then I, Bai Zhanyun, will take complete care of you in the capital!"

Jiang Chen didn't know whether to laugh or cry. It was obvious to see that elder Blue was biased towards Bai Zhan Yun.

"What if I don't wish to?" Jiang Chen riposted coolly and gave a light laugh.

"What?" Bai Zhanyun was more than a little surprised. "What's wrong with you? I am the heir to the White Tiger dukedom, the future White Tiger duke. You don't even show respect to the four great dukes of the kingdom? You. You're cocky. Tell me your

name. Let me see how great is the person who doesn't even respect me, the heir of White Tiger dukedom."

At the moment, someone watching the show dared to speak up, "He's Jiang Chen."

"The heir of Jiang Han dukedom I think."

"Yeah, that's him. But wasn't he caned to death?"

Both Bai Zhanyun and elder Blue were stunned by these responses. The heir of the Jiang Han dukedom?

Bai Zhanyun's gaze sharpened on Jiang Chen and finally seemed to recognize him. He pointed at Jiang Chen and started laughing loudly. "You. It really is you. Weren't you dead? Alright you Jiang Chen, you pretended to be dead. This is misleading the king and treason!"

Jiang Chen's entire being had underwent a significant change thanks to a round of training. Add to that the fact that Bai Zhanyun hadn't had much contact with Jiang Chen before, and you get why the former hadn't recognized Jiang Chen earlier.

He felt on even firmer footing after he'd identified Jiang Chen. "Jiang Chen, you've got some guts. It's one thing to play dead, how dare you brazenly come out in public when you're supposed to be dead. This is clear provocation against His Majesty's authority, and a public insult against the royal family. I think you should hurry

home and get your affairs in order. Even if you are able to buy it, will you have the life to use it?”

Jiang Chen had a face full of resignation and turned his head to smile wryly at elder Blue. “Would the Hall of Healing rather do business with idiots than sell spirit level ingredients to normal people?”

Bai Zhanyun was immediately enraged, “Jiang Chen, who are you calling an idiot?”

Jiang Chen shrugged. “Definitely an idiot. Can’t even solve such a simple question? Who else is an idiot here apart from you?”

The crowd watching the show grew heated with excitement. Had these two young dukes eaten gunpowder today? Each was more bold than the last, each was more domineering than the last.

Was a battle of who could be more good for naught about to take place?

Chapter 12: Genius Beauty? Jiang Chen Doesn't Care

Bai Zhanyun, the heir of White Tiger dukedom, was a domineering, bratty sort.

But wasn't this heir of the Jiang Han dukedom, who had even committed the crazy act of the century, by farting during the Rites of Heavenly Worship, a legendary good for nothing? When had he turned so awesome?

At this moment, he wasn't even treating the heir of the White Tiger dukedom seriously. This was a development of going against the heavens!

One had to know, that although the duke of Jiang Han was ranked in the top 15 of the 108 dukes, the duke of White Tiger was ranked number 4. He was one of the four most renowned and preeminent dukes in the kingdom.

Differences in strength existed between dukes of different rankings. In reality, the duke of Jiang Han and the duke of White Tiger weren't on the same level at all!

Besides, thanks to his earth shattering fart, Jiang Chen's life story had been dug up by the rumor mills over the past two days. Who didn't know that Jiang Chen was dandy and a ne'er do well?

It was precisely because of this that everyone was incredibly

shocked by Jiang Chen's attitude.

"Hahaha, although you weren't caned to death, you were beaten into an idiot, weren't you Jiang Chen? Good, good. You were lucky last time and weren't beaten to death. I shall relieve some of his Majesty's burden today, and beat you to death for a reward."

It was at this moment that another hubbub stirred at the Hall's doors, and a crowd of young men surrounding a girl in a white dress walked in.

The crowd of young men started yelling as soon as they walked in: "We want the Dragonbone Sun Grass, bring it here swiftly. My household, the Yanmen dukedom, will be buying."

"Huh. When was it your turn to pay. My Vermillion Bird dukedom will be having this Dragonbone Sun Grass!"

These youths fought each other for the chance to pay the bill, livening up the atmosphere at once in the lobby of the Hall of Healing.

Jiang Chen rubbed his nose as he thought, Do these people have more money than what they know what to do with? What's the deal with them today? Did all these guys make a pact to come annoy me today?

Although, that didn't really seem to be the case. How could the others have known that he needed the Dragonbone Sun Grass?

Plus, Jiang Chen himself didn't believe that he had somehow offended so many so deeply, to the point where the heirs of multiple dukedoms were ganging up on him.

In a matter of moments, there were at least seven or eight people who were vying for the opportunity to purchase the Dragonbone Sun Grass. Each was displaying a level of resolution that indicated they would not rest until they got their hands on it.

This put elder Blue in a quandary. She was an expert at observing people, how could she not tell that this crowd of young men were putting on a show for the girl?

But, there was only one of the Dragonbone Sun Grass? She was bound to insult a large group of people, no matter who she sold it to.

These little emperors were all the devil incarnate. No matter who she offended, it would be a dicey matter, not to mention that this offense would be given to quite a few people.

Elder Blue thought furiously, glanced at Jiang Chen out of the corner of her eye and formed an idea.

"Dearest young dukes, we are honored and flattered by your presence. However, the Hall of Healing has always had one rule when it comes to doing business. It was Jiang Chen, the heir to the Jiang Han dukedom, who first wanted to purchase the Dragonbone Sun Grass. Anyone who wishes to buy it instead can only do so if he is willing to give it up. The Hall of Healing will sell to anyone

who can convince him. This is the rule, and we hope for your understanding."

What a way to shift blame and responsibility. Nicely played.

The Hall of Healing had washed its hands of the matter this way, and thrown the hot potato to Jiang Chen.

If he refused to give it up, then that would be Jiang Chen's issue, not the Hall's. It would be Jiang Chen offending people, and not them.

All gazes swiveled as one and locked onto Jiang Chen.

"Eh, why is it him?"

"Jiang Chen? The joker that farted during the Rites? Isn't he dead?"

"Did he fake being a corpse?"

"Was this kid lucky and didn't get beaten to death?"

"Too weird, too weird. Weird things happen every year, and there's a ton of them this year."

"Hah. Who cares if he died or not. No one can take this

Dragonbone Sun Grass from me!”

“Jiang Chen, there’s no place here for your lowly Jiang Han dukedom. Accept your place and bow out.”

“That’s right. How dare a criminal show his face?”

“Go back and prepare your affairs!”

Only a few people had known that he hadn’t died, so these people’s reactions didn’t surprise Jiang Chen in the least.

What surprised him was that, did his face truly that provoke that much anger and hate? Why were these guys stomping all over him?

He ignored all the hostile glares and smiled wryly, “Did I fail to check the almanac before leaving the house today? Dealing with one idiot is irritating enough, but now I have to deal with a crowd of idiots?”

He didn’t waste more time on idle chatter and stared at elder Blue, saying coldly, “Elder Blue, what good use of pawning off your issues onto someone else. I don’t want to hear your blather; are you selling the Dragonbone Sun Grass or not?”

Elder Blue’s face darkened, “Are you threatening me? If that’s the case, then I really will wash my hands of this matter!”

“Just a moment!”

Someone hurriedly walked out from the back of the lobby. It was the third hallmaster.

The third hallmaster was absolutely livid and said harshly, “What’s your problem elder Blue? Why can’t you even take care of such a small matter? The Hall of Healing conducts our business according to one rule, we sell to whoever comes first!”

Elder Blue was momentarily dumbfounded, thinking: Did you take the wrong medicine this morning? Don’t you see this crowd of little emperors eyeing their prize? Aren’t you afraid of all these little demons holding a grudge if you sell to Jiang Chen?

Not to mention, was it necessary to go to these lengths for a mere Jiang Han heir, and a worthless good-for-nothing at that?

The third hallmaster completely ignored elder Blue’s confused look and smiled at Jiang Chen, “Young duke Jiang, you are the first who wished to purchase the Dragonbone Sun Grass, and thus naturally it’s buyer according to our rules.”

He paused, and then turned towards the other heirs of their dukedoms, “Gentlemen, my apologies. The Hall of Healing is able to have a foothold in the Eastern Kingdom purely because of our golden sign based on credibility and rules. I am deeply honored that you have seen fit to patron the Hall of Healing, but unfortunately there is currently only one of the Dragonbone Sun

Grass. We can only sell it to the person who has arrived first: young duke Jiang. As for whether or not young duke Jiang wishes to give it up for anyone present, that is not up to me to decide."

"However, this is the Hall of Healing, we ask for your understanding and to refrain from unruly behavior." The third hallmaster's tone hardened slightly.

The Hall of Healing wasn't a place in which just anyone could come and cause a ruckus.

What?

Was the third hallmaster crazy? He was selling the Dragonbone Sun Grass to Jiang Chen?

Any of the assembled young dukes present were more prominent, more powerful, than the heir to Jiang Han. Had the third hallmaster taken the wrong medicine this morning?

What made them even more taken aback was that the third hallmaster then turned a face of such welcome and cheer towards Jiang Chen and said, "Young duke Jiang, my apologies for the offense. Please follow me inside, so that the Hall can offer a cup of tea in apology."

The crowd of little emperors were completely dumbfounded by this turn of events.

When had this worthless dandy, who had no inkling of presence whatsoever on the Hidden Dragon Trials, become so popular in the Hall of Healing?

Even the girl in white dress that the crowd had clustered around turned her gaze onto Jiang Chen for the first time.

This girl was the beloved daughter of the Eastern Kingdom's first duke, Long Teng's daughter, Long Juxue.

The horde of dukedom heirs were fighting amongst themselves mostly due to a desire to ingratiate themselves with this Long Juxue. The whole hubbub over purchasing the Dragonbone Sun Grass was to offer it to her, and to cure her cold humours.

However, Jiang Chen wasn't the slightest bit interested in this crowd of crazies. When he caught a glimpse of Jiang Zheng lurking behind the third hallmaster with a sidelong glance, he understood the situation perfectly. He smiled lightly, "Please wrap up the spirit level ingredients that I wanted. As for payment..."

The third hallmaster hastily said, "Let's talk about payment later. Shall we have tea?"

The items were wrapped quickly and placed into Jiang Chen's hands. He walked inside with the third hallmaster, but how could he not have known that the reason behind the third hallmaster's attentions was the latter's desire to finalize the contract for the Heavenly Karma pill?

Otherwise, how could the third hallmaster have ignored all the other heirs and insisted on selling the Dragonbone Sun Grass to him? And to give him such face to boot?

“A moment, brother Jiang Chen.” A well dressed, handsome young man emerged from the crowd. “I am the heir of Black Tortoise, Yi Taichu. I sincerely request that you give up the Dragonbone Sun Grass to me. I am willing to pay double the price for your friendship, is that amenable to you?”

One had to say, this Yi Taichu handled things far more appropriately than that White Tiger heir Bai Zhanyun. However, this Dragonbone Sun Grass was of certain use to Jiang Chen. There was no way he was giving it to someone else.

“My apologies, I have use for this blade of the Dragonbone Sun Grass and cannot give it away. Brother Yi, you are in the prime of your life, but find yourself so bored as to run errands for a pretty face?”

Jiang Chen smiled noncommittally as he flicked a glance towards Long Juxue, feeling especially disapproving towards her. This woman was allowing such a crowd of heirs to preen and strut before her, yet spoke no word in return. This type of woman was either vain, or had duplicitous intentions. So what if she was as beautiful as the flowers?

In his past life, this type of woman wouldn’t even be fit to be a maid to his ladies in waiting.

Yi Taichu felt a bit awkward, but still retained his grace and good manners. He thought briefly, and seemed to think through something. He abruptly left without a word.

Long Juxue was even more ill disposed towards Jiang Chen upon seeing Yi Taichu leave. She greatly enjoyed the feeling of the crowd of youths fighting over her. Only when millions worshipped the moon, could her status as the center of attention be fully displayed.

But this Jiang Chen was throwing a wrench in the works, and was truly despiteful.

The worst thing was, this Jiang Chen hadn't even really looked at her throughout all of this. How was this the style of a ne'er-do-well, who was ridiculous beyond belief?

If it was any other day, Long Juxue couldn't even be bothered to spare a glance for someone on the level of Jiang Chen. But today, in this type of setting, the oddities of a woman's heart made her feel extremely put out, and think that Jiang Chen was purposely denying her face.

She even felt that Jiang Chen was intentionally playacting to be a generous, carefree and mysterious stranger. This was another type of trick to draw her attention.

An heir to a small dukedom; trash that's not even worth the effort of carrying it in hand, pretending to be deep? Hmph. I'd like to see if it's possible for you to look like a fool in front of me!

Her thoughts spun as she suddenly moved towards Jiang Chen, each step as graceful as a lotus.

“Jiang Chen is it?” Long Juxue’s voice was cool. “As far as I know, you have no use for this level of spirit ingredient. These family friends are fighting to purchase the Dragonbone Sun Grass because they wish to cure me of my cold humours. Why do you seek to buy it?”

Although her words weren’t terribly ugly, the meaning behind them was apparent. You, lowly Jiang Chen, have no way to use the Dragonbone Sun Grass.

If Jiang Chen was attempting to please Long Juxue in fighting to buy it, then it was time to stop the charade.

Jiang Chen felt nonplussed as he looked at this woman who was too full of herself. He smiled without really seeming to, “Then what do you think I need it for?”

“I don’t care what you need it for. If you wanted to gift it to me, I accept your sincerity and will remember you.” She replied indifferently. “If not, then, I will also remember you, Jiang Chen.”

This, was a pure and naked threat.

Chapter 13: I, Jiang Chen, Carry Even More Of A Grudge Than You Do

Long Juxue made no attempt to conceal her pride and superiority at being the beloved daughter of the first duke. Her tone was indifferent, but it gave others a feeling of undisputable confidence.

“Out of the 108 dukedoms in the Eastern Kingdom, there is nothing that anyone can steal from me if I, Long Juxue, want it.”

Jiang Chen was startled into laughter, “That absolute? No exception?”

“Exceptions are impossible.” Long Juxue responded coldly, “At least, I’ve never met one.”

“Alright…” Jiang Chen smiled faintly. “Then I congratulate you, you’ve met one today.”

One had to say, this woman’s sense of superiority was far too strong. She maintained a lofty and haughty demeanor even when she was asking for a favor. As if she was bestowing some great favor by talking to Jiang Chen, like a snow white swan blessing a lowly toad.

But this kind of attitude was beyond laughable in Jiang Chen’s eyes.

The daughter of the first duke in the Eastern Kingdom? So what? Even if it was the first duke himself, such a person wouldn't even be qualified to carry Jiang Chen's shoes in Jiang Chen's past life.

Long Juxue lost face to a man for the first time in her life as she watched Jiang Chen's resolute figure with the third hallmaster.

"Jiang Chen, I'll remember you. If I let you successfully pass the Hidden Dragon Trials at the end of the year, then I will change my surname to be the same as yours!"

"I, Bai Zhanyun, will also remember you. You may have won today, but I will show you the price of insulting me during the Hidden Dragon Trials. This isn't something that a mere Jiang Han dukedom can endure!"

"And I, the Vermillion Bird dukedom, and the Yanmen dukedom!"

These guys had wanted to proclaim their interest and devotion, but their plans had been thwarted. Hearts burning with anger, how could they not take advantage of the chance to beat down on an easy target?

Jiang Chen naturally paid no heed to these kinds of threats. Rather, he thought it quite humerous that these fellows voluntarily identified themselves.

Tripping over each other to identify themselves eh. They might

as well, this saves me the trouble of finding them one by one in the future. White Tiger, Vermillion Bird, Yanmen is it? You like to hold a grudge is it? It won't be long before you learn that I, Jiang Chen, carry even more of a grudge than you do!

If it was any normal day, the third hallmaster would never involve himself in the various ducal feuds. But this time, he had no choice, he had to support Jiang Chen wholeheartedly.

When Jiang Zheng came to find him, he knew that this was his only choice, and the Hall's only choice.

Otherwise, making Jiang Chen unhappy meant losing the Heavenly Karma pill, and meant losing a huge business deal.

A few ducal heirs was in no way worth as much as such a business deal.

Not to mention, these heirs had no reason to vent their spleen on the Hall of Healing. They would only choose to direct their attention to the seemingly weaker Jiang Chen.

As for how Jiang Chen would handle the situation, the third hallmaster didn't really care. What he was more concerned with was properly handling the matter at hand.

The negotiations had gone very smoothly, and the contract had been drafted yesterday. Jiang Chen had made a few suggestions regarding some minor details, and allowed Jiang Zheng to sign it.

He was an heir to a dukedom, and naturally wouldn't appear for such a small issue.

Of course, Jiang Chen didn't fully trust the Hall of Healing. He still controlled two vital parts; there was no way that he would unreservedly share the entire recipe and refining method.

He had to be on his guard against the possibility of the Hall of Healing having second thoughts once it received the entire recipe and refining method.

The contract was thus happily signed. Because Jiang Chen still had control over the key areas, the contract stipulated that Jiang Chen would visit the hall once on odd numbered months, and twice on even numbered months.

In the world of practitioners, pill medicine was exceedingly precious. An ordinary healing pill was sold for one or two thousand silver. Slightly higher level pill went for three to five thousand silver.

And the Heavenly Karma pill would sell for around eight to ten thousand silver due to its potency and effects. It would be positioned as a luxury item and would undoubtedly have a large market.

So even if only one hundred pills were refined a month, that was still a revenue worth millions of dollars. It was a market worth tens of millions in a year.

This was also the lowest, most conservative estimate.

And what about when they entered the markets of the neighboring sixteen kingdoms, and expanded their production, refining thousands or even tens of thousands a month? With the sixteen neighbors' purchasing power, even if the Hall produced tens of thousands of pill a month, demand would far outstrip supply.

It was easy enough to imagine the vastness of this market with a few simple calculations.

Thus, it was easy to understand why the third hallmaster was so eager to please.

When the contract had been signed, the third hallmaster raised the suggestion of dining at the Autumn Crane, but was politely declined by Jiang Chen. Keeping a low profile was the name of the game in his partnership with the Hall of Healing. He didn't want it to become common knowledge within the city.

Besides, he was only in a business partnership with the Hall of Healing; they weren't friendly enough to the point of sharing a drink.

The third hallmaster politely sent Jiang Chen on his way with two other elders accompanying him, including that elder Blue.

Elder Blue still nursed some prejudices against Jiang Chen, and her facial expressions were stiff.

Jiang Chen was well aware of this, and felt that this woman's magnanimity and grace were as narrow as a rat's stomach or chicken's intestines. She better not ruin my plans in the future, I still need to irritate others with sarcastic words when the situation calls for it.

He thought for a bit and suddenly smiled, "Third hallmaster, if we didn't have this cooperation in place, you most likely would not have sold the Dragonbone Sun Grass to me today, would you?"

"Haha, how can you say that. The Hall still adheres to our rules when conducting business." The third hallmaster gave a hearty laugh, but even he himself didn't quite believe his words.

Rules were a dead thing, but people were living. If it wasn't for this business deal, then the Dragonbone Sun Grass would have gone to anyone but Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen also laughed heartily and didn't poke holes in the third hallmaster's charade. He said, "No matter the reason, I can only say that the third hallmaster made a wise decision."

"What makes you say that?" The third hallmaster's interest was piqued.

"Simple. Because obtaining the Dragonbone Sun Grass was a

mission appointed by the king himself. If you hadn't sold it to me, then the lawsuits that the Hall of Healing would have faced would have been many. Hahaha, I've spoken too much, too much."

Jiang Chen laughed heartily again, swiftly mounted his horse, and gave a long laugh, "You don't need to continue sending me off, third hallmaster."

The third hallmaster was dumbfounded and became deep in thought as he watched Jiang Chen gallop off into the distance.

"The king himself?" The third hallmaster murmured to himself as he thought of yesterday's engraved dragon medallion. He subtly felt that, perhaps this Jiang Chen had not spoken a falsehood.

"This brat can make a good boast The king himself? Wasn't he just beaten by His Majesty?" Elder Blue pouted and muttered disdainfully.

The third hallmaster glared at her severely, "What do you know? You almost wrecked the deal today! Take this to heart, be smarter about how you conduct business in the future! Do you think his engraved dragon medallion is a fake? You think that the wind blew in the Heavenly Karma pill receipe?"

Elder Blue had nothing to say. True, there's something odd about this brat.

The third hallmaster was still haunted about what could have

been, and issued a warning. “No matter the situation, all of you remember this! Humble yourself in front of Jiang Chen! He is not a simple character!”

Deep within the palace.

Eastern Lu slowly put down the book in his hand and lightly tasted the tea in the cup on the table.

“Tiandu, what news from the Jiang Han household?”

“Your Majesty, the duke of Jiang Han has been quiet, without making any movements.”

“And the kid?”

“The kid? He seems to have stayed home all day yesterday, and went to the Hall of Healing this morning. He got into a conflict with a crowd of heirs…”

The trusted guard called Tiandu gave a thorough overview of the situation, missing not a single detail.

“Oh? This kid was severely beaten and not only didn’t die, but could prance around on the streets today? When did my guards become unable to carry out a decent beating?” Eastern Lu smiled but didn’t really seem to. “But, you say that the Hall of Healing supported Jiang Chen and ignored those sons of eminent duchies?”

“Your servant also thought it odd, but this is the truth. In addition, the Hall of Healing kept him as a guest and entertained him for quite a while. It would seem that this kid is not as useless as the rumors say he is.”

Eastern Lu was deep in thought and nodded, “I hope so. We can only pin our hopes for Zhiruo’s sickness on him. I hope this kid doesn’t get up to any tricks.”

“It wouldn’t seem so. If he’s running a con, how would he dare swagger into the public like this? Deceiving the monarch is not a crime that the Jiang Han duchy can afford to commit.”

“Tiandu, remember this. Protect this kid no matter what. Fully carry out whatever plans he has. If anyone is so blind as to cause trouble, punish first and ask questions later, no matter their identity.” Eastern Lu commanded.

It was quite obvious that Eastern Lu had no desire for a repeat of the events of this morning. He deduced that the Dragonbone Sun Grass had something to do with his daughter’s illness!

If it has something to do with my daughter’s illness, then even Long Teng’s heir must step aside for me!

Jiang Chen did not immediately return home upon leaving the Hall. He had some more errands to run. There were a lot of preparations to be made before entering the palace in three days.

He hadn’t walked far before his keen instinct enabled him to discover someone surreptitiously following him. He couldn’t be bothered to reveal their existence.

“Huh. Someone who is blind. Come at me if you’re truly strong enough to steal even from Eastern Lu!” Jiang Chen did not care in the slightest if he caused a clash between monarch and subject.

Others had been treated to a grand show at the Rites of Heavenly Worship. If someone was so blind as to step out of line and create trouble, he wouldn’t mind if a nice struggle between monarch and subject developed.

He would even cleverly, subtlely, play along.

What Jiang Chen felt regret about was that public security was actually quite well in within the capital. At least something like robbery in broad daylight didn’t occur.

“What a bunch of spineless people. The Dragonbone Sun Grass is here right now, come on out and try to grab it. I’d definitely not risk my life for Eastern Lu. I would happily hand it over if you tried to grab it, and then happily hand you over when Eastern Lu questions me about it.”

Jiang Chen was joyfully anticipating something like this happening as he walked, but sadly enough, those tailing him never came to rob him. This made him a bit depressed.

“What a bunch of cowardly robbers!” Jiang Chen shook his head and thought no more of this small interlude. He spurred his horse on towards the Turquoise Hall, he had more errands to run.

Chapter 14: Denying Face Twice

The heir of White Tiger, Bai Zhanyun and the heir of Vermillion Bird, Hong Tiantong were surreptitiously discussing something in a secluded tavern in the capital.

“Brother White, the kid is extremely cocky. He thinks nothing of you or me, particularly you Brother White. You and he arrived at almost the same time, but he stole the Dragonbone Sun Grass from you, this cannot be tolerated!”

Hong Tiantong was obviously quite crafty and his words carried evident overtones of provocation.

“Huh! Jiang Chen, insulting I, Bai Zhanyun, is to seek death!”

As Bai Zhanyun spoke, an underling in charge of following others came hurriedly rushing in.

“Young duke, the kid didn’t go back to the Jiang Han manor. He seems to have gone to the Turquoise Hall.”

“Turquoise Hall? What’s that kid doing there? Does he want to buy spirit stones?” Hong Tiantong was a bit skeptical.

Bai Zhanyun, on the other hand, displayed a strange smile upon hearing those words. “Turquoise Hall is it? Are you sure?”

“Your servant has been continuously following him and could not have been mistaken.”

Bai Zhanyun laughed joyfully. “Jiang Chen you brat, you’ve brought this upon yourself. The owner of Turquoise Hall is my uncle!”

He grew even more proud when he finished speaking. “Brother Hong, come. Let’s go watch the show and ruthlessly insult this kid. Let’s also seize the Dragonbone Sun Grass while we’re at it!”

Their current location wasn’t that far from the Turquoise Hall. The two of them quickly arrived and entered through the back door.

Turquoise Hall was a retailer that specialized in spirit and exotic stones. Its scale of operations was all encompassing, and was a premier brand in the capital.

Jiang Chen’s visit was naturally not for viewing or admiring stones, but to customize a stone.

He wandered around the Turquoise Hall for half a day, calling upon his past life’s various memories of appraising stones to decide on a particular stone. He discussed, and settled on the price.

The owner of Turquoise Hall hastily walked out when Jiang Chen was waiting to pay. He smiled, “Little brother, what a horrid coincidence. I’ve only just learned myself that the crouching yang

stone you've reserved was already reserved by someone else last night."

"Who reserved it? What a coincidence!" Jiang Chen was quite surprised, did such a coincidence truly exist in this world?

"Why, the great me of course!" An ear piercing voice rang out from behind as Bai Zhanyun sauntered out.

"Jiang Chen, how unfortunate. I've purchased this yang stone. You want it? Hand over the Dragonbone Sun Grass. I may just consider giving the stone to you if I'm in a good mood."

Jiang Chen was quick on his feet. When he saw Bai Zhanyun, that coyly smirking Hong Tiantong behind him and then the owner of Turquoise Hall, he understood the situation at once.

It seems like this Bai Zhanyun was bored out of his empty mind. He'd started a fight at the Hall of Healing and continued it to the Turqouise Hall. He really wanted to start something with Jiang Chen.

However, the owner of Turquoise Hall was greatly demeaning himself in taking orders from the son of a duke. Jiang Chen's opinion of the man was abruptly revised downwards.

"Interesting. Interesting. Boss Song, are you sure you're not selling the stone to me?" Jiang Chen asked as he maintained his composure.

Bai Zhanyun bellowed, “Jiang Chen, I’ve already told you that I will only give up the stone if you hand over the Dragonbone Sun Grass. Otherwise, don’t even think of getting the crouching yang stone.”

“Oh? What if I must have it?” Jiang Chen smiled lightly.

“Hahaha, do you think I, the mighty Bai Zhanyun, would give it up to you? I’d sooner buy this stone to line my latrines than give it to you.”

“Your household’s latrines are certainly fancy. So, there’s no room for negotiation?”

“Negotiation my ass! Either you hand over the Dragonbone Sun Grass or get the hell out of here!” Bai Zhanyun also more or less knew that it would be unrealistic to expect Jiang Chen to hand over the Dragonbone Sun Grass.

Jiang Chen laughed heartily and paid Bai Zhanyun no heed. He couldn’t be bothered to waste spittle on idiots like Bai Zhanyun. It’s not like he was buying stuff for himself.

He was purchasing equipment for the royal princess. He wasn’t about to waste time and effort in explanations. Since the village idiot Bai Zhanyun wanted to go up against the royal family, then by all means let him try.

“Boss Song. It seems like you’re a smart guy engaging in dumb transactions.” Jiang Chen laughed lightly and shook his head with a sigh. “If you don’t sell to me now, it will be too late even if you come to me crying in the future.”

He waltzed out without a glance at Bai Zhanyun or Hong Tiantong after that.

He’d just reached the main lobby when an associate came tearing in, his expression extremely terrified. He murmured a few sentences next to boss Song’s ear with a face full of fearful reservations. He didn’t even dare meet Jiang Chen’s eyes.

Boss Song’s face abruptly whitened after he’d finished listening. It was as if all the blood had been suddenly sucked out of his body. His face was starkly white and his lips infused with bitterness.

He called out in a voice that was almost crying, “Young duke Jiang, hold your steps, please hold your steps! This crouching yang stone is yours. Turquoise Hall will not charge you anything and will immediately courier it to your manor.”

Boss Song’s attitude did a complete 180 in a blink of an eye, greatly surprising Bai Zhanyun and Hong Tiantong.

Particularly Bai Zhanyun, his very foot hopped in astonishment.

“Uncle, are you serious? Haven’t we already agreed?”

Boss Song had a woeful face. “I say little emperor, don’t make things tough for your uncle. Don’t throw us mere mortals into the middle when you celestial beings are fighting.”

Bai Zhanyun became enraged. “Celestial being? Faugh. What kind of crap celestial being is Jiang Chen? His Jiang Han dukedom doesn’t even rank in the top out of all 108 Eastern Kingdom dukedoms. You’re scared of him uncle?”

If he hadn’t been intimidated by Bai Zhanyun’s old man, boss Song would have definitely rushed up and dealt out the beating of a lifetime. He would first beat Bai Zhanyun so hard that he wouldn’t be able to function normally, and then disdainfully spit on him a few times for good measure.

This brat was not only the ruination of his family, but also dragging boss Song down with him!

Boss Song almost leapt forward and attached himself to Jiang Chen’s thigh. “Young duke, I was senseless and blind. I beg you, I beg you to accept it! Please view this crouching yang stone as a token of old Song’s devotion!”

They said to forgive and forget, Jiang Chen had no intentions of making too much of a fuss over a small business owner.

He smiled, “Boss Song, your words actually highlight that I am an ungrateful person. Since you are so sincere, I will accept this stone if I must. As for the price, someone will naturally pay pay for it. Send the stone to a certain address on the day after tomorrow. I

will notify you of the address when it's time."

"Yes, yes. The young duke is magnanimous and generous. I am shamed, shamed."

Jiang Chen laughed heartily. How could he not know that someone outside must have intervened, resulting in old Song's about face?

As for who intervened, that was even more obvious.

How many houses within the capital possessed such power that not even the great dukes dared to defy? And at this moment, who else other than the royal family would protect Jiang Chen's interests?

"It would seem that ole Eastern Lu has made certain preparations. Afraid I'll renege?" Jiang Chen shook his head in his mind and stepped out merrily.

He'd finished preparing all the components needed for the initial steps.

Bai Zhanyun had been repeatedly ignored by Jiang Chen and suffered under a most ignoble feeling of defeat. He glared ferociously at boss Song, "Uncle, you must give me an explanation for this matter!"

Boss Song rolled his eyes, "Bai Zhanyun, you'd best watch

yourself! This is the capital, not your White Tiger territory! Think about whether or not you can afford to offend someone before behaving atrociously. As your uncle, I'll give you a word of advice. Be careful of ruining generations of your family's work in a single night if you make one wrong step!"

Boss Song was absolutely not being an alarmist. His associate had only spoken two sentences just now.

The first was, "Commander Tiandu of the royal guard is outside", and the second was, "we must sell the crouching yang stone to Jiang Chen, or else face the consequences."

Those two sentences alone were enough to alter boss Song's attitude.

Who didn't know that the royal guard was the king's personal guard, a contingent with one of the highest fighting competencies, an entity that held the power of life and death in the Eastern Kingdom?

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that if the royal guard was offended, even the White Tiger duke would end up in pieces, not to mention a mere boss Song!

The royal guard was also one of the most powerful forces within the kingdom. What did this indicate when an entity of this caliber was secretly protecting Jiang Chen's interests?

Boss Song wasn't an idiot, he could read the writing on the wall and discern the seriousness of the situation.

It was with certain resignation that he couldn't clearly explain himself in the face of Bai Zhanyun's whining complaints. His warnings fulfilled the duties of being a relative.

If Bai Zhanyun insisted on pursuing this like moths to a flame, then boss Song would have to draw a line between the White family and his at the earliest opportunity.

Bai Zhanyun was still cussing and ranting as he accused boss Song of not honoring relationship ties. Hong Tiantong however, was deep in thought. He thought this development was too strange. This had happened not only once, but twice!

"Is it possible that this Jiang Chen really has some influential figure backing him up?"

As for Jiang Chen, he didn't loiter outside once he'd completed his errands, but made straight for the Jiang Han manor.

Two people walked out as soon as he'd set foot into the doorway. One of them was Jiang Feng, the duke of Jiang Han and father that he'd gotten for cheap.

The other was a middle aged man with a gloomy and ominous face. His expression was cold and he walked straight towards the exit. The duke of Jiang Han was accompanying him with a

somewhat obsequious smile, murmuring something in a low voice.

His manner was even a bit humble.

But no matter how warmly Jiang Feng came off, it was as if he was putting a hot face next to a cold butt. The middle aged man remained remote and had no reaction at all.

When they reached the door, they ran into a just returning Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen finally recalled who this man was from his past self's memories. Assistant Organizer Du?

This man was actually one of the main organizers of the Hidden Dragon Trials.

"Chen'er, you've come back? Come and greet the great Organizer Du. I've finally been able to invite him to our manor but unfortunately, master Du needs to go attend to a few matters."

That Assistant Organizer Du flicked a glance at Jiang Chen, and smiled without really smiling, "You're Jiang Chen?"

As one of the main organizers of the Hidden Dragon Trials, he naturally knew who Jiang Chen was. This question was obviously fake.

Jiang Chen was a smart guy and a keen observer. He feared that his father had gotten a face full of dust from this fellow, and replied noncommittally, “That’s me. You’re Assistant organizer Du?”

Du Ruhai, the assistant organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials, was ranked number two in terms of real power. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that he held the fortunes of all the great families participating in the Trials!

No matter which duke it was, who didn’t present a polite and ingratiating front when they met Du Ruhai? Who wouldn’t humble themselves?

If he threw a wrench into the works at a critical moment because you offended him, you wouldn’t even know how you died.

Therefore, seeing that Jiang Chen was not only not eager to please, but in fact questioned him back with this sort of tone, organizer Du was quickly incensed.

It wasn’t that Du Ruhai had no measure of subtlety, but more like he had no need to pretend he was generous and forgiving in front of the Jiang household.

His expression froze, “Duke of Jiang Han? Your son is quite a character. He dared desecrate even the Rites of Heavenly Worship, no wonder he doesn’t think much of a mere organizer .”

Jiang Feng knew things were bad when he heard those words, and was about to apologize.

Du Ruhai spread out his hands and laughed coldly. “Duke of Jiang Han, no further words are necessary. I was planning to help your son during the Hidden Dragon Trials. But I’ve received a lot of messages from other dukes this afternoon, saying that your son has no understanding of morals or ethics. Helping him would be akin to putting myself in harm’s way. Therefore, you’re on your own for the Trials!”

“Organizer Du, this…” Jiang Feng was extremely agitated.

“Duke of Jiang Han, don’t blame me for speaking frankly. Even without the dukes’ reminders, based purely on your son’s good-for-nothing attitude, you should be offering daily prayers that I don’t make life difficult for him!”

Du Ruhai arbitrarily decided to cast aside all consideration for others.

Chapter 15: Three Foundational Exams

Seeing as everything had been laid out on the table, there was no point in Du Ruhai further concealing his blatant threat. With his status in the kingdom, there was no need to be polite to a duke who was about to lose his power and influence.

Jiang Feng had originally wanted to plead for leniency, hoping for a fluke, but his face darkened as well upon hearing the last couple of sentences. “Organizer Du, insult me if you must, but leave my son alone! So what if the young are a bit good-for-nothing? Are you that certain that my son won’t turn himself around? They say to bully the old but not the young!”

“What a pretty turn of phrase! Do you mean to tell me what goes around comes around? Not to insult a young man for being poor? Hahahahahaha…” Du Ruhai threw his head back in laughter. “Wake up! If it he wasn’t such a lucky bastard, Jiang Feng, you’d be holding a funeral for your son and not trying to curry favor with me!”

He flung his sleeves in a grand flourish and walked proudly towards the outside.

“Hold!” Jiang Chen had been standing beside his father and suddenly spoke. “Du Ruhai is it? If I remember correct, my father sent you 600,000 silver last time on my behalf. You no longer concern yourself with my matters, yet do you intend to pretend ignorance of the money?”

Du Ruhai's body abruptly halted as a vicious glare shot out from his eyes. He stared fixedly at Jiang Chen, his glare so savage that it sought to swallow Jiang Chen whole.

But what he hadn't anticipated was that when his vicious gaze swept over Jiang Chen's calm and placid eyes, his entire body shuddered involuntarily, as if he had suddenly fallen into an ice cold hell.

"What the hell? That kid's gaze..."

Du Ruhai calmed himself down and told himself earnestly that that had been an illusion.

"600,000 silver? Go look for it in the official treasury! Bribing an official is another severe crime. Do you think I am such a corrupt individual? I have long since turned over the silver you offered to the official treasury!"

There was no way that Jiang Chen believed such tripe. How could someone possibly have spat a choice piece of meat that had made its way to their mouth? This Du Ruhai in no way resembled an honest person with integrity.

It would seem that Long Juxue and the other heirs had already started covertly moving against him because he hadn't handed over the Dragonbone Sun Grass!

If it was the old Jiang Chen, offending several noble sons and

Long Juxue, as well as the organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials carrying a grudge aginst him would definitely spell his doom.

However, what did Jiang Chen fear now? All of these people added together were no more than bothersome flies in his eyes.

Given just a bit of time, he would be able to smack them to death many times over.

A few hints of an icy smile tugging at his lips, he looked at the swaggering Du Ruhai and raised his voice. “Du Ruhai, to seek gain and avoid losses is part of human nature. It’s no big thing to be afraid of those influential dukes. But to bully the kind and fear the evil, and insult my Jiang family — you will know what a grave mistake that was before too long.”

If Du Ruhai had politely and respectfully declined Jiang Feng without a mutual loss of face, then Jiang Chen would have fully understood.

But Du Ruhai had long since accepted the money and suddenly come by today to renege on his promises. Fine, renege then, but return the money.

If you wanted to still keep the money, at least display a better attitude?

To take such a hard line and be so cocky? Was he already viewing the Jiang family as a pile of bones in a grave, a flower to wilt on the

morrow?

That kind of attitude successfully enraged Jiang Chen.

“Ai, Chen’er. This Du Ruhai is not someone to irritate. He’s ranked number two out of all the organizers of the Hidden Dragon Trials.” Jiang Feng sighed lightly. “And, your father has heard that the one who ranks number one doesn’t ask many questions. He has delegated a lot of power and basically allows Du Ruhai to do as he wishes. He listens to periodic report from Du Ruhai; therefore, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that he’s the main person in charge.”

As a duke, Jiang Feng was brave and heroic. But in terms of strategy and planning or power struggles, he didn’t amount to much.

Jiang Chen didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. He hadn’t had enough time to understand the situation since he’d reincarnated. Could it be that the mess left behind by the previous Jiang Chen was bad enough that money couldn’t resolve things?

“Ai, Chen’er. Don’t be depressed. I will continue thinking and see if there’s another path we can walk. Not to mention…”

There was a saying that a loving mother led to a failure of a son. But with Jiang Feng as a father, Jiang Chen gained a new understanding that a loving father could also lead to a failure of a son.

However, Jiang Chen was still touched. The duke of Jiang Han truly did love his son. The situation was so dire that a burning flame had made its way to their butts, but he still did not speak any harsh words.

“Right, father. What are my grades like for the Hidden Dragon Trials? Did Du Ruhai mention them at all?”

Jiang Feng’s expression was a bit awkward as he stammered, “Well… this…”

Jiang Chen was seriously speechless. His father was still trying to preserve his feelings even now?

“Father, I have a thick face, I can take it. How bad is it? You can tell me directly.”

Jiang Feng was also worried that his son wouldn’t be able to accept it in the face of just surviving such a disaster. He “heh”ed in laughter upon seeing that his son was mentally prepared. “You darn kid are a special one alright, asking your old man for your own grades? Are you sure you won’t be shocked by my response?”

“Tell me, surely I can’t be last?”

“Can there be any doubt that you’re last?” Jiang Feng smiled wryly. “The problem in front of us is that you haven’t passed a single one of the three foundational exams. The final tests of the second half of the year will be held at the end of this month. If you

don’t pass the three foundational exams, you won’t even have the qualification to sit for the final tests in the Hidden Dragon Trials.”

The first two and a half years of the Hidden Dragon Trials were a period of learning and growth. A qualification examination was held at the end of this time.

If a candidate couldn’t even pass the qualification exam, then he would not even have the right to participate in the final Trials.

Jiang Chen finally understood why his old man would humble himself. Why a proud and regal duke would be lectured like a kid by Du Ruhai.

Upon seeing Jiang Chen lower his head without a word, Jiang Feng smiled even more wryly. “Darn kid, don’t tell you don’t even remember what the three foundational exams are?”

Jiang Chen rubbed his nose and said, “Alright, I’ll go back and think hard about them.”

If it was any one of the other dukes, a stinging slap across the face would have been a given after hearing such passive words from his son.

Jiang Feng was a unique one amongst fathers, he only sighed lightly. “Son, looks like your destiny is one of going back to the fields with your old man. Ai whatever. A life of fortune and riches is not written in the stars for the Jiang family. We might as well

take off our armor and return to the fields with your generation. Too much nonsense occurs in politics, going back to a simpler life may not be a bad thing."

"Wait a second. Old father, when did I say that I wanted to go back a rural life and work the fields?"

Jiang Feng was dumbfounded. "But the three foundational exams..."

"So they're three exams! When I have time, I can pass eight, or even ten of them."

"Darn kid, will you die if you don't boast once a day? If nothing else, take the first foundation for example, it's also the most basic requirement. Your true qi must be within the intermediate realm of true qi, at least four meridians true qi. Do you have that?"

"Four meridians true qi? The foundational exams ask for such a simple thing?" It was Jiang Chen's turn to be gobsmacked and he minutely raised his arm. "Father, look at the stone stool over there."

His true qi circulated throughout his body as he spoke, flowing through his four meridians like four thundering rivers. They coalesced into one and concentrated at the tip of his finger.

He shook his finger, looking out of the corner of his eye..

A hole was poked straight through the stone stool where his finger had been pointing.

“A line formed of true qi, coalescing without dispersing. This is truly the intermediate realm of true qi? You kid, when did you locate the fourth acupoint, clear the fourth meridian, and successfully train to four meridians true qi?”

Jiang Feng was overjoyed beyond belief with a face full of incredulity. Four meridians true qi was a quite basic achievement for any son of a duke. Clearing the fourth meridian was something not even worth being happy about.

But to Jiang Feng, it was a moment on par with witnessing a miracle with his own eyes.

“Heh heh. I did this yesterday. I just meditated for a few hours. Right, Father, what are the other two foundational exams? Can you tell me all at once, and I’ll go back and think of ways to handle them? We can’t let vile characters like Du Ruhai make a mockery out of us, can we?”

Jiang Feng was speechless. Since when had the foundational exams become so easy in this kid’s eyes? He could handle them by sparing just a random bit of time?

“What’s wrong? Can that old fart Du Ruhai make life difficult for me even after I’ve passed the foundational exams?”

“No way!” Jiang Feng puffed his chest out and said assertively. “Your old man isn’t a vegetarian who just rolls over to play dead. As long as you can pass the foundational exams and make it to the final tests of the Hidden Dragon Trials, I can assure you there will be no problems there. But as for the content of the final tests... if Du Ruhai has something hidden up his sleeves...”

“Vile characters are as common as ghosts. I, Jiang Chen, am an outstanding individual and do not fear these characters. The only thing I’m afraid of is that his abilities are not up to par and won’t be able to create some complicated mess for me. That would greatly disappoint me then.”

At the end of the day, Jiang Chen paid no heed to third rate clowns like Du Ruhai.

The three foundational exams really weren’t hard. Their purpose wasn’t to stump test takers, but to weed out the good-for-nothings.

Unless one was a dandy that expended absolutely no effort on training, it was truly not a problem to pass the foundational exams.

Apart from Jiang Chen, all participants in the Trials had achieved four meridians true qi. Even fatty Xuan had achieved five meridians true qi.

The second exam was to practice the kingdom’s “Eastern Amethyst Qi” method until one reached the perfection level, and be able to successfully maintain it for an hour in a room filled with

level four fighting aura.

The Eastern Amethyst Qi method was created by an ancestor of the Eastern royal family. It was a method used in the process of founding the kingdom, and thus highly symbolic. It was further divided into five achievement levels of ‘minor achievement’, ‘skillful’, ‘perfection’, ‘flawless’ and ‘great perfection’ realms.

The so called perfection realm was to merely learn the entire set of foundational tactics and know them thoroughly.

The third foundational exam was a theoretical exam. It’s purpose was to test the academic knowledge of each duchy’s heirs. This exam was even easier, one could basically pass it by rote memorization.

“What the heck! The past me dragged his heels for two and a half years on such easy exams, and still couldn’t pass them?”

Jiang Chen was a bit lost in wonder. What was even more eye popping was his old man. When faced with such a son, had he never thought of harshly slapping him?

His agreement with Eastern Lu was for three days, and only two days had passed. In the remaining day, Jiang Chen decided to spend some time and effort on the foundational exams.

A mere dukedom was nothing to Jiang Chen, but it seemed that a subtle general situation had developed in the capital, and he had

no desire to lose any advantage.

Particularly when some bored fellows were waiting to see a fool made out of the Jiang family.

As for those idiots that came up to him asking to be slapped, he could vent a bit of his frustrations by obliging them, no?

Amethyst Eastern Qi was a complex set of tactics. Duchy heirs only learned the most basic parts of this method.

The purpose of mandating that all heirs learn the basic tactics were to evaluate their potential, personality, understanding of martial dao, and the ability to endure suffering in the path of training.

Jiang Chen sat cross legged and meditated for a moment, running through the foundational portions of the Eastern Amethyst Qi.

At that moment, the vastly knowledgeable memories of his past self were starting to show their true worth.

Chapter 16: Entering The Palace, Diagnosis

Even if the subject in question was a method from the heavens, there was nothing he could not understand, not with his breadth of knowledge. To him, a foundational method from the common world was as simple as a child reading the “Three Character Classics” or the “Hundred Family Names”[1].

After running the method through his mind, its peculiarities, pros, and cons, were all unabashedly revealed to him.

What made Jiang Chen both furious and amused was, that in his memories, the past Jiang Chen had only practiced the Eastern Amethyst Qi six times in the past two and a half years.

And of those times, two sessions had lasted not even ten minutes before some of his friends dragged him out for some fun.

What was really infuriating was that a practitioner had to be the pinnacle and epitome of laziness in order to fail so hard.

The only silver lining and source of some amusement was that the less the former Jiang Chen had trained, the better it was for Jiang Chen now.

This way, he could spend less time correcting the mistakes that the prior Jiang Chen had made when practicing. Still, he really had only practiced the method on and off for six times.

This was basically starting from scratch.

Practicing such a method as basic as this one didn't require any particular thought on Jiang Chen's behalf. Not only could he easily understand many martial dao mysteries that would even occur to others, but could improve upon, in spades, any flawed or incomplete methods.

Of course, Jiang Chen did not bother with undue reflection, since such a foundational method wasn't worth him spending too much time over.

He had fully digested the foundational theories in an hour.

It would be easy to practice once he had fully digested it.

He was a bit hesitant and unfamiliar the first time through, but became much more at ease and confident the second time around.

The third time, his execution was as pure as the fires of a forge.

The fourth time, fifth time...

If the Eastern royal ancestor had been able to witness Jiang Chen's sixth deployment of the method, his jaw would have surely dropped in shock and perhaps even wanted to hail Jiang Chen as his master.

This was because he had already gone through more than ten derivations of the foundational method, and this was when Jiang Chen was holding himself back. If it wasn't for the fact that he didn't want to unnecessarily waste brain cells, he'd actually easily derive more than a hundred permutations.

His curiosity satisfied after a few more times, Jiang Chen grew bored and stopped practicing. Wasting too much time in studying such a basic tactic was akin to strangling the prime of his life.

He decided to revisit the third exam.

"The Articles of Martial Arts", "The Articles of Spirit Medicine", "The Papers of Power and Influence", and "The Papers of Military Strategy".

The third exam mostly encompassed the above content, which just needed to be committed to memory. Of course, there was also some room for creativity.

For the creative portions, one could receive passing marks even if they didn't fill it in. It was just something used to separate geniuses from the mediocre.

Jiang Chen took a half hearted glance through it, it was a crude and simple collection of items. With his experiences and knowledge bank, it was as if an adult was answering questions written for kids. It couldn't get much easier than this.

“Alright, no need to waste too much time on small fry like the Hidden Dragon Trials. The task at hand is to find a method suitable for this body. It can’t be too good, but must possess unlimited potential.”

Grand, heavenly methods spanning everything in the world were as common as the hairs on a cow in Jiang Chen’s memories. But to find one that was suitable wasn’t that easy.

Firstly, this body would simply be unable to practice any methods that were too extraordinary and went against the course of nature. It would be like someone used to eating light, simple food suddenly devouring delicacies from the land and sea. It was bound to cause indigestion.

Of course, the method couldn’t be too subpar either. If it was subpar, then his starting point would be lower than others and greatly limit himself in the future.

Jiang Chen had no desire to make his path of cultivation unnecessarily rough and jagged just because he had started off on the wrong foot.

This was also something that couldn’t be rushed. With his current state, Jiang Chen was not fully familiarized with his body yet, and naturally could not customize a method most suited for himself.

Oh well, the new and improved Eastern Amethyst Qi was enough for him now.

The task at hand was to appropriately handle Eastern Lu.

The third day, Jiang Chen hunkered down with the book collection in the manor instead of going out. He knew almost nothing about this world since his arrival. Apart from a bunch of crazy, ridiculous and pointless acts committed by his past self, there weren't many memories worth much at all.

Jiang Chen did not intend to live out his days in ignorance. To know one's enemy as well as one knew himself was the way to constantly emerge victorious from battle.

Although he was the reincarnated son of the Celestial Emperor, he now occupied an ordinary position, and his past life's memories could only support him theoretically. He would still have to rely on his current body in terms of actual training.

Theory could save him a lot of effort by avoiding winding paths, and could help him grow much faster than others, but it couldn't turn him into a peerless master in a short time.

If he rested on his laurels because of memories from his past self and became supercilous, then he just might die one day without even knowing how.

After all, the level of his martial strength ranked amongst the lowest of the low in this world. There were simply too many people who could crush him to death with one finger.

Jiang Chen's understanding of his current world were greatly deepened after a night of reading, and he felt quite productive. When night fell, he entered the secret room again and was hard at practice.

After a night of training, he had further consolidated his control over his four levels of true qi. The four cleared meridians were noticeably stronger after he'd put them through the wringer a few times.

"Judging from this tempo and speed, my meridians will be able to support clearing the fifth acupoint in five or six days time."

In the realm of true qi, each successive step would become harder than the last.

The difficulty of opening up each consecutive meridian would be many times greater than the previous one. If the beginning foundations were not firmly set in stone, and the practitioner started opening up meridians willy nilly, then it was very likely that he would cause friction between the meridians. The best case scenario was that the meridians were damaged, and the practitioner was forever halted on the path of training. The worst case scenario was that the meridians exploded and the practitioner died immediately.

The path of cultivation was fraught with peril. This was not an empty line out of nowhere.

Of course, Jiang Chen had his advantages as well. There were many ways to toughen the meridians in his memory banks, and many approaches to strengthen them. Add a certain amount of spirit medicine in support, and he would be able to drastically cut down the time he needed.

Usually, those with high potential would use three months to ascend from four meridians to five meridians. Those were at the pinnacle. Six months was considered excellent, and nine months average. Those taking longer than a year were mediocre.

Of course, there were also those who struggled all their life and never made it. They were outside the realm of consideration.

But with Jiang Chen, through the use of certain techniques and the support of spirit medicine, he was confident that he could breakthrough four meridians to five meridians true qi in just seven days.

There was one process in particular that he did not need to spend time on, and that was to locate his true qi acupoint.

In this world, exploration and reflection were needed to locate and clear every acupoint.

But Jiang Chen was equipped with the location method of True Acupoint Resonance.

Jiang Chen was quite satisfied with the lifestyle of continuous

training.

The next morning, Jiang Chen rose early when the first ray of light had peeked out from the east. He moved to the training field in the manor and ran through the entire Eastern Amethyst Qi method, as well as the two martial arts tactics contained within it.

“Amethyst Cloud Palm” was graceful and elegant. It was a gust of falling leaves and flowers one second, and rainbow clouds chasing after the moon the next. Both insubstantial and tangible, it emphasized being ethereal.

“Eastern King Point” on the other hand, emphasized unpredictability. It was as sudden as thunder, but also like the shooting stars. A fleeting glimpse of a divine dragon would abruptly materialize, catching one off guard.

Jiang Chen fully went through both of them and loosened his limbs. In his hands, many details not contained in the original instructions were demonstrated, drawn out of a method to develop the mind along with the accompaniment of two martial arts techniques.

It was a pity that not a single audience member was present then, otherwise Jiang Chen surely would have brought the crowd to its feet.

Jiang Chen had eaten breakfast an hour later and sent Jiang Zheng to boss Song, ordering the former to personally deliver the shipment of crouching yang stones into the palace.

The past Jiang Chen had followed the duke of Jiang Han into the palace a few times, so the route to the palace was not unfamiliar in his mind. He was also quite versed in the customs that must be observed.

Armed with the engraved dragon medallion, he faced no obstacles along the way.

Although the palace was a hundred times more impressive than the temporary household the duke of Jiang Han had set up in the capital, it still stirred absolutely no interest in Jiang Chen.

Compared to the great scenes he had seen in his prior life, the assorted splendor of this palace seemed a bit wanting in comparison.

“Jiang Chen pays his respects to Your Majesty.” They had agreed on not bowing in front of the king, so Jiang Chen merely inclined his body slightly when he saw Eastern Lu.

Eastern Lu naturally was not in the mood to make a fuss over such a small things like manners, not to mention this was an honor he had personally bestowed. There was simply nothing to become upset about.

“Jiang Chen, I am pleased by your presence today. Let’s forget about what happened before between you and I, and look forward. What do you say to that?”

“What happened before? Your Majesty, the best trait I have is my poor memory. Heh heh.” Jiang Chen didn’t feel like mincing words and so simply decided to play dumb.

“Good, I like a smart man. Xia Ting, take Jiang Chen to the inner courtyard to diagnose Princess Zhiruo.”

“Yes, your servant obeys.” Xia Ting was an eunuch. The rank of a eunuch who could attend at the side of a king was naturally not low.

Xia Ting was a clever one, and didn’t look down on Jiang Chen because of his rapscallion past. On the contrary, he was pleasant and polite, and smiled in an easy going way, “Young duke, please follow me.”

Jiang Chen nodded, “My steward bodyservant Jiang Zheng will deliver a shipment of stones later, please send them to the princess’ chambers.”

The palace was quite vast, and it took them a while of walking to reach the imperial harem.

Jiang Chen shook his head slightly when walking down the quiet path in the flower gardens.

In terms of surroundings, there was nothing to criticize about this location. Tree-lined shade, clusters of flowers, a peaceful

terrain, corridors to pavilions, and various garden decorations lined the walkways.

A green expanse was revealed after passing through a walkway and an arched door. Xia Ting led Jiang Chen to a halt in front of a wooden frame filled with flowers.

“Young duke, we stop here.”

There were two people in the field. Two girls, to be more exact. Youthful innocence still remained on one of the girl’s faces, and her body was in between fully developed and yet unformed. The girl in question was Eastern Zhiruo.

She was wielding a wooden sword at the moment, parrying the other girl’s advances with strained effort.

The other girl was just past twenty years old with an exceedingly well developed body. She wore a suit of form fitting leather armor, further accentuating her exquisite curves.

The girl had a dashingly spirited face, and appeared quite serious in between yells. A heroic, unyielding air emanated from her gestures.

“Hit!”

A light yell sounded as the wooden sword in Eastern Zhiruo’s hand clattered to the ground. In turn, the sexy lady’s wooden

sword was resting on Eastern Zhiruo's dainty neck.

Jiang Chen shook his heads without words. Who is this woman? She has some guts, resting the wooden sword on the princess' neck. Doesn't she understand the meaning of holding back in educational sparring matches?

And, hadn't I repeatedly advised last time for Eastern Zhiruo to stop practicing martial dao?

"Idiot woman." Jiang Chen thinned his lips slightly as he took quite an exception to the scene. "A brainless bimbo indeed, the ancients were right when they coined this phrase."

But who knew that the shake of his head and the thinning of his lips would happen to fall into the sexy lady's line of vision, and cause no end of trouble.

Notes:

[1] Basic ancient Chinese that all children would learn

Chapter 17: Princess? I'll Still Lecture You Without Fail

"Where did this lecher come from? How dare he behave atrociously in the imperial harem?" The sexy lady had already been in a bad mood when she was surprised by the sight of a stranger. Wasn't this the perfect target to vent her frustrations since he had had the gall to shake his head and quirk his lips?

Jiang Chen frowned and turned his head to ask Xia Ting, "Who is this idiotic woman?"

It was as if someone had shoved a goose egg into Xia Ting's mouth when he heard this. He wore a stunned expression and a wry smile, as no words came out of his open mouth, unable to respond for the moment.

"You lecher, alright, who are you calling an idiotic woman?"

"Who else but you?" Jiang Chen had also been enraged by two repeated labels of "lecher". "If I recall correctly, I gave the order last time for Eastern Zhiruo to stop practicing!"

"And I'd like to ask who decided to appoint such an idiot by the princess' side?"

"If I have to continuously answer such basic, idiotic questions, then I'll ask you to find another expert for this diagnosis!

And, you idiot woman, don't rest your sword on the princess' neck whenever you feel like it. The mind wavers when the heart palpitates, and qi is lost when the mind wavers. The princess' life qi was already weak to begin with, are you complaining that she's not dying quickly enough?

And the most idiotic thing of all is that the wooden swords you're using are made from enigmatic cloud wood. The wood possesses a yin character, and will trigger the yin humours in the princess' body. Are you all idiots in this vast palace?"

The woman had been working herself up into a temper when she was halted in her tracks by Jiang Chen's direct harangue. She was also slightly surprised that he had recognized the enigmatic cloud wood with one glance.

As for Eastern Zhiruo, she ran over laughing with an air of shyness from a young girl. She tugged at Jiang Chen's sleeve, "Alright brother Jiang Chen, aunt Gouyu just returned today from an adventure outside. She doesn't know anything about Zhiruo's matters, so please forgive her."

"Wait a second!" The woman called Gouyu had regained her senses. "Zhiruo you give me an explanation right this second. Who wants this... this darned brat's forgiveness? How am I wrong? And who is this brat? How can he access the imperial harem?"

"And you don't admit that you're an idiot. You think I care about entering some imperial harem?"

“Brat, if you call me idiot one more time I’m going to beat you so hard that you can’t feed yourself or even relieve yourself!”

“Psht! A threat? From the likes of you? Save it.” Jiang Chen was contemptuous.

Off on the sidelines, the eunuch Xia Ting had wanted found a moment to surreptitiously slip away, because he’d discovered that things were not what he’d imagined. He did not wish to be awkwardly caught in the middle.

He’d brought the person here; it was out of his control if things devolved into a ruckus of chickens flying and dogs jumping.

Poor Eastern Zhiruo had to put out the fire on both sides.

Jiang Chen grabbed her, “Come, girl, show me your chambers.”

These words thoroughly enraged Gouyu. She shook her wooden sword and exhorted, “Lecher! You really think I won’t dare cleave you?”

“You crazy woman, you really took the wrong medicine this morning. I came to diagnose Princess Zhiruo out of the goodness of my heart, and you create trouble not once, but multiple times. Do you believe that…”

“Do I believe what?” Gouyu laughed coldly.

“Forget it. Good men do not fight with woman. Princess Zhiruo, is she your martial dao teacher? Fire her at the earliest opportunity. You won’t live past 16 with her at your side.”

The translucent skin on Gouyu’s face was covered by thunderclouds in an instant. She focused her voice and yelled, “Brat, I dare you to say that one more time!”

By the sight of her expression, Eastern Zhiruo knew that Gouyu was truly enraged. She hurriedly said, “Alright auntie. Both of you stop talking. Listen to Zhiruo’s explanation. This is Jiang Chen, father has employed him as my royal physician. Auntie, don’t underestimate Jiang Chen! He’s really amazing, he could tell that I wasn’t sick, but that I was born with a yin constitution and thus cannot cultivate. Cultivating will increase the burden on my meridians and deplete my life qi.”

“Royal physician? This brat?” Skepticism was written all over Gouyu’s proud face.

“Auntie, his name is Jiang Chen, not ‘this brat’.” Eastern Zhiruo responded merrily. “Brother Jiang Chen, this is my aunt, and the sister of my father. Call her Princess Gouyu and not idiot or crazy woman. That doesn’t sound nice!”

“Aunt?” Jiang Chen was taken aback. He hadn’t expected this at all. He had assumed that this violent woman was a female martial dao teacher of some sort.

But she still had to be lectured, and even more so, if she was Zhiruo's aunt. "Aunt? Is there any aunt in the world who would treat her own niece in this way? Do you know that everything you've just done was pushing her down the road of death? Just because you're a princess doesn't mean you have the right to be a self righteous moron."

Rage and killing intent boiled in Princess Gouyu's eyes as her beautiful hands unconsciously groped for the handle of her sword.

Their eyes met. Jiang Chen's look was open – calm and pure. His heart was selfless and encompassed the world, and did not fear killing looks like the one Princess Gouyu was sending his way.

"Brat, I don't care who you are. You've called me idiot five times. and crazy woman once today. Remember this, women carry grudges."

"Jiang Chen is it? Young duke is it?" A strange smile suddenly tugged at Gouyu's lips, as if she had gotten hold of one of Jiang Chen's secrets.

Jiang Chen shrugged, "I'm afraid of everything but a woman's threats. Alright, I'm going to diagnose Princess Zhiruo now. You aren't welcome here."

"I'm not welcome? Says who?" Gouyu grew even more displeased. "This is my home, get it?"

“What? You mean to tell me that you haven’t gotten married off yet? Please, how old are you? Even your niece is about to marry someone, and you still have the nerve to call this your home? Do you hate marriage that much? Is it really that much fun to be a leftover woman[1]?”

If it wasn’t for Eastern Zhiruo’s illness, Gouyu would have definitely cut Jiang Chen down with one swing and dragged his corpse out to feed the dogs.

Her ferocious gaze completely illustrated her thoughts at that moment.

“Okay, brat. Congratulations. You have been successfully remembered by this princess. I’m going to go back and change. If I find out that diagnosing Zhiruo is a false pretense, you’ll find out that you’ll die a horrible death.”

Jiang Chen was derisive. “Hurry up and scram! Remember to close the blinds when you change to avoid scaring anyone. Even if you don’t manage to scare people, it’s still wrong to scare people of small importance.”

“Alright brother Jiang Chen, Auntie has left already! Stop being so sharp tongued. Auntie is actually a good person, there must have been a misunderstanding between you two today.”

A charming smile blossomed on Eastern Zhiruo’s face, projecting an air of naive innocence. This smile somewhat alleviated Jiang Chen’s mood. He had been truly maddened by that woman to the

point of losing his wits.

He didn't mind the idiotic gestures. What got to him was that the woman had immediately started off with "lecher" as soon as she'd opened her mouth.

"To think that I, Jiang Chen, have been insulted by a brainless bimbo! Sigh!"

Jiang Chen came to Eastern Zhiruo's quarters under her guidance, and he spent some time wandering around them.

"Brother Jiang Chen, what do you think? My place is pretty nice, right?"

Jiang Chen smiled lightly. "It's passable, but it's extremely inappropriate for you to live here. Whether in terms of the greater environment, or in terms of the design of the details — they are all pushing you further towards death."

Eastern Zhiruo's composure was greatly ruffled. "Brother Jiang Chen, don't scare me."

"The imperial harem is a great compound within the palace, and is already a place of strong yin qi. The design of this imperial harem garden is overly quiet, with no concentrations of yang qi, making it easier to attract yin things. If you had not practiced martial dao when you were born and didn't live here, your lifespan would be about the same as ordinary folk. It was a pity that you

were born into the royal family."

"Ah? Brother Jiang Chen, you're scaring me. Will Zhiruo really not make it past sixteen?"

"If you hadn't met me, you may not have even made it beyond this year."

Jiang Chen wasn't being an alarmist. This environment was a natural yin focal point. How could the ill humors within a yin constitution not have been worsened?

Ignoring Eastern Zhiruo's look of worry, Jiang Chen took a quick walk. He lifted his head; at times climbing onto the wall, and at times walking upstairs.

He returned to Eastern Zhiruo's side after a while and asked, "If I were to demolish this imperial harem compound and redesign it, would your father the king agree to it?"

"Brother Jiang Chen, you're... you're kidding right? There are three thousand in the imperial harem, not just an abode for Zhiruo alone."

"So, this proposal wouldn't work?"

"No, no." Eastern Zhiruo spread out her delicate hands. "Zhiruo cannot impact the daily lives of the entire imperial harem just for herself."

What a girl to be pitied and to be respected. She was facing her death, but still thought of the greater picture. The very definition of an expendable royal life!

“Then you must move out, the earlier the better. The longer you live here, means the closer you are to death.”

“That is also undoable. Zhiruo is a royal princess, and cannot leave the imperial harem for the outside world before her marriage.” Eastern Zhiruo’s voice was as low as a mosquito, like a child who had done wrong. Her head was so low because she didn’t dare look up at Jiang Chen.

As if this was all her fault.

“I say, are these damn rules important, or your life important?” Jiang Chen was a bit at a loss for words.

“Brother Jiang Chen, do you have any other ways? My life and the rules are both important. But Zhiruo is afraid that breaking the rules will cause others to be unhappy.”

“Who? Who dares to be unhappy? Tell your old man to execute him.” Jiang Chen’s majestic demeanor was evident.

“Pfft…” Eastern Zhiruo was amused by Jiang Chen’s seriousness. “Brother Jiang Chen, you like to joke! It’s so interesting being around you.”

The girl wove her arms lightly around his upper arm and said sweetly, “I know brother Jiang Chen will come up with a better idea.”

The mild fragrance of a maiden wafted leisurely into Jiang Chen’s nostrils, making him feel from the depths of his heart that it was good to be young.

He laughed, “I’ve got ideas already, but you really can’t practice anymore. Ai, that idiot woman, you say she’s your aunt?”

“Hehe, you’re insulting auntie again.” Eastern Zhiruo blinked a pair of lively, spirited eyes. “Brother Jiang Chen, Zhiruo will tell you a secret. You can’t insult my auntie anymore.”

“Why not? She’s such an idiot, and yet I can’t lecture her? I insult her to help her become smarter. My intentions are good and kind.”

“Hehe, but my auntie is a princess. She’s also the number one organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials. Don’t you need to participate in them?”

“What?” Jiang Chen leapt up upon hearing these words. “Why didn’t you tell me this earlier?

“Because both of you didn’t give me a chance to earlier.” Eastern Zhiruo felt a bit aggrieved.

Jiang Chen was quite depressed. He'd just offended Du Ruhai, but the latter was just second in command. But now, that Princess Gouyu was the primary person in charge!

The Hidden Dragon Trials...

Jiang Chen could see many flaming and spiked obstacles flying his way. The main organizer and her right hand man both hate him. How was it not possible that life wouldn't be easy for him in the Hidden Dragon Trials?

Notes:

1] Leftover woman is modern Chinese slang indicating a spinster not by choice

Chapter 18: Princess Gouyu's Internal Dilemma

After a bout of depression, Jiang Chen finally asked apprehensively, "Your aunt isn't the type to carry a grudge is she?"

"Hehe, she dotes on me a lot. As for whether or not she carries a grudge, Zhiruo doesn't know! Brother Jiang Chen, don't be afraid. I'll speak to her on your behalf when I have time."

"Hmph. It doesn't matter who begs on your behalf, Jiang Chen! Heir to the Jiang Han duchy, ranked dead last in the pre exams, and yet to pass any of the three foundational exams"

By the artificial mountain, Princess Gouyu had reappeared unbeknownst to anyone, dressed in a downy yellow light robe.

There were some traces of a cold smile on her face, "Jiang Chen, you have some courage in walking in here."

Some said that a dead pig is not afraid of boiling water. Since matters stood the way they were, Jiang Chen could only see them through to the end. "What, you want to get revenge on me?"

"Get revenge?" A hint of a cold smile tugged at Gouyu's lips. "The current you isn't even worth getting revenge on. Worry about that if you make it into the final examination."

True, as the main organizer, Princess Gouyu could not bear to demean herself and harass someone who couldn't even make it past a single one of the foundational exams.

Heh heh, idiotic woman. You think far too little of me. Jiang Chen knew that in Gouyu's heart, he was most likely equated with the words of "ignorant and incompetent".

He was about to say something when a loud pattering of footsteps sounded from the outside. The shipment of crouching yang stones had arrived.

Jiang Chen beckoned and said to Princess Gouyu, "What's your name, Gouyu is it? Princess Zhiruo says that you dote on her. I ask only this, do you have any authority in the imperial harem?"

"Why?" Gouyu asked coldly.

"If you have authority, then demolish all the buildings within a hundred feet of Princess Zhiruo's quarters. Demolish any mountain, fill in any water."

"Also, hire the best artisan to hew the largest piece of crouching yang stone into a stone bed. Let Princess Zhiruo sleep on it. It's best if she sleeps nude."

Jiang Chen did not care at all that a black line had slowly formed on Princess Gouyu's beautiful forehead, and continued speaking.

“Arrange the rest of the eight crouching yang stones according to the diagram on my paper. I’ll come back with more tasks next time.”

“And, little Zhiruo, I’ve commissioned these sachets for you. I’ve broken the Dragonbone Sun Grass into nine pieces and put them into nine sachets. Keep one on you at all times, and place the others in places you often visit. Although this Dragonbone Sun Grass is a slight bit of trash, it’ll do for now. The yang qi that it produces will nourish your meridians.”

“In addition, this is a hand sketch of the ‘Sun God Spirit Diagram’, along with an accompanying incantation. Meditate and contemplate with your heart. This will help your body produce yang qi.”

“This is a temporary fix, we need to stabilize your condition first. Remember, do as I say. In particular, do not train anymore, or the circumstances will be bad beyond comprehension.”

Jiang Chen’s words of guidance had quite the air of a master. His demeanor and delivery stunned even Princess Gouyu silent for a moment.

He didn’t give Gouyu the chance to speak after he finished speaking. He dusted off his sleeves and started swaggering off.

Gouyu regained her senses just as Jiang Chen was about to leave. She snorted, “Jiang Chen, you’re a person who couldn’t even pass the three foundational exams. Why should we listen to you?”

Jiang Chen's gaze was cold as his body halted, but he didn't turn around. "If you truly love your niece, you will do as I say. If you want her to die earlier, then continue practicing with her like you were just doing."

One had to say, Jiang Chen had the potential to be a master bluffer. His awe-inspiring words accompanied by a quietly dignified aura, were enough to cause the preeminent Princess Gouyu, the powerful figure in charge of the fates of all the dukedoms through the Hidden Dragon Trials, to be at a temporary loss for words.

It was only when his shadow had disappeared that Gouyu recovered, "That insolent upstart! He makes me so mad!"

Eastern Zhiruo laughed, "Auntie, brother Jiang Chen is actually quite kind. Listen, that day at the Heavenly Rites of Worship..."

When Eastern Zhiruo had finished conveying the happenings of the recent days, Princess Gouyu's face underwent a variety of expressions.

"Who would've thought that so much would happen in the time capital during the time that I was gone? I left for not even a month!" Gouyu's expression became complicated upon hearing that Jiang Chen had risen from the dead after being caned to death, and actually gained divine patronage because of his misfortunes.

Princess Gouyu had been born into a royal family, and had one of the highest standards in the entire capital. Her ambitions and worldview had never stopped at a mere kingdom.

Thus, she committed herself to training and set herself the goal of exploring the wider, more exciting world, through the path of martial dao.

It was because she had her eyes set high, that she knew a bit more than the average person about divine patronage. If an ordinary person was wavering between skepticism and belief, then she believed about 70% after listening to Zhiruo.

“It’s impossible for a teenage youth to fabricate so much in the heat of the moment. Particularly that Zhiruo and her mother had been born under a solar eclipse. This kind of royal secret has never been disclosed. Yin constitution, yin humors?”

Princess Gouyu was feeling a mixture of feelings. Eastern Zhiruo was one of her most beloved nieces, and she had watched her grow up.

She had always insisted that Eastern Zhiruo was weak and frail, and thus had insisted the latter to train and practice. Even if she didn’t achieve any accomplishments, strengthening her body was still a good thing, no?

But, Jiang Chen’s overwhelming and harsh lecture today had caused her convictions of many years to falter, just that little bit.

“Have I really been wrong? All that I’ve been doing for Zhiruo hasn’t helped her, but in fact harmed her?”

“Divine patronage? Should I believe in something like this?”

Princess Gouyu struggled with an internal dilemma. She naturally wanted Eastern Zhiruo to be well, but if she continued to insist that Jiang Chen was a charlatan, wouldn’t that be harming Zhiruo?

At this moment, eunuch Xia Ting had led a crowd of people nearby.

“Princesses, do we demolish this area? Your servant begs royal guidance.”

Princess Gouyu surveyed the surroundings, a few hints of apprehension in her exquisite eyes. She took another glance at Eastern Zhiruo and noted the eagerness in the girl’s eyes. It was obvious that she was full of confidence in Jiang Chen.

“Demolish it!”

Gouyu herself found it hard to believe that she had said those words. Why demolish it? Why should she listen to that damned brat? Had she really fallen for his act?

No no, I’m thinking of Zhiruo. If it makes her happy, then we demolish this area! The proud Princess Gouyu quickly found a

palatable excuse for herself.

When he left the imperial harem, Jiang Chen paid another visit to Eastern Lu. He was the king of a nation after all, the common courtesies had to be observed. Jiang Chen was a smart person and didn't want to supply any fodder for the gossip mill.

Eastern Lu was quite satisfied with Jiang Chen's report. "Jiang Chen, I can see that you are much better than all those royal physicians."

"Your Majesty, there is an overabundance of yin qi in the imperial harem. It is not a suitable place of residence for someone with the Princess' constitution. Your subject's actions are merely to counteract the yin qi. In order for the Princess to be just like an ordinary person, she needs to move out from the imperial harem and settle down in a place that gathers yang qi."

"Mm. Your suggestion has been noted. But this matter is of great importance and needs some deliberation." This was an action that was at obvious odds with royal tradition. Even Eastern Lu could not easily agree to it.

"With that said, your subject requests his leave. I will enter the palace to renew my diagnosis each month and discern the Princess' condition. If there are no accidents, her condition can be stabilized. As for whether it can be effective beyond expectation, that will depend on the Princess' karma."

There were many things that Jiang Chen did not need to explain

in too much detail, such as that “Sun God Spirit Diagram”. That was actually quite a life changing stroke of luck for the Princess. It was something that the Celestial Emperor had prepared for Jiang Chen back in the day.

Jiang Chen naturally did not have the ability to replicate the Sun God Spirit Diagram, but had no issues in simulating a simplified version.

If Princess Zhiruo really did meditate upon it daily, over the course of time, the effect of this single diagram would be enough to allow her to life a normal life.

But Jiang Chen would never voice this. Playing this hand close to his heart would prevent Eastern Lu from burning bridges.

Discarding someone after they had outlived their usefulness; Jiang Chen had been born into a royal household in his past life, how could he not know of this?

When he left the palace, he didn’t go to his usual haunts to drink and whore, nor did he call upon his friends. Rather, he went straight back to the manor.

His best friends had all been grounded by their respective old men because of the furor they caused at the Jiang Han manor a few days ago, not to mention the fact that the month end exams were fast approaching.

A sense of urgency had filled the hearts of all the dukes. The second half of the year would herald the arrival of the final examinations of the Hidden Dragon Trials. Their sons' performance at this stage was the key to determining if they could keep their positions for the next twenty years.

Those who knew for certain that their positions would be kept still had to worry if their ranking would change.

All in all, the harsh competition of the Hidden Dragon Trial caused all the dukes to be on their guard.

On the contrary, the Jiang Han household actually had a more relaxed atmosphere.

Jiang Feng, the duke of Jiang Han, had no lofty expectations to begin with. He had already mentally prepared himself to hang up his armor and return to the fields.

As for the Jiang Chen of now, the mere dukedom of a kingdom did not even register on his radar.

He was participating because he didn't want the outside world to think that the Jiang family was full of cowards and didn't even have the courage to show up at the Trials.

The greater picture of fierce competition amongst the dukes had long since formed, and Jiang Chen had no choice but to go with the flow.

Otherwise, to avoid the first battle after his reincarnation would leave a shadow in his heart, undoubtedly affecting his path of training in the future.

The biggest piece of gossip these days in the Jiang Han household was none other than Jiang Chen. That was because the servants had made the startling discovery that the young duke had stayed home for a full five days.

This was a heaven defying piece of news. One had to know that the young duke was a restless master before. He had not even previously set a record of staying home for ten hours, not to mention five entire days.

Even Jiang Feng was astonished and he kept muttering, “What is this kid up to? This isn’t his style?”

Jiang Feng’s child rearing philosophy was encompassed by four words, “Do as he will”.

As for the protagonist of the rumors, Jiang Chen made no response to the reactions of the outside world. He had not wasted a single moment in the past five days.

Training, strengthening his meridians, fortifying his body — all final preparations for clearing the fifth acupoint.

Reading to understand and assimilate as much of this world as

possible through perusing various volumes – these two items almost became Jiang Chen's entire life over the past few days.

When dawn broke on the sixth day, his four strands of true qi were as full of vitality as the dawn, and as full of vigor like the rising sun.

Chapter 19: Jiang Family's Concealed Danger

After a few determined days of tough training and the support of medicine, Jiang Chen had finally strengthened his four meridians to a satisfactory level.

"The four meridians are the same, as if they are a blossoming flower with four petals; neither too fragile nor too hard, and they act almost in unison. The meridians have now increased in pliability and strength more than ten times compared to the first time I trained it."

Jiang Chen was quite satisfied with this progress, even though he knew that compared to the training of others, the previous Jiang Chen was still many steps behind them.

But this wasn't an excuse to proceed in haste, Jiang Chen still moved according to his tempo. Fine products come from slow work, and all would fall into place at the right time.

Finally, on the sixth morning, Jiang Chen welcomed his peak condition.

The four meridians true qi were like dragons, full of wild, explosive power. They formed an unpremeditated consensus, one that was aimed at clearing the fifth acupoint.

A doughty and extremely rhythmic true qi flow filled Jiang

Chen's entire body with a sense of calm.

Exhale, circulate qi!

Four meridians true qi were like four carps about to leap upstream. They were in fine fighting spirit and full of vitality. Under Jiang Chen's guidance, they took the same action and coalesced as one, and as swift as a meteor, shot towards Jiang Chen's long located fifth acupoint!

A feeling of warm agitation, similar to the sublime joy of a man and woman becoming one, filled every pore when the acupoint was cleared.

The acupoint was broken through like cracking an eggshell. The strong qi current rushed through the acupoint and thundered along the preset path, clearing the fifth meridian!

Fifth acupoint, breakthrough!

Fifth meridian, clear!

Fifth level of true qi, perfection!

As he welcomed the light of the dawning sun, Jiang Chen smiled his first heartfelt smile since reincarnation.

Five meridians true qi did not surprise him. What gave him

happiness was the sense of achievement gained from training, from breaking through.

This feeling of accomplishment was something that his exalted past self, the son of the Celestial Emperor, had never enjoyed.

“Five meridians true qi is surely enough to not place me at the bottom of all the heirs anymore? And with my experience and potential, there shouldn’t be anyone within the realm of true qi, even the advanced realm of true qi, that can win out over me.”

Jiang Chen still possessed this little bit of confidence.

With his insights, and a foundational knowledge of this world, he could absolutely see through to the true essence of things with one glance. He would be able to fully read all of an opponent’s strategies before they even attempted a single technique. This was a huge advantage in this sort of competition.

When Jiang Chen walked out of the secret training room, he realized that it had been many days since he had called on his old man.

Since he had arrived on this world, the duke of Jiang Han had been Jiang Chen’s mental support, whether in terms of blood ties or first impressions.

From this man, Jiang Chen could experience what it meant to have love in this world.

Although he did not verbally express it, he placed great importance on this familial tie.

When he saw his father, the duke of Jiang Han was holding an invitation in his hand. His brow was slightly creased, and it was obvious that something was troubling him.

“Father.” Jiang Chen walked in.

“Haha, Chen’er, you’re here!” Jiang Feng’s mood was always exceptionally well when he saw his son, and he skillfully concealed the shadows overhanging his forehead. “How goes things? I’ve heard that you haven’t set foot outside in days. Have you truly hardened your heart this time and will pass the three foundational exams no matter what?”

Jiang Feng’s tone was half joking, but it caused Jiang Chen to be at a loss for words. This old man seriously had a positive attitude. He could still find it within himself to crack a joke at this time.

“The foundational exams aren’t important. Father, what were you looking at just now? I saw that you seemed to be worrying about something.” Jiang Chen asked decisively, seeing that his father would not bring it up.

“Ah, this. Haha! Chen’er, you’ve never expressed an interest in household affairs before. Don’t worry about these kinds of matters.” Jiang Feng bypassed the question and attempted to change the subject.

“Father, although I am your son, there should be a limit to the extent of your protection? Aren’t you afraid that you’ll spoil me into a worthless good-for-nothing?”

“Heh heh, Chen’er, what are you saying. An old man protecting his son is only just and proper! It’s actually nothing major, just that the duke of Soaring Dragon sent over an invitation, welcoming all the dukes to a reception in celebration of a major event of joyous tidings at his manor.”

“Soaring Dragon dukedom?” The first person that Jiang Chen thought of was that Long Juxue.

“Our relationship with the Soaring Dragon dukedom isn’t deep enough to be invited to a banquet, is it?” Jiang Chen asked probingly.

“Ai, duke of Soaring Dragon! This is a barely veiled display of power to run roughshod over the Jiang family. Chen’er, since you ask, I will tell you. Keep your wits about you when you’re out and about, and don’t offend anyone from the Soaring Dragon duchy. The land of our Jiang Han territory is rich and fertile because it’s in the southern part of the kingdom. We even discovered a piece of land with a spirit vein running through it. Thus, our family has always had a large business deal cultivating spirit ingredients for the Pill King Garden.”

Discovering a piece of land with a spirit vein naturally made it have fertile soil for planting spirit ingredients. It was also quite

normal to have business relations with the Pill King Garden, a place that specialized in pill medicine.

Jiang Chen listened quietly because he knew there was more to it.

“But recently, the duke of Soaring Dragon has approached me many times to rent the piece of land with the spirit ingredients garden.”

“Rent? It’s not as if renting property doesn’t exist between the dukedoms. What was his offered rental price?” Jiang Chen seemed to be slowly forming the picture.

“When I say the Soaring Dragon duchy is bullying us, this is what I mean. Based on our business with the Pill King Garden, this piece of land brings us five million silver in profit every year. But the duke of Soaring Dragon offered three hundred thousand silver to rent our land.”

Cultivating ingredients for the Pill King Garden resulted in revenues of roughly five million a year!

But renting it out to the duke of Soaring Dragon would directly shrink revenues to three hundred thousand!

Robbery, highway robbery through sheer display of power!

Jiang Chen understood everything at once. This duke of Soaring

Dragon was playing on his power as the first duke of the kingdom. The so called banquet was one of false pretenses. Inviting the duke of Jiang Han was undoubtedly to pressure him in person and force him to acquiesce.

If pressure only came from the duke of Soaring Dragon, that would be simple. We're all dukes of Eastern Kingdom; if you pressure me, then I will just simply ignore you.

It would be a violation of ancestral code of conduct and a huge taboo if dukes easily warred with each other.

Seeing as his father was so troubled, Jiang Chen felt that the pressure must not only come from the duke of Soaring Dragon.

"Is it that the Pill King Garden has secretly made a deal with the Soaring Dragon dukedom?" Jiang Chen asked.

Jiang Feng thought it was a bit odd and looked at Jiang Chen. "Well Chen'er, you normally don't ask after these matters, but you've identified the hidden currents within this one. That is indeed the case, Pill King Garden has let out hints that even if we don't rent to the Soaring Dragon dukedom, they plan on terminating the relationship after the Hidden Dragon Trials."

Jiang Chen finally fully understood the situation. This was adding insult to injury.

The two sides had teamed up to sideline the owner of the land

with the spirit vein.

This duke of Soaring Dragon was too scheming, this was conducting business without any skin in the game.

When faced with a choice between the Soaring Dragon dukedom and the Jiang Hang dukedom, the Pill King Garden naturally fawned on the former. After all, that was the first duke in the kingdom.

“Then, tonight’s banquet is a dinner where treachery is planned?” Jiang Chen toyed with the invitation with some interest. The duke of Soaring Dragon’s arrogance, and a sense of a petty villain winning the day emanated between the lines of text.

The crucial point was, the invitation took particular pains to remind the duke of Jiang Han to bring Jiang Chen as well.

Was this to create a package out of father and son for joint bitter humiliation?

“Chen’er, I’m thinking that I should go alone. You…”

“Go of course! Why not. I really want to open my eyes.” Jiang Chen laughed heartily. “I’d like to see if this duke of Soaring Dragon really has three heads and six arms.”

After his father’s explanation of this matter and the combination of all that had happened before, Jiang Chen had full reason to

suspect that the duke of Soaring Dragon was involved in the fart that the previous Jiang Chen had released during the Rites.

Even if he was not directly involved, he must be indirectly involved.

Plus, how could a mere duke of Soaring Dragon make Jiang Chen call for retreat?

Halting progress due to fear? Avoiding conflict and provocation? Those were the actions of the weak.

In this life, Jiang Chen would only be one of the strong!

Plus, Jiang Chen also wanted to see just what kind of fortuitous circumstances had happened to that upstart duke for him to bluster that it was a major event of joyous tidings.

The next day, the palace.

After a few days of busy activity, Eastern Zhiruo's quarters had been remodeled according to Jiang Chen's blueprints.

Eastern Zhiruo's quarters were now clearly not as delicate and exquisite as before, but had a few traces of masculine lines.

Eastern Lu had also heard of this matter, and had come for a personal inspection today, accompanied by princess Gouyu.

“Haha, this Jiang Chen knows how to stir up something alright, how does this look like a princess’ quarters!” Although Eastern Lu said this, it was obvious to see that he did not really mind.

“Gouyu, what do you think about this Jiang Chen?” Eastern Lu smiled merrily and asked the princess next to him.

“Royal brother, if Jiang Chen can cure Zhiruo, then we can naturally allow his horseplay. But if this is all a sleight of hand, I will be the first to punish him!”

Eastern Zhiruo came bouncing over like a little deer as they were speaking.

“Father, auntie, you’ve come to see Ruo’er?”

“Yes, Ruo’er, how have you felt these past couple of days?” Eastern Lu felt a bit guilt ridden as he looked at the daughter who had weathered many hardships since childhood.

Zhiruo had been dealt an unfortunate fate since she was a child, but had never complained. On the contrary, she was very mature and always thought of others when doing anything.

Even with an illness ridden body, even knowing that she did not have long to live, she had always lived optimistically.

“Father, Ruo’er has been quite happy these days. Look at Ruo’er’s face, doesn’t it look much better than before? And, Ruo’er is no longer so afraid of the cold when it gets to midnight. I feel wonderful everyday and sleep much better than before.”

It was indeed apparent from Eastern Zhiruo’s spirit and complexion that her condition was much better these days. She also did not look as listless as before.

“Ruo’er, this means that Jiang Chen’s treatment is having effect?” Eastern Lu’s eyes gleamed.

“Yes, it must be credited to brother Jiang Chen. I keep two of the satchels he gave me on my body, and don’t feel that I get tired as easily as I did before. I don’t get woken up by cold air in the middle of the night either. Father, auntie, I contemplate everyday the diagram that brother Jiang Chen gave to me. I think it works really well!”

Hearing Eastern Zhiruo’s words and seeing that her body had taken an obvious turn for the better, Eastern Lu and Gouyu looked at each other, a meaningful expression on both their faces.

Chapter 20: Banquet Is A Trap? I'm Not Afraid!

"That brat, that brat, is he that good?" Gouyu was averse to accepting the situation. She still felt particularly awkward whenever she thought of being lectured by Jiang Chen. It was a bit hard for her to let go of face and admit Jiang Chen's superiority.

Eastern Lu lightly pulled Eastern Zhiruo into a one armed hug, sighing softly. "Who would have thought that after what happened at the Rites of Heavenly worship, fortune has befallen us in the wake of disaster. Is it the will of the heavens to use Jiang Chen's hand as a vessel to ease Ruo'er's suffering?"

The more he thought about it, the more that this explanation became the only possible one.

"Oh right, Gouyu, Jiang Chen is in the capital to participate in the Hidden Dragon Trials, how are his grades?" Eastern Lu suddenly remembered this matter.

"Royal brother, out of the 108 heirs, this Jiang Chen's grades are without a doubt the last in his class. And up until now, he hasn't passed a single one of the three foundational exams. There are only three or four more days until the final deadline at the end of the month. If he still can't pass them then, then he won't even have the qualifications to participate in the final exams of the Hidden Dragon Trials." Gouyu could only answer honestly.

"That bad?" Eastern Lu was also quite surprised. "This puts me

in a difficult position. If this kid cannot pass even the foundational exams and lose his family's duchy as a result. Then my intentions to award honors and riches…"

"You reap what you sow. He didn't try before, it wouldn't be an injustice for his family to lose their dukedom. Royal brother, I'm saying this first. Since you've put me in charge of the Hidden Dragon Trials, I will not be going easy on anyone." Gouyu still kept a stiff upper lip.

"Haha, how would I put you in a difficult position. If being a duke truly isn't written in his stars, then being a powerless official in the capital is just as good. No power or influence, or wealth and riches. That'd be quite a carefree life as well."

This was actually Eastern Lu's preferred conclusion to the matter. Otherwise, all the various dukes would return to their territories after the Hidden Dragon Trials, and who then would treat Eastern Zhiruo's illness?

"Oh right, royal brother, speaking of the Hidden Dragon Trials, Gouyu received an invitation today. It came from the Soaring Dragon duchy."

"Soaring Dragon duchy?" Eastern Lu vaguely creased his brow, obviously quite sensitive to these three words.

"Yes, it says that there will be a banquet tonight, and invites me to attend. Apparently, an incredible event of joyous tidings has occurred in the Soaring Dragon household."

“Joyous event?” Eastern Lu’s expression became even more complicated. As the exalted ruler of a kingdom, by all rights he should have absolute control over all in the capital.

But what event of great happiness had occurred in the Soaring Dragon household? Eastern Lu had no clue.

Of course, the duke of Soaring Dragon would have never invited the king to the banquet. Firstly, dukes did not command such respect, and secondly, custom laid down by the forefathers did not permit such an act.

“He didn’t elaborate in the invitation, and only said that it had something to do with his youngest daughter Long Juxue. Can it be that Long Juxue has had some breakthrough on her path of martial dao?”

Eastern Lu actually didn’t mind if it was truly such a small matter. He spread his hands, “You might as well attend since you’ve been invited. This duke of Soaring Dragon, heh heh.”

Gouyu’s expression was also a bit complicated, and she understood her royal brother’s reservations towards the duke of Soaring Dragon. He was the first duke under heaven, and of preeminent position and power. His influence almost rivaled his liege’s.

The Soaring Dragon manor was located in the southeast district of the capital. Its location was superior with prosperous streets and magnificent buildings. The Jiang Han manor was absolutely

incomparable.

Of course, even though it was called the Soaring Dragon manor, it was but a temporary housing site for when the duke was in the capital. Each duke's true manor was still situated in their respective territories.

Jiang Feng had meant to prepare a handsome gift since he was attending a banquet, but had been vetoed by Jiang Chen. Since they were sure to declare a feud, why bother? Just bring some random items, and the Soaring Dragon household could accept them if it wished.

Besides, it was a sure bet that this invitation did not care for gifts carried in by hand. What the duke of Soaring Dragon wanted was the Jiang Han parcel of land that contained the spirit vein, and to cut off the largest source of income for the Jiang Han duchy.

To seize someone's food was to start a blood feud. Jiang Chen clearly understood that this matter would not be settled easily.

Jiang Chen plodded out of the secret training room when it was dusk. In his words, they would be subjected to cold looks even if they arrived early, so why not wait until everyone was present?

Jiang Feng thought this made a lot of sense and thus accepted Jiang Chen's suggestion.

Most of the invited guests had already arrived when the father

son duo had arrived at the Soaring Dragon manor.

The scene in front of him was completely within Jiang Chen's expectations. Whether by previous accord or coincidence, several dukes had formed an agreement with the Soaring Dragon duchy and purposefully snubbed the father son duo.

It was a good thing that Jiang Feng usually conducted himself in a good manner and had made a few friends with some of the dukes. Some familiar peers came to greet Jiang Feng.

So things were not too ugly.

"Old brother Jiang, this duke has been pining an eternity for your arrival. You are finally here!" A hearty laugh suddenly sounded from the front, and a man dressed in luxurious robes strode towards Jiang Feng with large steps.

This man had a sturdy frame and walked with the poise and energy of a tiger. A domineering aura punctuated his every gesture. He was the duke of Soaring Dragon, Long Zhaofeng.

"This is too much, brother Long is too polite."

"Come come come. Old brother Jiang you are my esteemed guest today, and must sit next to me at the high table."

It was not easy to obtain a seat at the high table. A household such as a duchy's was most particular about seating arrangement.

Although the duke of Jiang Han's position was good, it was not good enough to warrant a seat at the high table.

"How can I accept this? Brother Long please continue to go about your business, I will sit with this band of brothers." Jiang Feng still wished to sit with his crew of brothers.

However, he had apparently underestimated Long Zhaofeng's determination.

"A guest has to follow his host's wishes. Old brother Jiang must listen to this duke's words today." Long Zhaofeng had an air of I-will-not-rest-until-you-sit-at-the-high-table.

Off to the side, Jiang Chen said lightly. "Father, it is rare that the duke of Soaring Dragon favors us so greatly. Since there is a seat for you at the high table, why not sit? Go ahead and sit."

"Hahaha, and this must be...? Oh right, you must be dear nephew Jiang Chen. Good good, a tiger father will not beget a dog son. Dear nephew, the younger generation can have fun elsewhere. I will not greet you all separately." The duke of Soaring Dragon laughed and cast a slightly meaningful look, spending a quick moment on Jiang Chen.

"Heh heh, please help yourself, your Grace." Jiang Chen gestured randomly with his hands and turned to leave.

"Brother Chen, over here."

Jiang Chen saw a large mound of a figure waved excitedly to him from a table not too far away as soon as he had turned.

Only one person in the entire Eastern Kingdom had such a large volume of stature. There was no other. It was naturally that fatty Xuan.

Sitting with fatty Xuan was the heir to the Hubing dukedom, Hubing Yue. These two fellows were Jiang Chen's best friends who happened to be in the capital.

As for the other, Yang Zong, he was hiding at another table, and did not even dare look over at fatty Xuan and the others. It was obvious that he wanted no part of anything.

"Brother Chen, these few days have been such an agony for your younger brother!" Fatty Xuan was quite coarse as he used his sleeve, made from the finest silks, to wipe off a chair. "Brother Chen, this is the seat that I've occupied for you since early in the evening. Haha, having tonnage is an advantage in grabbing seats!"

"Brother Chen, haven't seen you in a while, I've rather missed you." A surge of enthusiasm also emanated from Hubing Yue's eyes. This fellow did not talk much, but was real and direct.

Jiang Chen was more or less touched that these two would act this way at such a gathering, particularly with the duke of Jiang Han's precarious position.

There was a reason why these guys were called best friends.

Jiang Chen ignored the looks coming from all directions and was about to take his seat when a figure flashed by the side of the chair, and sat firmly in the chair that fatty Xuan had just wiped off.

“Fatty Xuan, thanks for saving me a seat.”

This man wore black robes and had a nose prominently red from rosacea. A few hints of mockery dripped out from the sharp edges of his lips as he brazenly took over the chair.

“Yan monkey, what’s the meaning of this?” Fatty Xuan was immediately outraged.

“Fatty Xuan, I’d like to ask you the same, what do you mean by this? Can I not sit in this seat?” This person was naturally the heir to Yanmen dukedom, Yan Yiming. He was also the same person who had voluntarily identified himself when threatening Jiang Chen at the Hall of Healing.

“This is a seat that I reserved for my brother Chen!” Fatty Xuan wanted to haul Yan Yiming off the chair.

“Brother Chen? You mean him?” Yan Yiming smiled superciliously. “Fatty Xuan are you blind? This is the intermediate realm area. Only those with at least four levels of true qi have the right to sit here.”

He flicked a glance at Jiang Chen and said in an exceedingly mocking tone while pointing to a lonely table for one in the corner, “Jiang Chen, that table for specially prepared for the initial realm.”

Raucous laughter sounded from all sides as soon as Yan Yiming had delivered his words. It was obvious that this was a play that had been long since planned, and was just waiting for Jiang Chen and fatty Xuan to come along and play the fool.

Fatty Xuan was infuriated. “Yan monkey, don’t you know to pick better times when you need to be slapped?”

Yan Yiming smiled faintly. “fatty Xuan, you’re a mere five levels of true qi. When did you have the ability to slap a better of six levels?”

Yan Yiming’s six meridians true qi surged as he spoke, directly sending out an imposing aura.

The sabers were rattling, and it seemed extremely likely that a fight would soon break out.

All of a sudden, a crisp and toe curling voice came from a nearby table. “Brother Jiang Chen, sit here. I saved you a seat.”

The voice was naive and clear. Jiang Chen knew without turning his head that it was Princess Eastern Zhiruo.

A faint smile at his lips, Jiang Chen suddenly reached out his hand and patted Yan Yiming's shoulder. "This young duke has fine bone structure with a handsome face, and even steals seats with such personality! You have a bright future ahead of you. Your master must admire you? Yan Yiming is it? I will remember you."

With that, Jiang Chen completed ignored the jeering looks around him and waltzed towards Eastern Zhiruo with a peaceful face.

"You silly girl, what are you doing at such a filthy place instead of staying at your quarters?"

The assembled crowd was shell shocked, as if lightning had burnt them all to a crisp after Jiang Chen had spoken. This was the princess! Jiang Chen had been caned by the king last time and narrowly escaped death, but his behavior had worsened and now dared to speak to even the king's most beloved princess with this kind of tone.

This sounded like someone lecturing his own sister?

And to say that this was a filthy place in front of the banquet host, was not this a verbal slap?

The scene's atmosphere took on strange overtones in the blink of an eye.

Everyone tilted their heads and thought that had this young Jiang duke, one with a penchant of not stopping until he had said something completely outrageous, spontaneously gone crazy because of all the pressure?

Chapter 21: The Pride Of The Long Family

Jiang Chen had not anticipated that a few careless sentences from him would have such a sobering effect. The spirited conversations that had been taking place in twos and threes suddenly all quieted down.

Countless pairs of eyes looked towards Jiang Chen in synchronized movement.

Those present were all heavyweights in the Eastern Kingdom, and all of them knew that the duke of Soaring Dragon had always wanted the piece of land with the spirit vein running through it. He had been scheming and plotting to seize it from the duke of Jiang Han.

Judging from his posture, was Jiang Chen planning on declaring war? Was he going to engage in a public dispute with the duke of Soaring Dragon?

Jiang Chen, the subject of their speculation, was completely insensitive to it all. He pulled a chair towards himself, and sat down with an air of generosity, sneaking a glance at Eastern Zhiruo's body. He muttered, "Looks like you've been busy these past couple of days. At this rate, you'll have no issues getting past sixteen."

Clink, kalunk...

At least three or four people fumbled their wine glasses after

hearing these words. They were so shocked by Jiang Chen that even their wine glasses fell to the ground.

The minority that had not known Jiang Chen already could not contain themselves and started surreptitiously quizzing their neighbors. Which family did this young duke hail from? This was simply too brave.

This was the king's most beloved daughter, after all.

And beside the princess sat elder Princess Gouyu, one whose face was already starting to sink down in disapproval.

Seeing that Princess Gouyu's face had sunken low enough to draw water, those who wanted to watch the show did not dare to brazenly cast their gazes over here.

Everyone knew that Princess Gouyu was the martial dao genius of the Eastern Kingdom. She was an exceedingly influential person in the Eastern Kingdom who held true power.

And not to mention, just by her status as the main organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials, which duke at the banquet would dare to insult her?

Yet Jiang Chen seemed to be completely oblivious and had no idea that he was sitting in the most prominent area, and gave no indication that he realized he had become the center of attention.

Jiang Chen had basically observed everyone with side vision after he sat down. What surprised him was that there were a few familiar faces.

The third hallmaster of the Hall of Healing for instance; the duke of Tianshui who had slapped himself for another.

It was apparent that the duke of Tianshui was behaving today. He kept to himself. If he had been as before, he would have surely led the offense to make life difficult for the Jiang family.

However, whether it was the duke of Tianshui or his heir, they were both oddly quiet today.

The duke of Tianshui was obviously still haunted by what had happened at the Jiang Han manor. Although he did not take any action himself, it still gladdened his heart to see others picking on the Jiang family.

These fellows did not know anything of the agreement between Jiang Chen and Eastern Lu, and thus did not have any reservations in bullying the Jiang father son duo.

Indeed, a few duchy heirs walked over in tandem just as Jiang Chen wanted to ask Eastern Zhiruo how she had been lately.

The leader of the band was the heir to the White Tiger dukedom, Bai Zhanyun.

“Jiang Chen, do you know what day it is?” Bai Zhanyun’s face was a study in indignation. “Today is miss Long Juxue’s sixteenth birthday. How dare you say it’s a filthy place! I command you to apologize!”

“And I, Hong Tiantong, order you to apologize to the host and other guests in the name of the Vermillion Bird dukedom!” Hong Tiantong had departed from his usual modus of inciting others to pick the fight, and actually took the initiative today.

It was apparent that Hong Tiantong had no desire to let Bai Zhanyun claim all the glory for fawning on Long Juxue in a setting like this.

These two came from an impressive background.

The strength of the 108 dukes in the Eastern Kingdom varied accordingly, but the top four dukes had always been firmly ranked in the top four. No matter what changed in the kingdom, their position had never changed.

Soaring Dragon duchy ranked first, White Tiger second, Vermillion Bird third, and Black Tortoise fourth!

Two heirs of the four major dukedoms had stepped forward, and had brought some of the heirs of other high ranking dukedoms with them. They encircled Jiang Chen with an aggressive air.

Jiang Chen kept his cool and flicked a noncommittal glance at

Hong Tiantong. He then asked lightly, “Are you commanding me?”

“You can take it that way.” Hong Tiantong responded arrogantly.

“Oh… “ Jiang Chen smacked his forehead lightly, smiling without seeming to at princess Gouyu. “Princess Gouyu, is this fellow part of the royal family? Or have I remembered incorrectly? Do dukes have the power to command each other? I seem to remember that only the royal family has the power to issue commands to dukes!”

He looked at Hong Tiantong lazily, laughing, “The heir to Vermillion Bird is it? When did you change your surname to Eastern? Why didn’t you make a big proclamation out of such a big event? You should’ve notified us earlier so we could be mentally prepared!”

Hong Tiantong, who had occupied the aggressive high ground a moment ago, was suddenly at a loss for words by this simple question. He became as transfixed as a statue.

“As for you, Bai Zhanyun is it? If I remember correctly, this is the third time that you’ve provoked me. I didn’t want to lower myself to your level before, but today, what do you mean by standing here and hollering your head off if you claim that this isn’t a filthy place? Are you blind? Do you not see Her Highness sitting there? Do you know anything about noble etiquette? Yelling and jumping up and down in front of the princess, do you have any notion of decorum?”

“And the others, what do you want? Accompanying these two idiots in making a spectacle of yourself, are you trying to tell everyone present that there is no longer a need to conceal your mutinous hearts?”

Jiang Chen’s torrent of words caused the crowd of youths to be tongue-tied, red in the face, and minds to go completely blank. They wanted to find the words to retort, but had absolutely no idea what to say.

Bai Zhanyun was trembling in his rage, “You… Jiang Chen… your mother… you’re spitting blood from your mouth![1]”

“Does your mother not spit blood from her mouth? If your mother didn’t spit blood, where did you crawl out of? Or are you some runt that your father picked up from the streets?” When it came down to verbal sparring, Jiang Chen had had a career in cursing others for millions of years in his past life. His spiteful tongue had once cursed everything under the heavens.

These jokers were absolutely no match.

But Eastern Zhiruo did not understand the last part of his words. She tugged on his sleeve with a face full of naive innocence. “Brother Jiang Chen, what does his mother spitting blood have to do with him being picked up from the streets?”

“Eh….” It was Jiang Chen’s turn to be halted in his tracks as he

stammered, “This question isn’t suitable for children. You’ll understand when you go and get married.”

Princess Gouyu on the sidelines was also perplexed. She thought that Jiang Chen was cursing a bit randomly and had no idea what he meant. But after his explanation, she suddenly thought of the scenes of childbirth...

Was that not literally spitting blood?

Gouyu’s gaze sharpened with killing intent as her thoughts wandered down this path. This damnable Jiang Chen! He was sure to pollute Ruo’er if she spent more time with him!

She decided to vent her rage on Bai Zhanyun and Hong Tiantong. Those two were still dumbly standing there like blockheads. She slammed her hand down on the table, “You two, what do you have to say for yourself? Do you still retain any of your noble decency?”

The atmosphere abruptly worsened as Princess Gouyu lost her temper.

This was no ordinary individual. Many times, Princess Gouyu’s attitude had represented the king’s attitude!

The representative hearty laugh of the duke of Soaring Dragon traveled in from the main hall at this awkward moment. “Ladies and gentlemen, please calm down. It’s a rare occasion that we have so many present, and it happens to be my youngest daughter’s

sixteenth birthday. I've invited everyone here to, one, celebrate my daughter's birthday and, two, share the news of a great event of joyous tidings with everyone."

"Oh? Your Grace, what happy event is this? You have kept a tight seal on the news."

"Yes, Your Grace, out with it! We can't wait."

"Haha, let's not be in such a rush everyone. It appears that I've hidden the news too well. I shall do that no longer. To be honest, this matter is also an issue of great joy for the Eastern Kingdom, and is a momentous occasion for the kingdom. My daughter Juxue, due to her Azure Phoenix Constitution from birth, has attracted the attention of a hidden master and been picked as his direct disciple. The master will personally come to welcome my daughter to the Purple Sun Sect after the Hidden Dragon Trials!"

"What! Purple Sun Sect? That's the head sect of the four great sects of the sixteen countries!"

"All hidden masters are the equivalent of a prominent heavyweight within a sect. Who would've thought that Long Juxue would have such good fortune. Congratulations indeed!"

"A azure phoenix constitution even sounds extraordinary!"

"This kind of joyous occasion should be celebrated through all the lands! Felicitations to Your Grace, the future of Soaring Dragon

duchy is indeed one of unlimited wealth and endless potential!”

“Congratulations!”

In that moment, all sorts of greasy remarks poured in like the unending river waters.

Long Zhaofeng was in fine fettle. He had long since planned for today. He was completely unsurprised by the situation.

“To be honest, the heavyweight of the Purple Sun Sect had decided upon this master and disciple relationship the moment my daughter was born. But, I’m a low-key person and thought of Juxue’s growth and childhood. I didn’t want to overly draw attention to her. But now that my daughter is sixteen years old, this news naturally doesn’t need to be concealed anymore.”

Long Zhaofeng’s words were the epitome of pride.

In actuality, how could this be called low-key. If this was called low-key, then nothing under the heavens could be labeled high profile.

And, it was not that Long Zhaofeng had avoided speaking the truth, it was that he did not dare speak of it.

When Long Juxue had been born, a strange phenomenon struck the sky. A great rainbow appeared in the vast sky, with vague impressions of the legendary phoenix dancing in its rays. All the

birds on earth paid their respects and lingered long thereafter.

It was true that an elder in the Purple Sun Sect had heard of this phenomenon and surmised that the Soaring Dragon dukedom in the Eastern Kingdom had given birth to a Azure Phoenix Constitution. He had not set foot outside sect territory in several hundred years, yet he rushed to the Soaring Dragon dukedom at first light and established the master disciple relationship.

Except, absolute perfection didn't exist in the world. What it meant to have an Azure Phoenix Constitution was that an evil humour of extreme yin existed within the body. If this evil humour was not resolved, then that person would not live past 30 years old, and any and all talk of genius potential would be as tangible as the clouds.

Long Zhaofeng had been wracking his brains and trying all possible methods over the past couple of days and had finally dispelled the evil humour within Long Juxue. This way, there was no longer any restrictions on the Azure Phoenix Constitution.

At the same time, the Purple Sun Sect elder had sent word that Long Juxue would be officially initiated into the Purple Sun Sect after half a year.

Long Zhaofeng's first thought after receiving such confirmation was to proclaim it far and wide!

There was no way that Long Zhaofeng would pass up such a prime opportunity to flaunt his family. To that regard, almost all

the dukes of importance, ministers, and royal officials, had received an invitation from the Long household.

Even the high and mighty Princess Gouyu had been no exception.

At that moment, Long Juxue was standing next to her father like a proud phoenix. She sparkled such that no one dared look at her directly. Modesty and pride suffused her eyes.

Even to a hidden power like the Purple Sun Sect, an Azure Phoenix Constitution was still an exceedingly rare talent. She had sufficient reason to be proud.

Bai Zhanyun and Hong Tiantong's gazes on Long Juxue were full of desire and adoration.

Jiang Chen finally understood what the duke of Soaring Dragon had meant by an event of joyous tidings in his invitation.

"Azure Phoenix Constitution?" Jiang Chen searched his memories, remembering that all sorts of body constitutions existed in the common world of martial dao.

But on the path of martial dao, no matter how great the potential, the practitioner would still not make it far if an appropriate disposition did not go hand in hand with the potential. There were many examples of that, too.

But at the end of the day, even something like the Azure Phoenix

Constitution did not amount to much in Jiang Chen's eyes.

His past self had seen too many top talents. How many of those had actually successfully developed and matured?

Notes:

1] Chinese saying that this is a malicious attack, slander/slur

Chapter 22: You Think You're Awesome? Destroyed With One Poke

The atmosphere at the banquet was quite fervorous. Even Princess Gouyu wore an extremely solemn expression on her face. Although she seemed indifferent on the surface, she was still quite shocked at heart.

After all, it was not a good thing for the royal family if the duke of Soaring Dragon became increasingly powerful.

Especially this Long Juxue. If she truly entered the Purple Sun Sect, then her future development would be unlimited. Although Princess Gouyu had been hailed as a martial dao genius in the kingdom, she had never attracted the attention of any of the hidden sects and secluded masters.

Jiang Chen was exceedingly observant, and with just a careless glance, he had deduced most of Princess Gouyu's internal struggles.

"Heh heh, she's just a person with a bit more talent, that's all. The path of martial dao is like scaling an abyss. Those with better potential just happen to climb a bit faster than others. If the slightest mistake is made and a hand slips, they too fall and land in pieces. All is still in vain if one has talent alone and not the right disposition."

His voice was not loud. It seemed like he was both murmuring to himself, and explaining something to Eastern Zhiruo.

But a listener who listened with their hearts would understand this sentiment. A strange light shot out from Princess Gouyu's eyes when she heard those words. Her gaze raked across Jiang Chen's face, and she suddenly thought that this venom-tongued youth was not so distasteful after all.

"No, how could I just forgive this kid just like that?" Princess Gouyu immediately suppressed that little bit of goodwill.

Jiang Chen stretched lazily and pouted, "So, the boasts have been boasted and the awesomeness has been demonstrated, this should be enough right? When will the food be served? I'm so damn hungry that my chest is touching my back!"

He had not suppressed his voice when saying these words. They sounded like the disgruntled rumblings of a young fop.

But, when voiced at such an occasion, they were quite irritating.

Long Zhaofeng had originally wanted to wax eloquent, but felt hard pressed to proceed, when he was interrupted by an ear piercing and unexpected voice.

But, what could he do? He couldn't very well haul Jiang Chen out for a beating.

This Jiang Chen had never known how to pick the right timing. For someone who had even dared to fart at the Heavenly Rites of

Worship, proclaiming those few idiotic statements seemed to be in line with his style.

The duke of Soaring Dragon was a bit relieved when he thought of this. “This kid was born with brain damage. It’s actually a good thing, since the duke of Jiang Han will find it even more difficult to build upon his foundations with such a useless son. It should be easier to convince him to surrender the land with the spirit vein later.”

Zhao Longfeng’s internal discontent was swept away after a round of self comfort. He laughed, “Yes, yes. My apologies for keeping everyone waiting, let’s start the banquet! Everyone be at ease. Please, eat. Drink!”

However, Long Juxue’s gaze raked Jiang Chen. A hidden trace of a conspiratorial smile appeared on that beautiful profile when she thought of the events that had transpired in the Hall of Healing.

“Hold! The house is rarely so full, particularly with the attendance of the main organizers of the Hidden Dragon Trials. There are so many dukedom heirs present today, why not join in the fun? Let us have everyone display what they have learned thus far in life as entertainment for the banquet!”

It was apparent from Long Juxue’s tone that she had already assumed the identity of a direct disciple of the Purple Sun Sect, and had already put herself on equal footing with the main organizers of the Hidden Dragon Trials.

“What a wonderful suggestion!”

“Haha, very good. If we exhibit our talent in front of the future direct disciple of the Purple Sun Sect, perhaps miss Juxue will write an introduction for us to the Sect if she so fancies.”

“That makes a lot of sense! Haha, it looks like we must fully display our talents in front of miss Juxue today.”

“It would justify the efforts of a lifetime if we were graced with a smile from a beautiful woman.”

Armed with the memories of his past life, Jiang Chen had a keen intuition. When he felt Long Juxue’s gaze pass over his face, he knew that the woman was targeting him.

Princess Gouyu was just as sensitive as Jiang Chen. Although she was unaware of why Jiang Chen and Long Juxue were at odds with each other, with her wit and astuteness, how could she not figure out the situation? Long Juxue had not really bothered to conceal her intentions.

She kicked Jiang Chen underneath the table, muttering under her breath, “Brat, be careful! Long Juxue is setting you up.”

Jiang Chen was a bit taken aback. Since when did Princess Gouyu concern herself with his affairs? Did she not yearn to give him a thorough beating?

He popped a fruit into his mouth uncaringly, laughing indifferently. “Why aim for me? How could good-for-nothings like me, who wouldn’t even hurt a fly, threaten someone born with a superior constitution?”

Gouyu felt extremely frazzled upon seeing Jiang Chen’s laziness. You’ll know Long Juxue’s power when she makes a fool out of you later.

Indeed, Long Juxue chuckled and spoke to Bai Zhanyun’s table, “Family friends Brother Bai and Brother Hong seemed to have conflicted earlier with the heir to Jiang Han, Brother Jiang. Why not take advantage of this opportunity to learn something about each other? Us practitioners of martial dao obliterate enmities with a smile. All relationships are built upon our fists. Wouldn’t everyone agree?”

Bai Zhanyun was overjoyed by these words and immediately jumped up. “Yes, Miss Juxue makes the most ample amount of sense. You only form true friendship after a fight. Jiang Chen, what do you say to gaining a better understanding of each other today?”

“Brother Bai, I of the Hong family would also like to get to know Jiang Chen. Why don’t I go first?”

“You two elder brothers, you’re the heirs to the four great dukedoms; you wouldn’t take our duties away from us would you? I, Yan Yiming, have long been fascinated by brother Jiang Chen.”

These fellows were giddy with silliness when they heard Long Juxue say that all friendships were formed on a foundation of sparring. They finally had a perfectly justifiable excuse to beat Jiang Chen and severely humiliate him. This was a chance that would not come around again.

At this moment, the other prominent dukes had received their cues from the duke of Soaring Dragon and joined in the jeering.

“Yes yes, the time will pass for us old fogies one day and it will be the younger generation’s turn to take their places. What a rare opportunity for our heirs to learn from each other and strengthen their friendships! This also enhances the atmosphere of martial dao in the Eastern Kingdom. What a great, great thing!”

“Indeed, indeed. The young are the future hope of the kingdom. If they are strong, then the kingdom is strong!”

Around ten dukes had joined the crowd in the span of a moment. They all expressed affirmative opinions, with even more hangers on fawning in agreement.

Yan Yiming was extraordinarily proud and cupped his hands in a phony gesture. “Jiang Chen, we had a misunderstanding before. Why not spar a bit and get to know each other. Perhaps we can even become good friends after a fight?”

He had finally brought his provocation straight to Jiang Chen’s face.

Jiang Chen sighed in resignation and threw down the nuts he held in his hand. He responded in a carefree manner, “Yan Yiming is it? If I were you, I wouldn’t stick my neck out like this. With your position and potential, you are not meant to be the star of tonight. Why bother paving the road for others? If you misstep, you subject yourself to embarrassment.”

“Embarrassment?” Yan Yiming laughed cockily. “Jiang Chen, speak frankly if you’re scared. If you’re willing to bow your head in apology and beg on the ground for forgiveness, I’ll consider forgiving you.”

“Apology?” Jiang Chen stood up lazily. “I, Jiang Chen, don’t even know how to write the word ‘apology’. But you will soon find out how wrong you were. What did you just say? Go for a round of sparring? Then let’s do it.”

Jiang Chen picked a random spot in the empty area next to the main hall.

“Heh heh, keep pretending Jiang Chen! A weakling of three meridians true qi who dares put himself forward, I’m impressed by your courage.” Yan Yiming grinned sardonically and stepped forward. His six meridians true qi surged as he built up an impressive aura, attempting to crush his opponent through aura alone.

“Stop blustering! If you want to attack then do so, I want to eat after the fight. Do you think it’s been easy staying hungry for so long?” Jiang Chen paid no heed to Yan Yiming’s posturing.

“Jiang Chen, you pretend to have an ace up your sleeve when you only have a mere three meridians true qi. You’re asking for death. Eat my fist!”

Since it was a friendly spar and Princess Gouyu was present, Yan Yiming did not call upon his family’s traditional martial arts, but rather deployed the Amethyst Cloud Palm technique of the Eastern Amethyst Qi method.

Six meridians true qi was the highest plane of existence within the intermediate realm. When he activated his six meridians true qi in combination with a magnificent wave of his palm, his aura was thus that it even stirred stirred up loose dust and small rocks.

Yan Yiming leapt upwards, his body light as a feather. Purple light emanated between the movement of his palms and multiple afterimages of his palms appeared. They were like blossoming plum flowers, fluttering to the ground in grand celebration. The sight overwhelmed the onlookers.

“The shadows of the palm fills the sky as birds fly through long grass. The plum flowers fall in flight. Who would’ve thought that Yan Yiming would’ve practiced the Amethyst Cloud Palm to the peak of perfection! How incredibly rare.”

“The heir of Yanmen lives up to his reputation. No wonder he is listed within the ranks of the top ten!”

Plaudits sounded from all over in that moment. Even Bai

Zhanyun and Hong Tiantong looked at Yan Yiming with a serious gaze, deep in thought.

The level of their training was mostly likely all on par with each other, simply judging from this display of the Amethyst Cloud Palm. This Yan Yimin was actually something!

“Huh. How dare that Jiang Chen step up just with a mere three meridians true qi.” Bai Zhanyun burned with a need to immediately see Jiang Chen beaten until he spat up blood.

Surrounded by palm shadows that filled the air, Jiang Chen was like a lonely canoe drifting on the current. There did not seem to be a way in which he would be able to avoid being swallowed by the palm shadows.

The smile of a victor’s became increasingly concentrated on Yan Yiming’s face.

And at this moment, Jiang Chen made his move.

To put it simply, Jiang Chen simply stepped forward lightly. Princess Gouyu had been observing the fight with solemn eyes, and this one step caused a strange look to flash through her eyes.

Because, Jiang Chen had stepped out with unerring accuracy and landed in the singular spot in which Yan Yiming’s aura was the weakest, the area in which his attacks were most hard pressed to cover.

This was the tiniest opening, and yet it was as if Jiang Chen had foreseen it and took that marvelous step when Yan Yiming came hurtling towards him.

At the same time, Jiang Chen's arm raised slightly, and a finger pointed with the movement of his hand.

An ear piercing sound cut through the air like a meteor racing across the heavens.

People did not know from where it came, and where it was traveling to.

A agonizing yell sounded out in the next moment, and the numerous palm shadows suddenly dispersed like damaged branches and wilted leaves. Yan Yiming's dashing and light body suddenly rushed towards the ground in a severe fall, like dead weight.

A solid thwack!

It was such a hard fall that even the ground vibrated subtlely!

This impact caused even bystanders to feel an itch in their bones. The subject of their stares had most likely fallen even harder.

The other protagonist, Jiang Chen, lightly dusted off his hands

and sighed. “For someone who looked down upon us three meridians true qi, I actually thought you were something. But who knew that you would be destroyed by a single poke! Bah, so bad. Disappointing, quite disappointing.”

Silence. A desolate silence reigned.

At this moment, being quiet was far better than making a sound!

Chapter 23: Princess Gouyu's Recommendation

Yes, a strange stillness had fallen over the proceedings in the blink of an eye.

There were plenty of strong practitioners present. Amongst the dukes, who was not a heavyweight? But now, even they were not sure of what they had seen in that split second.

It was Yan Yiming who had held the upper hand, and he was a finishing move away from beating Jiang Chen into the ground. Jiang Chen had only moved twice in all of this.

He had taken one step forward, and had raised his arm once to stab his finger forward.

It was two simple motions, but it was as if lightning had struck Yan Yiming, and he had fallen like dead weight.

It was an exceedingly comical scene. If it was not for the fact that they had been rattling their sabers and bawling into each other's faces earlier, those assembled would have almost suspected Yan Yiming of playacting with Jiang Chen. Was he pretending to be a great antagonist to further heighten Jiang Chen's awesomeness?

But it did not seem like this.

Yan Yiming obviously wanted to make Jiang Chen look like a fool, but he had somehow ended up making himself the fool.

In that moment, different thoughts ran through the minds of all the guests at the banquet.

Those who were friendly with the duke of Jiang Han were naturally happy for him. They had indeed been worried for the son of their old friend earlier, and they would have never dreamed of such a result.

Those who were on less than friendly terms with the duke of Jiang Han, or friendly with the duke of Soaring Dragon were extremely baffled. Some began to suspect that the heir to Jiang Han was a wolf in sheep's clothing. Had he always been pretending to be a ne'er-do-well?

But the majority were neutral, and they held the attitude of waiting to watch a good show. Of course, they were also incredibly mystified by the strange scene that had developed in front of them.

These neutral parties were the most at ease. As people just watching the show, they were naturally unafraid of things getting out of hand.

Princess Gouyu was the most surprised.

When Yan Yiming had started to execute the hit that was at the peak of perfection, she almost wanted to speak up and stop the

sparring.

She did not have the chance to do so before the situation took a 180 degree turn!

At this moment, Princess Gouyu did not give a damn whether Yan Yiming had been actually beaten to death, and had completely forgotten the Amethyst Cloud Palm at the peak of perfection.

There was only one picture in her mind, and that was Jiang Chen's unfathomable, untraceable point.

Princess Gouyu was quite familiar with the origins of the Eastern King Point. It was another martial arts technique found within the Eastern Amethyst Qi method.

However, Princess Gouyu was unable to fully comprehend the mysteries contained within Jiang Chen's poke. The point had contained endless enigmas, and it condensed the intricacies of life's riddles and essence of martial dao on a singular, concentrated point.

What silly meridians true qi and superiority of different realms.

None of that mattered at this moment.

To Gouyu, that poke had spoken of the true meaning of martial dao.

It gave her an incomprehensible feeling. How could this point have been so otherworldly?

“This brat, was it all happenstance?” Gouyu suddenly realized that she did not understand Jiang Chen as well as she thought she did.

She did not think that a coincidental poke could have such remarkable power.

But, if it wasn’t a coincidence, could a dandy, who had not even passed the foundational exams, be able to deploy such an amazing point?

Someone finally broke the frozen atmosphere.

Bai Zhanyun leapt up, “Jiang Chen, did you cheat just now? Yan Yiming is a lofty six meridians true qi and you a mere three meridians. How could you defeat him with one move?”

Jiang Chen’s tone was extremely innocent. “You should ask these sorts of idiotic questions to him. He was beaten by a lowly three meridians true qi, I don’t even know how to comfort him.”

“Huh. You must have cheated. I, Bai Zhanyun, will play with you.”

Bai Zhanyun, the heir to White Tiger, eight meridians true qi, the advanced realm of true qi!

This was a genius character that completely outclassed Yan Yiming.

Jiang Chen did not even blink and was about to speak when Princess Gouyu stood up. “Hold! The heirs who are participating in the Hidden Dragon Trials are free to spar here, but it is a loss to the Trials no matter who is injured. Since you desire to vie for rankings of strength, I have a suggestion to make in my capacity as the main organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials. This way, we can determine the talent within your meridians without wounding each other.”

“Oh? What grand strategy does Princess Gouyu have?”

“Princess Gouyu is the main organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials and she expends so much effort and will on it. The princess has our admiration and respect.”

Sycophantic comments poured in like the tide in the blink of an eye. After all, no matter how important the duke of Soaring Dragon was, he was still a duke. Princess Gouyu was the representative of the royal family.

In the current situation, the number of people willing to fawn on the royal family far outnumbered those dancing attendance on the Soaring Dragon dukedom.

Princess Gouyu said lightly. “The royal family had originally intended to advocate the practice of martial dao in holding the Hidden Dragon Trials. The heirs present here have all practiced the founding method of the Eastern Kingdom – Eastern Amethyst Qi. I propose to have each heir present take their turn on stage in demonstrating the accompanying techniques of the Amethyst Cloud Palm and Eastern King Point. As the main organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials, I can also double as a judge to determine whose comprehension of martial dao is the greatest, and whose realm of training is the highest.”

“Haha, princess Gouyu is truly worthy of the title of royal princess. Such a recommendation is inordinately good. No blood will be shed, and we will be able to determine who is superior.”

“Mm. This suggestion is indeed good. This old duke supports it.”

It was impossible for these dukes to publicly oppose this suggestion now that princess Gouyu has voiced it. Disagreeing with princess Gouyu meant disagreeing with the royal family.

They would then most likely die a humiliating death in the Hidden Dragon Trials.

Jiang Chen shrugged his shoulders, directing his words at Bai Zhanyun. “Looks like you’re much luckier than Yan Yiming.”

Bai Zhanyun’s face darkened, “What do you mean?”

“How can I not call you an idiot? Do I have to spell everything out for you? You don’t understand? Ponder on it if you don’t understand.”

Jiang Chen could not be bothered with Bai Zhanyun after those words and walked back to his seat.

Eastern Zhiruo giggled. “Brother Jiang Chen, you looked so good just now.”

“Is that so? I think so too, haha.” Jiang Chen was in a great mood as he flicked a meaningful side glance to Gouyu.

Princess Gouyu snorted. “I merely didn’t wish to see anyone hurt before the Trials, and I wasn’t protecting you. Don’t think too much of it.”

“I think you’re thinking too much.” Jiang Chen laughed. “Can’t you see that I’m really annoyed at you? This Bai Zhanyun has ticked me off several times, and I finally had the chance to beat him up. Was your proposal meant to protect him?”

Gouyu was completely speechless. This… this BRAT is ridiculous. Does he not know that being part of the advanced realm of true qi, Bai Zhanyun could beat someone in the initial realm into a meal pie with one punch?

She cursed inwardly, “This princess was obviously protecting you from being beaten to death by one fist from Bai Zhanyun. You

damned ungrateful brat!”

With Princess Gouyu’s proposition and the supportive efforts of those in power, it looked like the start of the banquet would be delayed yet again.

All the respective heirs of their dukedoms were high spirited and they were itching for action on the demonstration stage in the Soaring Dragon manor. They all wanted to use such a gathering to make a name for themselves.

Princess Gouyu’s voice sounded and it was as clear and cold as jade. “Everyone, many heirs of their respective dukedoms have been gathered here today. As the main organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials, I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to review their progress in practicing the Eastern Amethyst Qi. Do not feel the need to hold back and display your full potential, understanding and talents!”

To be honest, all the heirs were chomping at the bit even without princess Gouyu’s encouragement. Who would want to miss the opportunity to leave a good impression on the main organizer of the Trials, and demonstrate their talents as well?

All martial dao methods were divided into the achievement levels of “minor achievement’, ‘skillful’, ‘perfection’, ‘flawless’ and ‘great perfection”.

Under the personal observation of Princess Gouyu, several heirs quickly presented themselves for a demonstration. Some chose the

Amethyst Cloud Palm, and others chose the the Eastern King Point.

One had to say, no mediocrity existed amongst the heirs to the 108 dukedoms.

Those who dared step onto the stage all possessed decent potential and were quite confident in the level that they had trained to.

Jiang Chen squinted his eyes as he sat below the stage, there was an absent-minded look on his face. He would occasionally nibble at some nuts, or make fun of Eastern Zhiruo every now and then.

A trace of an amused smile clung to his face as he sometimes flicked a glance at the busy hustle on the stage. It was obvious that he did not think much of the demonstrations by the heirs.

However, a fellow then stepped onto the stage that perked Jiang Chen's interest.

This youth was well built and took solid steps. He was the heir to the Hubing dukedom, Hubing Yue, and one of the few best friends that Jiang Chen had in the capital.

Jiang Chen was inwardly resigned as he watched Hubing Yue walk onto the stage. With his temperament and characteristics, neither the ethereal Amethyst Cloud Palm nor the unpredictability of the Eastern King Point were suited for him.

Therefore, Jiang Chen was a bit surprised that Hubing Yue had put himself forward.

But, what surprised those below the stage was that the heir to the unassuming Hubing dukedom, ranked middle out of the 108 dukedoms, possessed a strong martial dao foundation. Seven meridians true qi roared like dragons within his meridians. He was in the advanced realm of true qi with seven meridians true qi!

This astonished even Jiang Chen.

One had to know, even Yan Yiming, the heir to a top ten dukedom, possessed merely six meridians true qi.

But the Hubing dukedom was ranked towards the bottom of the 108 dukedoms. Was its heir going to vault to new heights through the Hidden Dragon Trials?

Seven meridians true qi were indeed extraordinary. They were great dragons accompanied by the sound of thunder when deployed.

However, the Amethyst Cloud Palm seemed to lack a bit of true meaning, a bit of elegance, when demonstrated by Hubing Yue.

“Hahaha, Hubing Yue, is that the Amethyst Cloud Palm? This is chopping wood!”

“Amethyst Cloud Palm is elegance personified. This Hubing Yue looks like a farmer plowing his fields when he demonstrates it. I can watch no longer.”

Some audience members mocked him immediately. Although their words were jeering, they were not without some truth.

This also fit in with Jiang Chen’s earlier conclusion. The Amethyst Cloud Palm was not a good match for Hubing Yue’s style.

However, it was not as if there was nothing that could be gleaned from Hubing Yue’s version of the Amethyst Cloud Palm. At least his foundations were solid, and it was much more practical than some of the other flowery versions that were demonstrated earlier.

Princess Gouyu recognized his steadiness and stability, and pronounced a judgement of “peak of skillful”.

The identity of the heirs who followed him were even more outstanding.

Chapter 24: Jiang Chen Shocks All Those Present

The heir of Tianshui dukedom, Shui Qingshu, demonstrated the Eastern King Point. Fluttering and ethereal, it was a bizarre flow. It appeared that he had actually trained it to a pretty good level.

Princess Gouyu inclined her head slightly upon seeing this, and rated it at “Peak Perfection”.

The heir of Black Tortoise, Yi Taichu, exhibited a flowery version of the Amethyst Cloud Palm. It was extremely elegant, like mercury spilt on the ground. This cooled the ardor of several youths who had been chomping at the bit to hop onto the stage and have a go.

They felt the distance yawning between them and Yi Taichu in comparison.

As for Princess Gouyu, she also looked on in admiration and gave a rating of “Initial Flawless”.

This was also the first heir of the day who had received a “Flawless” realm evaluation.

One had to know that it was incredibly uncommon to practice a martial dao method to even “Peak Perfection”.

Achieving the flawless realm basically meant that there were no vulnerabilities or flaws. The practitioner had reached a level in which not even a drop of water would find an opening.

The next level was the “Great Perfection” realm.

Only a true genius was able to train a martial dao method to the level of “Great Perfection”. This meant that, at least for this particular martial technique, this particular practitioner’s understanding and talent were at the apex.

Bai Zhanyun, the heir to White Tiger, became a bit fidgety when Yi Taichu received such a high commendation.

“I shall demonstrate a set of Eastern King Point.”

Bai Zhanyun was practically on the same level as Yan Yiming when it came to the Amethyst Cloud Palm. He was also at “Peak Perfection”, and had not yet reached the “Flawless” realm.

But he had steeped himself in the practice of Eastern King Point for many years, and had naturally formed his own interpretation.

Although Bai Zhanyun might be arrogant, there was a certain flow in the way he deployed the Eastern King Point. It was as if swallows hid amongst the clouds, or birds speeding towards the woods. An unexpected twist would always take place whenever it came to a bend in the road. It illustrated the saying of “Where hills bend, streams wind and the pathway seems to end, past dark

willows and flowers in bloom lies another village.”.

Under Bai Zhanyun’s guidance, “unique” and “change” could be the additional adjectives used in describing his set of Eastern King Point. Although he had yet to reach the perfection realm, his innovation and expansion of the method was already worthy of a judgment of “Flawless Realm”.

Indeed, after Princess Gouyu’s contemplation, she gave a “Peak Flawless” commendation.

Bai Zhanyun was incredibly proud that he had received “Peak Flawless”, firmly outclassing Yi Tai Chu. His chest puffed out quite a bit, and a few more traces of fervor were apparent in his sneaky side glances to Long Juxue.

Bai Zhanyun stood on top of the stage in high spirits, as if he were the champion of the boxing ring. He surveyed the four corners proudly, “Who else wishes to come up and give a demonstration?”

Hong Tiantong felt that his level of Amethyst Cloud Palm was, at most, on par with Yi Taichu, roughly at the “Initial Flawless” level. He gave up decisively after some thought.

Bai Zhanyun became even more insufferably arrogant and laughed loudly upon seeing Hong Tiantong concede. His gaze settled on Jiang Chen’s face.

“Jiang Chen, if I remember correctly, you said I was very lucky just now. Surely you’ve practiced these two martial arts techniques to an impressive level?”

Bai Zhanyun was exceedingly self satisfied. He had long since taken a dislike to Jiang Chen. It would feel damn good to severely humiliate him, particularly on such an occasion.

Plus, Bai Zhanyun vaguely knew that the duke of Soaring Dragon coveted the Jiang Han plot of land with the spirit vein. Therefore, maybe he would be able to curry extra favor with Miss Juxue if he suppressed Jiang Chen at this gathering?

Bai Zhanyun’s call out made Jiang Chen the center of attention again.

Jiang Chen had bafflingly won over Yan Yiming earlier. The process had been supremely fast and many had not been able to see what had happened. They all thought it was a coincidence.

Jiang Chen counted; this was the fourth time that Bai Zhanyun had provoked him. He spat out a piece of chicken bone in his mouth back onto the table, sighing in resignation, “Why do so many lack brains in this world? You, Bai Zhanyun, have had your limelight, and your performance ranks first in this stage. Why must you seek to slap yourself in this face?”

“Slap myself?” Bai Zhanyun gave voice to unbridled laughter. “Jiang Chen, if you can slap my face, then I, Bai Zhanyun, will stand here and let you.”

Jiang Chen stood up slowly and said no more. He cast a look at Princess Gouyu, and walked onto the stage with a hint of a faint smile.

“Bai Zhanyun, you must be proud to have received a “Peak Flawless” commendation and to have beaten down the pack of contenders. Wouldn’t it be the icing on the cake if you found an unlucky fellow able to stomp on while you’re at the prime of your life? Isn’t that so? In this case, a so-called beauty would definitely look at you with different eyes, right? I have to say, you’re so naive, and an utter failure.”

“Naive? Failure?” Bai Zhanyun snorted lightly. “You’re an inferior good-for-nothing, a worthless loser who wouldn’t even pass the three foundational exams. What gives you the right to call me a failure?”

“It’s not that I’m calling you a failure, it’s that you really are one. You view the beauty as a heavenly phoenix, but she views you as a random dog on the street. You’ve repeatedly pretended that you’re all that in front of me, but don’t even know the reason for proclaiming that you’re so awesome. How can you say that you’re not a failure if you don’t even understand the reason for why you live, and waste your years in an attempt to realize an unrealistic dream?

Your set of Eastern King Point has won a standing ovation, and a commendation of “Peak Flawless”, but do you really think that your practice of Eastern King Point is truly flawless and invincible?

Since you're so hopped up on your own triumph, and think that your Eastern King Point is so infallible, I shall give you a chance. Use the Eastern King Point on me with all your might, and I'll let you understand what it means to be truly invulnerable!"

Jiang Chen's eloquence knew no bounds. It was like the unceasing spring thunder, as it built up to a posture of dark clouds descending on a city in the blink of an eye.

A subconscious shift occurred in those present as the bystanders were slightly moved after Jiang Chen's words.

"Jiang Chen? Are you challenging me? Are you sure you wish to use an egg to attack a rock?" Bai Zhanyun was completely unaffected and his face grimaced in a laugh, displaying a wild, ferocious smile.

"Cut the chatter and display your vaunted Eastern King Point. Let me see just how much an heir of the four great dukes is worth!"

In the eyes of the audience, one was a publicly recognized dandy in the initial realm of true qi with three meridians true qi.

The other was an heir to one of the four great dukes, recognized by the kingdom and in the advanced realm of true qi with eight meridians true qi.

These two people were not on the same level of existence. One could even say that under normal circumstances, a superior

practitioner of eight meridians true qi would not even have interest in tormenting someone at three meridians true qi.

This distance between the two was simply too big.

But now, the one who had issued the challenge was the one in the initial realm of true qi!

“This Jiang Chen, was he caned into idiocy?”

“Challenging an advanced realm of true qi. This Jiang Chen is impatient for his own death!”

Even Jiang Feng, the duke of Jiang Han who had always allowed Jiang Chen to do as he wished, called out. “Chen’er, you…”

Jiang Chen raised his arm slightly with an air of ease, a faint sense of persuasiveness about him. This stopped Jiang Feng’s words in their tracks.

Princess Gouyu’s beautiful body shook slightly. In that moment, she had seen a type of confident demeanor that called for others to blindly follow!

“Has this kid truly gained divine patronage?” Princess Gouyu almost couldn’t prevent her thoughts from traveling down this path.

Bai Zhanyun laughed uproariously. “Alright, Jiang Chen, I’ve always disliked you. But I have to admit, you’re a man with balls.”

His footsteps moved slightly when he finished, and eight currents of true qi wound around his body. They circulated speedily, seeming to evaporate off his body like a divine purple halo.

“Eastern Amethyst Qi! He is truly a superior with eight meridians true qi, a genius!”

Jiang Chen stood stock still, his eyes squinted into a fine line, as if he was a meditating old monk.

“Empty posturing! It’s about time to end this!” Bai Zhanyun roared lowly as he lifted both feet off the ground. The purple qi circulating around his body turned into two currents of air as the divine purple halo seemed to materialize as two wings on his back, shooting him into the air.

Circulating purple qi, employing true qi. Fire and lightning seemed to wind around the tip of Bai Zhanyun’s finger, as a vague hint of purple qi formed within them, giving others a surprising sense of oppression.

“Sword from the West!”

Bai Zhanyun concentrated his qi into a blinding light. Woosh! Woosh! Woosh!

The strong qi almost seemed to ignore the laws of space, as it formed bizarrely shaped currents shooting towards Jiang Chen.

“Volant Fire Meteors!”

Blinding purple qi flew according to Bai Zhanyun’s motions. Qi covered the stage in the blink of an eye like a shower of meteors, locking onto the space within a radius of 100 meters and fully covering the entire battlefield.

“Too slow!”

Jiang Chen started to move his feet as Bai Zhanyun started activate his techniques. A few traces of mockery could be found on his lips. “Watch my poke as it stabs your right arm!”

Woosh!

Bai Zhanyun discerned the direction of the attack from the sound of the wind, but the piercing sound had already shot to his right arm when he heard Jiang Chen’s voice.

“Stabbing your left knee!”

Another point that was synchronized with the sound of the voice. Bai Zhanyun did not even have time to react before a numbing paralysis engulfed his left knee. It was obvious that he had been

hit.

“Damnit!” Bai Zhanyun could not figure out why he was unable to dodge the hit when he could hear his opponent’s voice, and could anticipate what direction the point was coming from.

And, his opponent’s force was so gentle, almost weak!

“Third rib on the left!”

“Right shoulder!”

“Left ankle!”

It was as if Jiang Chen was smoothly reciting a book. His poke reached Bai Zhanyun whenever he named a body part. Each poke was unearthly, ethereal, and completely untraceable.

Bai Zhanyun scrambled around in panic whenever Jiang Chen announced his next move, but he could never successfully dodge a single hit.

How maddening! Bai Zhanyun almost wanted to spit blood in his frustration.

In terms of force, he felt that he was more than ten times his opponent’s superior. In terms of body, he far outclassed the other. Even Princess Gouyu had highly praised his level of training.

But, he had a feeling of being constantly countered, an inability to utilize his strength; and could only passively take the hits when faced with someone from the initial realm of true qi.

It was as if the other anticipated his every move and was able to stay one step ahead of him despite not moving that quickly.

Bai Zhanyun became even more frustrated as he fought, but had to admit at the same time that if the other used just a bit more force, he would have probably been thumped into the ground many times over already.

Jiang Chen suddenly yelled, “Pause” in the middle of the fight, and dashingly retreated backwards to the side. He circulated his qi and poked a stone lock next to him.

The stone lock broke upon impact. It had been completely perforated.

“Bai Zhanyun, what would have happened if I used this level of force in my pokes just now?”

Bai Zhanyun was dumbfounded. He had felt frustrated beyond belief just now on the stage because he had been unable to fully deploy his strength.

But now, he felt a cold draft on his back as cold sweat poured out. After all that fighting, it wasn’t that his opponent lacked true qi,

but that he had not used his full strength, and had pulled his punches.

Otherwise, he probably would have been flat on the ground after the first poke!

The onlookers watching the fight immediately deduced some of that conclusion, and complicated looks crept into their gazes as they looked at Jiang Chen.

Chapter 25: Legendary Realm Of Training

“Hahaha, brother Jiang, who would’ve thought your son would be so accomplished! You’ve kept him a secret from the entire Eastern Kingdom!”

“Indeed, indeed! Brother Jiang, I think you father and son must have purposely hid your true strength, and wanted to vault to fame in the Hidden Dragon Trials!”

“This must be it. Even the duke of White Tiger’s genius heir has suffered such an ignoble defeat at Jiang Chen’s hands. How could such an enigma be unable to pass even the three foundational exams?”

“Duke of Jiang Han, congratulations, congratulations. Who would’ve thought that the entire kingdom would’ve been kept in the dark by you two. You must be punished, heh!”

Jiang Feng was also flabbergasted in that moment. He wouldn’t have been surprised at all if Jiang Chen had been defeated within a few hits.

He wouldn’t have even been surprised if Jiang Chen immediately conceded.

But, this fight’s outcome surprised him beyond his capability to be shocked.

Hiding his true strength? A wolf in sheep's clothing? Jiang Feng didn't know whether to laugh or cry. If this was the case, then his brat's acting skills were truly unparalleled. Even his old man had been kept in the dark.

Even in his dreams, Jiang Feng had never dreamed of such a situation!

This was the perfection depiction of one man's joy being another man's sorrow.

The dukes who were at odds with the duke of Jiang Han – some who even had a feud against him – now had gravely serious faces after wanting to see the duke of Jiang Han become a laughing stock.

They too had realized that they had been taken for a ride by the Jiang father and son duo.

Even the duke of Soaring Dragon, Long Zhaofeng, watched Jiang Chen with a few more traces of wariness in his gaze. It seemed that they had always underestimated the schemes of the Jiang family!

As for Long Juxue, she disliked Jiang Chen even more now. The words that Jiang Chen had spoken to Bai Zhanyun just now appeared to mock the latter on the surface, but in reality had just knocked him on the head and actually jeered at her, Long Juxue!

"What use is it if a pathetic and poor dukedom schemes a little?

Small schemes and little tricks are all as real as floating clouds in front of absolute power.” Long Juxue was still contemptuous of Jiang Chen. With her azure phoenix constitution, she was sure to soar high once she entered the Purple Sun Sect.

So what if these commoners inherited their dukedoms. They were still mere ants!

Whether it was Jiang Chen or Bai Zhanyun, they were all ants in Long Juxue’s eyes.

However, even if they were ants, she still wished to see them frolic in front of her, creating some entertainment for her and allowing her to enjoy the spotlight of the stars dancing in attendance on the moon.

But this Jiang Chen, this damnable ant, kept messing up her plans!

The only one completely devoid of any reaction was Princess Gouyu, because her entire being was in a reverie. She was still caught up in the mentality of the fight that had occurred, even up to now.

Jiang Chen’s magical poke – that undefinable mental landscape – was like a person up and about at night who had lured away Princess Gouyu’s consciousness and brought her to that wondrous mental state.

She repeatedly pictured the fight scene, but no matter how she simulated it, with her knowledge of martial dao and her study of Eastern King Point, she still couldn't fully reconstruct the previous fight!

That was to say, Princess Gouyu couldn't mimic Jiang Chen's actions and win so easily, so handily, even in a theoretical fight!

The key wasn't in winning or losing, but that Princess Gouyu was wholly unable to match the mental state, the level of Jiang Chen's Eastern King Point.

Princess Gouyu continued to simulate the fight, and finally discovered, tragically. that it was impossible to even picture that martial dao realm with her level of strength, not to mention actually training to that level.

This meant that even after Jiang Chen's demonstration, she was unable to replicate his actions even if she were given the chance to.

This realm... a phrase floated into Princess Gouyu's mind. A certain kind of realm...

It was at this moment that Du Ruhai used a pompous, self righteous tone and hectored, "Jiang Chen, this is a sparring match in front of Princess Gouyu. It's already been decided that combatants shall use the Eastern Amethyst Qi method and it's accompanying martial arts techniques. How dare you use other techniques; do you still possess any integrity? Do you still want any dignity as a member of the nobility?"

Jiang Chen flicked a careless glance at him, lacking the desire to even insult such a witless person. It would be an insult to himself if he wasted even spittle on those who kissed up to those in power.

Upon seeing Jiang Chen's arrogant attitude and silent response, Du Ruhai thought Jiang Chen was afraid of him. His attitude became even more haughty. "Jiang Chen, let me tell you something. This is an affront and disrespect to royal dignity. I will most definitely report this matter to His Majesty..."

"Main Organizer Du, please say no more." Bai Zhanyun's face was ghastly white, but he still chuckled bitterly. "He used the Eastern King Point. I lost, and fully admit my defeat."

Du Ruhai thought that Bai Zhanyun was searching for a way out that saved some face. He comforted, "Bai Zhanyun, don't feel dejected. This Jiang Chen has employed some kind of sinister trick. Think about it, this person couldn't even pass the three foundational exams. How could he use the Eastern King Point to defeat you? According to me..."

"Du Ruhai, this princess commands you to shut up!"

Princess Gouyu had finally come back to herself and was immediately faced with Du Ruhai jumping up and down and creating a scene, accusing Jiang Chen of using a sinister trick.

The revered method used in founding the kingdom had become a sinister trick in the mouth of this ignorant fool. How could

Princess Gouyu not be enraged?

“Princess, this Jiang Chen…” Du Ruhai even wanted to add insult to injury and frame Jiang Chen.

“I’ve already said, shut your mouth!” Princess Gouyu’s tone became even harsher. “As an organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials, how could your vision be so shallow to not even recognize the founding martial dao method! I am seriously considering petitioning my royal brother to revoke your position as the organizer of the Trials.”

“What? Princess, I’m innocent!” Du Ruhai’s facial expression changed greatly.

“Leave me!” Princess Gouyu also didn’t know why she had suddenly become so infuriated with Du Ruhai. Perhaps it was because of Du Ruhai disturbing her mental contemplation with his ruckus?

At this moment, Eastern Zhiruo had a carefree, innocent face and asked with a giggle, “Auntie, brother Jiang Chen is very strong. You say he’s defeated Bai Zhanyun who’s at “Peak Flawless”, what realm is his Eastern King Point? “Peak of Great Perfection?”

Peak of Great Perfection?

The faces of all the practitioners shifted as these four words were spoken. Everyone knew that only top notch geniuses were able to

practice any technique to the “Great Perfection” realm. And the “Peak of Great Perfection” indicated the highest realm possible for a martial arts technique, and was unsurpassable.

To be able to practice a method to this realm meant one was a martial dao genius born only once every hundred years.

But, Princess Gouyu’s sexy thin lips were quivering slightly, and an extremely animated light filled her eyes in this moment, as if the words “Peak of Great Perfection” were inadequate to describe the mental state she had been lost in just now.

“Peak of Great Perfection?” Gouyu’s jade lips squirmed marginally as she breathed out the scent of orchids. She sighed lightly, “I happened to meet a master when I was sixteen. I learned from the master that an even higher realm exists above “Peak of Great Perfection” in the ranking of martial dao practice!”

The crowd gave an outcry upon hearing her words.

Of those present, who wasn’t a martial dao master? There were several here who were true qi masters who had trained for multiple decades!

However, they had never heard of a higher realm, one above “Peak of Great Perfection”.

What else could a martial arts technique do above “Peak of Great Perfection”? Was it not enough to be at “Great Perfection”? This

was inconceivable.

Princess Gouyu seemed to be deeply moved as she thought of the wondrous encounter of yesterday, murmuring lowly. “I know, this seems to be hearsay. But that master told me, the world of martial dao is as the scintillating galaxy – unending and without borders. And martial dao geniuses are stars within the galaxy, too many to be counted. Our Eastern Kingdom, and the surrounding sixteen countries are but a drop in the ocean on this grand continent!

The true martial dao geniuses of this world are one in a billion, whether in terms of potential or enlightenment. These geniuses are able to easily train to “Great Perfection” in a martial arts technique, and the scariest thing is, they can innovate numerous changes to the foundation of “Great Perfection”. They can derive many mysteries that did not previously exist, elevating the technique’s quality, realm, and true meaning!”

Princess Gouyu’s tone was suffused with piety, and concentrated traces of yearning filled her beautiful eyes.

This is why Princess Gouyu had never limited her mindset to just one country. What she hungered for was the more expansive world of martial dao.

She had been filled with longing for the outside world when she heard that master’s words that year, and was insatiably curious about those legendary geniuses.

Princess Gouyu had actually had the faint feeling that Jiang

Chen's mastery of Eastern King Point in his earlier poke had reached the level of the so-called true martial dao geniuses in the master's words.

"More realms above 'Peak of Great Perfection', what should we call them?" The martial dao masters present all felt a bit at a loss at the presentation of a concept beyond their comprehension.

"All realms above 'Peak of Great Perfection' are labeled as the "Legendary Realm"!"

Princess Gouyu didn't hold back and spoke candidly. "Of course, to these true geniuses, there's no point in practicing some of the more superficial techniques to the "Legendary Realm". The true geniuses take a few superior techniques and train those to the "Legendary Realm", and then create their own style, adding in their own philosophies and personal mysteries to elevate these techniques to become their hidden ace card. That, is the hallmark of a true genius!"

The crowd finally understood after this round of explanations.

So this was what the "Legendary Realm" was all about.

"Auntie, does this mean that brother Jiang Chen's Eastern King Point has already reached the Legendary Realm?" Eastern Zhiruo was eager to confirm this point.

"I've practice the Eastern King Point for thirteen years and my

own ranking is that of “Initial Great Perfection”. I feel that I can theorize the status of “Peak of Great Perfection” in my mind, but I was unable to see through Jiang Chen’s Eastern King Point. It was like a dragon revealing itself, with only the head being visible, and not the tail. I couldn’t even simulate his actions in my mind. Everyone, please think about this. What level could his Eastern King Point be if even I was unable to theorize it?”

Princess Gouyu stopped here, but threw a meaningful glance at Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen however, laughed lazily. “Legendary Realm? Does such an amazing realm exist? Anyways, I won purely because Bai Zhanyun was too idiotic. He’d already showed off his Eastern King Point in front of me, and I merely saw through his mysteries. How could so many bloody deep mystery things exist?”

Bai Zhanyun was shamefaced. No matter how proud he was, he couldn’t bring himself to hate Jiang Chen. Putting aside the fact that Jiang Chen had pulled his punches just now, Bai Zhanyun realized that Jiang Chen had spoken truthfully when the former had calmed down and reflected.

He had gone to incredible lengths to please Long Juxue, but when had this woman ever responded sincerely to Bai Zhanyun?

Chapter 26: Jiang Feng Erupts

A sparring match between the heirs of the dukedoms had ended with this outcome. With her identity, Princess Gouyu was naturally safe from suspicion that she was on Jiang Chen's side.

After all, whether in terms of identity or position, Jiang Chen did not merit such favoritism from Princess Gouyu.

Besides, who didn't know that Princess Gouyu was renowned for being cold and impartial? If that wasn't the case, how would His Majesty the King have been willing to let Princess Gouyu govern over an event as important as the Hidden Dragon Trials?

At the same time, although it was miraculous that Jiang Chen had defeated Bai Zhanyun, it had happened right in front of the audience's very eyes. Even if they wanted to suspect foul play, they were unable to find an excuse to do so.

Back to the banquet, in which wine and food flowed in copious amounts. The atmosphere hadn't fully recovered yet thanks to the events of the day.

For better or worse, everyone had their own internal worries.

Particularly those dukes whom had been at odds with the duke of Jiang Han – they still couldn't quite place a finger on it, had Jiang Chen's win been a fluke?

Or was he a wolf in sheep's clothing, and the father son duo had finally started to reveal their hideous fangs in the last segment of the Hidden Dragon Trials?

To say that someone in the initial realm of true qi could hone in on the weaknesses of someone with eight meridians true qi after one demonstration from the latter; even martial dao masters would be hard pressed to believe it.

How was it possible to find flaws after one viewing, and then defeat one's opponent in actual battle?

If it was so easy for the weak to triumph over the strong, then what was everyone training so hard for?

But, to say that Jiang Chen had been pretending to be a wolf in sheep's clothing – wasn't his act just a bit too real?

The key thing was, farting during the Rites of Heavenly Worship wasn't in the playbook of being a wolf in sheep's clothing! This was a mortal sin, and extreme punishment was a given.

Unless... had King Eastern Lu played along with Jiang Chen?

This was even more ridiculous! Surely the king wasn't so bored as to do something like this? Plus, surely the Jiang family did not command so much face as to have the king wholeheartedly act along with their playbook?

Only the duke of Tianshui and several other officials could faintly guess at what was truly going on, because they had been eyewitnesses to the happenings that night in the Jiang Han manor.

“Perhaps the divine patron has not yet left Jiang Chen, allowing this kid to benefit from sheer, dumb luck?” The duke of Tianshui explained things this way to himself.

This kind of speculation was the most logical. The duke of Tianshui had concluded something after observing Jiang Feng’s expressions and actions. Jiang Feng, at least, had no prior knowledge of this matter.

With Jiang Feng’s level of shrewdness, his acting skills wouldn’t be up to par if he was pretending to be a wolf in sheep’s clothing. He would quickly reveal his flaws.

Fatty Xuan and the others walked around socializing when the banquet started, and were quite friendly with Jiang Chen. They hung out with Jiang Chen before because he was generous, had a sense of justice, and was willing to speak up for a friend.

Now, with Jiang Chen’s strength, they had an even greater mutual sense of pride.

“Damn straight! Brother Chen, I, fatty Xuan, have hung out with you for two or three years but never knew that brother Chen was the true genius! World class acting skills, world class potential, and definitely world class strength. Little brother is in awe, awe!”

Fatty Xuan wore a look of extreme excitement and spittle flew as he gesticulated. He was more excited than a kid at Christmas – as if Jiang Chen being awesome was the same as him being awesome.

Bai Zhanyun was white faced at the other table, and he kept his head down as he found solace in the bottom of his wine cup.

Yan Yiming, who had been one hit ko'ed by Jiang Chen earlier, had finally regained his senses and muttered fiercely. "That Jiang Chen must have used a sinister trick! He's merely got three meridians true qi, how could he have beaten me!"

Hong Tiantong, on the other hand, was secretly relieved. Good thing he was smart enough to avoid seeking the spotlight after Bai Zhanyun had demonstrated the Eastern King Point.

Think about it! If he'd been the one to spar with Jiang Chen, then the person shamed in front of everyone today would not be those two, but him, Hong Tiantong.

Hong Tiantong's thoughts churned as he saw Bai Zhanyun drown his sorrows in alcohol, he wanted to continue to provoke the latter. "Brother Bai, don't be despondent. In terms of strength, he's in the initial realm of true qi. How could he possibly be your opponent? Eastern King Point is but a basic technique. This kid was lucky and has practiced it more, that's all. If we were to compete in terms of family history, how could that duke of Jiang Han even think to vie with your family of White Tiger's heritage?"

Bai Zhanyun only ducked his head and smiled wryly, altering

from his usual style of domineering pride. He shook his head lightly, but didn't say anything. He wasn't a stupid man.

The previous times in which he'd picked on Jiang Chen were purely to gain Long Juxue's favor.

Except, he had suddenly seen the light after Jiang Chen's enlightening words, and his thoughts had been cleared up.

Indeed, he was in the prime of his life. Was it worth it to go to such lengths for a woman who would never seriously consider him? And, though Hong Tiantong had picked on Jiang Chen several times with Bai Zhanyun, the former had never suffered any loss, whereas Bai Zhanyun had always been the one to deal with the consequences.

What did that mean?

This meant that Hong Tiantong was a devious sort who always used Bai Zhanyun as cannon fodder!

"Do you really think I'm that dumb?" Bai Zhanyun flicked a glance at Hong Tiantong as his heart grew more than a few traces of wariness and disgust for this calculating character.

At the head table, and as the host of today's proceedings, although Long Zhaofeng was rather surprised at what had just happened, he thought no more of it.

Even if this Jiang Chen had some plots in mind and possessed some potential, there was an insurmountable gap between him and his daughter's innate constitution.

Therefore, Long Zhaofeng's machinations on the Jiang Han land with the spirit vein did not abate, but rather, he decided to step things up.

After several rounds of drinks had been poured, Long Zhaofeng raised his glass towards Jiang Feng. "Old brother Jiang Feng, I'm truly astounded by your son's performance today. He has broadened my worldview. I have long since wished to become friends with old brother Jiang. Why don't we make use of this opportunity today? I stick by my words, what are your thoughts regarding my proposal?

Why not go with the flow today and happily put a seal of approval on it? Old brother, you've seen my sincerity. As long as you nod your head, you won't have to do anything anymore and will receive three hundred thousand silver from me every year. Our two families will be united as brothers forever, how does that sound?"

Long Zhaofeng's tone was magnanimous, as if he was actually giving great face to the duke of Jiang Han when forcefully seizing the Jiang property at a rock bottom price.

Jiang Feng knew that this seat would be tough to sit in when Long Zhaofeng led him to this table. The gloves were off, and Long Zhaofeng had come straight to the point.

He could only put a bold face on it and say, “Duke Long, my Jiang Han territory is situated in the south and is a destitute place with not many sources of income. The entire household budget stems mostly from the revenue from that piece of land with the spirit vein. Duke Long’s proposal is to cut off the main avenue of money for my Jiang Han territory. Little brother here truly finds it hard to agree.”

One had to say, with Jiang Feng’s temper, it was already an uncommon sight to see him speak with such a low posture. If it was any other occasion, Jiang Feng would’ve likely long since pounded the table and left with a wave of his sleeves.

“Jiang old brother, you’re making things difficult for me.” The duke of Soaring Dragon’s tone hardened.

“Heh heh, duke Jiang, receiving three hundred thousand per annum without doing anything is pure profit with no skin in the game. Why do you resist?” Another duke pretended to persuade Jiang Feng.

“Indeed! If it was me, I wouldn’t even frown at the thought of sitting on land and taking in money for doing nothing.”

“Duke Jiang, Duke Long is the most preeminent duke and wishes to become friends with you. How many people would give their heads for such an opportunity? And you don’t even know how to cherish this?”

“Right? The duke of Soaring Dragon is the first duke of the kingdom, and a hidden sect has claimed Miss Juxue. The Long family is destined for a life of unlimited riches. You’ve rebuffed Duke Long’s good intentions and brushed away his face, aren’t you making your future road more narrow?”

These people were all dependant on the duke of Soaring Dragon. It sounded like they had Jiang Feng’s best interests at heart, but in reality they were threatening him, persecuting him, and being an accessory to a tyrant’s crimes.

There were many things that the duke of Soaring Dragon couldn’t voice frankly, and they were here to be the villain.

One had to give it to him – if it was any other duke, they would’ve probably capitulated by now. But Jiang Feng was a tough old bird and shook his head decisively. “Speak no further. Anyone can mouth pretty words, but you wouldn’t be so generous if you were the ones asked to cut off a piece of yourself.”

The representative of the Pill King Garden was also in attendance and had not spoken yet. He was the Grand Courtmaster of the Pill King Garden, and chuckled at this time. “Duke Jiang, throughout the course of the multiple deals my Pill King Garden has conducted with Jiang Han, we’ve discovered that your skill in cultivating spirit ingredients is not up to our Garden’s standards. Therefore, after the unanimous decision of the Garden’s internal officials, we’ve decided that we will no longer accept any spirit ingredients from the Jiang Han territory. Let this conclude our partnership from henceforth on.”

Jiang Feng's expression changed radically after these words.

He had refused to crack and had been unwilling to rent out the land with the spirit vein because of this business relationship with the Pill King Garden.

Through this partnership, the Jiang Han territory could receive five million silver a year.

But, the head of the Pill King Garden had spoken and had terminated their partnership, banning all Jiang Han spirit ingredients in the future!

This was cutting the ground in which someone stood on.

Jiang Feng asked raspily, "Grand Court Master, must you be so heartless?"

The Grand Court Master replied lightly, "He who observes the greater picture and takes action accordingly is the clever one. Duke Jiang, you have erred in not realizing how the currents of power have shifted."

What kind of persuasion was this? This was another attempt to rip off Jiang Feng.

Jiang Feng had held back the anger in his belly for quite a while, and the Grand Courtmaster's words were the spark that lit the flame.

His long repressed rage erupted in a second as Jiang Feng shot to his feet, laughing loudly. “Good. Good! Each of you pretend to be the good guy, but all of you are savage robbers!

Let me tell you something, I, Jiang Feng, am not a Buddha formed from clay! I can earn less money, and even not earn any at all, but I will not give away the slightest ounce of the backbone of being a man!

Pill King Garden is it? Ban my Jiang Han territory will you? Doesn’t matter! I’d rather raise pigs on that land than allow you highwaymen to profit off of it!”

Jiang Feng had erupted. He had erupted suddenly, and very thoroughly.

So it felt this damn good to explode. Jiang Feng felt that the enraged emotions in his belly had been completely vented in this moment.

As for the banquet, all became silent again following Jiang Feng’s eruption.

All the gazes settled on Jiang Feng, looking at him strangely. They were all thinking, this Jiang father and son duo have made a scene one after another, and become the center of attention. What was their purpose? Did they seriously want to create trouble for the Soaring Dragon duchy and be at odds with them?

Chapter 27: Scolding The Elite

Utter silence! A deathly silence descended!

No one had anticipated that Jiang Feng would suddenly erupt so thoroughly. This was thoroughly destroying all their relations with Soaring Dragon, and starting a feud with the first duke in the kingdom!

In just that single moment, even those friendly with the duke of Jiang Han broke out in a cold sweat on his behalf.

As for the neutral parties, they didn't even dare to look at Jiang Feng. To do so might cause the duke of Soaring Dragon to misunderstand and think that they too supported Jiang Feng.

The banquet's atmosphere was bizarrely still.

It was at this moment that an ear piercing round of applause started sounding.

Jiang Chen stood up lazily, "Good scolding, aptly done! You're my old man alright. I'm curious about one thing though. Isn't there a single backbone to be found amongst you so-called dukes – so-called elite nobles?

Do we need to rely on you weak-willed, sycophant, mediocre layabouts to defend the frontiers of our Eastern Kingdom?

Do your only remaining capabilities lie in suppressing your peers, seizing land from your peers and robbing your peers of their profits?

As for you, Pill King Garden is it? For a mere businessman, do you have any achievements to your name? Have you rendered any services to the kingdom? Where do you get the courage to lecture a duke of the second rank with that sort of tone?

Who gave you that courage? Does the king know how cocky you are? He who observes the greater picture and takes action accordingly is the clever one, is it? See the bigger picture, is it? Alright, I'd like to see what kind of bigger picture is the picture that you, Pill King Garden, are referring to. Partnership termination? I spit upon that. This young duke tells you clearly now, the Pill King Garden has been banned by my Jiang family!"

The grand courtmaster snickered coldly. "Banned? Who do you think you're fooling? Your Jiang family is but a dispirited duchy. Ban my Pill King Garden? Your family's land with the spirit vein can only be used to raise pigs without my Garden's support, to say nothing of anything else."

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "Is that so? Third hallmaster of the Hall of Healing, this Grand Courtmaster says my family's land can be only used to raise swine. What say you?"

The third hallmaster chuckled and rubbed his nose. "It would be a pity to raise livestock on a piece of land with a spirit vein. Our Hall of Healing is willing to offer ten million silver and sign a five year contract with the Jiang family. No, ten years, twenty years...

you determine the length of the contract!”

What? Everyone present, including the duke of Soaring Dragon, all thought that they had heard incorrectly. The third hallmaster from the Hall of Healing had offered ten million silver to sign a contract with the Jiang family under these circumstances?

If it was any other time, and they were signing a contract for purely business dealings, then it wouldn’t be such a big deal.

But with these happenings, the Hall of Healing’s actions were publicly supporting the Jiang family, and ran the risk of antagonizing the duke of Soaring Dragon.

This was odd.

Who didn’t know how dominant the Hall of Healing was?

Who didn’t know how crafty the Hall of Healing was?

It wouldn’t be a surprise for the Hall of Healing to not have an opinion in these circumstances. But, it was truly odd thing for a hallmaster from the Hall to step forth and express their opinion.

When had the Jiang family connected with the Hall of Healing, and formed such strong ties?

No one felt that the Jiang family commanded so much face as to

cause the Hall of Healing to publicly declare its support for them.

The grand courtmaster's expression changed, "Hallmaster Qiao, this isn't the thing to do?"

Out of the three market incumbents in the capital for spirit ingredients, the Hall of Healing was the leader of the market, and held fifty percent of the market share.

The Temple of the Farmer God and Pill King Garden shared the remaining half of the market.

Although the three parties engaged in fierce competition, they also respected a hidden rule of avoiding stealing each other's business maliciously.

This was a principle that no one voiced, but a line that everyone toed.

The third hallmaster smiled faintly. "Courtmaster Wang, I clearly heard you declare the end of your business relationship with the Jiang family just now. If this wasn't the case, how would my Hall possibly intervene? We all understand the rules of business. You no longer wish to pursue this deal, and thus we picked it up. There's nothing untoward here, is there?"

The Hall of Healing wasn't in the wrong whether it came to the defined rules or hidden rules.

The grand courtmaster wore an ugly expression on his face. He had put himself forward so publicly and destroyed his relationship with the Jiang family because he wished to curry favor with the duke of Soaring Dragon.

Conducting business was all the same, regardless of who they did it with. If the Long family controlled the land with the spirit vein, then they would do business with the duke of Soaring Dragon. There wasn't a single bit of downside for the Pill King Garden, and they could in fact use this opportunity to pave the way for a relationship with Soaring Dragon. There was only good to be gained, and no bad.

Plus, he had calculated that even if he said that the Garden had banned the Jiang family, the Hall and Temple wouldn't step forward to take the business.

After all, a business deal worth five million silver a year wasn't worth the risk of offending the duke of Soaring Dragon.

The grand courtmaster hadn't counted on things spiraling beyond his control.

Not only had the Hall of Healing stepped forward, but they had upped the ante and doubled the partnership rate. Their attitude was clear, they would support the Jiang family!

The grand courtmaster didn't understand, he really didn't understand. The Hall of Healing was so shrewd... was it worth that little bit of profit to offend the duke of Soaring Dragon at this

time?

Could the Hall of Healing be unable to understand even the tiniest hint of the bigger picture?

It was obviously difficult for the banquet to continue now that things had progressed to this point.

Many guests knowingly took their leave, upon seeing the duke of Soaring Dragon's face darken in anger. The duke had intended to use this banquet to flaunt his wealth and power.

But now, thanks to the Jiang father son duo and additional participation from the Hall of Healing, it had turned into the Jiang family striking down the face of Soaring Dragon.

The situation was exceedingly odd.

No matter what, the peace of Eastern Kingdom was likely to be broken.

Because, the duke of Soaring Dragon was quite enraged!

The consequences from the anger of the first duke of the kingdom would be quite severe.

As the representative of the royal family, Princess Gouyu was feeling complicated emotions. She had been biased against Jiang

Chen, but had suddenly realized that this insufferably cocky, venom tongued fellow really did have a few traces of a dominant aura and a hint of a backbone!

Jiang Chen's aggressive lecture, his ease in facing off with all sorts of noble elites, the mysteriousness of the Hall of Healing's intervention — all of this forced Princess Gouyu to privately admit —

Even she had been wrong about this Jiang Chen kid before!

When the banquet was over, the grand courtmaster stood outside the door and smiled coldly at Jiang Feng. "Jiang Feng, it's over for you and your son. Offending the duke of Soaring Dragon means the future for the Jiang family will be so arduous that it will be difficult to even take a single step forward."

"Courtmaster Wang, I'm actually curious. As a business person, is it so fascinating to be a dog for others and eagerly make the way for others?"

Jiang Chen chuckled as he swept past the Grand Courtmaster with a disdainful look.

"Jiang Chen, you brat, keep strutting. Time is running out." Courtmaster Wang grit his teeth.

"You're correct, time is running out. Pill King Garden, heh heh... the kingdom may be vast, but there doesn't seem to be a need for

three market participants in the field of spirit medicine."

Jiang Chen dug in with his heels after delivering his words and galloped away.

To suffer such impudence from Jiang Chen's arrogant attitude, Courtmaster Wang was so incensed that he wanted to spit blood. It was a depressing day.

His business deal with the Jiang family was over for nothing, and he'd played the role of a villain for free. No benefits had been forthcoming at the end of the day, just a thorough lecture.

Except, even if Courtmaster Wang was the slightest bit displeased, he dared not take it out on the duke of Soaring Dragon. Even if Duke Long had been the main culprit in the Pill King Garden losing this partnership.

"Ah, forget it. A business deal is a small matter. Losing it doesn't harm the foundations of my Pill King Garden. As for this Hall of Healing, some good can still be salvaged from the situation if the Garden takes advantage of them offending Duke Long. We can make use of this opportunity to oppress them."

Courtmaster Wang's thoughts were exceedingly flexible as he thought of Duke Long's great reach, and some barely voiced rumors within several circles.

The greater Soaring Dragon's influence grew, the bigger of a

threat they would become to the Eastern Kingdom. And now, Miss Juxue had garnered the attentions of a hidden sect.

In time, the possibility of the Long family replacing the Eastern family and becoming king was not inconceivable.

“Duke Long has grand aspirations. I hope this day can soon be materialized. At that moment, the Garden can take advantage of the change in fortunes to strongly beat down on the Hall of Healing and seize the premier position for spirit medicine within the kingdom. This is inevitable...” Courtmaster Wang’s mood abruptly lightened as he thought of this.

Jiang Feng’s emotions had slowly calmed down after they’d returned to the Jiang Han manor. Although it had felt good to erupt like that today, there were still bound to be serious consequences.

If they were just speaking of their respective territories, the lands of Jiang Han and Soaring Dragon were spaced far apart and thus there was no need to fear Soaring Dragon.

After all, without royal order, war could not be declared casually between dukes.

But now that everyone was gathered in the capital, everyone knew that Duke Long’s eyes and men were placed everywhere. He also had dealings with all the various powers in the capital.

Many of the officials at court also hailed the duke of Soaring Dragon as their brother.

Jiang Feng smiled upon seeing Jiang Chen's serious expression. "Kid, you've got guts. You've brought great face to your old man today."

"They say that a tiger father doesn't give birth to a dog son. Old man, your performance today was pretty strong too."

Jiang Feng stared at Jiang Chen with a meaningful smile. "Kid, stop pretending and speak truthfully. Why did the Hall of Healing step out and prop us up under those circumstances?"

"All underneath the heavens congregate for profit. All underneath the heavens disperse for profit. The Hall of Healing naturally has their reasons for doing so." Jiang Chen smiled. "Father, I only have one line. The days of our Jiang family being jeered and mocked by others, strung up like sheep led to slaughter are gone, forever!"

Jiang Feng's eyes lit up as he heard those words. "Chen'er, many dukes have said today that we've hidden our true strength and were wolves in sheep's clothing. Have you truly been hiding your strength, and even conned your old man?"

"Wolf in sheep's clothing?" Jiang Chen smirked. "I think they're thinking too much. Our Jiang family doesn't need sheep's clothing, and they're no tigers themselves!"

A sense of unquestionable pride could be gleaned from Jiang Chen's words. His confident smile made Jiang Feng suddenly feel that he suddenly couldn't see through his son.

Chapter 28: Turmoil In The Capital

What Jiang Chen hadn't thought of was that the ruckus raised at the Soaring Dragon manor would create currents and eddies beneath the calm surface of the capital.

The Duke of Soaring Dragon, Long Zhaofeng, was naturally feeling the most out of sorts. He might have been able to contain himself because of the greater picture, if Jiang Feng had only turned him down.

But to be declined in such a haughty manner, he felt that he had lost face.

Although Duke Long hadn't immediately erupted or flown into a rage during the banquet, that wasn't because he had a forgiving nature, but that he understood that as one in a position of power, he had to control his temper at such a gathering.

When all the guests had left and only his confidantes remained, his first sentence was, "Those who adhere to me prosper, those who defy me die. I don't care what you do, the Jiang family must fail out of the Hidden Dragon Trials!

Let's see how presumptuous this father and son duo can be when they lose their dukedom, including that land with the spirit vein!

And someone run an investigation into what's going on with the Hall of Healing!" He was incredibly infuriated that the Hall of Healing had openly stood out at such an occasion to bolster the

Jiang family. No one had anticipated that scene.

Those confidantes and buddies who yet remained all nodded their heads.

“That Jiang father and son duo are truly ridiculous! Duke Long’s prestige is bound to be damaged if we don’t suppress them and beat them down this time!

There must be something going on between the Hall of Healing and this Jiang Chen. When I was at the Hall of Healing the other day…” Long Juxue described the events that had happened at the Hall that day; how the third hallmaster had declined to do business with all the heirs of the preeminent dukedoms, and had sold the Dragonbone Sun Grass to Jiang Chen. He’d even honored Jiang Chen as an esteemed guest.

Even Long Juxue felt that these happenings were rather odd when she recalled them.

Long Zhaofeng didn’t know whether to laugh or cry when he heard about them. “Xue’er, why didn’t you mention such an important matter when it happened?”

Long Juxue was similarly regretful. “Xue’er only felt then that a mere dandy wasn’t worth bothering father about. Who would have known that the Hall of Healing…”

To be honest, Long Juxue’s words made sense. At the end of the

day, the day that they'd all fought for the Dragonbone Sun Grass was merely a small matter – an interlude in the lives of all the heirs. Although Long Juxue intensely disliked Jiang Chen because of it, she felt there was no need to bring such a small issue to her father's attention.

But, within the capital, many subtleties could be gleaned from a small matter, and each small ripple encompassed great meaning.

If Duke Long had known of this beforehand, he would've been prepared when he invited the Hall of the Healing to the banquet, and would've avoided such a loss.

The unexpected showing from the Hall of Healing immediately removed the power that Soaring Dragon had gained from taking the initiative.

"Right! Duke Long, have you discovered that another thing is rather odd?" The person speaking was the duke of Yanmen, Yan Jiuzhuang.

Apart from the duke of Yanmen, there were tens of other dukes still present. Everyone who was left were the trusted confidantes of Duke Long.

That was to say, out of the 108 dukes in the Eastern Kingdom, more than ten of them had secretly thrown in their lot with Duke Long.

This was already an incredibly frightening power.

The duke of Yanmen was ranked in the top ten out of the 108 dukes. He therefore spoke with more authority out any of the other dukes who had sided with Duke Long.

“Duke Yan, what have you discovered?” Long Zhaofeng asked.

“There were two points of strangeness in tonight’s banquet. One, why were Princess Gouyu and Princess Eastern Zhiruo so familiar with Jiang Chen? Two, why was the duke of Tianshui’s performance so abnormal? Everyone please remember that the duke of Tianshui and Jiang Feng are hated rivals. He would been the first to strike out against the duke of Jiang Han normally, but did he even speak up today?

Not only him, but his son Shui Qingshu would bully Jiang Chen whenever the two met in the capital. Did he express any opinion at all tonight?”

His words reminded everyone of the obvious.

This was true, the Tianshui father and son duo had behaved rather oddly tonight.

The duke of Soaring Dragon oppressed Jiang Feng because of the land with the spirit vein, the former actually had no prior enmity with Jiang Feng.

But the duke of Tianshui were hated enemies with the duke of Jiang Han. The two territories were neighbors and fought openly and under the table over land, resources, ranking, and achievements. They were enemies-unto-we-die.

But, the duke of Tianshui hadn't indicated anything tonight, and didn't make use of this opportunity to suppress Jiang Feng!

Something was amiss here!

"I remember that the duke of Tianshui accompanied the king to pay their respects when Jiang Chen was caned to death for what happened at the Rites. Why did Jiang Chen come back from the dead? What on earth happened that night? This matter has never been able to be investigated fully. The old farts that went that day are keeping an extremely tight seal on their lips."

All sorts of bizarre points were being unearthed.

Long Zhaofeng sank into deep thought. He too felt it was odd. King Eastern Lu had greatly capable and outstanding men; there was no reason for them to be unable to cane a good-for-nothing to death.

But Jiang Chen had survived the ordeal, and from the looks of things, not only had Jiang family's relations with the royal family not soured, they had actually grown closer.

"Everyone's information is quite useful. It seems the conclusion

here is that I have underestimated Jiang Feng. Has this person latched himself onto the King Eastern Lu's coattails?"

Although the duke of Soaring Dragon said Eastern Lu's title, there was a certain lack of respect in his tone.

"Slot the duke of Tianshui into my schedule; it looks like clues of this matter must be gleaned from this person." Long Zhaofeng ordered.

"In addition, tell Du Ruhai to use all necessary methods possible, in order to block Jiang Chen in the Trials. No matter how much backing they have, the Jiang family will be nothing as soon as they lose their dukedom!"

This was tackling a problem at it's foundation. No matter how strong someone's backing was, or how many crafty schemes they had, losing the dukedom meant they had lost the right to control their territory.

On what basis could the Jiang family talk, once they lost control?

This method was simple and crude, but direct and effective!

Schemes and seizure, schemes and seizure. Since scheming hadn't worked, then seizure would have to do.

The duke of Soaring Dragon wasn't a kind soul. His methods towards achieving his desires were diabolical and without a bottom

line.

In his eyes, treating someone courteously before resorting to force wasn't because he feared the Jiang family power. But rather, he wished to build a reputation of overcoming others through morals and ethics. But since the Jiang family was ignorant and dense, rendering these hypocritical methods ineffective, then all bets were off and violence was the only way!

Just as the duke of Soaring Dragon was holding a meeting late into the night, so were the senior executives in the Hall of Healing.

The four hallmasters and ten elders. The highest levels of the Hall's power, were all in attendance.

The third hallmaster, Qiao Baishi, fully conveyed all the happenings that had occurred in the banquet.

In the Hall of Healing, the lord hallmaster Song Tianxing held the absolute right to speak. It wouldn't be a hyperbole to say that he was the main pillar of the Hall.

When the third hallmaster had finished describing the situation, all eyes swivelled smoothly to Lord hallmaster Song. It was apparent that no one dared rashly venture forth an opinion before understanding the lord hallmaster's thoughts.

Song Tianxing chuckled, "I'll refrain from speaking first. Everyone share your thoughts!"

“Even elder Shun has vouched for the Heavenly Karma Pill with 90% surety, it must be reliable. I think the third hallmaster has made the correct decision.” One of the elders spoke first.

“I too support the third hallmaster. The Hall of Healing has been established in the capital for hundreds of years; it would be impossible to please all and offend none. Offending a few for the profits of the Hall is unavoidable.”

“Indeed, and since the Heavenly Karma Pill has such a bright future and such market potential, we have no choice if we have to offend even more dukes, not just the duke of Soaring Dragon.”

It was apparent that there were more senior executives who supported Qiao Baishi. Everyone weighed in on the issue from the perspective of future profit to the Hall, and all felt that there was no problem with Qiao Baishi’s decision.

“Number two, say something as well.” Song Tianxing looked at second hallmaster with a congenial smile.

“I agree with everyone’s opinions. Anything that benefits the Hall is commendable.” These words were quite slippery and didn’t say much.

Elder Blue spoke up suddenly, “Lord hallmaster, I have a few words.”

“Alright, everyone is welcome to speak their mind. Elder Blue, go ahead.” Song Tianxing encouraged her.

“I feel that the Jiang father and son are not too dependable. Has everyone thought about the consequences if Elder Shun is in the wrong? Wouldn’t the Hall become a great laughingstock? If rumors of this travels, what of our credibility? If the Heavenly Karma Pill is pure bluster, then haven’t we offended Soaring Dragon for nothing? I’ve heard that Long Juxue, the beloved daughter of Duke Long, possesses an azure phoenix constitution and has attracted the attentions of one of the hidden sects. Her future in martial dao is incredibly promising. This way, wouldn’t Soaring Dragon rise in her wake as well? Could a change in the landscape of kingdom ownership occur in the future?”

The Hall of Healing wasn’t a governmental agency, and thus was less reserved, more bold about discussing matters of power. People’s expressions didn’t even flicker when discussing potential changes in rulers.

“Elder Blue, you worry too much. Firstly, it’s impossible for elder Shun to be wrong. And another thing, changes in ruling families follow the laws of nature, and will not be suddenly upended by the emergence of one or two people. The duke of Soaring Dragon is filling out his wings, sure, but the Eastern royal family will not idly sit by.”

Qiao Baishi immediately refuted elder Blue’s words. “Besides, even if the duke of Soaring Dragon was able to, he would not openly declare war against our Hall over one business deal. Our Hall has been established for hundreds of years, and will not be

easily trifled with. Ignoring profits at hand to consider details that will not happen, has never been the way our Hall has conducted business."

No one could deny that the future profits they could gain from the Heavenly Karma Pill were simply too tempting. If the pill was supplied in large quantities to the market, then none of the other medicines currently in the market for bodily injuries would be the slightest bit competitive.

They said that inferior goods would be discarded after comparison. The Heavenly Karma Pill was a superior good that would sweep away its peers.

This market was practically a treasure bowl. If leveraged appropriately, the profits from this single pill medicine would be enough to support the operations of the entire Hall of Healing.

After rounds of debating, everyone's gazes finally landed on Lord hallmaster Song Tianxing again.

"It seems that most still agree with number three's decision. I'm sure you can deduce my attitude as well. I confidently left things in number three's hands when I ventured out. This also meant that I trusted his judgment and abilities."

Song Tianxing's attitude was quite apparent by this point.

"I also must remind everyone that our Hall of Healing pursues

the greatest profits. Although we avoid the battles of politics, we need not fear involvement. It's impossible to keep one foot on both sides of the fence forever. When a side needs to be picked, there's only one side for us, and that's profit. The Heavenly Karma Pill will bring us profit, so we choose it! As for who wins or loses, our Hall has survived for so long, do we lack even this little bit of adaptability?"

Chapter 29: Changes In Attitudes From All Sides

Qiao Baishi heaved a sigh of relief at Song Tianxing's clear-cut attitude. To be honest, he had been rather stressed out by the decisions he'd made lately, and had pushed through purely on the basis of his own daring and resolution.

He could tell that his choices had been correct based on the lord hallmaster's attitude.

"Number three, you've been the one to strike up the relationships with Jiang Chen from the Jiang household. You'll be in charge of maintaining the relationship. It would seem from various bits and pieces of info, that this young man's shadow has been cast over all of the large happenings in the capital lately. This young man is one to keep an eye on."

Song Tianxing had never seen Jiang Chen before, but had been able to deduce such an astounding conclusion from the details of the numerous reports he'd received.

Even the normally steady second hallmaster, Yue Qun, exclaimed involuntarily, "Lord hallmaster, isn't this evaluation of Jiang Chen a bit of an overstatement?"

Song Tianxing smiled faintly, "I have yet to meet Jiang Chen, but I have met Jiang Feng of the Jiang Han dukedom. If the source of all the unexpected is from the Jiang father and son, my money would be on Jiang Chen and not Jiang Feng."

Qiao Baishi was moved. He knew that the lord hallmaster's position was lofty, and his worldview cynical. His standards were high, and he basically never made an error when judging people and matters.

For the lord hallmaster to give such high praise to a teenager he had never met before – Qiao Baishi rejoiced more than a little that he had made the right choice.

"Heh heh, I, old Yue, have always admired the lord hallmaster's eye for assessing things. This time however, I'm curious as to the possibility of the lord hallmaster being mistaken?" Yue Qun chuckled. With his status and position, it wouldn't be an overreach if he cracked a few lines of a tame joke.

The convention of the senior executives ended with the lord hallmaster's conclusion.

Song Tianxing pulled Qiao Baishi aside for a private meeting afterwards and patted Qiao Baishi's shoulder. "Baishi, you have handled this matter with quite a bit of boldness. I am proud of you."

Although their relationship was one of the lord hallmaster and the third hallmaster, Song Tianxing far outstripped Qiao Baishi in both age and experience, as well as status and standards.

One could say that Song Tianxing had intended to groom Qiao Baishi as his successor.

Qiao Baishi was gobsmacked and flattered, and he hastened to offer a few humble words.

“Baishi, you must not slight Jiang Chen. Have you tallied up the number of amazing things that have happened around Jiang Chen?”

“Your subordinate is dense, and awaits the lord hallmaster’s enlightenment.” Qiao Baishi was exceedingly humble.

“For one, this youth was caned to death at the Rites of Heavenly Worship, but why was he caned and still alive?

For two, the king has caned this youth, but why has the king personally bestowed the engraved dragon medallion to the latter’s keeping?

For three, this youth is a mere son of a duke – from whence did he obtain this ancient pill recipe for the Heavenly Karma pill?

Four, this youth’s martial dao level is insufficient to pass even the three foundational exams, but why was he able to first defeat Yan Yiming with one stroke, and then effortlessly toy with Bai Zhanyun afterwards?

Five, why are the royal princesses of two generations so familiar with this youth?

Six, this youth is wholly unafraid in front of the duke of Soaring Dragon, and denounced a room of elites. His performance was wholly not in agreement with the character of a young man. Where is his surety coming from?”

Qiao Baishi’s expression became more serious with every point that Song Tianxing listed. He had more or less also considered these points.

But, his considerations were not as well thought out or as comprehensive as the lord hallmaster’s.

Suddenly, Qiao Baishi connected the dots between the hints dropped by Song Tianxing. He exclaimed in astonishment. “Is this to say that the Jiang family is backed by the king? And that dispirited, dejected demeanor before was an act to confound opponents? This father and son could be pawns set into motion by the king? Even possibly pawns with the ability to enact change in the greater picture?”

Song Tianxing remarked lightly, “If not this, what other reasons do you think could explain all that has happened thus far?”

Being caned, but not to death, was revealing enough, to speak of none of the others. If it wasn’t for secret instructions from His Majesty, would the king’s men really not have the ability to beat a mere youth to death?

“No wonder, no wonder.” Qiao Baishi suddenly recalled the events surrounding the purchase of the Dragonbone Sun Grass.

Hadn’t Jiang Chen told him then that he’d made the correct decision?

Hadn’t Jiang Chen told him then that the Dragonbone Sun Grass had been purchased for the royal family?

Qiao Baishi had felt the Dragonbone Sun Grass’ familiar spirit aura from Princess Zhiruo that night at Duke Long’s banquet.

Then, the Dragonbone Sun Grass had indeed been purchased by the royal family. Jiang Chen had not been blustering about this matter.

Qiao Baishi reaffirmed the lord hallmaster’s judgment even more firmly when his thoughts traveled to this point.

It was no wonder that Song Tianxing would conclude this. From all aspects, none of this would be explainable if it wasn’t for the fact that the Jiang family had long since reached an agreement with the royal family.

And with Princess Gouyu’s identity, how would she so unabashedly laud a youth’s martial dao performance?

It was obviously to use Jiang Chen’s performance as an excuse to offset the impact of Long Juxue’s azure phoenix constitution.

“Baishi, if the Jiang family is a pawn that the royal family laid down a long time ago, what does this indicate? This means that the

royal family started their preparations a long time ago.

The duke of Soaring Dragon is hotly ambitious, but more of his power shines day by day.

One side with early preparations, one side with unconcealed ambition. If these two sides really were to become embroiled in conflict, to be honest, I would not bet on Duke Long. Unless –" Song Tianxing stopped at this point. It was obvious that the possibilities behind this "unless" caused even him to fear speaking it, as if it was taboo.

"Unless what?" Qiao Baishi couldn't resist asking.

"Unless the heavyweight of that hidden sect makes a personal appearance and intervenes in the fight for power between kings. However, with said heavyweight's status, it would be much too demeaning for them to involve themselves with the power struggle in a common kingdom. Besides, the Eastern family has controlled the kingdom for at least a thousand years, and hold many aces up their sleeves, as well as a rich and unknown heritage. Other than the wildcard Long Juxue, I simply cannot think of what other advantages Duke Long may hold in a fight between a subject and king?

Therefore, no matter if it's from the perspective of profits or from politics, your decision today was an extraordinarily wise decision!"

Song Tianxing complimented Qiao Baishi once again.

A similarly sleepless night passed by in the inner courtyard of the palace.

Princess Gouyu's news also caused Eastern Lu to sink deep in thought.

"Royal brother, the duke of Soaring Dragon is no longer bothering to completely conceal his ambitions." Princess Gouyu was the only one who dared to speak thusly to Eastern Lu.

"It's understandable that he would become tired of his position as first duke in the lands after being in it for so long. It's only natural progression that he would seek to advance another step forward." Eastern Lu's tone seemed calm, but it was suffused with a heart pounding sense of killing intent.

"Thankfully, he tried to dictate terms to the tough old bird Jiang Feng today. If it was any other, somewhat weaker willed duke, they would have likely capitulated by now."

Princess Gouyu was also exceedingly displeased with the duke of Soaring Dragon when she recalled how it all had unfolded in that moment. He had schemed against another duke's territory in front of a royal representative. This looked like a clash between dukes, but was an affront to royal face in reality.

Eastern Lu sighed lightly. "All things change. Even just a few days ago, who would've thought that the Jiang family would be my generals of good luck?"

Eastern Lu didn't know whether to laugh or cry when thinking of the current situation in the capital. "Perhaps many powers will now think that the Jiang family is one of my Eastern clan's men, and a pawn that I had long since set in motion?"

Princess Gouyu also laughed with a smile. "Gouyu might have thought the same if I hadn't known the internal proceedings."

"Have you discovered that every change, every twist in the situation in the capital, has been closely tied with a shadow?"

"Jiang Chen?" Princess Gouyu's beautiful eyes shifted slightly as she spoke involuntarily.

"Have you also discovered it, royal sister?" Eastern Lu smiled meaningfully.

Come to think of it, the current situation in the capital had indeed evolved from Jiang Chen's fart during the Rites.

Ever since that moment, each event that had occurred in the capital had seemed to be tied to that person's shadow.

"I had originally believed without a doubt that he had had a divine visitation in his dreams. But after tonight, I can't help but suspect that perhaps this youth has falsely borrowed the name of the gods from the very beginning?"

To be honest, Eastern Lu felt that it was quite headache inducing when he thought of this matter.

Logically speaking, a son of a duke shouldn't be so uncanny. Caned, but not dead, identifying the root source of Zhiruo's illness, handling the Hall of Healing, defeating an opponent of the advanced realm of true qi with the strength of the initial realm...

Multiple abnormal circumstances had happened to the same person. To say that there were no secrets about this youth — there was no way that Eastern Lu would believe this.

Of course, as the ruler of a nation, he wouldn't pursue these matters – at least not yet.

After all, Eastern Lu would not only avoid thoroughly investigating the valued assistance of the Jiang family unintentionally clouting Duke Long's influence, but he would reward them instead!

"Gouyu, visit the Jiang Han manor on my behalf tomorrow."

A visit to the Jiang Han manor was naturally to reward the Jiang father and son. She could also declare their intentions at the same time, and as a matter of course, bring the Jiang family into the royal camp.

It was absolutely effortless for Eastern Lu when it came to means of power.

“In addition, you must guarantee that Jiang Chen can pass the Hidden Dragon Trials.” Eastern Lu’s attitude had subtly shifted from what it had been before.

Previously, his thoughts regarding Jiang Chen had merely stopped at the idea that this youth could heal Eastern Zhiruo’s illness. Therefore, Eastern Lu thought nothing much of the possibility that the Jiang family could lose their dukedom. Staying in the capital as a wealthy official with no power would actually benefit Zhiruo’s illness.

But now, after tonight’s events, the strategic importance of the Jiang father and son had instantaneously risen a hundredfold. Now, the matter of whether or not the Jiang family kept their dukedom was a small issue that could greatly impact the greater picture.

If the Jiang family lost their dukedom, then it was possible that Soaring Dragon could encroach on the Jiang Han land with the spirit vein, to speak nothing of anything else.

This was what Eastern Lu truly didn’t wish to see.

The fact that a duke could seize another duke’s lands without abandon meant that a problem had developed within the royal family’s control of power.

And the Jiang family’s vow of contending with Soaring Dragon unto the death was in actuality an indirect way of protecting

Eastern Lu’s grasp over the kingdom!

Therefore, the Jiang family’s dukedom must be kept!

Chapter 30: Having Fun With Yan Yiming, Again

The next day, Princess Gouyu personally visited the Jiang Han manor with an imperial summons and a large amount of rewards to commend the Jiang father and son.

The reason given: the Jiang father and son had accomplished an achievement in helping fight Princess Zhiruo's illness.

This reason was a still bit unclear. Apart from the few witnesses in the know, no one could figure out how the Jiang father and son could've helped Princess Zhiruo's illness.

But those who had attended the banquet at the Soaring Dragon had discovered that Princess Zhiruo had talked and laughed gently and her appearance was more healthy looking. It was a far cry from her previous sickly state.

Could it be that the Jiang father and son really had accomplished something on the subject of Princess Zhiruo's illness?

Rumors flew wildly as the outside world speculated.

One thing was certain, the Jiang father and son were destined to become famous figures in the capital spotlight in the near future.

As for the protagonist of the matter, Jiang Chen, he had never

been concerned about the reactions from the outside world. What he cared more about was improving his own strength.

As time went on, the deadline for the month end examination approached.

Jiang Chen had no reason to panic. The contents of the three foundational exams were a piece of a cake for him now.

Three days passed very quickly.

In these three days, Jiang Chen committed himself to strengthening his fifth meridian. After three days of forging, the toughness of his fifth meridian was basically the same as the previous four.

This way, the five meridians would advance side by side and were on the same level.

On that day in the Soaring Dragon manor, Jiang Chen had only used the strength of three meridians true qi and he hadn’t even touched the true strength of five meridians true qi.

Of course, he was well aware that there were many elements of luck behind his complete restriction of Bai Zhan Yun at eight meridians true qi.

One, his level of martial dao knowledge was eons ahead of a practitioner in the true qi realm.

Two, the two had agreed to spar to using Eastern King Point. With regards to a common technique like the Eastern King Point, Jiang Chen had indeed reached the legendary realm and thus, he could naturally suppress Bai Zhan Yun of the flawless realm.

Third, and the most important point, was that Bai Zhan Yun had already demonstrated the Eastern King Point previously. Jiang Chen had completely seen through his version of Eastern King Point.

At the end of it all, Bai Zhan Yun had actually lost all initiative before the battle had even begun. It was normal for him to be countered at every turn.

Of course, Bai Zhan Yun was also extremely unlucky. How could he have known that his opponent would be a deviant, whose knowledge of martial dao far surpassed this world?

If both sides had brought their strongest techniques and given it their all in an actual match, it would have been difficult to determine who would've won if Jiang Chen had matched up against Bai Zhan Yun's strongest firepower.

After all, Jiang Chen's true strength was at five meridians true qi, and Bai Zhan Yun was at eight meridians. The three levels of difference between the two encompassed an entire realm.

But, Jiang Chen also believed that if he was able to take or avoid thirty of Bai Zhan Yun's hits, then he, Jiang Chen, would be the

final victor

After simulating the battle, Jiang Chen had a further understanding of the real fighting strength of a practitioner in the realm of true qi.

“Speaking a thousand lines and theorizing ten thousand lines, that is all fake. A martial dao battle is constantly shifting and changing. I can sit here and run simulations, but the many unexpected twists of battle can’t be simulated. At the heart of it all, I need to continue to improve myself. Thankfully, my fifth meridian has gone through the initial steps of strengthening. The next step is to use the True Acupoint Resonance and locate the sixth acupoint.”

He had come to this world and he only used half a month to train from three meridians true qi to five meridians. Even top notch geniuses would have needed three to five months.

But Jiang Chen had only used half a month.

However, this was far from enough. Five meridians true qi were still a bit too weak. Jiang Chen would likely fall victim to many small defeats in skirmishes against other heirs, not to mention fighting against the truly powerful cultivators in the kingdom.

“The final examinations of the Hidden Dragon Trials are fast approaching. Judging from the atmosphere in the capital, it seems that winds are whipping the clouds into a funnel. It would seem that even in a small kingdom, a large vortex would still be formed

when the winds and clouds are turbulent. My current strength is still vastly insufficient to navigate the vortex with ease."

The end of the month had arrived quickly.

On the last day of the month, Jiang Chen arrived at the testing site with Jiang Zheng in tow, he felt completely at ease.

If it wasn't for those who knew otherwise, who would've thought that such a carefree person had yet to pass even the three foundational exams?

Because of his performance at the Soaring Dragon manor that night, Jiang Chen's appearance attracted quite a bit of a attention. The only difference was that in comparison to that day in the Hall of Healing, those who had pointed and stared without abandon then were more reserved and wary today.

Jiang Chen naturally didn't give a fig about what the outside world thought about him and he made a beeline straight for the building of the testing site.

Someone was walking out just as he walked in. It was the Yanmen heir, Yan Yiming

"Jiang Chen!" Yan Yiming's eyes spat fire upon seeing Jiang Chen.

His defeat at the hands of Jiang Chen's singular poke in the

Soaring Dragon manor last time was the shame of his life for Yan Yiming. Not only did he lose all face in front of his peers, but more importantly, he had been made a fool in front of Long Juxue. Even now, Long Juxue was rather stand-offish towards him.

Yan Yiming felt that it was all Jiang Chen's fault. If it wasn't for that bastard, Jiang Chen, how could he, Yan Yiming, be relegated as a joke for the entire capital?

"You're that Yan monkey who stole my seat?" Jiang Chen first drew a blank, but then recognized the person in front of him.

Except, his sudden epiphany was even more of an insult in Yan Yiming's eyes.

"Jiang Chen, how dare you treat me this way! If if wasn't for your evil trick, do you think you could've beaten me with a mere three meridians true qi?!" Yan Yiming yelled hoarsely as he paid no heed to what sort of occasion it was.

"This means that you don't accept your defeat?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

"Accept? Who do you think you are for me to concede to you? Is your Jiang Han duchy ranked higher than my Yanmen duchy? Or is your level of training higher than mine?"

"Then, what do you want to do?" Jiang Chen remained cool and collected.

“I... I want to fight you!” Yan Yiming roared. He did not accept his defeat, he had not conceded! He was going to gain back his lost prestige and more!

And the most direct way was to defeat the culprit, Jiang Chen, humiliate him severely, tyrannize him and stomp him firmly into the ground!

“Fight? I have no time and no interest for you!” Jiang Chen smiled carelessly as he shook his head and walked past Yan Yiming like he was air.

“Jiang Chen, you coward! You won by a fluke and no longer have the guts to fight me? Alright! I’ve long since known that your Jiang family is a clan of cowards. You don’t fight? Fine! I will let you go as long as you admit in front of everyone that you’re a coward!”

Jiang Chen ignoring him was, in Yan Yimin’s eyes, a guilty act. This bolstered Yan Yiming’s confidence even more and made him firmly believe that Jiang Chen had won through luck.

Suddenly, Jiang Chen’s steps froze.

Whether it was the label of coward or the insult to his father, they were both acts that crossed his bottom line.

Those who cross my bottom line cannot be forgiven!

“Three moves!” Jiang Chen glared at Yan Yiming coldly. “You have no qualification to fight with me! I will concede if you aren’t flat on your back in three moves!”

“Hahaha! You are very cocky indeed! I don’t want your three moves! I am the exalted heir of Yanmen…” Yan Yiming was about to continue his boasts and bluster when the words abruptly died in his throat.

He dared not speak further and he could not speak further because in front of him, Jiang Chen had become like a cocked arrow, emitting a strange kind of aura and locking onto Yan Yiming.

“First move, watch carefully!”

Jiang Chen had no flowery moves and merely took one step forward. His arm lifted slightly as he took one step.

Except that when he raised his arm, it gave others a heart pounding feeling.

“Thunder!”

An aura as sharp as a sword spread out, from his fingertip, and lanced through the air. It had an incredible path, it was as if it would cleave the heavens as it shot towards Yan Yiming!

Yan Yiming only felt that his eardrums were going numb as thunder roiled. This astonishing point was speeding towards his weaknesses like a loosed arrow.

“Huh. Same old tricks. Trying to harm me with this Eastern King Point?”

Although Yan Yiming had been surprised by the suddenness of this point, he was still confident that he could evade it.

His body dashed away like the waving movements of willow tree branches.

“Willow Step, waves without wind!”

Yan Yiming’s body moved like dandelions soaring through the air. The rhythm of the movement was like water ripples caused by the wind, it had an indescribable elegance.

This was Yanmen’s exclusive heritage — “Willow Step”.

Yan Yiming was very confident. He firmly believed that that day’s defeat was a result of method restriction. He was going to fully demonstrate his family’s heritage today and beat the shit out of Jiang Chen!

However, his moment of pride didn’t last long. Jiang Chen took another step forward, but the movement of his arm had somewhat increased in speed.

“Second point, Starburst!”

Jiang Chen’s moves were simple, fast and without embellishment. It may have seemed to be overly simple and crude to outsiders.

But, only Jiang Chen himself could understand the true meaning of his seemingly clumsy moves.

It was easy for all techniques under heaven to become more complex, but it was difficult for the complicated to become simple.

Jiang Chen’s two points had actually already reached the level of simplifying the complex. All complications were concentrated into the move.

Seeking change in the midst of constancy.

Of course, a trace of a proud smile found its way to Yan Yiming’s face. “Jiang Chen, although your Eastern King Point is not bad, but you’ve run out of tricks haven’t you? You want to hurt me? Keep dreaming!”

But, it was as if he hadn’t spoken.

Jiang Chen’s entire posture sudden changed drastically. His finger moved slightly and the rhythm changed again.

“Third point, Nameless!”

This point caused flowers to not be flowers and fog to not be fog. It was indescribable and unexplainable. It obviously hailed from the Eastern King Point, but it far surpassed the meaning that the Point should have.

An incredible line, an incredible curve, an incredible point.

A shocking hit.

Yan Yiming only felt a sharp pain under his rib cage in the same position as last time, but he felt more than ten times that power. It ripped apart all his moves and defenses mercilessly like it was paper. Another hit!

Yan Yiming’s body fell heavily to the ground again, his status unknown!

Chapter 31: Start Of The Foundational Exams

The same two people had faced off once more, and Yan Yiming had fallen in defeat and once again lost completely.

Jiang Chen was once again the victor and had used the same Eastern King Point to win.

The only difference was that Yan Yiming had employed his family's heritage this time and his mindset had been adjusted from underestimating his opponent to full battle readiness.

But, Yan Yiming had still been the one to fall.

And, it was within the agreed upon three moves.

That was to say, Yan Yiming still hadn't been able to take three of Jiang Chen's hits even when the former had been fully prepared.

Of course, Yan Yiming hadn't been so lucky this time. Jiang Chen had left him some face during last time's spar and he hadn't really used his true qi.

This time, Yan Yiming's repeated provocations had crossed Jiang Chen's bottom line. Thus, Yan Yiming had tasted at least 70% of Jiang Chen's strength.

After this loss, Yan Yiming probably wouldn't be able to get out of bed without recuperating for three to five months first.

"How does the saying go? A full bucket of water doesn't sway, but half a bucket of water likes to sway back and forth; those who are knowledgeable don't like to boast, but those who are ignorant love to strut and preen. This saying was probably meant for people like you, was it not?"

Jiang Chen didn't care if Yan Yiming was still alive or dead. Brawls between heirs were more than common in the capital, not to mention that the Hidden Dragon Trials were originally designed to increase competition between heirs.

The heirs who were unfriendly with Jiang Chen all took subconscious steps backwards when they saw Yan Yiming lying prostrated on the floor.

They were deathly afraid of being seen by Jiang Chen. They didn't even possess the strength of Yan Yiming to fight back if he were to challenge them.

By this point, no one believed that Jiang Chen only possessed three meridians true qi.

Only a fool would believe that Jiang Chen was in the initial realm of true qi after that poke.

Could someone in the initial realm have inflicted that type of

injury on Yan Yiming?

Jiang Chen didn't think much of defeating a mere nobody such as Yan Yiming. After all, his current strength was at the peak of five meridians true qi.

With all of his advantages, it was a foregone conclusion that he could defeat Yan Yiming, who was at six meridians true qi.

If he found it difficult to defeat someone with even six meridians true qi, then all the advantages that had been conferred upon him in his past life would be a joke.

As for Jiang Zheng, he puffed his chest out with elation. He had already enjoyed the treatment of being waited upon by others last time in the Hall of Healing. And today, he was once again receiving looks of respect from those around him.

What was the key point in being a servant? That was for things to go smoothly, and to be able to walk proudly upright, no matter where he went.

And today, Jiang Zheng's waist was quite upright.

"Organizer, my house's young duke wishes to sign up for the three foundational exams." Jiang Zheng's voice was also louder than normal.

If it had been before, Jiang Zheng would've found it too

embarrassing to sign up for the foundational exams at such a shameful timing.

But things were drastically different after Jiang Zhen had trampled over Yan Yiming. How couldn't a superior practitioner, who had run roughshod over Yan Yiming, be unable to pass even the three foundational exams?

Why hadn't he come before? That was because our young duke had been too busy to come and pass the exams!

Other than Jiang Chen, there was no one else who had not yet passed the three foundational exams before the deadline.

However, no one dared cause trouble for Jiang Chen in this step of the process.

He quickly arrived at the testing site for the first exam.

There was a large disc in the center of a ring. The disc was punctuated by twelve holes. Each of the holes had a white jade column erected in the middle of them.

These were the true qi columns that were used in testing true qi.

No one was able to cheat in this test. The candidate would be able to light the number of white jade columns according to how many meridians true qi he possessed.

One could reserve his strength, but could not falsely inflate his strength.

That was to say, if you had ten meridians true qi, you could display eight levels, or even four meridians true qi.

But if you only had four levels, there was no way you could materialize an additional meridian out of thin air.

Therefore, this was a test that no one could cheat in.

“No wonder the past Jiang Chen couldn’t pass this test. How would it be possible for three meridians true qi to pass?” Jiang Chen shook his head slightly and walked forward, placing his palm in a depression and circulating the five meridians true qi within his body.

The disc started turning with a crackling sound.

The white jade columns on it started lighting up one by one.

One column, two, three, four, five...

Some in the crowd breathed a sigh of relief upon seeing the light stop at the fifth column, whereas a few others were slightly disappointed.

All sorts of reactions were present, but Jiang Chen paid them no heed. He did not reserve his strength for this particular test.

“Eh? Look. Although there are only five columns lit, this light...” Other people immediately noticed this after one person had pointed it out.

“That’s right, we only give rise to faint blue light normally. Jiang Chen’s true qi light is green! And look, there are no impurities within the light, every column is quite balanced and pure...”

“Such perfect true qi. No wonder a mere five meridians true qi was able to easily defeat Yan Yiming!”

“Looks like we’ve underestimated this Jiang Chen!”

“Makes sense! With this kind of true qi purity, I think he’d be able to put up a fight even if he challenged someone in the advanced realm of true qi!”

The lowest barrier to the advanced realm of true qi was seven meridians true qi. Such an assessment was high praise indeed.

Even the official in charge of this exam was slightly moved by Jiang Chen’s true qi columns, and he cast a complicated look at Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen could see praise and doubt in that look. Perhaps, in the official’s eyes, Jiang Chen had even held back some of his true

qi.

“Alright, Jiang Chen, five meridians true qi. You pass the first foundational exam!”

The official continued speaking brightly, “Jiang Chen, congratulations. Your passing grades and performance will be recorded and used for reference.”

“Thank you for going to the trouble.” Jiang Chen smiled faintly. He would naturally respond in good grace if someone was polite to him.

He had easily passed the first foundational exam. Jiang Chen had also anticipated this.

He arrived at the second foundational exam site after walking through a few hallways.

The second exam took place in a sealed off room with sword aura.

“Jiang Chen, the second exam is not the same as the first, and it embodies a certain amount of danger. If you don’t possess four meridians true qi and your Amethyst Eastern Qi hasn’t been trained to the realm of “perfection”, you are very likely to fall victim to the aura inside this room.” The organizer of the second exam reminded Jiang Chen of the dangers, as according to the rules.

Jiang Chen nodded. “Thank you for your reminder, I am ready.”

“In that case, go on in.” The organizer nodded and said no more. Since the candidate had already come, there was no reason for the candidate to leave just because of his words of warning.

The sword aura room was a square space measuring roughly ten meters by ten meters.

Countless mechanisms were installed within this room. They would randomly shoot out all sorts of sword aura, following no rules or reason.

Candidates must endure an hour within the room.

In addition, one or two flying beetles would be placed into the room at regular intervals. Candidates must shoot down at least ten flying beetles within an hour.

They had to remain unharmed in the room and shoot down at least ten flying beetles within the designated time.

This exam was, in comparison, only slightly harder than the first exam.

A practitioner wouldn’t be able to shoot down the flying beetles if he had yet to reach four meridians true qi. The flying beetles

speed, flight patterns, as well as the hardness of their armor, would not be easily overcome by someone in the initial realm of true qi.

"This exam is a bit interesting."

A current of sword aura came shooting at him just as Jiang Chen was thinking those thoughts. But these simple sword aura currents posed no threat to him.

The face of the second in command of the Trials, Du Ruhai, was turning ghastly pale as he listened to the reports from a trusted man within a secret room in a highly restricted area.

"This brat had concealed his true strength of five meridians true qi. And the purity of his qi is actually on par with the heirs of the preeminent dukedoms!"

Du Ruhai's face darkened considerably upon viewing the results of Jiang Chen's first exam. He had been harshly lectured by Princess Gouyu on that day at the Soaring Dragon manor. Although he hadn't been fired afterwards, he was facing tremendous pressure from the rumors in the outside world.

His credibility and influence had also been similarly impacted with the team in charge of the Hidden Dragon Trials.

This was what he least wished to see. Du Ruhai had made his way up from the bottom of the ranks. His desire for power outweighed

everything else.

And now, the duke of Soaring Dragon had given him an ultimatum. If he wasn't able to stop Jiang Chen, then he would lose Duke Long's trust.

Losing Duke Long's trust meant losing his biggest backer. It could even be said that without the duke's support, all his vaunted riches and power would quickly become a joke.

Therefore, he had to suppress Jiang Chen. He simply had to suppress Jiang Chen at all costs!

He had to take the risk. Duke Long's ultimatum wasn't a mere joke. If the duke became unhappy, then perhaps Du Ruhai's corpse would be found on the streets tonight.

"Xiaoma, come here. I want you to..." Du Ruhai issued a series of commands to his most trusted man.

This Xiaoma was absolutely loyal to Du Ruhai. He thumped his chest in affirmation after hearing Du Ruhai's instructions, "Be at ease sir, I will complete the task with competence, and leave no clues behind!"

"Mm. If this matter is conducted smoothly, I will ensure a life of riches for you."

Within the sword aura room, the bodies of more than fifty flying

beetles lay haphazardly in the smooth floor. Time elapsed had been one hour exactly.

Jiang Chen did not leave the sword aura room, and had, in fact, become more and more excited.

“No human opponent can match this sword aura room. Who in the same level can deploy such abstract, unsystematic moves like the mechanisms of this room? Where else could I go to find a free opponent like this one?”

Jiang Chen was hooked on this room.

Although the force of the room’s sword aura attacks would double every hour, Jiang Chen grew more invigorated from battle, and his interest intensified.

He also became more skilled at utilizing his five meridians true qi as time went on. The clashes between true qi and sword aura further heightened his battle intent and potential.

Chapter 32: Impressive Performance, Setting New Records

Geniuses loved spending time in the second foundational exam.

Every genius seemed to love using this masochistic method to stimulate his or her own potential. Jiang Chen was no exception.

Previously, none of the many Eastern Kingdom geniuses had docilely left the room after an hour was up.

Every person kept hanging on inside, and refused to come out until they had reached their limit.

This exam had basically become a hidden battle stage for the top notch geniuses.

They competed on who could stay inside the longest.

Who could kill the most flying beetles.

In actuality, no one could spare a thought for shooting down flying beetles towards the end of the exam. They were too busy dodging the boundless sword aura that danced without rules, threatening to take candidates' lives at any moment.

Observers had started gathering outside the sword aura room.

Jiang Chen had been in the sword aura room for a full four hours. Many curious bystanders rushed to the room when the news circulated.

Four hours, what kind of concept was that?

The sword aura attacks would double in strength every hour in the sword aura room. This meant that after four hours, the sword aura in the room had increased sixteen fold!

If he still hadn't emerged after another hour, the strength of the sword aura would increased to 32 times, and continue at that rate!

"This Jiang Chen, has he already died in there?"

"Stop bullshitting. If a candidate is killed the sword aura, the mechanisms will stop attacking when it senses no life. They will also send out a notification."

"Heh heh, I'm curious, is all. Is this Jiang Chen really that good?"

"A wolf in sheep's clothing. He's absolutely a wolf in sheep's clothing."

"Ai, the only result of comparing oneself to another is a frustrated death! I remember that I wanted to put up a front when

I took the second foundational exam and stay in there for another hour, but that doubled sword aura was almost the end of me!”

“Do you know what the longest record for staying within the sword aura room is?”

“I don’t think anyone’s made it past six hours.”

“It’s said that Miss Long Juxue stayed in the room for almost six hours. She almost faced 32 fold attacks!”

“Huh. Don’t compare Jiang Chen with Miss Long Juxue. He’s not worthy!”

“Yes. Although Jiang Chen is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, he’s only that tiny bit stronger than ordinary geniuses. Miss Long Juxue is a genius for the ages! A peerless genius who has an azure phoenix constitution and has attracted the attention of the great hidden sects! They’re absolutely not on the same level.”

“Comparing Jiang Chen with Miss Juxue is an act of sacrilege against Miss Long Juxue!”

Many zealous fans immediately opened their mouths to reduce Jiang Chen to less than worthless when it came to Miss Long Juxue.

It was apparent from this that Long Juxue was in high demand amongst these heirs. You had to give it to her, her natural

captivating charms were no trivial matter.

"You there, what nonsense are you farting? My house's brother Chen is my brother Chen, why does he need to compare himself against others?" This voice rang out like an earthquake.

Fatty Xuan had arrived. As Jiang Chen's best friend, insulting Jiang Chen in front of him was worse than insulting him.

The brawny Hubing Yue stood next to fatty Xuan.

The two were either fat or stocky – like two mountains, giving others an imposing feeling.

It was easy to be sarcastic, but these onlookers didn't yet have the guts to really face off against Jiang Chen. These two arrivals were Jiang Chen's best friends. Insulting them was the same as offending Jiang Chen.

Another hour passed...

Fatty Xuan checked the time in the hourglass — this was the sixth hour's hourglass.

Every hourglass represented an hour. This was to say, Jiang Chen had already been in the sword aura room for six hours.

The level of sword aura attacks had now reached 32 times.

Although fatty Xuan still swaggered around pridefully, his tightly clenched fingers beneath his robes betrayed his internal anxiety.

“Fatty Xuan, do you think brother Chen could be in some danger?” Hubing Yue was also similarly worried.

“Do you think brother Chen is someone who doesn’t know his limits?” Fatty Xuan asked in response. Although that’s what he said, fatty Xuan wasn’t too sure of his own words.

The previous Jiang Chen had never been so awesome or displayed such potential before.

He had vaulted to the challenge of enduring the sixth hour. Out of all the heirs, only Long Juxue had taken the challenge before, but she hadn’t made it through to the end.

If Jiang Chen emerged after the hourglass had run out, then he would’ve broken this year’s records!

However, Long Juxue had already been at eight meridians true qi, about to breakthrough to the ninth meridian when she took the second foundational exams.

She treated the sword aura room as a means to stimulate her potential and break her shackles, as a way to successfully ascend to nine meridians true qi!

She was successful in the end.

Although she wasn't able to fully take the entire gamut of attacks from the sword aura at 32 times, she broke through to the ninth meridian and created a sensation in the kingdom.

Long Juxue had not even been 15 years old at the time. She broke through to the ninth meridian in one fell swoop and became one of the few, the mighty within the kingdom.

One had to know that apart from very few true qi masters, nine meridians true qi was basically invincible.

And out of all the true qi masters in the kingdom, who hadn't trained for at least a few decades? She could stand shoulder to shoulder with the experienced true qi masters at the tender age of not even fifteen. With such potential, no wonder she possessed the asure phoenix constitution.

Long Juxue was now sixteen, and there were vague rumors that there was only a thin veil separating her from being a true qi master of ten meridians. It was a very thin veil that could be punctured by a single poke.

All eyes stared intently at that hourglass.

Many felt complicated emotions. They hoped for a miracle to be born, for a subject ripe for new gossip to appear within the kingdom. They also felt a bit envious at the same time. What right

did this Jiang Chen have to suddenly become such a blockbuster figure?

Long Juxue's fans even cursed him inwardly, hoping for Jiang Chen to be hit by a sword aura attack and thus be ruined.

Long Juxue was the goddess of their heart, and they were absolutely unwilling to see a previously infamous good-for-nothing break the record set by their goddess.

Allowing Jiang Chen to break Long Juxue's record was the greatest insult to the goddess!

However, matters would not change because of some people's thoughts. The sand in the hourglass slowly trickled downwards as time marched on, second by second.

Finally, the hourglass reached its end.

As the final grains of sand trickled down, the entire hourglass had finally emptied!

That meant that six hours were up!

The stone doors to the sword aura opened haltingly. There were slight traces of sweat on his forehead, as the previous five hours hadn't taxed him at nearly the level that the last hour had.

The power of sword aura at 32 fold in the sixth aura had simply be too frightening. If it wasn't for the fact that Jiang Chen had grasped a tiny bit of the sword aura rhythm, he would have definitely been unable to take the barrage with his true level of training.

Upon seeing Jiang Chen walk out slowly from the room, those who had been verbally attacking Jiang Chen all hid guiltily towards the back.

It was as if Jiang Chen could pierce through the darkest recesses of their hearts with his bright, clear gaze.

They didn't even have the courage to look Jiang Chen in the eye at that moment.

As for Jiang Chen, his entire being was like a finely honed knife, his light increasing with each step he took. It wasn't Jiang Chen stepping out of the room! Everyone had the sudden impression of a divine weapon walking out of the room.

After the baptism by sword aura at 32 fold, Jiang Chen was indeed infused with the light of a slashing sword at this moment. It would be more appropriate to say that the sword aura had cut and polished Jiang Chen, rather than baptized him.

Regardless, Jiang Chen had become one with the sword aura, and his light shone patently!

“Brother Chen, Brother Chen, first of all geniuses!” Fatty Xuan called out with great emotion.

“Jiang Chen, congratulations. You have passed the second foundational exam with flying colors!” The organizer in charge of this segment was also agog with surprise, and sincerely admired Jiang Chen’s performance.

Such an amazing performance wasn’t available every day. The organizer also felt proud to be able to witness such a feat with his own eyes.

“What? Six hours? Are you sure that nothing’s wrong with the sword aura room?” Du Ruhai found it hard to believe his eyes when he received the report of the results of Jiang Chen’s second foundational exam.

Even Long Juxue’s prior performance paled in comparison with this record.

“There’s nothing wrong with the sword aura room. That kid stayed in there for a full six hours and shot down 120 flying beetles.”

“Jiang Chen!” Du Ruhai’s overcast eyes shot out a sinister look. “It looks like I would’ve had to suppress you even without Duke Long’s exhortation. Otherwise, with the grudge that I have formed with your Jiang family, what place would there be for me if your Jiang family actually rose to power?”

In this moment, Du Ruhai was even more resolute in his determination to firmly suppress Jiang Chen.

If he didn't suppress Jiang Chen, he, Du Ruhai, would have no future to speak of.

The Jiang Chen of now was the greatest victor of the two foundational exams, and had won the support of many neutral parties. Many saw shadows of themselves in Jiang Chen.

Ordinary potential, middlingly dukedom rank. But even with these circumstances surrounding his birth, Jiang Chen's performance was not any less than those top tier heirs.

They had found emotional sustenance, a point of resonance with Jiang Chen.

So therefore, when Jiang Chen appeared at the testing site for the third foundational exam, he was actually accompanied by a large crowd that cheered and applauded him.

Apart from a few preeminent heirs, only Jiang Chen had enjoyed such treatment.

The third exam was also the easiest out of all of the foundational exams. It tested the basics, concepts that could be committed to memory.

Of course, there were also dissertation topics that allowed for

creative leeway – ones that tested the candidate's experience. The final score wouldn't be affected even if these freeform topics were left blank.

As long as one answered all those rote memorization topics, one would receive enough points to pass the theory exams.

Therefore, there was a saying in the three foundational exams that as long as one passed the first two exams, the third one was a walk in the park.

Only idiots or people who really hadn't studied would fail out of the third exam.

Jiang Chen walked into the testing site for the third exam in the midst of a hail of applause.

Four scrolls, four tests represented the major topics from "The Articles of Martial Arts", "The Articles of Spirit Medicine", "The Papers of Power and Influence", and "The Papers of Military Strategy".

Chapter 33: End Of Exams, Brothers Lay Their Hearts Open

A generous amount of time was given for the exam and Jiang Chen wasn't unduly worried. This third exam was a walk in the park for him. With the reading abilities that his past life had cultivated for millions of years, he had developed an almost photographic memory for things that needed to be committed to memory.

Therefore, this little bit of rote memorization was no sweat for him.

He inked in his name with a grand flourish of his brush and started to answer the questions.

About an hour later, he had completed the rote memorization problems to his satisfaction.

The creative portion was next. This section's questions would be more flexible and deeper as well.

Of course, with Jiang Chen's experiences, these questions were still so low and crude that they were just a joke to him. However, he still structured his answers very seriously.

Although the topics were shallow, it wouldn't do for his answers to be too insightful. With the Eastern Kingdom's standards of theoretical knowledge, it was unlikely for the kingdom to be able

to digest anything that was too convoluted.

With Jiang Chen's knowledge, if he really answered too profoundly, then it would be no different to him handing in a blank exam paper.

Anything too profound wouldn't be understandable... then what difference would there be to answering nonsense?

Therefore, Jiang Chen racked his brains to start from this world's foundation of knowledge, and elaborated with some innovation.

These answers were actually ranked as very low knowledge in his knowledge banks. But Jiang Chen was still a bit worried that he had gone outside of the box and created some unnecessary trouble.

Thus, he repeatedly held himself in check and finally overcame the urge to really elaborate. He controlled the summary for the creative section and held it at a level appropriate for knowledge found within the Eastern Kingdom.

Doing it this way actually created more work for him. He double checked his exam paper after an hour, discovered that it was impeccable, and then turned it in.

The organizer in charge of this exam sealed Jiang Chen's exam into a box in accordance with the rules.

“Jiang Chen, this exam needs to be read by senior officials and graded by officials from the various subjects. Do you understand this rule?”

There was indeed such a rule and Jiang Chen paid it no heed. He nodded.

No matter who graded it, this exam was sure to pass. Jiang Chen was completely confident about this point.

It was already dusk when he’d completed the three foundational exams. Fatty Xuan jogged as he kept up with Jiang Chen. With his weight and body shape, it was tough for him to keep up with Jiang Chen.

Fatty Xuan was panting heavily after a short distance. “Brother Chen, wait for your brother!

Brother Chen, I’ve reserved a table at the Autumn Crane to celebrate you passing the three foundational exams. I knew a long time ago that Brother Chen must be a wolf in sheep’s clothing. You didn’t pass the exams before to purposefully portray that you’re weak. Heh, numbing the enemy through strategy!”

Fatty Xuan’s fawning words flowed like the tides and he was utterly unembarrassed in doing so.

“Let’s not go to the Autumn Crane.” Jiang Chen said faintly, thought for a moment, and sighed when he saw the earnest Fatty

Xuan and Hubing Yue. “Let’s gather at my place tonight.”

Hubing Yue nodded, “Yes, Brother Chen is correct. My old man has also said that there is too much going on within the capital recently. We should avoid going to places like the Autumn Crane.”

“Heh heh. If Brother Chen says not to go, then we won’t go. Besides, going to Brother Chen’s manor just means more face for us brothers, right?” Fatty Xuan was an easygoing character and went with the flow instead of stubbornly sticking to something.

As a personal body servant, this was Jiang Zheng’s moment to shine. He immediately spoke up when he heard Jiang Chen’s words, “Your steward will return home to make preparations.”

Fatty Xuan and them were even more relaxed once they reached the Jiang Han manor.

This was also the first time that Jiang Chen had gotten together with his best friends since arriving in this world. He was in good spirits, and listened raptly to fatty Xuan and the others talk of all that had happened before.

“Brother Chen, wouldn’t you say that that Yang Zong is completely heartless? To think that you took such care of him back then, and he recoiled from fear and shrank from responsibility after something happened to you. He hunkered down and was too afraid to interact with us. Looks like this person is unreliable. And I even treated him as a brother before. What a shameful person!”

Fatty Xuan was quite impassioned when it came to Yang Zong.

On the other hand, Jiang Chen laughed easily and decided to ignore the matter. Everyone had their own ambitions. Yang Zong had chosen the pursuit of profit and a side that benefited him instead of choosing his brothers. That was his choice.

Except, Jiang Chen naturally struck off Yang Zong's name from his heart.

Fatty Xuan eased off crucifying Yang Zong upon seeing that Jiang Chen didn't join in. He changed the topic to the Hidden Dragon Trials.

"Brother Chen, do you actually have any ambitions when it comes to the Trials?" Fatty Xuan had had a bit too much to drink and his tongue had become a bit loose.

"What ambitions?" Jiang Chen smiled.

"Brother Chen, I, fatty Xuan, am a stubborn sort. I don't think much of any of those premier dukes. I only feel a kinship with Brother Chen, so if Brother Chen soars triumphantly in the sky, then I will smile even in my dreams! Brother Chen, I wish you would aim for those preeminent positions!"

"Indeed Brother Chen, that Bai Zhanyun is just that. You absolutely have the potential to make a play for a position as one of the four great dukes." Hubing Yue was also extremely fervent as he

thought of Jiang Chen's performance that night.

"Four great dukes?" Jiang Chen murmured lightly and then grinned widely. "The four great dukes are not my end goal."

"Ah? Brother Chen, then what is your goal? It would also be great if you could vault into the ranks of the top ten." Hubing Yue said.

"Hubing Yue, are you a silly pig?" Although Fatty Xuan was drunk, his mind wasn't. With his understanding of Jiang Chen, his tone wasn't that he couldn't nab one of the spots as one of the four great dukes, but that he didn't deign to!

As his thoughts traveled down this path, Fatty Xuan's immense body shook briefly, his sobriety returning immediately. Looks of unparalleled fervor shot out from his quickly darting eyes beneath his plump eyelids.

"Brother Chen, can it be that your goal is the position of the Eastern royals? Haha, that's my Brother Chen alright! Great ambitions, damn straight!"

Fatty Xuan was also a slight bit of a bastard. Add to that the influence of alcohol, and that resulted in him completely losing all reservations when talking. He probably hadn't thought that these words would already clap him as a suspect for rebellion.

"This... Brother Chen, are you for real?" Hubing Yue was

gobsmacked and his breathing also grew heavy.

Jiang Chen didn't know whether to laugh or cry upon seeing how serious these two were. "Fatty Xuan, your imagination is too active. When did I say I wanted to replace the Eastern royals?"

"Then what?" Fatty Xuan scratched his head and wore a perplexed look.

"I am a cultivator. It would be a waste of my life if I pursued momentary weath. I, Jiang Chen, wish to pursue martial dao with my life. All common wealth and riches are but floating clouds to me."

Fatty Xuan became completely listless upon seeing how serious Jiang Chen was.

"Brother Chen, this doesn't seem like you. What happened to our previous vows? Didn't we agree to go crazy together, enjoy everything together, be wild and free together, and weather all storms together?"

Fatty Xuan pouted as he muttered complaints.

"People have to change." Jiang Chen sighed lightly. "Fatty, since you two are my brothers, I won't voice false words. Although playing hooky is fun, those days won't last long. Do you know how many eyes are staring at the dukedom that you hold in your hands, to speak of nothing else? If it wasn't for the dukedom, on what

basis do you have to be a dandy? What ability do you have to be wild and free?”

Fatty Xuan was speechless. How would he not know that to be wild and free together was just a temporary dream.

How could you be wild without strength? Who would allow you to be so haughty?

At the end of the day, they were able to be wild and free together because of a good father and a good reincarnation.

But after their generation had run carefree, what of the next generation?

This resonated deeply with Hubing Yue, “Fatty, Brother Chen is right. I too think that only strength is the true law of this world. Look at Brother Chen’s experiences over the past couple of days, isn’t it a perfect illustration of this rule? People used to challenge us no matter where we went. And now? Everyone who sees Brother Chen dare not even look at us. This is the change brought by strength!”

Fatty Xuan had become an old, lonely man as he despaired, “But you guys also know that I’m a fatty that no one takes seriously. Training is a luxury for me. I’ve only reached this step because my old man beat it into me with his fists and feet…”

Fatty became more dejected as he spoke. Although he was

ordinarily high spirited and looked like a complete dandy, he had a side to him that no one else could see, a fragile side.

His body size and weight had brought many troubles for him that others didn't have. It also brought for him discrimination and mockery that no one else would understand.

Inwardly sensitive, fatty had always cared a lot about this, but he had to pretend that he didn't care at all. He learned to self deprecate and to joke about himself.

Except, he had met Jiang Chen when he arrived at the capital for the Hidden Dragon Trials. He had met the only person in this world who didn't discriminate against him and even called him brother.

At that moment, fatty Xuan had felt that Jiang Chen was his confidant – his brother for the rest of his life, and someone that fatty Xuan would die for.

"Brother Chen do you know? When I first arrived at the capital, I tried very hard to assimilate into the world of the other heirs. But I was faced with their discrimination and mockery no matter where I went. You... you were the first one who called me fatty without a jeering smile on your face. In that moment, I decided that I would listen to whatever you said for the rest of my life!"

Fatty Xuan swiped fiercely at his red eyes when he stopped at this point. "Brother Chen, you were right just now. If we didn't have a good father, what right would we have to loaf around, to act

crazily? Besides, to ensure that my descendants have the ability to be a dandy, I must keep this dukedom!”

A resolute desire that would cause others to straighten with seriousness appeared for the first time in Fatty Xuan’s eyes.

Chapter 34: Secret Of The Nine Laughing Oceans

Jiang Chen still felt some loyalty and friendship towards the two best friends that his prior self had left behind. Besides, these two had something in common in that their hearts were trustworthy and that they were staunch people.

This point suited Jiang Chen's taste quite well. This was also a marked, foundational difference between fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue versus Yang Zong.

Jiang Chen could see that fatty Xuan's potential was average, and that there wasn't the requisite tenacity and fierceness to be found on him that practitioners needed.

It was perhaps possible in the short term, but it was impossible for fatty Xuan to maintain a mindset of 'till death will I cease' on the path of martial dao.

Hubing Yue, on the other hand, concealed a heart of martial dao with strong fortitude beneath his honest exterior.

Jiang Chen knew what to expect with this round of judgments.

He raised his glass, "Both of you have long since treated me, Jiang Chen, as your big brother. Therefore, as your big brother I will say these words today, if you will believe me. Well, no matter if your life's goal is to seek wealth and riches, or to pursue martial

dao — I can help you achieve them.

However, the caveat is is that you remain my brothers – unchanging brothers for a lifetime."

Jiang Chen was extremely serious when he spoke these words. These two were absolutely his brothers right now, but, time could change much. What he needed was eternal and unchanging loyalty.

"Brother Chen, I, fatty Xuan, have only one thing to say. The fat on my body is all yours. Whenever you tire of tasting the delicacies from land and sea and want to try human meat, then come carve it from my body. If I can't trust you, then I can trust no one!" Fatty Xuan's brow didn't even crease.

"Brother Chen, I'm not the best with words but I've always felt that you're a good big brother, a big brother worthy of me to follow." Hubing Yue also expressed himself.

"Alright. We're brothers. For life." Jiang Chen nodded. "Let's stop here today. Remember, come here again after the Hidden Dragon Trials. I'll give you a little surprise."

Jiang Chen also needed to consider what to do with these two people, and how to help them in a way that wasn't over the top but in a way that was curiously effective for them.

Being too over the top would inevitably catch others' eyes and

incite unnecessary trouble.

Being too stingy might lead to less than ideal effectiveness. Then the help he rendered was the same as not giving any at all.

This needed to be personally tailored and some time was needed to muse over it.

It is said that it's hard to clap with one hand. In any world, one is always powerless towards some things when relying only on the power of one. Sooner or later, it would be imperative to cultivate some others.

Jiang Chen did not remain idle after sending off his two best friends. He went directly into the secret training room and shut his doors for training.

The six hours that he'd spent in the sword aura room during the day had helped him comprehend and gain much. When he had been confronting the 32 fold sword aura in the room, the five meridians true qi and five meridians in his body had been repeatedly forged, impacted, bathed, and attacked until they metamorphosed...

Jiang Chen had unwittingly ascended to six meridians true qi during that battle.

This was also his biggest gain in that battle.

“I can feel that my battle strength has risen at least two or three times after entering six meridians true qi.” Jiang Chen sensed the changes in his body. He could feel that his life signs had been strengthened by a level, and had changed a lot from how he had been when he first entered – it was as if he had been reborn.

“The battle with Yan Yiming today also obliquely illustrated a few of my current problems. Although I won, it was a victory gained through trickery.” Jiang Chen analyzed that battle and had some reflections on the gains and losses of it.

Firstly, Jiang Chen had been disadvantaged in terms of martial arts techniques. The previous Jiang Chen had been exceedingly slipshod when practicing the family’s martial dao techniques. The only one that he’d truly put some effort into practicing was the jack of all trades “Eastern Amethyst Qi”, and this was because the Hidden Dragon Trials would test it. If this wasn’t the case, he probably wouldn’t have practiced it either.

To think that he would still be using the accompany martial arts techniques of “Eastern Amethyst Qi” to combat foes since coming to this world, one had to admit that Jiang Chen would have to herald in a new generation in the field of martial arts techniques.

Jiang Chen familiarized himself with the Jiang family’s hereditary martial dao methods. Its name was the “Vast Waves Method” and it was a method that combined training qi and martial arts techniques.

“Vast Waves Method” was a middle-grade martial dao method and it could be practiced to nine meridians true qi. This was also

its upper limit.

The accompany martial arts techniques were “Wave Breaker” and “Sea God Fist”.

This “Vast Waves Method” counted as one of the aces of the Jiang family martial dao methods.

“Indeed a poorer family.” Jiang Chen smiled wryly. “This world’s wudao ranking seems to be divided into five great degrees of ‘common’, ‘spirit’, ‘saint’, ‘earth’ and ‘heaven’. These five great degrees are then divided into minor ranks of ‘inferior’, ‘middle’, ‘upper’, and ‘supreme’ rank. To sum it up, a martial dao method that is common degree, middle rank is a second grade from the bottom. And this kind of grade is an ace method of the family clan.”

Jiang Chen had to lament that the starting point of his reincarnation was indeed a bit low.

Of course, out of all methods under heaven, as long as a method was able to be ranked, that was still something.

A great many practitioners practiced ordinary methods that couldn’t even be ranked.

The so called common degree method was actually an exceedingly precious martial dao classic in a nation such as the Eastern Kingdom.

What caused Jiang Chen to not know whether he should laugh or cry was that his previous self had practiced this “Vast Waves Method” since he was small, but had only just achieved the minor achievement realm.

“How lazy could this fellow have been to practice the family clan’s prized method to this level of accomplishment? Were his thoughts really not on training at all?”

In terms of technique training, minor achievement was but the first step. Skillful, perfection, flawless and great perfection followed thereafter, and there was even a legendary realm.

Minor achievement meant one was just getting started.

“The upper limit of “Vast Waves Method” was training only to nine meridians true qi. No wonder father’s training has halted at nine meridians true qi. It looks like restrictions in methods were indeed sufficient for a genius to become a mediocre talent within this world.”

A duke’s prized clan method only went up to nine meridians true qi at the highest. Any further meant reaching the limits. One had to say, this was a practitioner’s sorrow.

“Ask not how high the heavens are, I ride the waves myself? Wait a moment…” Jiang Chen suddenly had a sense of deja vu when he read the first line in “Vast Waves Method”. “Could it be that I’ve seen this “Vast Waves Method” before somewhere?”

But that couldn't be the case. Logically speaking, it would be impossible for an inferior method like the "Vast Waves Method" to enter the Tianlang Library. That was the library of the Celestial Emperor, how could it record such a low level method?

But, Jiang Chen truly did have an impression of those two lines.

He exerted great effort in searching through his memories and suddenly, a method of "Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans" surfaced in his mind.

I made one dream through nine lifetimes and dried the vast oceans with one laugh. Ask not how high the heavens are, I ride the waves myself.

Suddenly, many recollections regarding the "Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans" poured out from Jiang Chen's memories in the span of a moment.

Although this "Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans" was also not enough to even garner a glance from those on high, Jiang Chen remembered this method because he had been moved by the story behind the practitioner who had created this method when he perused it.

This person had reincarnated nine times for just one glimpse of the girl in his dreams. But he had waited until the seas had dried up and the rocks had rotted away, and this finally proved to be unattainable. He had quickly awakened to the truth, but realized

that he had already missed the law of heaven. He therefore lamented that “ask not how high the heavens are, I ride the waves myself”.

Although “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans” was also not enough to be called a method of the law of heaven, but it was a great many times stronger than the “Vast Waves Method”.

The mysteries ensconced inside were at least a hundred times more than the “Vast Waves Method”.

And, this “Vast Waves Method” was obviously an offshoot of the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans”. But it had reduced to an exceedingly mediocre method by the time it had been passed onto the Jiang family clan.

Of a common origin!

“Indeed, destiny naturally plays a hand somewhere. Since this “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans” is destined for me, then I shall practice it.”

Jiang Chen had previously searched for a method with great effort, but had never found one suitable for this body.

And now, the Jiang family’s prized method had lead to the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans”, what was this if not fate?

Jiang Chen’s heart was much more at ease after he had decided

on a method.

There were many accompanying martial arts techniques within the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans”, but Jiang Chen still decided to focus on the two techniques “Wave Breaker” and “Sea God Fist” that were of the same origin for the time being.

But these two wudao techniques naturally had different names, respectively “Vast Ocean Current Splitter” and “Divine Aeons Fist”.

Martial dao method, martial arts technique, all were selected.

Jiang Chen was in an excellent mood. After all, the “Amethyst Eastern Qi” was someone else’s method. There always lacked a sense of belonging when he practiced it.

Jiang Chen knew that he had made the right choice when he started familiarizing himself with this method. The moment that this method starting circulating in his body, the acupoints and meridians within his body almost started resonating together.

Every acupoint emitted a light and rich rhythmic pulse, and his meridians thrummed slightly when they opened and closed.

“Meridian resonance? Acupoint resonance? This is the highest degree of endorsement that a body will show towards a method!” Jiang Chen was delighted.

“Indeed, a family’s own method is the best.” Jiang Chen thought carefully and understood. Many families valued bloodline heritage when it came to training in martial dao, and many clans emphasized not sharing methods with outsiders. In reality, this was a type of tradition, and a type of agreement between bloodline and method.

Only the suitable is the best.

Jiang Chen thought through this point and thereby understood this principle.

“Perhaps my mind is filled with all the methods under the heavens, but those are not suitable for the current stage me. Ultimately, right now I am but a common practitioner with six meridians true qi. My mindset should stress this life’s training and not the prior life’s experiences.”

The experiences of the prior life could bring all sorts of good fortune and pave the road for him, and even let him take shortcuts.

But training would still have to rely on this life’s body to step over obstacles and embark on the challenge to reach the peak, one step at a time. This was irreplaceable by any experience.

He started to circulate his true qi, circulating the true qi of vast waves within his body. Jiang Chen’s meridians became like the lesser dragons frolicking in the waves of the vast sea, at their hearts’ content.

“Vast waves true qi still lacks a bit of fierceness. It looks like the true qi within my body requires further forging in order to truly train some actual results out of the true qi of vast waves.”

After a night of starvation training, it was readily apparent Jiang Chen’s grasp over vast waves true qi was quite adept. However, it was uncertain how much stronger it was than when he’d practiced Amethyst Eastern Qi.

However, due to the short training period, fierceness was obviously lacking within the vast waves true qi. If dominance was lacking, then this method would be taken down a few notches.

“Fierceness is not something to be gained from closed door training.” Jiang Chen thought carefully and sighed in dissatisfaction. “Looks like, it’s almost time to experience the outside world, once the time is right.”

Chapter 35: You Won't Die If You Don't Seek Death

The repressed, bone-deep, wild nature of Jiang Chen's past and present life came abruptly roaring out uncontainably when he had the idea of traveling a bit in the outside world.

Of course, this travel wasn't something that Jiang Chen could arbitrarily decide.

First, he had to pass the Hidden Dragon Trials before leaving. Otherwise, leaving the capital without permission meant forfeiting the Trials.

The Trials were Jiang Chen's first major objective upon arriving in this world – there was no way he would give up.

For one, he had to fight for his father's right to continue holding the dukedom.

In addition, the great undercurrent of power that had formed in the capital left Jiang Chen with no avenues of retreat – he had to fight!

Jiang Chen woke up early the next morning and went for a round of practice in the manor's practice field. He had prepared to pay a visit to the Hall of Healing when he saw that the sun had risen to the height of three connecting bamboo segments.

He had signed a contract with the Hall of Healing and naturally wouldn't break his appointment.

Except, he didn't have time to set foot outside before fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue came hurriedly rushing in. Their faces looked like the sky was caving in.

"Brother Chen, why are you acting like nothing is going on?" fatty Xuan almost dashed into the door with a rolling posture, and came out at the very start with this question when he saw Jiang Chen.

"What about me?" Jiang Chen was baffled.

"Brother Chen, something major has happened!" A sense of anxiety also pervaded throughout Hubing Yue's clumsy honesty, a type of anxiety that accompanied the sky caving in.

"What?" Jiang Chen felt that the expressions on these two weren't a joke.

"Brother Chen, you didn't pass your foundational exams!" Fatty Xuan was almost to the point of tears in his worry. "Brother Chen, you lectured us yesterday, how..."

"Didn't pass? Impossible!" Jiang Chen shook his head resolutely. He was firm, that was absolutely impossible. "You guys also saw my exams."

“We saw it alright, you passed the first and second exams. However, you didn’t pass the third exam.”

The third exam, the theory exam, but that was one that no bystanders could watch.

“I didn’t pass the theory exam?” Jiang Chen thought back and resolutely shook his head. “I still don’t believe it. I wouldn’t have erred on a single one of the rote memorization portions. It was enough to guarantee passing. I also felt that I elaborated quite well in the creative portion, unless the examiner was blind.”

Fatty Xuan was like an ant on a hot pan in his haste and he kept pacing around in circles.

“No, no. Brother Chen we can’t sit still in the face of such adversary such as this. Didn’t you get strike up a relationship with Princess Gouyu? Hurry and enter the palace to request that the princess think of something. This matter will be irredeemable when the final results are announced!”

According to the rules of the foundational exams, if one of the three foundational exams had yet to be passed before the deadline, that meant the candidate hadn’t passed the exams.

If the foundational exams weren’t passed, then the candidate had no qualifications to participate in the Hidden Dragon Trials afterwards.

Therefore, there was naturally nothing to speak of when it came to retaining the dukedom.

Although Jiang Chen was a bit dumbfounded, he didn't panic. As he was lost in thought, the duke of Jiang Han also trotted out quickly from the manor. He had obviously also just received the news.

"Chen'er, you..." Jiang Feng walked towards Jiang chen.

"Father, I feel that something must be amiss here. The only thing I can guarantee is that there is no way my answers wouldn't've passed the exam."

Jiang Chen's tone was quite firm with no room for doubt.

Jiang Feng had originally wanted to console his son, but blanked for a moment upon hearing his words. His eyebrow crooked, "Then this is to say that someone is conniving against our Jiang family!"

"Damn, daring to do something even to the Hidden Dragon Trials, is this not giving the royal family face? No, Brother Chen, we can't let them get away with this!"

"Right, we must thoroughly investigate. We must understand why if we are to die!"

Jiang Chen spread out his hands, "I must get to the bottom of

this. Father, stay within the manor and avoid throwing ourselves into disarray. Your son will go to the Trials testing site to look up my answer scroll. If it truly was my fault, then I, Jiang Chen, am not someone who cannot take a loss."

He paused, and his words turned in another direction as his tone hardened. "But if I learn of someone being up to no good, then they have very successfully infuriated me this time."

The news of Jiang Chen not passing the foundational exams quickly spread like a plague throughout the capital. Some felt it was unimaginable when they recalled how formidable Jiang Chen had been in the first two exams, whereas others gloated over misery.

Of course, even more people took a wait-and-see attitude. Those with even a little bit of brains could sniff out the undercurrents of conflict and could hear the bloodthirsty sounds of armored cavalry in this.

When Jiang Chen had arrived at the Trials testing site, it was already packed to the brim with people who were all waiting to see the show!

"I want to check my answer scroll!" Jiang Chen was straightforward.

There was nothing for Jiang Chen to be low key about, now that someone had taken their bullying to his face.

“Check your answer scroll? According to the rules, you only have the right to apply for such after three days.” The eyebrows of the official in charge quirked slightly and he didn’t even raise his head. His voice was lazy, as if he was almost about to die.

“I want to check it now!” Jiang Chen said diffidently.

“Who do you think you are? Checking it because you say so? On what basis?”

“On this basis!” Jiang Chen’s palm slapped down hard on the table, and the dragon medallion representing the royal family actually embedded itself on that metallic table, leaving a big, easily noticeable mark.

“What?” The official in charge immediately woke up upon seeing this item. He frantically stood up and left a panicked and battered sentence behind. “Please wait here, I will inform my superiors.”

With the engraved dragon medallion beating a path, this meant he had Eastern Lu’s imperial decree within the Trials testing ground. All difficulties became but floating clouds in front of royal power.

Finally, a middle aged organizer called Organizer Ma arrived.

“Young duke Jiang, according to the rules, a three day period are requisite before an application can be made for checking your answer scroll. However, since you have a royal token, you do

indeed possess the qualification for special treatment. Let's do it this way, wait a moment while I pull up your answer scroll. In addition, checking scrolls needs to be conducted under the personal supervision of our main organizer. Now, since our Lord Du has not yet arrived, you may need to wait."

"No need to wait, I will personally supervise." At the moment, a crisp and sonorous female voice traveled in from outside.

Heads turned and saw that it was Princess Gouyu, dressed in leather and boasting of a body so sexy that it would cause nosebleeds.

A royal princess and royal token appearing all at once in the Trials testing site. This immediately caused the site's atmosphere to become fervently excited.

Everyone knew that Princess Gouyu ordinarily didn't give much heed to the affairs of the Hidden Dragon Trials. She would only control it remotely sometimes and occasionally tell Du Ruhai to give a report.

Princess Gouyu was the main organizer – the first in charge, in name. But, it had always been Du Ruhai in charge of these matters. It wouldn't be unrealistic to say that Du Ruhai was shutting out the heavens with one hand.

Except, no one had thought that the normally aloof Princess Gouyu would descend personally today.

“What? Can it be that even I, who ranks as the number one main organizer, has no authority to decide upon the matters of the Hidden Dragon Trials?”

A frosty expression materialized on Princess Gouyu’s face.

Organizer Ma’s forehead sweated and he didn’t even dare breathe. He immediately went to pull Jiang Chen’s answer scroll.

After going through the process, the four answer scrolls were finally unfurled one by one. Scroll checking commenced under the witness of several examiner authority figures.

“This isn’t my answer scroll!” Jiang Chen shook his head with a cold smile after flicking his first glance.

Organizer Ma shifted his gaze to the officials from the various subjects who were in charge of reading the exams. He asked, “You were the ones who graded these answer scrolls. Take a look and see if these are the ones that Jiang Chen handed in.”

The officials all took a look and said, “These were indeed the answer scrolls that we graded. Look at these answers, unbearable mistakes and omissions, answers irrelevant to the question, completely nonsensical responses. We really couldn’t pass him with these kinds of answer scrolls.”

The various subject officials had been chosen to read exams naturally because they had authority, possessed integrity, and

were able to garner acceptance from others.

Bystanders' first opinion was that Jiang Chen's answer scrolls were indeed quite terrible after hearing the officials' words.

Princess Gouyu's phoenix eyes made a quick movement as she looked towards Jiang Chen.

"Don't look at me. These idiotic answer scrolls definitely didn't come from me. You're the main organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials, you take care of it."

Princess Gouyu inwardly ground her teeth. Would it kill you, you brat, to speak a bit more smoothly? She would have to take a slight turning point and make a bigger fuss out of this matter in order to create some room to maneuver.

"Everyone has their own explanation of this matter. As the organizer, I cannot be partial to any side. How about this, let's have Jiang Chen take the exam again right now?" Princess Gouyu's proposal was born out of compromise.

The various subject officials didn't care either way. It was just reading the scrolls again.

However, someone didn't agree.

"Princess, this must be avoided at all costs. The ancestors laid down the law that no makeups can be taken if the exams were not

passed after the deadline. The princess is the main organizer and a royal princess. How can the writs of the forefathers be abolished for a mere heir of a duke?”

It’d been said that he wasn’t here yet, but Du Ruhai had appeared in the nick of time.

“Du Ruhai…” Jiang Chen faintly guessed at something when he saw Du Ruhai’s face.

“Jiang Chen, you disregard law and discipline, greatly disturb the Trials testing site, your crimes are heinous!”

“Breaker of rules, tempting the princess into chaos, scheming to abolish the writs of the forefathers, you’re a traitor!”

“You’re a mere heir to a duke, how dare you!”

Du Ruhai’s words sprayed one after another and one large hat of crimes after another was buckled onto Jiang Chen’s head.

The former’s nose had almost traveled to Jiang Chen’s vicinity.

At this moment, an incredible scene happened!

Jiang Chen’s arm whirled as he viciously flung a slap onto Du Ruhai’s face.

“Jiang Chen, do not be reckless!” Princess Gouyu spoke hastily.

But, a burning, stinging big slap had landed solidly on Du Ruhai’s face. A bright red mountain formed by five fingers was imprinted on Du Ruhai’s face, appearing all the more conspicuous due to his grim, darkened face.

“Du Ruhai, I’ve warned you not to mess with me. But, you are indeed incorrigible. One won’t die if he doesn’t seek death. Since you seek death, I, Jiang Chen, will gratify you!”

“Come, I want you to accompany me to the Aurum Imperial Hall. I want to confront you in front of His Majesty. If my answer scroll is wrong, then I will docilely hand over the dukedom. If someone is playing a trick, then Du Ruhai, the head on your shoulders is mine!”

Jiang Chen completely ignored the complete shambles that the scene had fallen into, completely ignored those gobsmacked expressions as he strode out like the shooting stars, speeding straight towards the Aurum Imperial Hall.

Leaving behind a site full of a dumbfounded – utterly transfixed – crowd of people.

Princess Gouyu was expressionless as she too left swiftly, leaving Du Ruhai with no time to even squeeze out tears if he’d wanted to cry.

“Oh heavens! This Jiang father and son want to rebel! Beating up the organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials, greatly disturbing the Trials testing site, abolishing the writs of the forefathers! I too want to present my case to His Majesty in the Aurum Imperial Hall. This official seat will seek the annihilation of the Jiang family clan!” Du Ruhai’s expression was beyond grim!

Chapter 36: Complaining To His Majesty

The Drum of the Shocking Dragon was hammered ten times in a row and the Bell of the Waking Dragon rang out nine times in front of the Aurum Imperial Hall.

Jiang Chen walked in and headed towards the hall with large strides after the round of drum and bell sounds. Parting the road with the engraved dragon medallion, the ceremonial guards let him pass without challenge.

Under the shocked and astonished gazes of an entire gathering of civil and military officials, Jiang Chen took large steps to the front of the throne, and started wailing his innocence after paying his worship to the king. “Your Majesty, your subject persevered for ten years and industriously studied the civil and military subjects. Heaven and earth can bear witness to my heart of pure loyalty. Alas, your subject has run afoul of scoundrels in his life, and thus they have caused me to suffer a grave injustice. Your subject has nowhere else to request a redress and can only come to Your Majesty to present my case. Your Majesty is benevolent and moral, and can surely make a decision on your subject’s behalf.”

“Minister Jiang, what matter has caused you such desolation? Tell us of any wrongs you have suffered.” Despite Eastern Lu knowing that Jiang Chen was under suspicion for putting on an act, Jiang Chen had been imperceptibly crowded into the same boat as Eastern Lu given the current situation in the capital. Eastern Lu had no choice but to play along for a bit.

“The facts of the matter are, your subject…” Jiang Chen

immediately went over the entire issue from beginning to end, and naturally didn't fail to exaggerate things a bit in several crucial areas. All in all, the spearhead was directed at Du Ruhai.

He was irreproachable on this matter and reason was on his side. Therefore, he felt absolutely no pressure in making a ruckus.

Eastern Lu mused deeply for a while after listening, "If it is indeed as you say Minister Jiang, then you have truly suffered a grave injustice. We know of this matter now, but as with all things, it would be unwise to listen to only one side. We would also like to listen to what the testing site has to say."

"Your subject is willing to confront that Du Ruhai face to face!"

Jiang Chen's personality was that one always had to win some points, even if one was being unreasonable – not mentioning that he was entirely within reason this time.

Besides, Du Ruhai had truly enraged him this time. Jiang Chen had already determined that he would fight to the last breath with Du Ruhai.

At this moment, Du Ruhai also came wailing in. He was wiping away snot with one hand and tears with the other. Add to that the eye catching five fingered print on his face, and that he'd also conveniently ripped out his hair bun on the way over to make himself appear bedraggled and disheveled...

It gave others an exceedingly desolate feeling when he walked in like this.

“This Du Ruhai is a sly old fox alright, his acting skills are more than a step higher than the kid Jiang Chen.” A few ministers and officials thought privately.

One had to admit, Du Ruhai’s acting was more consummate and exquisite than Jiang Chen’s. Aggrieved eyes, desolate movement, and a body full of disordered hair and clothing. His entire body was an act.

“Your Majesty, your old subject has suffered injustices.” Du Ruhai’s head hit the floor, his butt stuck up perkily in the air as tears flowed down like an opened faucet.

“Minister Du, stand up and speak.” Eastern Lu could not treat one person well and treat another poorly in front of his assembled subjects.

Jiang Chen didn’t behave atrociously in the Aurum Imperial Hall. He stood to the side coldly, watching Du Ruhai put forth hard effort into his performance. Jiang Chen’s heart was filled with cold contempt and he was filled with scorn for mad little clowns like Du Ruhai.

“Your Majesty, this old subjects wishes to sue that this Jiang Chen is completely without law and order. He caused a great disruption at the testing site of the Hidden Dragon Trials, beat the organizer and even dared to tempt Princess Gouyu to destroy the

rules set down by the ancestors. Your Majesty, this brat had already acted wildly during the Rites of Heavenly Worship, and now insults the writs of the forefathers. The crimes of this Jiang father and son are heinous indeed, and your subject respectfully requests that Your Majesty pass a judgment to annihilate the Jiang family clan."

Given that he now stood in his current position, Du Ruhai possessed a few political schemes up his sleeves. He naturally knew how to stoke emotions, how to generate public anger, how to add insult to injury, how to frame others, and how to pin a label on others – especially in order to put the finishing touches on the Jiang father and son death sentence.

However, in the multitude of his schemes, he had never reckoned that Eastern Lu had long since listed the Jiang father and son as part of the royal camp.

His performance here not only didn't stoke any corresponding emotion from Eastern Lu, but rather gave birth to a bit of increased precaution against Du Ruhai.

Whereas amongst the crowd of assembled officials, some old men's emotions had become a bit restless thanks to Du Ruhai's machinations.

They were all old antiques and had already felt quite put out by the fact that Jiang Chen had luckily escaped being caned to death after his atrocious behavior during the Rites. They thought it was a bad omen.

And now, Jiang Chen hadn't even properly licked his wounds before causing a great disturbance at the testing site of the Hidden Dragon Trials, and had challenged the writs of the forefathers! In their eyes, this was high treason and a monstrous crime.

"Your Majesty, the Jiang father and son are too presumptuous, and their behavior cannot be condoned!

"I too agree, we cannot facilitate the growth of such unhealthy trends!"

Two old geezers with white beards had quickly jumped out to chime in.

Jiang Chen flicked a glance at these two old geezers and then looked at the duke of Soaring Dragon who was standing deep in thought to the left of the dial.

The duke of Soaring Dragon wore a calm and indifferent expression, as if this business had absolutely nothing to do with him. But in actuality, Jiang Chen could be certain that he must have been controlling everything for the matter to have progressed to this state.

Du Ruhai putting on an act and complaining, two old geezers adding fuel to the flame, and a crew of followers playing jackal to the tiger as well.

Those present were all heavyweights in the Eastern Kingdom. If there were those that belonged to the duke of Soaring Dragon's party, then there would definitely be those against him.

"Your Majesty, this old subject feels that something must be amiss after listening to Jiang Chen and His Excellency Du. Why not give them a chance for both to offer an explanation, respectively, and clear their own name? If Jiang Chen was in the wrong, then the law of the land will not forgive him. But if someone truly is so bold as to cheat and cause mischief on the Hidden Dragon Trials, is that not also an act of provocation against the writs of the forefathers? This old subjects feels that we cannot wrong a good man, and cannot let any villain off the hook. This matter must be handled in a just and open manner in order to give both sides a satisfactory explanation." This person was obviously a firm stickler for the royal family and had stepped forward to give Eastern Lu a hand.

"Yes, your subject also thinks this way. At the end of the day, it's a one-sided story from both of them. Your subject feels that we should let them finish their words and allow them to defend themselves." This was an official that was friendly with the Jiang family.

Eastern Lu was deep in thought for a moment and then nodded. "Since this is the case, Minister Du, you start first."

Du Ruhai nodded, "Alright, then please allow this old subject to speak first. This Jiang family had come to me twice before the three foundational exams began. The first time was to gift me six hundred thousand silver. I have been blessed with royal favor and

my responsibilities are great, how could I be someone who takes bribes and bends the law? I immediately harshly denied Jiang Feng's preposterous request to cheat and paid the silver to the national treasury after the fact.

The Jiang father and son once again invited me to their manor the second time. When their coaxing and pestering tactics failed, this Jiang Chen took to publicly threatening me, saying that I would regret my actions sooner or later.

This old subject is a firm and unyielding character. I have a clear conscience throughout the many matters I've handled for Your Majesty, why would I be afraid of the Jiang family threats? Except, who would've thought that this Jiang father and son would be so perverse and rabid as to disturb the testing site and even beat me when he didn't pass! Your Majesty, professionals handle the many portions of the exams, and those subject officials reading the answer scrolls can attest to the fact that the scroll Jiang Chen handed in for grading was sheer bullshit and irrelevant. In this case, how could I have shown favoritism and cheated? Destroyed the objective rules of the Hidden Dragon Trials? Destroyed the writs as laid down by the forefathers?"

Du Ruhai's tone was gloriously in state and he didn't even pause for breath. Judging from his appearance, it was as if he was as impartial and incorruptible as Justice Bao[1].

One had to give it to him, his eloquence was fantastic. After his round of words, many neutral officials all felt that this Jiang family was probably not innocent.

Eastern Lu also felt this matter was quite tough to handle and looked at Jiang Chen.

“Your Majesty, your subject has come to the Aurum Imperial Hall not to engage in a verbal spar with this Du Ruhai. He has been an official for more than a decade and has long since trained his official eloquence to a perfect and flawless realm. He would even be able to say that a stick of straw was a bar of gold.

There was indeed a matter involving six hundred thousand silver, but it definitely wasn’t from my father requesting him to cheat and let me through. But rather, this man came to my Jiang Han manor to solicit a bribe, hinting that my Jiang family could buy peace of mind with money. If we didn’t pay up the six hundred thousand, then he would halt my progress in the foundational exams.

He accepted the money but then came once again to my family after receiving pressure from some parties. He indicated that he had received the money but would still halt my progress in the foundational exams. My father could not contain his anger and argued with him a bit. He did indeed say that Du Ruhai has accepted money but not done the corresponding work.

If six hundred thousand could buy peace, then our Jiang family was willing to be that sucker. When it’s all said and done, we could just go back to our territory and tighten our belts for a few years of hard living. But, never did we anticipate that this Du Ruhai, charged with royal favor, would accept the threats from a few parties and completely ignore the regulations of the ancestors and blatantly undermine the rules of the Hidden Dragon Trials. He

employed slight of hand and switched out my answer scroll! Those present are all heavyweights with names and reputation in the kingdom. I would to ask how is it possible that I could pass the first two exams, but couldn't pass the third that was based off rote memorization? Does this conform with common sense?"

"What? Switched out the answer scroll?"

"This Du Ruhai has such presumptions?"

"No one has ever messed around with the Hidden Dragon Trials throughout the ages. Can this Jiang family be making a false complaint?"

"What Jiang Chen says makes sense. The third exam completely relies on rote memorization. Even a seven, eight year old child could pass given some time!"

The officials held heated discussions. They suddenly didn't know what was true and what was false.

If based on usual reputation, the duke of Jiang Han, Jiang Feng, was indeed a staunch and steadfast man.

On the other hand, Du Ruhai's reputation was more mediocre. Many in the capital had heard that the man was greedy and had his fingers in and ate out of many pies when he was an official.

Eastern Lu rubbed his forehead and looked out at the rows of his

subjects. He sorely wished that Princess Gouyu could materialize at this moment and help him make a judgment.

Except, this Gouyu hadn't appeared even now. What was she busy with?

Du Ruhai was hopping mad, "Jiang Chen, you're making unfounded, venomous accusations! Let me tell you something – this is the Aurum Imperial Hall. Your words must be backed up with evidence, if you have none, then I can sue you for the crime of defamation against an important official."

"Evidence?" Jiang Chen gave a cold laugh. "I only ask one question. Du Ruhai, you say that my answer scroll is complete bullshit and irrelevant. Then let's make a bet in the Aurum Imperial Hall. Summon the subject officials in charge of reading the scrolls, I will answer for them again, right now. We'll see if my answer scroll is as unbearable as you say!"

"Answer again?" Du Ruhai planted his hands on his waist and laughed. "Jiang Chen, who do you think you are? The rules set forth by the ancestors have never been modified. Why should they be changed for you?"

"Du Ruhai, you object with all your might because you have a guilty conscience."

At this moment, all the subject officials and Jiang Chen's answer scroll had been presented to Eastern Lu.

Eastern Lu took a brief look and sighed lightly. “Jiang Chen, this answer scroll has your name on it and this handwriting is the same as yours. You will need more evidence to prove your innocence.”

Jiang Chen was wholly unafraid as he looked lightly upon the four subject officials. “Your Majesty, it would be difficult for your subject to find evidence given how the situation is now. However, I happen to remember all the contents of the exams as well as clearly remember my answers. I respectfully request Your Majesty to give me an opportunity to rewrite my correct answers. In this way, even if my Jiang family still loses this lawsuit and the dukedom, I, Jiang Chen, will accept and admit my defeat!”

“In that case, bring out the four treasures of the study!” Eastern Lu immediately gave his approval.

“Your Majesty, doesn’t this violate the writs of the ancestors?”

“Please consider carefully Your Majesty, how can the laws of the forefathers be easily changed?”

Eastern Lu smiled faintly, “Those assembled need not unduly worry, we merely wish to view this Jiang Chen’s correct answers, but did not say that we would let him pass if his answers were correct. Our actions are done to pursue a judgment on the case, and not to readminister the exam. Both sides in the case are our important ministers, and we dare not act carelessly.”

The four treasures of the study were quickly readied and Jiang Chen stepped forward confidently and naturally. His facial

expression was cool and composed as he started writing.

The atmosphere of the scene however, fell into a strange sort of anxiety.

Notes:

1] Ancient Chinese judge known for his absolute impartiality and fairness

Chapter 37: Drastic Change In The Situation, Conquering The Examiner

One had to admit, Jiang Chen's memory was impressive. He had completely filled out multiple scrolls within the span of two hours.

Jiang Chen stood up, nicely rolled up his answer scrolls, and presented them.

"Your Majesty, please peruse these and then pass them over to the various subjects' officials." Jiang Chen's tone was at ease and brimmed with confidence.

Eastern Lu took the scrolls and glanced a few times over them. He discovered that these answer scrolls were indeed different from the ones before. He thought deeply for a moment and then passed them onto the four subject officials.

"Four ministers, read them well. This is an important matter and you absolutely cannot be numb or careless." Eastern Lu reminded.

The four officials in charge of their own respective subjects suddenly felt a mountain of pressure on them.

On one side was the ruler of the kingdom – the king's reminder – and on the other was Du Ruhai's gaze that held blatant warning and threats.

They were, after all, in the Aurum Imperial Hall, in royal territory. A king's dignified majesty finally overcame the psychological pressure that Du Ruhai brought them.

The four people tried quite hard to calm themselves down and started reading.

At first, the four's expression were only vaguely surprised as they thought that this answer scroll was indeed completely different from the one previous.

But when they read the creative portion in the second half, the expressions of the four subject officials became exceedingly grave. They would occasionally reveal an expression deep in thought and then smile in understanding. They would follow that up with an expression of running into a difficult problem, but then a look of sudden enlightenment would spread across their faces.

Many were extremely curious upon seeing the rich play of expressions across the four faces. Was the answer scroll that complicated to make this four read it with such ridiculous expressions?

The four finally rolled up the scrolls after a long while, despite wishing to continue.

"Well?" Eastern Lu asked personally.

"In response to Your Majesty, if we were to grade these scrolls,

we would have surely awarded full points.”

“Absolutely, indeed. And, the creative portion displayed such a depth in theory, unique opinion, and vast experience that even your humble subject feels quite humbled and doesn’t quite measure up.”

“Your humble subject greatly agrees. This answer scroll brims over with talent and inspires the feeling of beholding a high mountain.”

“Your humble subject only has one sentence to say. This scroll is the first that your humble subject has seen in his life, it is unprecedented!”

The evaluations were one higher than the other.

Anyone could see that the officials in charge of the four subjects weren’t talking off the cuff. The fact that these answer scrolls contained many things that they would need time to digest could be seen from their intoxicated expressions.

Judging from their satisfied expressions, it was most likely true that the contents within the scroll were enough to open their eyes, and imparted no small amount of benefit.

Eastern Lu looked at Jiang Chen meaningfully and sighed lightly. “My ministers, we are a bit confused. How can the two answer scrolls be so drastically different with regards to the same test

subjects. One of them brims with talent and has subdued the subject's officials, while the other is full of unreadable rubbish and does not pass."

"Your Majesty, a night has passed since that exam. The Jiang Han household could have easily hired a crew of experts to craft a satisfactory answer scroll through the course of a night. Such a matter would be so easy."

It was true that many things changed easily throughout the course of a night.

Du Ruhai also started clamoring. "Your Majesty, this Jiang family is self styling themselves as clever and is not worth despising. Your subject would like to say something unwelcome. This Jiang Chen is renowned throughout the capital for being a good-for-nothing as well as ignorant and incompetent. Even the peddlers and the porters would be hard pressed to believe that he had created answer scrolls that had subdued examiners."

The situation was once again disadvantageous towards Jiang Chen.

When everyone's gazes had once again focused on Jiang Chen, he gave a hearty laugh and took a proud step forward. "It is reasonable for you all to think that I've cheated given it's the same exam topic. Then if it would please the examiners, please propose a few more topics and Jiang Chen is willing to immediately engage the examiners in a bout of learning from each other."

Learning from each other!

“Jiang Chen, do you think this is your Jiang Han manor? Your childish play will not be tolerated in this great hall! Once had already been outrageous enough, how could you be permitted to do so again?”

Indeed, the king had already been magnanimous enough to allow you to answer the questions again. How could your atrocious behavior be permitted again?

Eastern Lu laughed heartily and curbed the officials and courtiers itching to take action. “In this great hall, we sit and pontificate. It’s a wonderful thing that our Eastern Kingdom has a young junior with such courage. This should be commended and not smothered. We will accede to Jiang Chen’s wishes. Unfortunately, this places additional strain on the four subjects’ officials and causes them to expend more effort.”

The four subjects’ officials didn’t really care, they had already let loose. Since there was an opportunity to express themselves before the king, this wasn’t too bad either.

Besides, they were truly curious. Had Jiang Chen truly created the four answer scrolls? If that was the case, they too wished to test Jiang Chen and see what they might gain.

The four main subjects of “The Articles of Martial Arts”, “The Articles of Spirit Medicine”, “The Papers of Power and Influence”, and “The Papers of Military Strategy”.

Of those, “The Papers of Power and Influence”, and “The Papers of Military Strategy” were actually accompanying topics. There wasn’t much content tested, and their proportion wasn’t as weighted. Therefore, these two subjects were tested first.

The two examiners each gave two topics. Jiang Chen thought briefly and began to respond eloquently.

Clear thinking, innovative perspectives, an aspirational viewpoint, an unbound realm.

When Jiang Chen had answered all four questions, not only did the two examiners, but also some of the courtiers and officials, break out in applause.

Because Jiang Chen’s answers had simply been too splendid. Each answer had not deliberately pursued to do something new and original.

But each answer had cut in from a fresh angle and resulted in unexpected responses that also made sense. Listeners were able to reflect on the answers and gain something.

“Your Majesty. These two topics already encompass your humble subject’s lifetime of knowledge. No matter what angle we look at it from, young duke Jiang’s response has surpassed your humble subject’s level of learning. Your humble subject acquiesces.”

“Your humble subject also acquiesces. Your humble subject believes that with young duke Jiang’s level for “The Papers of Military Strategy”, there is no way that he was the person of the original scroll.”

These words created waves when they were spoken.

“Examiner Hua, what do you mean by that?”

Examiner Hua of “The Papers of Military Strategy” spoke faintly, “I am an old pedant, but also a scholar with a scholar’s integrity. Young duke Jiang’s standards leaves me in admiration. Therefore, I will say an additional word. As the organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials, Your Excellency Du is broad minded, tolerant of diversity, and should be able to accommodate a variety of sounds?”

Du Ruhai’s face darkened, “But aren’t your words a public defamation that someone in the Hidden Dragon Trials cheated?”

“As to whether or not someone cheated, we prevail upon His Majesty to make an honored judgment. This humble subject dare not speak brashly.” Upon concluding, examiner Hua consciously backed up, closed his eyes and automatically entered a playing dead state.

“Heh heh, this humble subject will now test young duke Jiang in “The Articles of Spirit Medicine”.”

“Please deliver your instructions.” Jiang Chen cupped his hands.

“Alright, the first question deals with cultivating spirit ingredients. How is it that the common degree ninth rank spirit ingredient Three Immortal Grass often appears as one or two blades of grass when cultivated, as opposed to three blades of grass as it should be, like the three immortals in the heavens?”

Those who understood how to cultivate spirit ingredients all privately cursed this examiners. This question was too tricky wasn’t it? Even the examiner himself probably didn’t know why?

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. “The reason is simple. The Three Immortal Grass is a spirit ingredient in which three blades grow on the same stalk. If there is the slightest deviation during fertilization, causing one blade to become overly strong, it will swallow the other two blades. Therefore, in the cultivation of the Three Immortal Grass, there can be absolutely no aberrations in the tillage of the soil and application of spirit fertilizer. The slightest aberration will cause the gravest mistakes.”

“What? To think it would be so demanding?” The examiner thought carefully and suddenly whapped his head. “That’s true, why didn’t I think of this? I always thought it was the seed’s problem. According to the records, the Three Immortal Grass is like eagles and hawks in nature, able to eat their own kind. So it turns out it’s not that the Three Immortal Grass cannot grow three blades, but that it was swallowed by its brethren on the stalk!”

The examiner grinned widely and a few additional traces of admiration appeared in his look at Jiang Chen.

“Then I shall test you another question of refining pills. If you can also answer this question, I too shall vouch for you like old Hua has done!”

“Please go ahead.” Jiang Chen was neither humble nor overbearing, and did not forget himself in excessive joy because of the other’s promise.

“When I refine the ‘Divine Returning Qi Pill’, I sometimes use the eggs of the water heart bug, and sometimes the wings of ice cicadas. Why is it that using the eggs of the water heart bug can sometimes result in an upper rank pill, and sometimes the wings of ice cicadas can result in an upper rank pill? I’d like to ask which of these two ingredients are more suited for refining the ‘Divine Returning Qi Pill’?”

This question was also one that plagued this examiner for quite a while. In all these years of refining the Divine Returning Qi Pill, he ended up with a middle rank nine times out of ten and rarely produced an upper rank pill.

This had caused him to not gain much, and sometimes even resulted in a loss.

Jiang Chen searched through his memories and made his response. “Although the eggs of the water heart bug and the wings of the ice cicadas are both ingredients used in refining the Divine Returning Qi Pill, but they’re actually not the most ideal choice. If you use the Spirit Dream Frozen Rain Fruit, it will increase the chances of you refining an upper rank pill to seventy, eighty percent.”

“But why is that?” The examiner asked humbly.

“It’s quite simple. Whether it’s the eggs of the water heart bug or the wings of the ice cicadas, they are all beings of flesh and blood. The main ingredients of the Divine Returning Qi Pill will be somewhat cancelled out by the vigor of these two beings. When this is the case, you’d be hard pressed to refine an upper rank pill. Being able to produce one once in a while is simply good luck. The Spirit Dream Frozen Rain Fruit is a plant and has no vigor. Its characteristics also correspond best with the main ingredients. That is the best choice.”

“Ah…” The examiner’s mouth fell open and he didn’t speak for a long while. He finally bowed towards Jiang Chen after quite a bit of time had passed. “Now that I have heard this today, I can die without regret. I, old Zhao, also acquiesce.”

He then came to Eastern Lu, “Your Majesty, this youth’s knowledge of spirit ingredients is broad and profound, far surpassing this old man’s. Your humble subject also feels that young duke Jiang was not the author of that answer scroll.”

Examiner Zhao paused, and then added, “Completely incomparable. One is in the heavens, and the other on the earth.”

One person’s words may not hold much weight. Two people’s words could also be a coincidence.

But if three people speak, then that is no longer a coincidence.

The three examiners who had tested Jiang Chen had already spoken on his behalf and praised him ceaselessly. This situation had far outstripped everyone's expectation.

Changes began to slowly occur in the situation.

Chapter 38: The Truth Comes Out, Heads Roll

The fourth examiner was in charge of “The Articles of Martial Arts”.

Jiang Chen was even more at ease in this field. He easily resolved the three questions that the examiner asked in succession.

These three questions all belonged to this examiner’s martial arts obstacles. They had restricted him for many years, and he had a feeling of suddenly seeing the light after Jiang Chen’s explanations.

“Your Majesty, your humble subject is a man of martial arts and dares to use my head to vouch for the young duke Jiang. If even his level is unable to pass the foundational exams, then no one in the younger generation will be able to pass.”

These words were even more thorough, more absolute.

The duke of Soaring Dragon’s face darkened slightly when he heard the fourth examiner’s words. Was this a slap in the face? My daughter Long Juxue was born with an azure phoenix constitution. Would her potential and experience be inferior to this brat’s? Humph. You’re a mere examiner, what aspects of life have you seen? How dare you speak so wildly?

The duke of Soaring Dragon was quite infuriated.

Du Ruhai immediately jumped out, “Your Majesty, your humble subject was charged by Your Majesty to administer the Hidden Dragon Trials. I have been diligent and hardworking, but was beaten by this presumptuous youth today. I beg Your Majesty to make a judicious decision and a judgment for your old subject.”

“Your Majesty, this Jiang Chen is lawless. Although he has some talent, he has repeatedly committed grave infractions. Your subject feels that we can no longer tolerate this youth.”

The duke of Soaring Dragon had finally spoken up.

His words represented the attitudes of a select portion.

Indeed, many courtiers and officials also jumped out and all sincerely begged Eastern Lu to handle this harshly in accordance with the laws of the land!

“Ministers, Jiang Chen is a youth brimming with talent. How could he have produced answer scrolls filled with such unreadable nonsense? I however, will be appointing Minister Du to quickly investigate the circumstances. Are there those unworthy in the ranks below who have employed some shady methods in private?”

Eastern Lu gave those aggressive proclamations the cold treatment. His words were the equivalent of publicly protecting Jiang Chen.

The duke of Soaring Dragon was about to open his mouth when

light sounds suddenly traveled in from outside the hall.

“No need to investigate! I have already discovered the truth.” At this moment, Princess Gouyu, dressed in armor, walked in with a mighty and brave air.

The crowd of warriors akin to tigers and wolves that followed behind her were obviously the royal palace guards.

These royal palace guards had tied up a few people.

Du Ruhai’s face changed drastically when he saw the band of tied up people. These were all his confidantes! Had these guys broken under the pressure at this critical moment?

There was also a middle aged woman wearing gold and silver, with the shine of jewels all about her. Her face was shiny, and she wore powder and blush. Wasn’t this Du Ruhai’s wife?

The middle aged woman started cursing loudly when she saw Du Ruhai. “Du Ruhai, didn’t you commit a crime and were hauled off to the royal prisons? What are you doing here?”

Du Ruhai leapt up. “Who said I was hauled off to the royal prisons? That’s rumor mongering! You idiot woman, did you say something you shouldn’t have?”

The woman blanked, “I… I told them everything. They said leniency will follow frankness?”

Princes Gouyu laughed coldly once, “Royal brother, I have long since heard the rumors of Du Ruhai’s corruption and abuse of the law. I have been observing secretly and gathering evidence. Collecting evidence from all avenues has indeed resulted in rewards. This Du Ruhai is absolutely a harmful vermin! This is Du Ruhai’s wife’s confession and initialed testimony. There is detailed evidence for Du Ruhai’s cheating in the Hidden Dragon Trials.

And this, Ma Datong, is Du Ruhai’s confidente. Du Ruhai instructed him to commit the entire act. Ma Datong, now is your chance to redeem yourself with good service in front of His Majesty!”

This Ma Datong was indeed Du Ruhai’s confidante, and since Du Ruhai’s wife had confessed, he was only forcing himself down the path of death if he continued to cover things up.

He didn’t dare look at Du Ruhai either at that moment and genuflected tremblingly. He poured out the entire matter of how he’d swapped answer scrolls and how he’d hoodwinked others like beans being poured from a bamboo pipe.

Eastern Lu’s face darkened continuously as he listened.

“Then where are the original answer scrolls?

Princess Gouyu took them from the hands of a royal palace guard and presented it forward. “This Ma Datong was somewhat of a smart man and knew to hold something back. He surreptitiously

kept them when Du Ruhai told him to destroy them, and they've acted as a lifesaver."

Witnesses and material evidence were all present.

Following that, a steward who had mimicked Jiang Chen's handwriting also confessed honestly.

All the crimes and evidence pointed to Du Ruhai without a single exception. These people had all been threatened and coerced by Du Ruhai, leaving them no choice but to do so.

Next up were continuous counts of accusations.

Du Ruhai was completely befuddled by what was occurring in his surroundings, and his blood pressure skyrocketed. His facial expression was wretched as he sat down heavily on the ground.

"How can this be, how can this be?"

Suddenly, his eyes glanced at the duke of Soaring Dragon and it was as if Du Ruhai had found a straw to clutch at. "Duke Long, say something on my behalf. I, Du Ruhai, have accomplished things for you before."

At this moment, Du Ruhai was like a pile of turd. Whoever sullied themselves with it would be unlucky. Duke Long's brow faintly creased as he privately cursed "useless" and kicked Du Ruhai away with one leg.

“In this duke’s life, petty villains like you that are greedy and jealous of the virtuous are the most abhorred.” The tone of the duke of Soaring Dragon was filled with disgust, as if disdaining a large fly, one that was to be avoided like the plague.

“Your Majesty, the thing that your subject Long Zhaofeng cannot abide the most in this life are traitors like these. Your subject sincerely requests that Your Majesty pronounce an edict to allow your subject to haul this thief out to behead and display publicly!”

Eastern Lu smiled faintly, thought momentarily, and then actually nodded his head. “We are comforted by Duke Long’s loyalty. Approved!”

Even Jiang Chen was a bit surprised by this development.

Princes Gouyu likewise harbored some confusion. But her confusion aside, she wasn’t about to say something after Eastern Lu had made a decision.

Du Ruhai was frightened out of his sense when he heard those words. “Duke Long, don’t kill me. I’m still of use.”

He also started barking up the wrong tree in his panic. When he saw that the duke of Soaring Dragon was ignoring him, he actually crawled backwards to Jiang Chen, “Young duke Jiang, I was in the wrong. I’m not human. I.... but I have inside information. I was coerced. Young duke Jiang, I know that you’re currently His Majesty’s favorite. Plead on my behalf and I, old Du, will become

your dog from now on. I'll bite whomever you tell me to bite. I have inside information to report. I..."

Jiang Chen had seen some wretched, petty villains after coming to this world, but he hadn't thought that Du Ruhai could take things to another level.

"Du Ruhai, I said that you would regret it when you set a foot wrong. But who would've thought that you would die in Duke Long's hands. What great irony."

Jiang Chen laughed heartily and gave the duke of Soaring Dragon a meaningful look.

He had no need to treat anything as taboo in front of the duke of Soaring Dragon. Even a fool could see Duke Long's shadow behind this matter.

As for why Eastern Lu hadn't uncovered it, it must be because he didn't want to blatantly call out Duke Long, yet. That was to say, it wasn't time to show the cards in hand yet.

Du Ruhai was quickly hauled out and personally beheaded by the duke of Soaring Dragon!

When the duke of Soaring Dragon dragged the bloody, headless corpse in to discharge his duty, even Jiang Chen was a bit impressed by this person's ruthlessness.

Although Du Ruhai was one of his dogs, he was a dog that did Duke Long's bidding.

He'd beheaded Du Ruhai just like he said. He was indeed a fierce and ruthless person.

This disturbance quickly evolved into an anticorruption operation. Eastern Lu was exceedingly wrathful and he gave the order for house raids and execution!

The remaining accomplices were all sent to a distant exile!

As for the victim Jiang Chen's true answer scrolls, after a round of verification from the four examiners, they discovered that the answers were exactly the same, matching the new answer scrolls he'd drawn up that day, with not a single word different.

This way, people were quite amazed by Jiang Chen's astonishing memory.

The truth had come out. As the main organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials, Princess Gouyu immediately announced that Jiang Chen had passed the three foundational exams and were qualified to enter the final exams of the Trials.

"I owe you one."

When court had been dismissed, Jiang Chen nodded towards Princess Gouyu. Jiang Chen was much obliged to this favor as a lot

of trouble would have been necessary otherwise.

"No need!" Princess Gouyu's slender arms waved as she spoke with a businesslike manner. "I am the organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials and it is part of my duties to ensure that each dukedom's heir receives fair and just treatment."

Jiang Chen smiled involuntarily. "Must you be so cocky?"

"Excuse me?" Princess Gouyu's phoenix eyes moved and she asked with a frown.

"Women don't look good when they frown." Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "And, when I say I owe you one, then I owe you one."

"Whatever." Princess Gouyu flipped her wavy hair and her tone was still noncommittal. "Is there anything else? If not, I have many other things to take care of."

One had to say, women's thoughts were always quite odd. Princess Gouyu felt the same towards this Jiang Chen.

Her first impression had indeed been poor the first time she met Jiang Chen. She'd felt that this was a frivolous young man.

These thoughts became more resolute when he'd hotly lectured her during that first meeting.

Following that, Jiang Chen had even more unreservedly bossed around Princess Gouyu and dictated orders when it came to revamping Princess Zhiruo's quarters.

Some bizarre feelings had appeared in Princess Gouyu's heart at that moment, because she had yet to meet someone in her life who'd dared speak to her this way.

And, this person was at least six or seven years younger than her.

Afterwards, when Princess Gouyu learned that Eastern Zhiruos's illness had actually taken a turn for the better after Jiang Chen's diagnoses and treatment, her viewpoint had unknowingly taken a 180 degree turn in that moment.

When Jiang Chen caused the huge disturbance at the Soaring Dragon manor afterwards, Princess Gouyu had to admit that she had misjudged this youth previously.

And now in the present time, Princess Gouyu knew more clearly than anyone else that Jiang Chen was not as simple as he'd previously portrayed himself to be. That so-called fop and dandy who refused to learn and had no martial skills was absolutely a stealthy guise!

But, Princess Gouyu was also a headstrong person. She hadn't received any concessions from Jiang Chen in their previous interactions, and a woman's modesty prevented her from laying down her dignity and speaking calmly with this youth.

However, Jiang Chen had no idea that Princess Gouyu's thoughts were thus, and thought this woman was still holding a grudge because he'd yelled at her that day in the palace.

Smiling wryly at Princess Gouyu's sexy retreating figure, he smiled and increased his voice's volume. "Conflicts of true qi result in difficulties of control. You've been stuck in the ten meridians true qi realm for at least three years now, no? Why have you continued to fail to breakthrough? I'd originally wanted to use this opportunity to return this favor, but forget it since you don't want it."

Princess Gouyu's body that was as proud as a phoenix, vaguely shuddered once with weakness. Her moving lotus-like steps suddenly stopped.

Chapter 39: Giving Gouyu Pointers, Returning Her Favor

With Princess Gouyu's proud nature, if Jiang Chen had said anything else, she would've flatly not turned back again.

But, Jiang Chen had happened to hit on currently her most sensitive, followed most closely, and most worrisome matter!

Yes, she had halted at ten meridians true qi for a good three years. When she was 18, a Princess Gouyu in her prime had shaken off the shackles and broken through nine meridians true qi with one stroke, ascending to ten meridians true qi, becoming the kingdom's youngest true qi master.

In that moment, Princess Gouyu had resolutely affirmed that her life's faith lay in practicing martial dao.

She'd labored all the time during these three years and had pretty much completely thrown all the missions that her royal brother Eastern Lu had handed to her over to Du Ruhai to control.

This was also why Du Ruhai could command the wind and rain in the Hidden Dragon Trials. It really was because she had given him too much power.

But in these three years, no matter how hard she'd tried, ventured out to train, traveled from north to south, she'd been unable to find opportunity needed to breakthrough to eleven

meridians true qi.

That moment of ascension dragged its feet and had failed to arrive.

In these three years, she had tried, fought bravely, acted crazily, and even cried silently in the dark of the night when no one else was around.

But it was as if locks had been placed onto her path of martial dao. She had never been able to enter the halls of eleven meridians true qi.

She almost suspected that she had overestimated herself.

Was ten meridians true qi the upper limit of her potential?

During the time that she had returned to the capital, that was also one of the most downcast, dejected periods of her life.

That cold expression on her forehead spread out lightly, and subtle hints of emotion flashed visibly through her limpid eyes. However, this appearance only appeared for a brief flash.

Princess Gouyu reassumed her cold demeanor afterwards.

“You are young, do not guess wildly at issues of martial dao.”

“Is it really guessing randomly?” Jiang Chen smiled as he sat and waited. “You probably don’t even know that the anxiety you feel at being unable to breakthrough to eleven meridians true qi is written all over your face.

What probably has occurred to you even less is that at this rate, not only will you be unable to breakthrough, but you’re not far off from a cultivation deviation that will backfire on you.

You also have to admit that whenever the sun sets, your emotions become agitated and irritable, as if numerous raging fires are burning crazily in your chest, seeking to reduce you to ashes.

You can deny it, but I still have to say it. Treat it as me returning your favor. As for whether or not you’ll listen, that’s up to you.”

Jiang Chen displayed a kind smile. The smile of a fifteen or sixteen year old youth was the most brilliant and filled with sunshine, and also one to most easily dispel a gloomy haze.

Indeed, this kind smile caused the headstrong Princess Gouyu to surprisingly refrain from kicking up her heels and leaving, refuting Jiang Chen, but rather to look at him with a complicated gaze.

To look at a youth she understood less and less.

“Your potential, the method that you’re training in, all are all enough for you to breakthrough to the eleventh current of true qi.

Your body embodies even the potential to try for spirit dao.

But unfortunately, you're too bent on victory. Your headstrong personality has affected your state of mind."

"So what?" Princess Gouyu was a bit dissatisfied but still wished Jiang Chen to quickly continue speaking.

"Very simple, one word – tranquility." Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "The fire in you burns too hotly, resulting in an overabundance of yang qi within your body and causing an imbalance in your yin and yang. This affects the circulation of your meridians. Add to that your impatient nature, and it further weakens your control over your meridians."

"That it?" Princess Gouyu didn't seem to quite believe him.

"If you say it's simple, then it's that simple. But if you say it's not simple, it's also not that simple. Training in martial dao is not merely reading books and theory, but one must cultivate a state of tranquility and banish the demons of the heart. How is that simple? With your personality, I feel that the difficulty will be high. Have you not discovered that you're walking closer and closer to a cultivation deviation?"

Princess Gouyu was moved. A trace of low spirits flashed across the unparalleled beauty of her face. She really didn't want to admit it, but instinct told her that the truth was such.

Suddenly, her slightly frowning eyebrows lifted lightly and she blurted out a question, “Jiang Chen, do you have any ways to resolve this?”

Princess Gouyu had almost used up all her strength in asking this question. She even felt that she was truly weak. Why was she so childish as to ask him for answers? If he said he didn’t know, how ugly would that be?

Gouyu’s emotions were extremely complex in the span of a moment and she didn’t even have the courage to meet Jiang Chen’s eyes. The look from this youth seemed like it would pierce through metallic rocks and directly breach her inner mind.

“I said that I owe you one.” Jiang Chen smiled. “I’m going to go see Princess Zhiruo, would you like to come?”

Princess Gouyu stamped her foot, but cowardly her feet still betrayed her into following him.

Princess Zhiruo was overjoyed to see Jiang Chen. Her entire being seemed like it would fly up in her elation as looks of incomparably happiness shot out from her eyes.

“Brother Jiang Chen, didn’t you say you would come once a month? Is today’s visit because you missed Zhiruo?” The little girl was young and naturally had few reservations when she talked.

“How could I be at ease if I didn’t look in on you. What if they

tortured you and didn't follow my instructions? If anything happens to you, then my head will be chopped off to accompany you." Jiang Chen was equally relaxed and casual around Princess Zhiruo.

The two laughed and talked without any trace of estrangement.

The newly arrived Princess Gouyu witnessed this scene and felt a bit odd in her heart. She rather envied the fact that they could chat so intimately.

But she also vaguely felt that this wasn't quite appropriate.

But she said nothing in the end.

"Auntie, you've come to see me. How wonderful, Zhiruo has seen two of her most beloved people in the span of a second today. What joy!"

"Zhiruo, go fetch brush and paper, I'm going to write something down for your aunt." Jiang Chen held an attitude of I'm-the-boss. He was also the only person who dared ordered Eastern Zhiruo around like this in the entire kingdom.

Even Eastern Lu was too tender hearted to order his daughter around like a maid.

But, this little girl was eating this up and ran off happily, as if an adult had given a candy to a child, full of energy.

She seemed to be honored to do something for Jiang Chen.

After receiving the brush and paper, Jiang Chen mused silently for a moment as he held the brush, and then began to write.

Two forms were quickly written.

“The first form is a set of incantations to smooth your qi. Take it back for some study, it will absolutely be of use to you in seeking tranquility. As for the second form, it’s a prescription. You can take it to prescribe medication for yourself.” Jiang Chen stuffed those two items into Princess Gouyu’s hands with a fluid motion.

She accepted them with robotic movements.

“You must be thinking, you’re just a silly brat, you’re bamming me with these things?” Jiang Chen smiled merrily. “You can choose to believe, or you can choose to not believe. Either way, I’ve returned the favor.

Oh right, if you truly don’t believe me, then you can take the prescription and auction it off at the Hall of Healing. Perhaps it can bring in three or five million silver for you.”

Jiang Chen started wandering around Princess Zhiruo’s quarters after he’d left those instructions.

The crouching yang stone had been placed according to his instructions. But for the time being, these crouching yang stones were still dead items that were not communicating with each other and had yet to form a matrix effect.

However, this was the most that he could do at this moment. With his current level of training, it would be a bit unrealistic to manipulate a matrix.

Temporarily speaking, it was more form than function. It would be quite decent if it could expand a tenth of its power.

“Alright, you two have a lovely chat, I’ve still things to do and need to go. Don’t be mischievous little one, don’t forget the things I told you.”

Jiang Chen felt that the scene’s atmosphere was a bit odd and decided to take his leave.

Eastern Zhiruo was a bit depressed. “Brother Jiang Chen, leaving when you’ve just arrived? Don’t worry, Zhiruo will live healthily for Brother Jiang Chen, and won’t drag you down with me.”

Jiang Chen was speechless after hearing those words and took his leave.

Princess Gouyu glared at Jiang Chen’s retreating figure and muttered, “This person loves to boast cockily.”

“Heh heh, Auntie, it’s not kind to say bad things about someone behind their back.” The little girl laughed mischievously. “Not to mention that someone had just benefited from that cocky person.”

“Alright you little brat, you’re biased towards outsiders and forget about your own family?” Princess Gouyu was quite close with this niece, and they acted more like sisters usually.

The sounds of laughter, giggling and play chasing sounded. Sounds of joy filled the entire yard in that moment.

Jiang Chen’s mind had finally calmed down when he left the palace, and he was summarizing the gains and losses of the day when a crowd of men and horses came up the street.

The leader was clad heavily in body armor. It was the leader of the Jiang family Iron Guard, Jiang Ying.

“Young duke, Duke Jiang has ordered me to come aid you.” Jiang Ying jumped down from his horse with smooth, practiced movement. His eyes were filled with wariness and they observed the vicinity in between his words.

“Uncle Ying, what are you doing here?” Jiang Chen’s thoughts raced as he seemed to immediately understand something.

“Let’s discuss after we’ve escorted the young duke back to the manor.” The contingent of Iron Guard had already surrounded Jiang Chen in the protective care of their core as Jiang Ying spoke.

“Has something happened?” Jiang Chen asked lowly.

“When His Lordship was leaving just now, he was ambushed at the door of the manor. The situation is quite chaotic in the capital, thus His Lordship has ordered me to come aid the young duke.”

“What? Was my father hurt?” Jiang Chen’s face darkened. It seemed like he’d underestimated the chaotic situation in the capital.

“Just some light injuries, he will be fine with a few days’ rest.” Jiang Ying’s eyes constantly patrolled the area like a hawk as he responded. His level of wariness was quite high.

“Who did it? Do we have any clues?” Jiang Chen relaxed slightly upon hearing that his father was seriously incapacitated. To be honest, the first person that he had identified with upon arriving on this world was that adorable father of his.

“I haven’t had the time to investigate.” Jiang Ying responded simply.

“Hmph. Looks like they were unable to take our Jiang land with the spirit vein through wit, so now they’re prepared to use force.” Jiang Chen could use merely his toes to figure out that this must be another hand that the duke of Soaring Dragon, Long Zhaofeng, had played.

Du Ruhai played the role of a striker in blocking Jiang Chen in the three foundational exams. Now add to that the attack on his father at the front door — this was obviously a string of interconnected attacks.

Jiang Chen was enraged, truly enraged from the bottom of his heart.

The provocation that he'd been greeted with since coming to this world were all small interludes of minor fights and scuffles in Jiang Chen's eyes. He had always viewed them with a detached attitude.

But now, a bloody truth was in front of him. This wasn't a minor scuffle, but a bloodthirsty fight to the death.

"Long Zhaofeng..." Jiang Chen silently repeated this name in his heart, a strong urge to kill rushing to the forefront for the first time.

Chapter 40: Father Attacked, Controversy Renewed

What Jiang Chen and Jiang Ying both hadn't thought of, was the fact that the duke of Jiang Han, Jiang Feng, had an injury that wasn't as simple as it appeared to be. He hadn't merely suffered a small wound.

His opponent had actually applied poison to the blade of the knife, and it was a violent and swift acting poison!

In the short time that Jiang Ying had gone out to escort Jiang Chen – less than an hour – Jiang Feng's injuries had quickly deteriorated.

When Jiang Chen had returned to the manor, the duke of Jiang Han had already sank into a coma and his face was as black as cinders.

"Young duke, Master Ying, you've finally back. His Lordship..." The head steward of the manor, Jiang Fu, was so worried that tears had streaked down his face.

Jiang Chen combined three steps into two as he rushed to Jiang Feng, "Father!"

Jiang Feng's consciousness had already sank into a coma. He merely groaned slightly, and his eyelids didn't even open.

Jiang Ying's fierce eyes were filled with thick regret. As the head of the Jiang family Iron Guard, it was his dereliction of duty in not properly protecting the duke.

"Your Lordship, your subordinate has failed you and can only thank you with my death." Jiang Ying pulled out the dagger at his waist with a clang and slashed at his own neck.

Jiang Chen's elbow bumped him slightly, just so happening to bump into the area between Jiang Ying's waist and ribcage. Jiang Ying felt his arm go numb. Unable to firmly grasp the knife in his hands, the dagger fell to the ground with a clank.

"Jiang Ying, it's easy for a man to die. Toiling to live in the face of hardship is the difficult part. You're not going to tell me that the head of our Jiang family Iron Guard is a coward, are you?"

Jiang Chen's tone was cold and severe, and it carried a few traces of a lecturing tone.

It was as if lightning had struck Jiang Ying. How comical was this scene? When had the young duke started lecturing like this? When had a foppish dandy that had given Jiang Ying headaches become equipped with such skill? Causing him to be unable to hold his waist dagger firmly with a careless bump?

Jiang Chen paid no more attention to Jiang Ying and asked Jiang Fu, "Have we sent for a doctor?"

“Yes we have. We’ve sent for three or four doctors and they all left without another word when they saw this situation. They were so scared that their faces had turned green.” Jiang Fu’s words were said with a tearful tone.

This type of poison had spread incredibly fast. If it wasn’t for the fact that Jiang Feng was a strong practitioner at nine meridians true qi, an ordinary person would’ve long since succumbed to death.

How could ordinary doctors, who had never seen this kind of poison, be able to cure it?

“Have none of the spirit alchemists been by?” Jiang Chen asked.

Jiang Fu was distressed. “I went in person to the Pill King Garden but was met with ridicule and mockery. I have no connections with the other two places.”

The Pill King Garden had always been in partnership with the Jiang family. Therefore Jiang Fu had not given it too much thought when he went to the Garden to ask for a spirit alchemist. He’d been subjected to a good round of ridicule and sneering, and it made him so angry that his entire body had shook.

Jiang Chen was speechless. This Jiang Fu was turning to any doctor he could find in his time of need. It would be a bizarre thing indeed if the Pill King Garden was willing to come cure Jiang Feng now.

Who knew, perhaps the Garden had even had a hand in the business with the poison.

After all, the situation now was quite clear. The Pill King Garden had thrown their lot in with the duke of Soaring Dragon and become a biting dog at his behest.

Jiang Chen did not sit idly by. He placed his fingers on Jiang Feng's pulse as his brow creased faintly.

Jiang Chen had also conducted much research on the matters of employing poison in his past life.

He thought for a moment, stood up, and called for Jiang Fu to bring brush and paper, writing out a list.

"Jiang Fu, make a trip to the Hall of Healing and give this list to the third hallmaster Qiao Baishi. Also, ask him to come by with the items on the list."

Jiang Chen fished around in his pockets and gave the engraved dragon medallion to Jiang Ying. "Uncle Ying, take this item and accompany Jiang Fu."

Jiang Chen was calm in the face of panic and orderly in his measures.

For some reason, Jiang Ying had suddenly mysteriously grown a bit of confidence towards the young duke since being lectured by

him just now.

“I hear and obey.” Jiang Ying knew that saving a life was as urgent as dousing a fire and he grabbed Jiang Fu, hauling him as he flew out the door.

One had to say, Qiao Baishi gave Jiang Chen a lot of face. He had arrived at the Jiang manor with the spirit medicines on the list in less than five minutes.

Qiao Baishi was also extremely shocked to see Jiang Feng’s condition.

After a moment’s diagnosis, his expression became even more grave. There were hints of incomprehension in his expression, some of deep musing and a bit of helplessness.

“Young duke Jiang, His Lordship has been poisoned. Of that there can be no doubt. But the theory behind this poison is difficult for me to grasp. I’m afraid that I am helpless with my mere level of practice. The lord hallmaster is highly resourceful and has extraordinary powers, but he unfortunately set out on a trip yesterday…”

Qiao Baishi’s tone carried regret and apology. He looked at Jiang Chen, momentarily at a loss of how to comfort him.

And, he was also internally shocked. To think that the situation within the capital would suddenly deteriorate to this! A regional

duke had been ambushed on the doorsteps of his own house!

“Third hallmaster, in your mind, how many have the ability to use this poison within the capital?”

Qiao Baishi furrowed his brow in deep thought, and responded after a long while. “The three heavyweights in spirit medicine in the capital are all not particularly adept at using poison. I theorize that this wasn’t the work of a poison expert within the capital.

Young duke, the poison in your father has invaded the blood vessels. We must hurry and take action. Why not act according to the usual methods of treatment, and pierce the acupoints with silver needles in order to let out the poisoned blood?”

Although Qiao Bai could not fully grasp the workings of this poison, he knew treating poison usually followed this procedure. Bleeding out the poisoned blood first could at least slow down the speed in which the poison would attack the heart.

However, Jiang Chen shook his head. “No, we would be falling into the other’s trap if we use silver needles to pierce the acupoints. This poison is not one of blood, but one of the nerves. If we use silver needles to stimulate the acupoints, this will only cause the poison to spread faster.”

“What?” Qiao Baishi was extremely astonished. This was the first time that he had heard something like this.

Even the expressions of Jiang Ying and those on the sidelines changed drastically upon hearing these words.

Treating this poison in the usual way would actually increase the speed of the poison. It was a good thing that they hadn't fancied themselves clever and used the silver needles. Otherwise, wasn't this placing the duke in even greater danger?

Qiao Baishi suddenly remembered something and his brows quirked. "Young duke, you wrote a list for me and told me to bring those spirit medicines over. Do you already have a way to cure it?"

Jiang Chen nodded lightly. "If the level of my practice were similar to my father's, I would be able to easily cure him of this poison. However, my father's level is much higher than mine and thus it will take some effort to cure him. But I have my ways.

Jiang Fu, prepare a secret room.

Jiang Ying, activate the manor's highest level of alert!

Third hallmaster, thank you for making the trip. Please wait here, I will come chat with you when I have cured my father of the poison."

Qiao Baishi found it difficult to scratch the itch in his heart upon hearing Jiang Chen's words. He had never seen this kind of poison before and really wanted to observe from the side. But he also knew that there couldn't be a moment of distraction during the

process of curing the poison, so he fiercely contained his curiosity.

But he would never agree to returning to the Hall at this moment if someone told him to. He wouldn't give up this prime opportunity to broaden his perspectives.

Besides, he also wanted to use this opportunity to fully understand the theory behind curing this poison.

As a spirit alchemist, Qiao Baishi was an avid scholar. How could he miss a chance to learn and increase his skills?

He was willing to wait for ten days and ten nights without even the slightest crease of his brow – not to mention for just a short while.

This poison, although extremely incomprehensible in the ingredients used, wasn't enough to stump the widely knowledgeable Jiang Chen. Although there were some uncommon methods used in the application of this poison that confounded even Qiao Baishi, a hallmaster in the Hall of Healing. Whoever had used the poison would count as an adept in using poison.

To Jiang Chen though, these tricks were all still at the pediatrics level.

One had to know, Jiang Chen had spent millions of years in studying the dao of alchemy in his past life, what had he not seen? Many of the alchemy immortals had often come to ask questions of

Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen in his prior life was a wastrel in the aspect of training martial dao, but was a preeminent master at the level of being able to laugh proudly at the heavens in terms of the dao of alchemy.

In the entire process of Jiang Chen preventing Jiang Ying from committing suicide, instructing them to bring back Qiao Baishi, writing the list and conversing with Qiao Baishi just now, he had actually been continuously contemplating how to cure the poison.

Finally, he settled on a method that was most reliable for a cure.

After entering the secret room, Jiang Chen thoroughly crushed all the spirit medicine and completely dispersed them using vast waves true qi, incorporating the medicine into the true qi and conducting them into Jiang Feng's body.

The theory of using true qi to conduct medicine seemed simple in theory, but it wasn't something that just anyone could use to cure a poison.

First of all, the two people's true qi must be of a common origin and could not have even the slightest bit of conflict. Otherwise the true qi would oppose each other, and the slightest conflict between the true qi would be enough to stimulate the poison and result in the poison spreading in all directions.

This process wouldn't tolerate the slightest bit of interference.

For Jiang Chen, the only problem lay in the difference between his six meridians true qi and Jiang Feng's nine meridians true qi. Since this was the case, he would have to be careful of the poison counterattacking while he was in the process of curing his father.

It was a good thing that Jiang Feng was in a poison induced coma. Although his consciousness still went through the motions of manipulating true qi out of habit, there was no way he could actually activate the limits of his true qi.

Add to that the fact that Jiang Chen was practicing the "Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans", a method that was hundreds of times more sophisticated than Jiang Feng's "Vast Waves Method".

Therefore, Jiang Chen's vast waves true qi enjoyed absolute advantage and solidly conducted itself into Jiang Feng's body, carrying the antidote medicines to all corners of Jiang Feng's body.

In this matter, the process of curing the poison became simple.

Jiang Feng leisurely woke up after an hour.

"Chen'er, you've cured me of my poison?" Jiang Feng immediately extended his senses and was even more surprised. "Such rich and pure vast waves true qi, you... Chen'er, what level is your 'Vast Waves Method'?"

Jiang Feng thought the rich and pure vast waves true qi were

simply incredible.

Jiang Chen chuckled, “Father, I wanted to talk to you about this matter. I’m practicing not the “Vast Waves Method”, but the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans”. “Vast Waves Method” is merely an offshoot of it, and is a method that shares a common origin with it.”

“Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans?” Jiang Feng had become completely petrified.

“Yes, for instance. This Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans is like the old ancestor of the “Vast Waves Method”. Father, find your inner peace and I’ll tell you. Practice the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans” from now on and I promise that you’ll break through the shackles of the nine meridians true qi within a month, and join the ranks of the true qi masters!”

Within the realm of true qi, ten meridians true qi to twelve meridians true qi were all called true qi masters.

Becoming a true qi master meant entering the top levels of the true qi realm. The practitioner was bound to become the apex of the strong in the Eastern Kingdom!

It was as if Jiang Feng was in a dream, and his expression still had not fully recovered.

But Jiang Chen’s next sentence still fully flabberghasted him.

“Father, this “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans” is an advanced method. Practicing this method will grant you a seventy percent chance to assail the spirit dao realm!”

“Spirit dao realm?” Jiang Feng was utterly gobsmacked.

The spirit dao realm was a legendary existence to the superior practitioners in the Eastern Kingdom. It was said that in the entire hundreds of years of the Eastern Kingdom’s existence, only one had appeared!

Ascending to spirit dao was like becoming a golden scaled dragon. One would soar into the heavens, rise meteorically, break the worldly cage, and soar over the clouds!

Chapter 41: Talk Of The Town

Jiang Chen walked out of the secret room after roughly four hours.

To be honest, the process of curing the poison had only taken about an hour. Jiang Chen had then taken another hour to fully pass onto his father all the aspects of the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans”.

In addition to that, Jiang Chen had used this time to go over the mysteries, the keys to training in, and several details of the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans”.

Bridging the gap between the “Vast Waves Method” to the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans” wasn’t that difficult. After all, the “Vast Waves Method” was derived from the ““Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans”.

The “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans” was merely an upgraded method at the end of the day.

Of course, the mysteries contained within the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans” were more than ten times that of “Vast Waves Method”.

As a duke of a territory, Jiang Feng’s potential was quite good. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have been able to train to the peak level of the “Vast Waves Method” at thirty some odd years old.

If it hadn't been for the restrictions of the method, his current level of practice would definitely not be as simple as nine meridians true qi. With Jiang Feng's potential, it was a sure bet that he would enter the ranks of the true qi masters.

When Jiang Chen walked out from the secret room, Jiang Ying and everyone else immediately rushed up to him.

"Young duke, His Lordship..." Jiang Ying was the most concerned with Jiang Feng's well-being. He was admonishing himself quite severely, and he felt that the duke had been hurt because he hadn't properly protected him.

"Father has sealed the doors." Jiang Chen didn't precisely explain why.

Jiang Feng was naturally going to make use of the opportunity of gaining the "Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans" to assail ten meridians true qi. After all, he had spent quite enough time occupying the peak of nine meridians true qi.

Now that he had received a method heritage, this was a tremendous opportunity bestowed by heaven. He made use of this excuse to seal his doors, one to confound the outside world, and two to increase his strength. This was killing two birds with one stone.

Qiao Baishi was obviously already viewing Jiang Chen as an ally. He walked over, extremely concerned. "Young duke, how is your

father's injury?"

"Thank you for your concern third hallmaster, my father's injury is no longer a serious concern. I will personally pay a visit to the Hall of Healing in a few days to thank the third hallmaster for making this trip. However, I would like to request the third hallmaster to keep the events of today a secret."

"Naturally." Qiao Baishi was well aware of Jiang Chen's intentions.

With the current situation in the capital, obfuscating the status of Jiang Feng's injury would possibly cause the outside world to not have a full grasp of the picture and therefore be unwilling to act rashly.

Seeing that Qiao Baishi sported a face that yearned for knowledge, Jiang Chen smiled. "I will explain to the third hallmaster in detail the method I used in curing the poison when I have time."

Qiao Baishi smiled broadly, he had been waiting for this sentence. As a spirit alchemist, Qiao Baishi was eager for knowledge, of this Jiang Chen was well aware of.

After sending off Qiao Baishi, Jiang Chen gathered Jiang Ying and the others.

"Jiang Ying, the manor needs increased security in these days.

There can be no carelessness about this.

Jiang Fu, handle the matter of the duke's injury in an ambiguous way. Let the outside world speculate as much as possible, it would be best if it became the talk of the town."

"Yes." Unbeknownst to everyone, they had all grown used to taking orders from the young duke Jiang Chen.

It was as if the news that the duke of Jiang Han had been ambushed on his own doorstep grew legs, and it spread like wildfire.

Rumors and speculations abounded in a moment as this issue became the talk of the town.

The vaunted duke of a territory and a provincial magnate had been ambushed on his own doorstep, and it was said that his injuries weren't light – that his life was in precarious danger.

This gave all the other dukes a sudden sense of danger.

Even though they could all guess that the duke of Jiang Han had offended someone he shouldn't have, resulting in his demise, but still, even the duke of a province had experienced an assassination attempt in the capital. Some of the dukes even held sympathy for one of their own kind.

After all, the duke of Jiang Han was the unlucky one today, but

tomorrow? Who knew if it'd be someone else's turn.

Once a precedent had been set for things like this, no one knew what else might happen afterwards.

Apart from those who were unfriendly with the duke of Jiang Han, other dukes who were neutral were quite sympathetic towards the Duke Jiang's circumstances.

Within the Soaring Dragon manor.

The duke of Soaring Dragon was holding a private banquet within his manor and was feting his honored guests.

Those who could appear at such an exceedingly private banquet were all esteemed guests and the duke of Soaring Dragon's best friends and confidantes.

Beside the main seat, next to the edge of Duke Long's seat, sat a man wearing silver long robes with fey and strange flowers embroidered on them.

This man emanated a phantom and exotic air. His hair was like a yin yang fish – half of it was black, while the other half was a silvery grey, clearly delineating the left and right sides of his head.

Tranquil blue light flashed out of a pair of eyes, suffused with a bizarre, elusive aura.

“Master Violet, I personally salute you with this cup of wine.” The duke of Soaring Dragon lifted his cup and said to the fey and exotic man.

“Heh heh, Your Lordship is too polite. Drink!” The exotic man was quite straightforward as he threw his head back and drained his glass.

Grand Courtmaster Wang from the Pill King Garden laughed sinisterly, “Thanks to Master Violet’s action this time. Otherwise it would’ve taken quite a bit of effort to kill Jiang Feng without anyone noticing.”

The exotic man Master Violet laughed faintly, but unceremoniously accepted Courtmaster Wang’s flattery with no hint of humility.

The duke of Yanmen, Yan Jiuzhuang, chuckled. “Without Jiang Feng, those within the Jiang Han household will be a host of dragons without a head. That brat Jiang Chen is a mere sixteen years old, how much insight and capability can he possibly have? Without Jiang Feng, the Jiang family business will find it difficult to defend itself. We will be one step closer to what the duke of Soaring Dragon seeks.”

The duke of Soaring Dragon chuckled merrily. “Getting rid of Jiang Feng was the first step. The second step is to seize the Jiang Han dukedom. Only when the medallion signifying the ownership of that dukedom is in the hands of our own people will this step be

viewed as complete and perfect."

"That Jiang Han steward Jiang Fu was so pitiful. He actually came to my Pill King Garden to ask for a spirit alchemist to save Jiang Feng. It looks like the Jiang family is turning to any doctor they can find in their time of need." Courtmaster Wang felt that he had vented quite a bit of his ill humor whenever he thought of this.

"And what of Jiang Feng's injury?" The duke of Soaring Dragon asked.

Courtmaster Wang hastily responded. "With Master Violet making his move, Jiang Feng is dead without a doubt. Even a true qi master would find no antidote if struck with this poison, much less his nine meridians true qi."

"The Jiang family and the Hall of Healing have a strong relationship, I am worried that the Hall may come between our goal." The duke of Soaring Dragon still wasn't at ease, since he hadn't seen Jiang Feng die.

Master Violet said lightly, "Duke Long is overly worried. With my methods, even the Lord Hallmaster of that Hall of Healing would only have a thirty percent chance of understanding what happened. And that Lord Hallmaster Song Tianxing was not present in the capital the last couple of days. Those left in the Hall, heh, are all worthless."

Master Violet's tone was wildly arrogant, and he held extreme confidence in his methods of poison.

The duke of Soaring Dragon also seemed to rely heavily upon this person. He smiled, “Your aid in this time’s matter is representative of even the heavens helping me.”

“Duke Long, I will not spend too much time on polite words. You and I have both gained what we need. Don’t forget to materialize what you have promised me today, after you seize the throne in the future.”

“This duke is hardly someone who burns bridges after crossing them. Be at ease Master Violet, when I ascend to the throne in the future, the position of minister of the state will be yours without a doubt. However, the caveat is that you must help the Pill King Garden topple the Hall of Healing. Before I start my business, I don’t want such a mammoth figure as the Hall of Healing standing on the side of the Eastern clan.”

Master Violet said faintly, “If I couldn’t handle even this little bit of business, what right would I have to haggle over rewards with Duke Long?”

The duke of Soaring Dragon laughed heartily and raised his glass again, “Then here’s to a happy partnership and to building a great cause together!”

Within the depths of the palace, Eastern Lu had also received the news of the ambush at the Jiang Han manor.

“Tiandu, what is the latest news?” Eastern Lu was in an

exceedingly poor mood. He had just taken down Du Ruhai today, and had obliquely struck at Duke Long's arrogance.

Who would've thought that this Long Zhaofeng would pull out this on the flipside, and pointed the spearhead at Jiang Feng.

If Jiang Feng died because of this, the impact to the royal family would undoubtedly be greater than the one caused by the pruning of Du Ruhai. Regardless of how one looked at it, it was still him, Eastern Lu, who had come up short.

After all, Jiang Feng was a provincial magnate and his meaning in recent strategy had increased abruptly.

Du Ruhai was just a minor character. In the capital, his influence made him out to be someone on the outskirts, someone who was unable to make it into the inner circle.

"Your Majesty, things don't look so good. The Jiang family has sent for the third hallmaster of the Hall of Healing, but the third hallmaster left not too long after arriving. It would seem that Jiang Feng's injury is not very optimistic."

Eastern Lu violently threw his cup onto the ground, his tone sinister and cold. "Long Zhaofeng, are you publicly putting aside all considerations for royal face?"

"Your Majesty please cease to be angry. Long Zhaofeng is demonstrating his power this way, it's likely that his preparations

are not yet complete. Your Majesty still has much time to prepare."

Eastern Lu immediately resumed his royal dignity after his brief rage. "We must greatly comfort and appease the Jiang family in this issue no matter what. We must also prepare for the worst. If Jiang Feng succumbs, how to help Jiang Chen successfully navigate the transition will be an exceedingly difficult problem."

This was indeed the case. If Jiang Feng died, they would be hard pressed to convince the public that Jiang Chen, at the age of sixteen, should immediately inherit the dukedom.

Would the powers on the Jiang Han territory that the duke of Jiang Han ruled over submit to a teenager, much less the officials and courtiers at court?

A duke's territory encompassed a wide area of land, with many cities that had many powers deeply rooted and interlocked with each other. If there wasn't a strong duke ruling over them, then these local powers would be the first to jump out in rebellion.

"Your Majesty, no matter what, we must appease Jiang Chen. Otherwise, if he slackens, it will be disadvantageous to Princess Zhiruo's illness."

Eastern Lu nodded his head, feeling likewise. Eastern Zhiruo's illness dictated that Eastern Lu couldn't discard Jiang Chen, to say nothing of the strategic meaning of the Jiang father and son in opposing the duke of Soaring Dragon.

“Tiandu, go select a few strong underlings and send them to the Jiang manor. I am worried that targeting Jiang Feng was merely the first step. To fully seize the Jiang dukedom, Jiang Chen will undoubtedly be some people’s next target. Nothing must happen to Jiang Chen.”

“Your subject understands.” Tiandu nodded.

“Go get Gouyu.” Eastern Lu rubbed his forehead slightly, a bit tired. At this moment, only his sister Gouyu could set Eastern Lu’s mind at rest.

When Princess Gouyu had learned of the ambush on Jiang Feng, she also felt surprised and inexplicable. She had just finished raiding Du Ruhai’s home when she heard of Eastern Lu’s summons, and immediately hurried back to the palace.

She prayed inwardly for Jiang Chen, hoping that nothing would happen to Jiang Feng.

Chapter 42: Jiang Chen Has The Desire To Kill And Points To Pill King Garden

What many people didn't understand, was that even though the ambush on Jiang Feng became the talk of town, the anticipated great storm and waves didn't follow.

There were no major movements from the royal family.

The duke of Soaring Dragon also didn't seem to take any action.

The oddest thing was, the Jiang manor also didn't make any major moves. It was as if Jiang Feng being ambushed was just a small interlude, and it didn't cause major ripples.

Jiang Chen also kept an extraordinarily low profile. He stayed within the manor, kept a handle on the situation, and threw himself into training.

The Jiang Chen of now, after practicing "Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans", used the vast waves true qi to strengthen his meridians everyday. He had long since forged his six meridians to become extremely strong and durable.

If you add to that the stimulus and support provided by spirit medicine, Jiang Chen's six meridians could be labeled as containing the vigor of dragons and ferocity of tigers. They were full of vitality and held extreme explosiveness.

Jiang Chen had also successfully located his seventh acupoint through the “True Acupoint Resonance” method. However, a noticeable moat existed between six meridians true qi and seven meridians true qi.

Six meridians true qi counted only as the intermediate realm of true qi.

Seven meridians true qi would be the advanced realm of true qi.

Moving forward just one small step here meant a great increase in level. So therefore, against this hurdle, any practitioner would face more resistance towards their ascension.

It was the same for Jiang Chen. He was in no hurry to attack the barriers to breakthrough before he had found the appropriate timing.

About four or five days after the ambush, Jiang Chen still kept a low profile as he paid a visit to the Hall of Healing.

Qiao Baishi had been waiting with bated breath at the Hall of Healing. His eyes lit up when he saw that Jiang Chen had arrived. He had been waiting for the stars, the moon, and finally successfully awaited for Jiang Chen’s arrival.

“Young duke Jiang, I’ve finally awaited your arrival.” Qiao Baishi was overjoyed and he directly invited Jiang Chen to the secret room.

“What’s wrong?” Jiang Chen felt it was rather odd that Qiao Baishi had such a discreet manner about him.

“Young duke Jiang, our partnership must move forward earlier than planned.” Qiao Baishi cut straight the point. “We’ve gathered news from many different avenues that the Pill King Garden is researching a new type of miraculous medicine for healing, in preparation for storming the market. If the Pill King Garden obtains the first mover advantage, then it would be a fatal blow for our Hall.”

Qiao Baishi was indeed a bit anxious. He hadn’t thought that the Pill King Garden would suddenly play this hand.

One had to say, the hand that the Pill King Garden had played had come with unexpected swiftness, catching the Hall of Healing off guard.

“Pill King Garden?” A hint of killing intent flashed through Jiang Chen’s eyes when he heard these three words. He naturally wouldn’t have forgotten how the Pill King Garden had suppressed his Jiang family at the Soaring Dragon manor.

And, he would never believe that the Pill King Garden hadn’t had a hand in the ambush of his father this time. Instinct told Jiang Chen that there was definitely the Pill King Garden’s shadow behind all of this.

“What exactly happened?” Jiang Chen was unflustered. If it was

a matchup of healing medicine, he didn't believe that anyone could outdo him, Jiang Chen, within the capital.

"This is how things stand: In seven days time, the Pill King Garden will hold an exhibit for pill medicine in the largest marketplace in the capital. It's said that they will feature a new spirit medicine called the "Dragon and Tiger's Blood pill". It's a supreme rank pill for healing physical injuries and its effectiveness is the utmost. It will reign victorious over any other pill in the same category that's on the market currently."

Qiao Baishi's tone held a few traces of refusal to submit at this point. The Hall of Healing was the publicly acclaimed number one heavyweight in the world of spirit medicine in the Eastern Kingdom.

In terms of spirit medicine business, the Hall of Healing occupied half of the market territory just by itself.

As for the Farmer God Temple and the Pill King Garden, they, along with some other small, scattered vendors, occupied the other half of the market.

If the Pill King Garden was allowed to make a big splash with the "Dragon and Tiger's Blood pill" and gain the first mover advantage, then it would be an exceedingly huge blow to the Hall of Healing.

First would be the blow to reputation. The Pill King Garden could only count as a third heavyweight in the spirit medicine market in

the Eastern Kingdom. If it was able to thoroughly beat the Hall of Healing black and blue in the segment of healing panaceas, then it would undoubtedly be a huge blow to the Hall's face.

Secondly would be the blow to business. Everyone knew that healing pill medicines were the largest market in the pill medicine arena. Pill medicines were also finished goods, different from spirit medicines that had to be cultivated. Its prices were often quite astonishing. If the Pill King Garden was able to completely eat up this market, then its strength would be sure to greatly increase after a few years. But in terms of competition, others decrease when another increases. Who knew, perhaps the position of number one spirit medicine heavyweight in the Eastern Kingdom would change hands in ten years.

No matter how one looked at it, the Hall of Healing would not sit idly by and watch the Pill King Garden rise to power.

Jiang Chen had also heard these connotations from the words that Qiao Baishi had spoken.

"The Pill King Garden suddenly becoming so high profile likely means that they have completely thrown their lot in with the duke of Soaring Dragon and found a big backer!" Jiang Chen laughed coldly. "This move is likely their first step in a declaration of war on the Hall of Healing. Third hallmaster, forgive my candor. The ambitions of the Pill King Garden are great, and they are mostly likely rushing at an aim of replacing the the Hall of Healing."

Qiao Baishi's face was ashen, "My Hall of Healing has occupied the position of number one spirit medicine heavyweight in the

Eastern Kingdom for hundreds of years. As a latecomer upstart, the ambitions of the Pill King Garden are simply a bit too great. Young duke Jiang, I don't wish to put on any airs. As of today, your house and mine are actually two grasshoppers tied on the same string."

Jiang Chen smiled leisurely, "If they were to put on the exhibit tomorrow, then we really wouldn't have enough time. Seven days from now leaves us a lot of time."

Qiao Baishi's severe expression relaxed slightly upon hearing Jiang Chen's words.

"Can we refine the Heavenly Karma Pill in seven days?" Qiao Baishi couldn't really make an estimate and spoke these words with hesitation.

"Third hallmaster, do you only want to refine the Heavenly Karma Pill? Playing it by ear means always residing in passivity. We make not a move because we choose to, but when we do, we need to make such a move that the Pill King Garden has no room and ability to counter us!"

An astounding aura pillced between Jiang Chen's brows. He had finally revealed his long concealed extraordinariness!

"Young duke Jiang, do you possibly have other plans?" Never would have Qiao Baishi thought that Jiang Chen's appetite would be even bigger than what he'd imagined.

“Tell me first, what is the pill medicine that the Pill King Garden is most proud of, and thus the basis of their footing in the capital? Or to put it another way, what is their core competency?”

Qiao Baishi mused silently for a moment and said, “A large half of the Pill King Garden’s business is concentrated in two areas. One of which is pill medicine that replenishes and gathers qi, and the other pill medicine that clears internal fire and calms the mind.”

Pill medicine that replenishes and gathers qi were largely used in battle. The situation of depleting true qi often appeared in battles between the strong. At that moment, a pill medicine that replenished and gathered qi would serve the function of instantaneously replenishing qi.

Clearing internal fire and calming the mind was used more often in training. Martial dao practitioners often faced numerous internal demons when training, and maintaining a dispassionate self was something that a practitioner had to achieve at all times. Except, a practitioner’s internal demons were not that easy to control, so pill medicine that cleared one’s internal fire and calmed the mind were employed to control internal demons and prevent practitioners from a cultural deviation.

The coincidental thing was, Jiang Chen had written out a list for for Princess Gouyu a few days ago, and its use was to clear internal fire and calm the mind. It wasn’t a pill recipe, just a regular medicine prescription. She would be able to directly take it if she mixed the appropriate spirit medicine ingredients together.

“How much true qi can the pill that replenishes and gathers qi

instantaneously recover?" Jiang Chen asked with curiosity.

"Our Hall of Healing has a similar product, but one pill can at most recover twenty percent of true qi. It also cannot be taken in succession – it will be ineffective if retaken within two hours."

Qiao Baishi was a bit shamefaced. "Our Hall has always wanted to expand into this arena, but the technical barrier to a qi replenishing pill is high and difficult to breakthrough. The Pill King Garden actually is ahead in this area. Their qi replenishing pill can instantaneously recover thirty percent true qi, and usage can be repeated after an hour."

Jiang Chen nodded. "What of their mind calming pill?"

"There are no quantitative measures for this type of pill, but its effects are instantaneous and readily apparent after being taken. Our Hall is also slightly inferior to the Garden in this regard."

Qiao Baishi did not deceive himself and truthfully conveyed the situation to Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen didn't respond immediately, but closed his eyes and pondered. After a long while, Jiang Chen's finger lightly tapped on the table.

"What if we were to produce a pill that could instantaneously recover forty to fifty percent true qi. Would it defeat the Pill King Garden in this area?"

“Instantaneously recover forty to fifty percent?” Qiao Baishi surged to his feet with a face full of excitement. “If our Hall had such a good product, based on our sales channels and networks, as well as our strong distribution capability, we can absolutely cause the Garden’s products to go into the trash heap within half a month!”

“If the costs of the mind calming pill was only one tenth of similar pill products, but its effects were superior, would it be enough to throw the Pill King Garden’s products once more into the trash?” Jiang Chen asked again.

“Costs of goods sold are only one tenth? Its effects are superior? Then what else is there to say? It will definitely put them into the trash heap! We only need to wage a price war to wipe the floor with them!”

Qiao Baishi was agitated with excitement and his eyes were filled with desire. “Young duke Jiang, are you joking when you say all this?”

Jiang Chen said faintly, “Do I look like I’m joking?”

“This…” Qiao Baishi was at a momentary loss for words, but his trembling lips betrayed the wild and crazy emotions that were currently running through him.

The mere thought of this situation coming to bear fruit, and the victorious scene of thoroughly beating the Pill King Garden, was

enough to cause Qiao Baishi's heart to race and his hot blood to thrum quickly.

"I only have one request and that is to completely pulverize the Pill King Garden. Make them disappear and have that Wang fellow beg in the streets!"

Jiang Chen felt a deep seated internal disgust towards Grand Courtmaster Wang. Whenever he thought of the haughty tone that person had adopted as he'd lectured Jiang Chen's father, Jiang Chen had the urge to stomp him to death.

"Young duke Jiang, if we were to crush the Pill King Garden in these two areas, then the Garden would be a fly without wings. It wouldn't be able to struggle for long, and we would be able to swot them with one wave of a hand!"

"Old rules with regards to the split. I'll take sixty and you forty!

Qiao Baishi nodded his head repeatedly. "That is how it should be. Young duke Jiang is indeed a phoenix or dragon amongst men. Allow me to say something fawning and that is truthful – our Hall is honored even by a split."

Qiao Baishi was a smart man. The lower his profile was now, the more goodwill he would engender from Jiang Chen.

At this moment, the smart Qiao Baishi knew clearly that the partnership between the Hall of Healing and Jiang Chen was not

one of equal footing. The Hall was dependent on Jiang Chen and curried favor with Jiang Chen.

If he didn’t get that relationship straight, then the Hall definitely wouldn’t be in business for long!

Chapter 43: Three Types Of Pill Medicine

The plan was to be put into action immediately. Jiang Chen had one stubborn insistence: that the pill refiner must be Qiao Baishi himself.

Because, up until now, Jiang Chen hadn't understood much about the Hall of Healing. He only trusted Qiao Baishi. Relatively speaking, Qiao Baishi was a smart man, and one with morals and loyalty.

Therefore, when it came to the core of the refining operations, Jiang Chen was only willing to let Qiao Baishi participate, and none of the other pill refiners in the Hall of Healing.

Qiao Baishi earnestly wished for such a development.

Even if Jiang Chen didn't say anything, Qiao Baishi wouldn't hand over such a good opportunity to someone else. Even if Jiang Chen wouldn't let him get a handle on all the crucial content.

However, if he, Qiao Baishi, was involved, then it meant that he controlled the right to speak within the Hall.

This was undoubtedly a huge help for Qiao Baishi controlling the greater picture in the days to come.

As long as he and Jiang Chen had this layer of cooperation, how would anyone else within the Hall be able to upset his status as the

successor?

In this case, it would be perfectly justifiable for the Lord Hallmaster to cultivate him in the future and pass on the position to him.

After all, opposing Qiao Baishi would be equivalent to cutting off the core competency of the Hall of Healing.

Qiao Baishi was extremely grateful. He felt that he had made an extraordinarily wise decision that day. If it wasn't for the fact that he sold that Dragonbone Sun Grass to Jiang Chen against all odds, then the current situation in the capital would likely look completely different.

And he, Qiao Baishi, would still be toiling away within the Hall with his tail tucked between his legs.

And now, if he could successfully execute all of these things, and do away with their competitor the pill King Garden in one stroke, then his strength, charisma, and leadership ability, would spontaneously skyrocket.

This way, his position within the Hall of Healing would be stable without a doubt and he would receive countless endorsements.

After all, everyone wanted to see a Lord Hallmaster that could bring revenues and honor to the Hall of healing.

Firmly suppressing the pill King Garden would be an astonishing achievement that the Lord Hallmaster Song Tianxing had striven for, but never accomplished!

Three days later, the Heavenly Karma Pill was successfully produced. The fire had spat out eight complete pills. Three of them were upper rank, four middle, and one lower rank.

When Qiao Baishi felt the concentrated medicinal powers of the “Heavenly Karma Pill”, his eyes teared up at the sight of that flawless exterior that looked like it had been formed by nature itself, and the smell that was enough to make blood boil and surge by itself.

He finally believed that the Heavenly Karma Pill was true after all.

He had shouldered too much pressure in recent days. As the days went by and the Heavenly Karma Pill continued to fail to make an appearance, some skepticism and voices of doubt also sounded from within the Hall of Healing. They suspected that they had been played by Jiang Chen this time.

And now that the Heavenly Karma Pill that had captivated hearts was finally in front of Qiao Baishi, how could he not wash his face with tears?

A pill refiner felt the most accomplishment and thus was most moved at the moment when the fires died down to reveal the fully formed pill.

Qiao Baishi was no exception, the significance attached to this Heavenly Karma Pill was too much and too heavy!

It was as if Qiao Baishi had relieved himself of all the crushing burdens on his shoulders in that moment.

The qi replenishing pill was also produced after another two days. When Qiao Baishi inquired after the name of this pill, Jiang Chen concealed its original name and called it the “Vast Ocean Pill”.

In the last two days, Jiang Chen made some changes to the recipe for the mind calming medicine and named it “One Buddha Powder”.

This One Buddha Powder didn’t need to be refined. It only needed some crushed spirit ingredients, and to undergo a couple more steps, before becoming medicine.

The lack of a refining step meant the absence of material loss and the ability to bypass the costly step of refining.

This would naturally decrease costs to one tenth of regular pill medicine.

After all, eight or nine out of ten pills were lost in the refining process. Out of ingredients enough for a hundred pills, only ten or twenty pills would be able to be successfully refined in the end.

A highly skilled refiner could possibly refine twenty or thirty pills, but it wasn't a guarantee that that would always be the case.

Qiao Baishi had barely slept over the past six days, but he was still full of very strong vigor. He had the vitality of dragons and ferocity of tigers. It made one suspect that he wouldn't say that he was tired, even if he engaged in fierce battles for another two months.

Indeed, Qiao Baishi's professional passion had utterly immersed himself into this business.

The shock that Jiang Chen brought him over the past six days had simply been too great. Although he had been the one in charge of actually refining the pill, Jiang Chen had been the one in control of the core operations and recipe.

Qiao Baishi had no complaints about this setup, this was also what was written into the contract. It would be unrealistic to ask Jiang Chen to fully tell him all the details regarding the core operations and details of the pill.

A dreamlike, fruitful six days passed.

Gazing upon the pill bottles piled in front of him, Qiao Baishi still had a feeling of being in a dream. The feeling of accomplishment and contentment that he'd received over the past six days from being in the profession of a pill refiner was something that he had yet to experience in his life until now.

And this was all thanks to the youth in front of him.

In that moment, a feeling of beholding a high mountain grew within Qiao Baishi as he looked at Jiang Chen.

“Third Hallmaster, I have done all that I should. The rest is up to the operations of the Hall of Healing. I will be very disappointed if we are unable to thoroughly defeat the Pill King Garden.”

Qiao Baishi patted his chest. “Young duke Jiang, I never shoot my mouth off. However, just watch our operations this time. With the aid of such divine pill and the basis of my Hall’s networks and distribution channels, if we are unable to thoroughly defeat the pill King Garden, then we are truly unworthy of our reputation.”

Jiang Chen was satisfied with Qiao Baishi’s declaration and smiled faintly. “That is to say, the Hall won’t be missing the pill medicine exhibit that will take place in the marketplace three days from now?”

“Haha, it’s a given that we won’t miss it. The Pill King Garden is acting with such high profile, if our Hall of Healing doesn’t have any response, wouldn’t it be a bit of a let down of our reputation as the number one spirit medicine heavyweight in the kingdom?” Qiao Baishi was in exceedingly good spirits.

“Remember to notify me to go watch the show then. I wouldn’t want to miss such an interesting display.”

“Young duke Jiang is naturally the first esteemed guest we will invite.” Qiao Baishi smiled.

“Oh right, remember to send an invitation to Princess Gouyu when the time comes. There’s a portion of the One Buddha Powder reserved for Princess Gouyu.” Jiang Chen happened to say.

“Oh? Princess Gouyu also has a portion?” Qiao Baishi blanked momentarily and immediately smiled. “Then we must prepare a gift of gratitude for Princess Gouyu.”

Jiang Chen laughed heartily and thought, ‘that woman Gouyu probably doesn’t want for money…’ But given that the Hall of Healing was giving a gift, they probably would be too embarrassed to give anything below one or two million silver.

After spending a full six days in the Hall of Healing, when he returned to the manor, his father Jiang Feng still remained behind closed doors. Jiang Chen knew that his father’s sealed door training this time could last anywhere between one month to three or four months.

With his father’s martial dao-holic tendencies, he probably wouldn’t come out before he’d broken through ten meridians true qi.

Perhaps, the day that his father opened his doors, would be when the first true qi master appeared in the Jiang Han manor!

Since Jiang Chen had already given his orders before he went to the Hall of Healing, everything was still relatively calm. Panic hadn't ensued just because Jiang Chen had not appeared for a period of time.

"Jiang Fu, what has happened outside during this time?"

Jiang Fu stood reverently and respectfully in front of Jiang Chen. As he faced the young duke, Jiang Fu had withdrawn the neglectful and contemptuous intentions he'd held in the past.

You had to give it to him, Jiang Chen's performance during this crucial time had won over the servants in the duke's household.

"Young duke, all has been more or less calm the past couple of days. Rumors have been flying in the outside world about the duke being poisoned, but no big moves have been made. There is a saying that is most popular in the outside world right now, saying that the duke has... has already fallen victim, but that we haven't announced it due to some pressures..."

Jiang Fu spoke in halting bursts when he spoke of this. After all, the servants weren't too sure if the duke of Jiang Han was indeed still alive.

"There's no need to pay any attention to these rumors." Jiang Chen was naturally most aware of his father's current situation.

“Has anyone come to find me over the past couple days?” Jiang Chen asked another question.

“Yes, the duke of Jinshan and the duke of Hubing have been by, and their two young dukes.”

The Jinshan dukedom was fatty Xuan’s home, and the Hubing dukedom was Hubing Yue’s home. Friendship with these dukedoms had gone back for several generations, and it was very normal for them to visit upon hearing that something had happened to Jiang Feng.

“Has anyone else been by?”

“Yes, Princess Gouyu has also come.” Jiang Fu’s tone turned a bit odd when he spoke of this. “And, Princess Gouyu has been by, everyday and has left a message.”

“What message? What are you speaking so haltingly for? Speak candidly.”

Jiang Fu said with an awkward smile, “Princess Gouyu says whenever the young duke comes back is when he needs to get the hell into the palace to see her. She seemed to have said that Princess Zhiruo misses you.”

Jiang Chen laughed involuntarily. “This lass, if you miss me then say you miss me, why use the girl Zhiruo as an excuse? Looks like you’re not a thin skinned lass.”

Jiang Fu was tongue tied and dumbfounded. He had been gobsmacked by Jiang Chen. The two royal princesses had become “a lass” and “a girl” in the young duke’s mouth.

The young duke of his household was truly unwilling to let things be until he had spoken words that astonished all.

“Alright, then I need to go play in the palace. Uncle Ying, I’m afraid you’ll have to accompany me.” Given how things stood in the capital, Jiang Chen didn’t dare be careless.

“Yes.” As the leader of the Jiang family guard, protecting his master was Jiang Ying’s duty. He had berated himself continuously for not adequately protecting the duke previously, and hadn’t found a chance to redeem himself. Now that he took orders from the young duke, he had to naturally be hell-bent on carrying them out. Even if he were to sacrifice his life, he would have to ensure the young duke’s safety.

Princess Gouyu had indeed gone to the Jiang Han manor everyday the past couple of days. Her feelings had been quite complicated. She didn’t know if Jiang Chen was purposefully avoiding her or just didn’t want to see her at all. Or is it that Jiang Chen held a grudge against the royal family because of what had happened to Jiang Feng?

Princess Gouyu had always been a loner and pursued martial dao training, she very rarely paid attention to the feelings of others.

But somehow, that lazy youth – that venom tongued youth – had left a deep imprint on her consciousness, like a brand.

Even if she purposefully avoided thoughts of him, his lazy composure and an expression that seemed to smile, but not really at the same time, would float to the forefront of her mind when it was late at night and no one was around.

When someone came to report that the young duke Jiang had come to visit, Princess Gouyu abruptly surged to her feet, but then seemed to immediately feel that her reaction had been a bit exaggerated.

She took a moment to collect herself, and then walked out.

Jiang Chen was standing next to the fake mountains outside of Gouyu's chambers, watching the waters trickle down on the artificial mountain. He'd actually lost himself in contemplation during that moment.

Chapter 44: Loot From House Raids, Take Your Pick

"Eh? A lass that actually listens to instructions?" Jiang Chen's viper tongued personality revealed itself as soon as he saw Princess Gouyu. "Looks like you've agreed to believe me. I can tell that your condition is much better than a few days ago. At this rate, you'll breakthrough to eleven meridians true qi within the month. Congratulations in advance."

Jiang Chen's tone was lighthearted, as if breaking through eleven meridians true qi was as normal as eating and sleeping, and nothing to make a big fuss over.

Princess Gouyu had originally been full of expectation, waiting for Jiang Chen to compliment her with a few words. It'd be fine even if they were some all purpose, generic compliments – stuff like her extraordinary potential or being a rare genius at martial dao.

But, she discovered tragically, this fellow didn't even seem to know that women needed to be complimented.

Seeing that Princess Gouyu was staring at him in a wide eyed manner, Jiang Chen smiled tiredly. "So tell me, what did you need me for? The past couple of days have really exhausted me. If there's nothing else, I'm going to go home and sleep."

Princess Gouyu felt both enraged and amused by his demeanor.

“Jiang Chen, looking at how you are now, is your father well?”

Jiang Chen winked. “Do you want something to be wrong with him?”

“Of course not,” Princess Gouyu’s jade lips moved rapidly as she appeared to be a bit put out in her anger. “Am I truly so nefarious in your heart?”

“Alright, alright. We’re all on the same boat now. I have to hold my nose and co-exist with the good and bad parts of you, don’t I? Right, you’ve come to my house everyday, what urgent business is there?”

Princess Gouyu really didn’t know how to deal with this fellow and could only respond honestly, “Of course I had a reason when I came to find you. Follow me.”

“To where? You’re not trying to be a cradle robber are you?” A wary look appeared on Jiang Chen’s face.

“Rob your butt! What do you take me for?” Princess Gouyu almost directly slapped his face.

“Hmm, you’re so fierce and you look like a tomboy… do you like women?”

Princess Gouyu was utterly defeated. If looks could kill, Jiang Chen would have absolutely died at least ten times at this moment.

He followed Princess Gouyu along her way and the two arrived at a large warehouse surrounded by heavily armed guards on all sides.

They all made their respective bows upon seeing Princess Gouyu.

“Jiang Chen, come inside with me.”

Jiang Chen still gave Princess Gouyu some face in front of others as he docilely walked inside. This was actually a large treasury.

The gold, silver, and other treasures inside were piled into a small mountain. All sorts of strange and precious treasures were piled high on racks on its two sides.

“What do you think these are?” Princess Gouyu asked.

“Isn’t that nonsense? I’m not blind.” Jiang Chen responded snappily.

“These were all raided from Du Ruhai’s house. They sit here, untouched.”

“Ah? This dog of an official was this greedy?” Jiang Chen started cursing loudly when he heard these were Du Ruhai’s loot. “So it

pays this much to be an official in the capital? I must thoroughly consider moving to the capital and becoming an official. What's the big deal in being a duke? Fighting wars everyday, shedding blood and sweat, and having to face suppression in the end. How nice it is to be an official. An unimportant and miniscule official like Du Ruhai could hoard so much wealth! I say, what's your purpose in bringing me here? Are you trying to corrupt me? If that's the case, I only have one sentence — you win, hurry up and move all these things into my home."

Princess Gouyu was so amused by his manner of complete seriousness that she involuntarily cracked a smile.

She suddenly discovered that it was quite relaxing being with this damnable sort of character. This fellow was always up to a dirty trick of some sort whenever he found the opportunity to do so, and his open-minded optimism always suffused his seemingly diffident demeanor.

"Jiang Chen, my royal brother has instructed me that you can take your pick from the items here."

"You really are planning on corrupting me?" Jiang Chen hadn't thought that Princess Gouyu had brought him here for this purpose.

"You can't possibly really want all of it?" Princess Gouyu's eyes widened.

"If I wanted this gold and silver, I wouldn't take it from the

mouths of a corrupt officials. But I can consider spending it for you." Jiang Chen said with a merry laugh. "If I remember correctly, there's been successive floods in recent years within the territory of the Jinshan dukedom, and the people have fallen on hard times. Nine houses out of ten are deserted. If these stolen goods could be used to relieve their suffering, it can yet be regarded as charity. The only thing unknown is that, will the ruler of your house be willing to do so?"

"Are you... are you serious?" Princess Gouyu had never thought that such words would come from Jiang Chen's mouth. This enabled her to gain a better understanding of Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen said with a grave face, "Do you think I would joke with the lives of millions of victims of a natural calamity?"

Princess Gouyu felt a wave of vertigo as Jiang Chen's awe inspiring righteousness had driven her a bit out of breath. Finally, her phoenix eyes twitched, "Alright, I will make the decision on behalf of my royal brother. If I remember correctly, the Jinshan dukedom and yours are old family friends?"

"Succouring victims are an act of benevolent rule. It benefits the face of your royal family. What does that have to do with the relationship between our two families?"

Jiang Chen's rebuttal caused Princess Gouyu's face to flush red. She too felt that her words had lacked appropriateness and were deserving of admonishment.

After a moment of awkwardness, Princess Gouyu finally found a topic. “Jiang chen, this Du Ruhai was an avid collector of divine weaponry. These weapons are all out of the ordinary, why don’t you select an item or two?”

“Oh? I surely won’t be polite here.” Jiang Chen didn’t decline and came to the racks filled with weaponry.

It was a bit of an exaggeration to call these mundane weapons divine weaponry.

Jiang Chen swept his gaze over the lot. Most of these items were pieces of junk in his eyes. There were a few items that barely merited a look.

Jiang Chen’s gaze halted on a saber that was three feet long. This saber was hidden within its sheath like a dragon hiding in the abyss. It looked inconspicuous from the outside, and it didn’t have any trace of a gleam.

But Jiang Chen’s millions of years of memories from his past life allowed him to slightly perceive that some latent, wild power, was hidden within its ordinary exterior.

It was a kind of reservation that disdained showing its edge in mundane, common things.

It was an arrogance that disdained wallowing in the mire with common weaponry.

“That’s the one!”

Jiang Chen had chosen this saber with his first glance. It would keep to a subtle dormancy when it was time to keep a low profile. When its cutting edge was needed to be revealed, it would absolutely, unabashedly, display that peerless brilliance!

This was Jiang Chen’s personality, and was also this saber’s personality.

Congenial personalities meant it was serendipity!

Princess Gouyu was slightly surprised to see Jiang Chen ignore cutting sharp knives that were sending out brilliant rays of light, and chose instead a knife with an absolutely ordinary exterior.

“Jiang Chen, this is a piece of Layered-Feather Golden Crystal and is a superb material for crafting weapons. Why didn’t you decide upon it?” Princess Gouyu could only bite the bullet and make a recommendation.

If Jiang Chen chose only a saber, Princess Gouyu felt that this reward would really pale in comparison to the help that Jiang Chen had given her.

“Oh? I thought I could only choose one. Then I’ll choose that as well. But I have this saber and thus, temporarily, I have no need of other weapons.” Jiang Chen paused and suddenly thought of

something, his words taking a turn. “The Hidden Dragon Trials are about to commence, therefore I should make some preparations. Your connections are vast in the capital right? Help me forge flying daggers out of this material.”

“Forge flying daggers?” Princess Gouyu started and felt that such outstanding material should be used in refining divine weaponry. It seemed a bit of a shame to use it to craft small weapons like flying daggers.

“Yes, judging by the material amount, forge a set of nine flying daggers.” Jiang Chen didn’t care in the slightest about wantonly wasting things. To be able to become his, Jiang Chen’s, flying daggers – this could be said to be the Layered-Feather Golden Crystal’s good fortune.

Seeing that Jiang Chen was so resolute, Princess Gouyu naturally wouldn’t go against Jiang Chen’s wishes for the piece of Layered-Feather Golden Crystal. She nodded, “I’ll try to have it ready for you in the next couple of days.”

“Mm. Being so amiable and nice is more likeable, is it not?” Jiang Chen had a tone like that of lecturing a small girl.

Princess Gouyu now lacked the strength to challenge Jiang Chen and rolled her eyes at him. She suddenly thought of something again. “Oh right, Jiang Chen, the Pill King Garden will have a pill exhibition the day after tomorrow. This was included in the news that I’ve received. This Pill King Garden has great ambitions and likely has the Hall of Healing in its crosshairs. Your Jiang family has a partnership with the Hall of Healing, so you’d best be on your

guard.”

“Heh heh, I’ve also heard of this matter. It should be interesting.” Jiang Chen flashed a harmless and innocent smile, completely not thinking anything of this matter.

He carelessly spread out his hands. “I’ll be on my way if there’s nothing else.”

Princess Gouyu was extremely angry at seeing Jiang Chen care not a whit. But her thoughts suddenly took a turn, wasn’t this fellow always like this?

At the Soaring Dragon manor last time, hadn’t he also been completely unconcerned?

And what was the result? Bai Zhanyun had been punished with one bout, and was now docile and obedient towards Jiang Chen, as if he was a completely different person.

“Could it be that this kid hasn’t shown his face for a few days because he’s been secretly preparing a fine scheme?” The more she interacted with Jiang Chen, the more Princess Gouyu understood about his acting style.

When this kid displayed a harmless and innocent smile, perhaps this was when a plot was brewing.

Given these thoughts, Princess Gouyu couldn’t help but feel

anticipation, even though she felt that Jiang Chen didn't have a hope of winning against the Pill King Garden.

But this Jiang Chen often committed astounding and shocking actions – who knew what new tricks he would come up with this time?

Seeing that the sight of Jiang Chen's back was about to disappear, Princess Gouyu finally abruptly remembered something. "Oh right, Jiang Chen, the situation in the capital is complex during this time. Commander Tiandu has decided to arrange for a couple of his best men to be sent to your Jiang Han manor who will answer to your commands. This will avoid you having a shortage of people when you need them."

"Let them come tomorrow." Jiang Chen carelessly waved his hand, having taken advantage of someone but still pretending otherwise. "I'm saying this first – don't just send me a few sticks of wood, I'll reject the goods if they're not good to use."

Princess Gouyu truly wished to pluck off her shoe and beat this brat up. She'd been nice to him, even sent him men and gifted him presents. How dare he not have a single nice thing to say in return, and pick and choose instead?

"Rascal, this brat is a rascal." A trace of a smile slightly curved up Princess Gouyu's lips as she softly scolded him with a few words.

Princess Gouyu couldn't really bring herself to hate Jiang Chen when she thought of the changes that had occurred within her

during the past couple of days.

Because, the incantation for smoothing her qi that Jiang Chen had given her was simply too useful. Add to that the aid of the spiritual medicine prescription, and in just a few days, Princess Gouyu could feel that her internal demons were being dispelled and resolved with a speed that could be observed with the human eye.

The true qi within her body had also slowly changed from its original wildness to a state of being able to be controlled and handled with ease, compared to prior experience.

All of her confidence, pride, and faith that had been lost, had now been recovered.

The most important thing was when she did all this, that familiar true meaning of martial dao also reappeared naturally.

Eleven meridians true qi...

A strong sense of desire suffused Princess Gouyu's eyes – eyes that were as brilliant as the stars.

Chapter 45: Saber Aura Rising To The Sky

Jiang Chen had still come away with quite a haul after this trip to the palace.

First, although this saber didn't look like much, it gave Jiang Chen the feeling of meeting an old friend.

In addition, Princess Gouyu's plan to arrange some men for him could resolve his critical condition, one in which fire was singing his eyebrows.

Although his personal strength had greatly improved recently, his personal strength was not wholly up to the task of handling the large maelstrom that was the capital, one that could worsen at any time.

If a few good men could be sent, at least that could free up Jiang Ying and allow him to stay within the manor and preside over matters with peace of mind.

It was already night when he had returned to the manor.

Jiang Chen sat down cross legged. The nameless saber was propped up in front of him.

A man and a saber sat facing each other beneath the moonlight.

Circulating the vast waves true qi within his body, the current Jiang Chen was a giant whale traversing the vast ocean.

The vast waves of true qi were continuously drawn forth by him and circulated around him, like waves of that ocean, expanding layer upon layer.

Beneath the starry sky, Jiang Chen's vast waves of true qi were suffused with rays of silvery-white splendor, adding radiance and opulence to each other with that crescent curve. Layers of silver light sparkled, giving off a mystical feeling.

Currently, Jiang Chen was truly like a lesser dragon frolicking in the waves, as he circulated his true qi with abandon. His soul was as if a divine dragon traveling to the ninth heaven, free from inhibitions and thus carefree.

The splendor shone down from the multitude of stars in the sky actually indistinctly formed an odd flow, forming a strange sort of circulation with the vast waves true qi that Jiang Chen was guiding.

At that moment, the orbiting stars seemed to be the eyes of ancient deities, sending warm looks to this common place neatly in unison.

Suddenly, a strange scene took place!

The nameless saber propped in front of him, like a ninth heaven

precious gem that had been hidden in a dark age, abruptly shot out a beam of stunning splendor.

When this splendor shot it, it made straight for the vault of heavens like a soaring, towering beam that hung upside down from the milky way!

As if the world from ancient times had hurriedly taken a quick glance – as if an ancient deity had opened his eyes once again.

This brilliant splendor was as if it was a bolt of lightning in the sky – fading after it shot across.

In the next moment, this nameless saber emitted waves of low, humming resonances. The entire sheath started vibrating.

A surge of frightening power, as if it was uncontrollable, burst out of the sheath.

As if ancient, enormous demons were breaking through their seal – as if light that would cleave the earth was also erupting from the earth – as if tens of thousands of violent beasts were about to surge out of their cage…

At this moment, Jiang Chen abruptly opened his eyes and used his right hand to lightly press down on the scabbard. “Partner, does this mean that you’ve awakened?”

Jiang Chen’s press was like a strong and mighty seal, pressing

down at once on all the impulses – its aura and wildness.

The sheath in Jiang Chen's hand slightly moved a few times, and then docilely stopped.

Then, an odd ring of light emanated quickly from the hilt of the saber as it covered Jiang Chen's entire body.

In that moment, man and saber became one.

As if a solemn and dignified ceremony had been completed, a perfect union had been completed.

In the next moment, a thought flashed through Jiang Chen's mind. This knife had already established him as its master and was already admitting to him as its master!

When this thought flashed through his mind, a wave of composed, self possession passed through Jiang Chen's entire body; as if a protection talisman had been planted in his body. An incredible feeling of safety stole throughout his entire being.

In an exceedingly covert spot in the Eastern Kingdom, a sudden look of surprise shot from a mysterious elder's eyes. Looking at the brilliant splendor streaking across the sky like a meteor, his eye were filled with shock, astonishment, and even a few hints of fear.

"Such frightening splendor; can it be that a staggeringly strong person is passing by?"

If Eastern Lu had been present, he would have recognized this old man. He was the spirit dao practitioner who had been a recluse for hundreds of years, the legendary figure of the Eastern Kingdom!

The next day, Princess Gouyu did indeed bring four people. To speak more accurately, four strong people. They were all practitioners in the advanced realm of true qi.

“Jiang Chen, these four are all from Commander Tiandu’s Sheng battalion. You can call them, respectively, Sheng One, Sheng Two, Sheng Three, and Sheng Four.”

Sheng One was of average build, roughly thirty years old. His eyes were experienced and his movements crisp. It was apparent from one look that he was the leader amongst the four, and was actually a nine meridians true qi practitioner.

Sheng Two and Sheng Three were a pair of twin brothers, all strong as a bear in the hips, and with a back as supple as a tiger’s. Their bodies were filled with wild strength and boasted of eight meridians true qi.

Sheng Four was a fair skinned youth, no more than two or three years older than Jiang Chen. His personality was the same as his appearance, cold and aloof – giving others the impression of an unapproachable person of few words.

“Do you four know your duties?” Gouyu asked.

“Obey young duke Jiang’s orders, even if it means venturing into mountains of knives and oceans of fire or a dragon’s watery lair and a tiger’s den. To protect young duke Jiang, with our deaths before failure.” The four’s responses were clean cut and crisp.

They were practitioners and, more than that, they were soldiers. Obeying orders from above was the duty of a soldier.

“Very good. Young Duke Jiang is an important subject to the royal family. You four are now carrying out the kingdom’s mission. Remember, don’t lose face for your Sheng battalion; don’t lose face for your Commander Tiandu.”

“We’d rather die than lose face!”

Gouyu was quite satisfied by the four’s performance. Her eyebrow cocked, and with a few hints of a smile, “Jiang Chen, what do you think about these four?”

“Their strength is quite good and they listen to orders. I think I can make use of them.” Jiang Chen also didn’t avoid giving Gouyu some face.

Princess Gouyu was actually afraid that Jiang Chen would say some ridiculous things again. The worries in her heart were settled upon hearing his words.

“Oh right, Jiang Chen, I received an invitation from the Hall of

Healing this morning, inviting me to view some sort of pill exhibition tomorrow. What is going on? Wasn't it the Pill King Garden putting on the pill exhibition? What's this got to do with the Hall of Healing?"

Jiang Chen chuckled, "The heavyweights of spirit medicine in the capital aren't limited to just the Pill King Garden. After all, when did it become the Pill King Garden's turn to take the lead in the capital?"

"Just what is the situation?" Gouyu was extremely curious.

"You'll find out the specifics tomorrow, won't you? You have to go, perhaps there'll be a large red envelope." Jiang Chen smiled and was unwilling to say more regarding this matter.

"What red envelope, I have no interest in that. But, it seems that there is once again a good show to be seen. That, I can't miss. Are you going tomorrow?"

Jiang Chen waved the invitation in his hand. "How could I be absent from such a good time?"

Just as they were talking, Jiang Fu led a person in with a sullen, gloomy face. Jiang Fu knew how to behave in a delicate situation and bowed when he saw Princess Gouyu, speaking to Jiang Chen afterwards. "Young duke, this person says he's from the Pill King Garden. He says they are putting on a pill exhibition tomorrow, and that they invite our Jiang household to observe in attendance."

The person's face was shrewd and it bore a smile of a base person realizing his ambition. His voice was loud and carried, "Young duke Jiang, at the end of the day, your Jiang family was once in a partnership with the Pill King Garden. We will be hosting a large scale event tomorrow. What do you say, will you show us some face?"

Jiang Chen flicked a glance at the invitation the other had brought, but didn't accept it. He nodded, indicating for Jiang Fu to accept the invitation.

Jiang Fu was also a quick witted person. When he accepted the invitation, he respectfully opened it and placed it in front of Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen looked at it briefly and smiled faintly. "I am someone who doesn't give face, and only denies it. Are you sure you welcome me?"

"Welcome? We will definitely welcome you. Heh heh, but tomorrow, it's our Pill King Garden denying someone else face. If the young duke likes a good time, take care not to miss it."

That person smiled proudly and left with a turn. He hadn't seemed to recognize Princess Gouyu, and naturally wouldn't have observed the proper greetings to a princess.

"Pill King Garden, indeed a base person that is realizing his ambition." Jiang Chen observed that this person didn't even

possess basic courtesy, having ignored a princess, of all people.

One had to say that the Pill King Garden had become a bit too conceited, a bit too cocky.

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Within the Pill King Garden.

Courtmaster Wang and several other high executives of the Pill King Garden were in attendance.

Of those, Master Violet sat in the middle, surrounded by the crowd.

“Master Violet, all has been prepared. All we await is to amaze the world with a single, brilliant feat at tomorrow’s pill exhibition.” Courtmaster Wang looked like the cat that ate the canary, and extreme excitement marked his features. “This Pill of Dragon and Tiger’s Blood has such potency that, as soon as it hits the shelves, it is sure to occupy half of the market, and it would be nothing difficult to even open the markets of the neighboring sixteen countries. Add to that our three pronged approach with our Qi Replenishing Pill and our Crane Heart Pill, and given enough time our Pill Kill Garden is sure to replace the Hall of Healing’s position.”

“Yes, tomorrow, we can first harshly slap the Hall of Healing’s face.” Another Garden executive laughed. “The Hall of Healing has

always maintained its grip on the market of healing panaceas. When our Pill of Dragon and Tiger's Blood is available, let's see what other pill medicines they bring out to compete with us in the future?"

The impact to the Hall of Healing in defeating them in three different arenas would undoubtedly be huge.

The senior executives of the Pill King Garden could almost see the day where the Pill King Garden replaced the Hall of Healing. Even thinking of such a scene was enough to agitate their emotions.

Master Violet said faintly, "Denying face to the Hall of Healing is merely the first step. Besides, the Hall of Healing is a mammoth figure, and their Lord Hallmaster is no easy character. Don't think of everything as that simple. We must work in tandem with the duke of Soaring Dragon, otherwise it will be impossible to replace the Hall of Healing in the short run."

Master Violet's gaze was diabolic. He knew clearly that if the duke of Soaring Dragon was unable to replace the Eastern clan, then the Pill King Garden would absolutely be unable to replace the Hall of Healing in the short term.

This was the bigger picture.

However, Master Violet also firmly believed that this type of bigger picture was sure to reverse with the arrival of himself, Master Violet. And, such a reversal would definitely start with

tomorrow's pill exhibition!

All was prepared, the day that the Pill King Garden had long awaited for was finally here.

The weather was splendid, the sun was bright with not a cloud in the sky. This seemed to portray that the future of the Pill King Garden would really be smooth and bright

Jiang Chen walked out of the secret training room early in the morning, and made his way to the biggest marketplace, the Myriad Treasures Palace in the capital, after he was done enjoying breakfast, while being escorted by the four practitioners of the Sheng battallion.

The Pill King Garden had long since appointed greeters at the entrance to the Myriad Treasures Palace. When they saw Jiang Chen's arrival, the Garden's greeters all displayed some surprise.

In the eyes of the Pill King Garden, as long as the Jiang family's head was still screwed on properly, there would be no way that they would attend today's occasion.

If they came, they would be, without a doubt, making things unbearable for themselves. After all, the Pill King Garden was to raise their prestige and deny other's face today. If the Jiang family came, would that not be entering the lion's den?

Chapter 46: A Gloating Pill King Garden

The Pill King Garden's exhibition stage had been prepared within the luxurious main hall of the Myriad Treasures Palace. All of the various guest seating had been arranged appropriately.

As Jiang Chen walked into the Myriad Treasures Palace and trod on the noble carpet, he was enjoying himself hugely.

In contrast to the Pill King Garden's high profile, the Hall of Healing kept an incredibly low profile. They hadn't started preparing their exhibition stage, even up until now.

Many actually hadn't known that the Hall of Healing was also hosting a pill exhibition, including even the Pill King Garden.

A saying was in vogue in the capital at the moment, that the Pill King Garden had developed a new type of healing pill, and was about to challenge the Hall of Healing's position.

To put things bluntly, the pill exhibition today held the Hall of Healing in its crosshairs. It was to provoke and to slap the Hall of Healing in the face.

"Wait, you there, halt! This is a distinguished gathering for the pill exhibition. Do you have an invitation?"

Two practitioners with fiercely aggressive postures barred Jiang Chen's way.

Jiang Zheng, who was at Jiang Chen's side, gave a cold snort and directly flung the Pill King Garden's invitation into their faces.

They glanced at the invitation after receiving it and smiled spuriously. "This is the lowest leveled invitation, and provides standing room with no assigned seating only. Walk over to that corner over there by yourself. Remember not to talk loudly, and not to give offense to other honored guests."

A slap to the face. The Pill King Garden had indeed prepared this face denying move from the very beginning. They had already designed this slap in the face trap from the day that they had sent the invitation to Jiang Chen.

Yet Jiang Zheng laughed in contempt, "Don't get the wrong idea. Our household's young duke has no interest in your so-called pill exhibition, and has absolutely no interest in attending. We're just passing by and returning your paltry invitation."

The other party was stunned. Why had they come if not to attend the pill exhibition?

"Not here for the pill exhibition? Then you're just loitering. Someone come and throw them out." A Pill King Garden administrator walked over with an aggressive posture.

Jiang Zheng smiled coldly. "Has the Myriad Treasures Palace been rented out by you, the Pill King Garden, today? My household's young duke is an honored guest here. Are the bones of

you lowly slaves itching for a beating?”

The four brothers from the Sheng battalion stepped forward in unison, and the killing aura that they had cultured in the army flared out powerfully, causing the administrator’s face to go white and repeatedly back up.

Jiang Chen said faintly, “Get out of my way.”

At this moment, a figure took a turn out from the interior hallways of the Myriad Treasures Palace. It was the Third Hallmaster, Qiao Baishi, of the Hall of Healing.

Qiao Baishi was wreathed in smiles as he walked up in greeting, smiling hugely. “Young duke Jiang, I have been awaiting your arrival. Please come inside, come inside.”

“Hallmaster Qiao, what is with your Hall of Healing? Didn’t you say you were holding a pill exhibition today? Why so low key?” Jiang Chen complained purposefully.

Qiao Baishi smiled, “The style of our Hall of Healing has always been to keep a low profile. We will set up our exhibition stage soon. It actually won’t take too much time.”

“That makes sense. There is reality beneath the Hall of Healing’s surface. It’s quite normal for you to keep a low profile and not to create such a large scale ruckus like the nouveau riche.” Jiang Chen nodded with a smile.

“Qiao Baishi, what do you mean by this?” On the Pill King Garden side, Courtmaster Wang, the man holding down the fort, walked over in a huff. “It’s our Pill King Garden that’s holding a pill exhibition today, and you are guests. Do you intend to ruin custom and create trouble?”

Courtmaster Wang had struck a strong pose of righteousness.

“Courtmaster Wang, surely you’ve gotten something wrong? You’re putting on a pill exhibition, yes, but does that mean our Hall of Healing cannot do the same? You’ve sent an invitation to us, but does that mean we have to give you face and attend?” Qiao Baishi’s tone was diffident.

“You… you’re not here to attend the pill exhibition?” An expression of incredulity bubbled up in Courtmaster Wang’s eyes.

“We’re here to attend a pill exhibition, but one by our Hall of Healing.” Qiao Baishi smiled faintly.

“What do you mean?” Courtmaster Wang’s eyes grew cold. “Qiao Baishi, are you here to purposely cause trouble?”

“Cause trouble?” Qiao Baishi laughed coldly. “Courtmaster Wang, you think too highly of yourself. Is the status of your Pill King Garden worthy of the Hall of Healing causing trouble for you?”

Courtmaster Wang was speechless and glared at Jiang Chen. “Jiang Chen, you’ve even returned the invitation to us. What are you doing here then?”

“You dunce, I’m here to attend a pill exhibition. The Hall of Healing has a close business relationship with my Jiang family. How can I not do them the favor of attending when they hold a pill exhibition?” Jiang Chen looked at Courtmaster Wang like he was looking at an idiot.

Courtmaster Wang’s face was ashen, he felt that he’d been played by someone. But he immediately thought of the setup for the day – wasn’t it to slap the Hall of Healing in the face?

Since the Hall of Healing was so foolhardy as to overextend themselves with a pill exhibition, it was perfect timing to beat down the Hall’s arrogance with one stroke.

A trace of a sinister smile floated onto Courtmaster Wang’s face when his thoughts travelled down this path. “Qiao Baishi, looks like your Hall of Healing didn’t want to sit passively and await your doom. Since you came knocking, let’s compete and see who’s better at pill medicine.”

Courtmaster Wang was in high spirits and ready for action. Since the Hall of Healing was so overconfident at competing on the basis of pill medicine, then let the “Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood” harshly slap the Hall’s face.

The Hall of Healing was still highly efficient when it came to

execution.

An exhibition stage had been erected directly opposite the Pill King Garden in just a short time. Apart from Qiao Baishi, Second Hallmaster Yue Qun as well as six or seven elders were there from the senior executives of the Hall of Healing.

In addition, the Hall of Healing's large amount of administrators had also started their nervous preparations.

The Hall of Healing was playing to an extreme this time. Apart from people like Jiang Chen and Princess Gouyu, all the other guests hadn't received invitations beforehand.

Instead, they waited on the side. Whenever a guest of the Pill King Garden handed over their invitation, the Hall of Healing would smoothly and simultaneously hand them an invitation.

This way, the Hall's purpose of challenging the Garden in the immediate vicinity was more than readily apparent.

Basically, anyone with power or influence in the capital had received an invite from the Pill King Garden this time. When these guests also received the Hall of Healing's invitation after arriving, they all felt that it was odd.

However, the majority of these people were all neutral. Not only were they not against it when they saw that the Hall of Healing was actually commencing in head to head combat with the Pill

King Garden, but their interest was also quite piqued.

Their interest levels had truly been lacking when they'd originally thought that they were attending a pill exhibition. But unanticipated gains might be made if they were able to witness the competition between the spirit medicine heavyweights!

The Pill King Garden's senior executives huddled together and held a discussion for a while. They all felt that the Hall of Healing hadn't come with good intentions.

But Master Violet was quite confident. The "Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood" was his proud work, and a pill recipe that had come from a hidden sect. He was absolutely confident that it would storm the market in such a common kingdom.

The Hall of Healing? Master Violet shook his head, his eyes quite contemptuous.

The senior executives of the Pill King Garden had been a bit worried, but quickly returned to a status brimming with confidence upon seeing that Master Violet was so confident.

It was said that Master Violet came from a reclusive sect. Would such a superior person be unsuccessful in a mere kingdom capital? The Hall of Healing had come knocking at the door today, and was destined to be beaten into the shape of a pig's head by the Pill King Garden.

With this consideration, the Pill King Garden neither barred the way nor protested against the Hall of Healing's actions, allowing the Hall to give out invitations at their leisure.

Of course, they wouldn't be able to bar the Hall if they wanted to.

After all, sure the Pill King Garden was hosting a pill exhibition, but the Hall of Healing also had the right to hold their own.

However, these guests were still particular about courtesy and first sat in the Pill King Garden section according to custom, since they had received the Pill King Garden's invitation first.

Apart from a group of diehard Hall of Healing supporters, the neutral guests all held the mentality of not wanting to offend either, and found a seat in the Pill King Garden first.

They also knew that the Hall of Healing would naturally not mind that they had gone first to the Pill King Garden section because the Hall had given an invitation without forewarning. This was the custom of the order of arrival.

Courtmaster Wang was quite satisfied when he saw that the majority of the guests still sat on the Pill King Garden side. He looked in Qiao Baishi's direction with a few hints of provocation.

The senior executives of the Hall of Healing sat on the chairs behind the exhibition stage, more than a bit ill at ease. This whole matter had been under Qiao Baishi's organization.

They were also here today by Qiao Baishi's invitation, and weren't too sure as to what tricks he had up his sleeve.

They saw that a great commotion and gathering of people were present on the Pill King Garden side, whereas, apart from its few staunch allies, the Hall of Healing section had only a sprinkling of people.

"Number three, just what are you doing? If you want to do something, you should've sent invitations beforehand, no? How can our Hall of Healing bear this kind of result this way?" Second Hallmaster Yue Qun was finding it difficult keeping an affable expression on his face.

"The Second Hallmaster speaks sense. If I had known this was the case, I wouldn't have come today." The Blue surnamed elder who'd had some friction with Jiang Chen last time also complained.

"Heh heh. The Third Hallmaster most likely has a secret master plan." This was an elder who ardently supported Qiao Baishi.

"Let's reserve our judgment, we're here already. I won't believe that the Third Hallmaster has arranged for us to be here for the purposes of losing face. Our Third Hallmaster isn't such a brainless person." This was Qiao Baishi's confidante.

On the Pill King Garden's side, Courtmaster Wang was in high and vigorous spirits as he strode up the high exhibition booth. His

voice was loud and charged, full of heroism. “Everyone, our Pill King Garden is introducing the “Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood” on this time’s pill exhibition. It’s a healing panacea, and its effects are double those of similar products on the market, and even higher!”

What?

Healing panacea? Effects double those of similar products on the market, and even higher?

Many had originally been whispering in hushed conversations, but all quieted down in coincidental unison when they heard Courtmaster Wang’s words.

The scene had become so quiet that even a pin drop could be heard.

“This ‘Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood” dissipates bruises, strengthens connections between muscles and bones, and has enormously wonderful effects. Particularly with regards to external injuries – it can fully heal wounds from various knives and swords in three days, without even leaving a scar.”

Fully healing wounds from various knives and swords in three days, without leaving a scar!

“For internal injuries, even if you’re beaten so badly that you cannot get up from the bed, taking this pill will enable you to recover within ten days back to your conditions before the injury.”

Courtmaster Wang grew more excited as he talked, spittle flying wildly as he lauded the “Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood” so superlatively that it was like flowers were raining down from the sky.

One had to say, if the “Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood” was as miraculous as he said, then the pill was sure to triumph over all similar products on the market as soon as it was introduced.

The Pill King Garden had raised such a high profile and gone to such great efforts in advertising this time’s pill exhibition — it did indeed have the basis to be so high key. The Pill King Garden was definitely trying to amaze the world with this single, brilliant feat on the basis of this pill!

Who didn’t know that these types of healing panacea were currently one of the most popular pill medicines in pill medicine market? After all, no practitioner could avoid being injured. Once injured, they would be unable to avoid using this type of healing panacea.

Whoever occupied the market of healing panaceas would gain the first mover’s advantage. Whoever could corner this market would herald in the market trend.

In the span of a moment, most of the guests had surmised the reason being the Pill King Garden’s high profile. This was a declaration of war on the Hall of Healing, and a challenge to their position!

Chapter 47: Accidental Repeat Occurrence

On the Pill King Garden's side, the senior executives were all wearing cocky smiles. They had long anticipated the ruckus that the "Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood" would cause when it was announced.

This was why it was said that "those who undertake civil pursuits are poor, and those who undertake martial pursuits are rich". Those who cultivated were most amenable to spending money. If you had no money, then opt out of the road of martial dao while it was early.

Healing panaceas were the area that practitioners were most willing to spend money. After all, a good healing panacea oftentimes meant a safeguard for life!

The Pill King Garden had seized upon this point, eyed the supreme secret of this market, and chosen the right breakthrough point. As long as they were able to beat the Hall of Healing into the ground in this area, given enough time, what would be so impossible about them replacing the Hall of Healing's position?

After all, the Pill King Garden already had a great advantage in the areas of qi replenishing and heart calming pills.

If the Pill King Garden was able to obtain a lead in three areas using a three pronged approach, it would undoubtedly be a frightening challenge to the Hall of Healing!

Courtmaster Wang said, “Honored guests, we will place six “Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood” on six display tables beneath the stage. Please line up in front of the display tables and take turns in inspection and discussion. It’s said that what the ear hears may be false, but what the eye sees is true. Everyone can personally appraise whether the Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood is truly that miraculous, and if this courtmaster has any elements of bluster. When the appraisal is over, we will find ‘Pill Trial Warriors’ to conduct an on site experiment.”

The so-called “Pill Trial Warrior” was a type of high risk profession. Most who undertook it were those low level practitioners who had no hope on the path of martial dao, yet wanted to earn fast money. Whenever a new pill was introduced, they would test a pill on themselves.

Any type of pill, before it was checked by the extensive marketplace, held risk.

Pill Trial Warriors personally tried pills, undertaking risk with their own bodies, before the pill was fully trusted by widespread consumers.

This was a high risk, high reward profession.

After all, if something was wrong with the pill – or if there were side effects – the first unlucky ones were the Pill Trial Warriors.

The guests presents all got up and walked towards the display tables. Everyone wanted to obtain a place near the front of the line

to catch a glimpse first.

It was a good thing that there were six display tables with six lines. The wait wasn't too long in that regard.

Roughly an hour later, almost all the guests had had their look.

"Tsk tsk, I can tell that this Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood is uncommon just from its scent. The healing panaceas on the market truly are trash when compared to this!"

"I wonder how much the price will be per pill? I plan to buy and hold ten or more of them – the prices might inflate hugely then!"

"This 'Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood' will surely become the most wanted healing panacea in the capital after this!"

"Mm. Other similar products truly are not competitive when compared to it. Us practitioners can be thrifty everywhere except on healing panaceas."

"That's the theory! We're not afraid of high prices, just that it's not good enough!"

At this moment, Courtmaster Wang was wreathed in smiles and his heart was bursting with joy. He had kept his ears open and listened just now – the comments of all the guests were almost all positive to a fault. Apart from those who worried that the price would be out of their reach, almost all were waxing eloquent with

praise.

What did this mean? This meant that before the Pill Trial Warriors had tested the pill, the “Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood” had already received widespread acceptance.

What could almost certainly be anticipated was that once this Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood was introduced into the market, it would kickoff a purchasing trend and would be extremely popular and sell quite well!

“Grand Courtmaster, I’ve been listening and everyone is ceaselessly praising the pill. It looks like the effects are better than we’ve anticipated!”

“Heh heh, I took a look at the Hall of Healing side just now. The second hallmaster Yue Qun’s old face was almost purple with anger. I’d like to see what face the Hall of Healing has left to compete with us this time!”

The senior executives of the Pill King Garden were all extremely excited, and felt the exaltation from fulfillment. To be able to stomp on a mammoth competitor, this type of accomplishment naturally made them feel beyond excited.

Courtmaster Wang was still relatively calm and said, “Prepare to call upon the Pill Trial Warriors. Any pill introduced must first be tested by a Pill Trial Warrior. This way, we can dispel the last of the market’s worries and reservations.”

This part of the process could not be omitted.

The Pill Trial Warriors were invited out. There were four in total.

The process of testing the Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood was certainly going to be very cruel. One had to first injure the Pill Trial Warriors and then have them take the pill for on site proof of its healing properties!

All of the guests' eyes had focused on the Pill Trial Warriors.

At the moment, a golden mallet suddenly sounded from the Hall of Healing side as it crashed into a bronze gong.

The third hallmaster, Qiao Baishi, of the Hall of Healing was already on the exhibition stage with a smile on his face. "Sirs, it's rare to have so many guests present, truly many exalted guests have filled the seats. The Hall of Healing would like to make use of this opportunity to also introduce a healing panacea!"

"What?" The scene was in an uproar.

The Pill King Garden had introduced the healing panacea of Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood.

The Hall of Healing was also introducing a healing panacea – wasn't this an open challenge and call for combat?

There was quite a bit of surprise on the Pill King Garden side. Courtmaster Wang's features were hostile as he stared at Qiao Baishi, inwardly cursing, "Is this Qiao Baishi purposely causing trouble? What healing panacea could the Hall of Healing produce to rival my Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood in their flurry of haste? He is interrupting the rhythm of my Pill King Garden and attempting to impact the smooth introduction of the Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood."

In Courtmaster Wang's eyes, Qiao Baishi's move to introduce pill medicine was fake, but his attempt to disrupt the introduction of the Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood was real. To put it frankly, this was jealousy, causing trouble!

Except, Qiao Baishi didn't even look in the Pill King Garden's direction. He wore a faint smile and his tone rang out powerfully. "The Hall of Healing has always endeavoured to research and develop pills in order to benefit all practitioners under heaven. We have had great achievements in the past few years. The first type of pill we're introducing today – which is also a healing panacea – is called the 'Heavenly Karma Pill'. Coincidentally, the Heavenly Karma Pill was an ancient lost pill recipe. The pill's effects are as its name, almost to the realm of perfection.

Everyone, I am very delighted to tell you that this Heavenly Karma Pill is a shuffling of the cards, a revolution, a historical breakthrough, that we are bringing to the healing panacea market! Its effects are three times, five times, and even ten times those of similar products!"

Three times, five times, and even ten times!

Qiao Baishi's powerful voice was like large bell, bearing down on the chest of everyone present, resonating so that it caused everyone's eardrums to ring.

How.. how was this possible?

A sudden increase in healing properties to three, fives times and even ten times!

This was practically the healing panacea of legends.

Was the Hall of Healing serious? Was it purposefully causing trouble?

But with the Hall of Healing's large brand, how could it crack a joke that would destroy its own brand on such an occasion?

"In addition, if applied externally, this pill can cause wounds to immediately stop bleeding, and heal at a rate visible to the naked eye. If taken internally, it can strengthen connections between muscles and bones within an hour.

For internal injuries, even if the patient is someone who had been so severely beaten that they find it hard to move from bed, taking this pill will guarantee the vigor of dragons and ferocity of tigers, and allow recovery to one's initial condition from the least amount of one day to at most three days!"

Qiao Baishi's every word was like a cavernous bell or large drum, shaking every single person present.

With his descriptions, this Heavenly Karma Pill was absolutely outside the realm of everyone's imagination. If this pill was introduced, then what would that make all similar products on the market, including the Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood?

Your Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood only doubled the healing properties, whereas the other person's pill had increased three, five times, and even ten times!

You could thoroughly heal external injuries in three days, whereas the other's healed external hurts immediately and recovered immediately – it was absolutely a stroke of perfection.

As for internal injuries, your Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood needed ten days before the patient could recover, but the other's Heavenly Karma Pill would guarantee the vigor of dragons and ferocity of tigers and recovery to their initial condition from the least amount of one day to at most three days!

No matter from what aspect this was approached, the Heavenly Karma Pill was an absolute instant kill!

Yes, instant kill!

Instant kill without mercy!

Courtmaster Wang couldn't hold it in and called out loudly, "Qiao Baishi, beware of popping from your own bluster! When did your Hall of Healing operate at such a level? Forgive me for being out of touch with the outside world."

"Indeed, who doesn't know how to bluster? Whether it's a donkey or a horse, haul it out for a walk."

"Such a great healing panacea, bring it out for a look. Only what the eye can see is the truth!"

The senior executives from the Pill King Garden started attacking verbally, jeering at Qiao Baishi. They obviously thought that Qiao Baishi was bluffing.

Qiao Baishi's facial expression was composed, and his face was as if it embraced the wind in the face of the jeers raining down like wind and rain from the Pill King Garden.

"Courtmaster Wang, one of your sentences was true just now. You are indeed out of touch and ignorant of the outside world, like a frog at the bottom of a well. You couldn't contain yourself and impatiently hopped out as soon as you'd received a so called Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood, creating high profile media play. The Hall of Healing has always been practical. If it wasn't for your Pill King Garden's malicious provocation this time, our Hall of Healing originally made no plans to respond."

When his words finished, Qiao Baishi waved his hands and a few

trusted administrators walked out from the back. Everyone held a jade box, and the boxes numbered eight in total.

"Sirs, it is said that what the eye sees is true. These eight jade boxes contain eight Heavenly Karma Pills. One of them is an inferior rank and at three times effectiveness of similar pills. Four of them are middle rank, reaching five times effectives. Three of them are upper rank, reaching ten times effectiveness. If one day we are able to develop the supreme rank Heavenly Karma Pill, its healing properties are conservatively estimated at twenty times that of current similar products!"

Qiao Baishi strongly held in his internal agitation and introduced the Heavenly Karma Pill. When he had finished the introduction, he naturally walked off stage.

"Sirs, eight display tables. Please take turns in inspection and discussion!"

Whether it's a donkey or a horse, haul it out for a walk.

By now, the Hall of Healing was a sharp, unsheathed sword that was displaying its towering loftiness.

The guests present were all incredibly excited. If this Heavenly Karma Pill was truly as miraculous as Qiao Baishi's words, then who would care about the Pill King Garden's previous marketing?

One was not afraid of not recognizing value, but was rather afraid

of a side by side comparison!

The senior executives over at the Pill King Garden side who were still caught up in their anger also set aside their face and their modesty, and actually wormed their way into the lines, wishing to personally see this so called Heavenly Karma Pill that the Hall of Healing had brought.

In the entire process, Jiang Chen was as steady as Mt. Tai, a small smile on his face as he watched this theatrical scene.

He also rather admired Qiao Baishi's move. He'd waited until the Pill King Garden had jumped to its highest before smacking it down with one slap. The higher you were, the harder you fell!

The Pill King Garden fools wants to give a slap to the face? In the end, they'll tragically discover that their laboriously planned face denying gesture had landed soundly on their own faces!

Chapter 48: Upgraded Face Slapping

Another hour had passed, but the area before the display tables was still full of guests. Each guest had a great attachment, and were reluctant to part with the contents on the tables.

“Incredible, it truly is ‘one who’s not afraid of not recognizing value, but rather is afraid of a side by side comparison’. This Heavenly Karma Pill, whether in terms of potency, spiritual aura, or outward appearances, are all an instant kill towards the Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood.”

“The Hall of Healing is truly worthy to be called such. The first heavyweight in spirit medicine in the kingdom absolutely doesn’t hold an unearned reputation.”

“The Pill King Garden wanted to make use of this opportunity to suppress the Hall of Healing. Who would’ve thought that after creating such a large hubbub, the Hall of Healing still had superior tactics. Looks like the Pill King Garden has failed in face slapping, and rather slapped their own instead.”

“Such exquisite perfection, absolutely exquisite perfection. I’ve decided to choose this Heavenly Karma Pill in the future. To be honest, after seeing the Heaven Karma Pill, I feel all other healing panaceas are complete trash.”

“Hallmaster Qiao, when can this Heavenly Karma Pill be purchased?”

Some senior executive from the Pill King Garden left the Hall's display tables with a darkened face, returning to the Pill King Garden's side.

"Grand Courtmaster, it's too abnormal!"

"What's going on? Is that Heavenly Karma Pill really that good?" Courtmaster Wang's breathing became hurried.

"Grand Courtmaster, that pill is likely even a bit better than what Qiao Baishi described it as. Grand Courtmaster, we were played by the Hall of Healing!"

"What?!" It was as if Courtmaster Wang's chest had suffered a heavy impact, his face abruptly becoming ashen white.

Master Violet had been sitting there without the slightest stir when those fey eyes also suddenly opened, shooting out blue light.

"What did you say? The Hall of Healing's pill is better than my Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood?" Master Violet absolutely didn't believe that such a pill could exist in a common kingdom like the Eastern Kingdom.

But the truth, irrefutable like metal, had fully answered this question.

In the span of a moment, the guests and stores that the Pill King Garden had invited had all surged towards the Hall of Healing's

side. There were no exceptions.

They were all planning on ordering from the Hall of Healing, and in fact, were striving to be first and feared to lag behind.

This was in stark contrast to the Pill King Garden's side. Apart from a few staunch supporters, it was cold and cheerless – a deserted house that was possible to catch sparrows on its doorstep.

"How can this be?" Courtmaster Wang found it difficult to accept the situation in front of him.

He had planned so much for today, and prepared so long for this day of glory.

Finally, the historical moment had arrived today. He thought that the Pill King Garden being disadvantaged towards the Hall of Healing would become a thing of the past starting today.

Starting today, the Pill King Garden would advance triumphantly, and rebuff the Hall of Healing every step of the way!

Yet, harsh reality had dealt him a severe slap, causing him to suddenly fall down when he had climbed to the highest peak.

The Hall of Healing had used a way that they took the most pride in, to severely fling a slap at the Pill King Garden!

The Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood?

Dominate the healing panacea market?

Their hopes and dreams were quite full, but their reality was quite shallow!

The Hall of Healing's "Heavenly Karma Pill" had easy demolished all of their previous preparations. Their long fermented attack had been easily dispelled.

How was this a battle between equals? This was practically knocking on their door and asking to be tortured.

Courtmaster Wang suddenly understood why Qiao Baishi looked completely at ease. It turned out that he had long prepared a severe counterattack, and was only waiting for the Pill King Garden to hop in with both feet.

Failure, a complete and utter failure!

"Courtmaster Wang, we must not be dejected. The Hall of Healing had an advantage in the healing panacea market to begin with. It doesn't mean much that the advantage is in their hands right now. We still have the Qi Replenishing Pill and the Crane Heart Pill. We still lead the Hall of Healing in these two areas!"

"Right, let them strut for a while this time. Our Pill King Garden still has our advantages!"

The senior executives of the Pill King Garden started comforting themselves.

However, their self comforting didn't last too long. Qiao Baishi suddenly stood up again on the hall exhibition stage, and spread his hands downwards. "Sirs, we will not be accepting preorders for the Heavenly Karma Pill today. If everyone is still interested, you can apply to preorder it at the Hall of Healing starting tomorrow. Moreover, I have another piece of good news to tell everyone here."

More good news?

The fervent guests present had calmed down somewhat. The "Heavenly Karma Pill" that the Hall of Healing had introduced was simply too shocking. Therefore, they wished to see what other surprises the Hall of Healing would have for everyone?

Qiao Baishi smiled, "This time, the Hall of Healing is prepared to introduce en masse the pill medicines that we have been researching the past couple of years. Apart from the Heavenly Karma Pill, we will also be introducing two more pill medicines. One of them is the qi replenishing Vast Ocean Pill, the other is the heart calming One Buddha Powder."

Qi replenishing arena, heart calming arena.

Those present were all smart people and immediately understood that the pill medicines the Hall of Healing was introducing were

very targeted. It was patently obvious that they were targeting the Pill King Garden.

Those two arenas were the two that the Pill King Garden were originally most adept in.

Could it be that the Hall of Healing was also planning on intervening in these two arenas this time? Was this the tempo of thoroughly beating down the Pill King Garden?

The faces of the senior executives of the Pill King Garden changed drastically. Their confidence had already been crushed to pieces by the Heavenly Karma Pill earlier. They immediately had a sense of danger that the wolf was coming when they heard Qiao Baishi's words.

Courtmater Wang only felt a cold draft on the back of his head as cold sweat suddenly poured out. A bad premonition started rising uncontrollably from his heart.

He had a bad feeling. Not only had the setup that he'd prepared painstakingly, been completely dissolved by the Hall of Healing, but the Hall had also prepared a quick and forceful retaliation and was about to lure the Pill King Garden into a fatal trap by random blows!

Courtmaster Wang was well aware that if the two areas of the Qi Replenishing Pill and the Crane Heart Pill were defeated by the Hall of Healing, then armageddon undoubtedly awaited the Pill King Garden.

After all, a large part of why the Pill King Garden could find its footing in the capital and become the third heavyweight in the spirit medicine field in the Eastern Kingdom was due to the Qi Replenishing Pill and the Crane Heart Pill.

More than sixty to seventy percent of their revenue was derived from these two pill medicines.

If they lost their advantages in these two pill medicines, then the Pill King Garden would have utterly lost all of its advantages, and be no different from those small stores.

Except, the workings of this world was that whatever you were afraid of would be what came your way.

Under the gazes of all present. Qiao Baishi wore a smile that exuded confidence, and had a measured tone that was neither too hurried nor too slow. “Sirs, everyone knows that the pill medicines currently on the market can at most only recover thirty percent of true qi. The Vast Ocean Pill that the Hall is about to introduce can, in the worst case scenario, recover forty percent true qi, and fifty percent under normal conditions. If it’s an upper rank Vast Ocean Pill, then it can even recover sixty percent! And dosage can be repeated after just an hour, while repeated dosages will not impact effects in the slightest.”

“What, recover at least forty percent?”

“Recover fifty percent true qi under normal conditions? Is... is

this a joke?”

“An upper rank Vast Ocean Pill can recover sixty percent? My gosh, if this is in battle, a few upper rank Vast Ocean Pills will greatly increase battle strength!”

Everyone know that the technical requirements of a qi recovery pill were high. The most expensive pill medicine on the market was the Pill King Garden’s Qi Replenishing Pill. It could recover thirty percent, with its effects being slightly adversely impacted with repeated dosage after an hour.

But the Vast Ocean Pill that Qiao Baishi spoke of could recover forty percent under the worst conditions, fifty percent under normal conditions,and even sixty percent with an upper rank pill. This was basically a disruptive breakthrough.

One had to know that the Qi Replenishing Pill had occupied the advantage for more than two hundred years in the arena of qi recovery. That was to say, no technical advancement had occurred in this arena for a full two hundred years.

One could see how incredibly difficult it was to obtain a breakthrough in the qi recovery arena.

But the Hall of Healing’s breakthrough had come too quickly and was too frightening! It was absolutely a disruptive innovation.

“Hallmaster Qiao, since this Vast Ocean Pill is so amazing, will it

come with a whoppingly high price?”

“Indeed, ordinary folk will be unable to use it if it’s too expensive.”

Qiao Baishi smiled. “According to the calculations of our cost of goods sold, the Vast Ocean Pill that recovers forty percent of true qi will be priced the same as the current best product on the market – the Qi Replenishing Pill. Prices will double for pills that recover fifty percent, and double yet again for those that recover sixty percent.”

Every ten percent increase in effectiveness would lead to a doubling of price.

This price was quite reasonable. To recover an additional ten percent of true qi in battle was incredibly meaningful to a practitioner in battle.

“Hallmaster Qiao, you’re not joking are you?”

“Indeed, a pill that recovers forty percent true qi is priced the same as one that recovers thirty percent? Then we only recognize the Vast Ocean Pill!”

“Hallmaster Qiao, I want to preorder a hundred pills!

“I want two hundred pills!”

“And me…”

It was a scene of chaos as everyone realized a new era had arrived in the qi recovery arena! With such fabulous effects, why would one wait for its price to rise after it had cornered the market, instead of fighting for it now?

Everyone thought that the reason the Hall of Healing had set such a low price for the Vast Ocean Pill was surely because of them suppressing the Pill King Garden.

Such low prices would definitely not continue for long. Prices for the Vast Ocean Pill were sure to inflate after it had thoroughly beaten its competitors on the market.

Everyone was smart, and so were desperately fighting to preorder early!

Qiao Baishi pressed down with his hands and smiled. “Sirs, the same sentence holds. We will not accept preorders today. And, I can also promise that we will not inflate prices without rhyme or reason. Unless the price for the spirit medicine ingredients inflate, we will never increase prices!”

Qiao Baishi was well aware that the Vast Ocean Pill was the result of a superior pill recipe. When it came to the spirit medicine ingredients for the Vast Ocean Pill, its costs were possibly even lower than the Qi Replenishing Pill.

The Hall of Healing's advantage were actually the advantages that the young duke Jiang Chen had brought.

Never increase prices!

This promise prompted a series of cheers from the gathering and applause sounded like thunder in the span of a moment. One had to say, Qiao Baishi's bearing had conquered all the guests present.

When the Pill King Garden had exhibited that so called Pill of Dragon and Tiger Blood, it had been quite arrogant. The Qi Replenishing Pill had also often opportunistically changed prices, skyrocketing in times of need.

The Hall of Healing was the first heavyweight of the spirit medicine world after all. With these manners, this bearing wasn't something that the Pill King Garden could match!

"Faugh! When I get home, I'm throwing that Qi Replenishing Pill into the latrines!"

"Right? Randomly increasing prices for no reason, as if they're the only ones who know how to refine a qi recovery pill!"

"Standing up well to comparison. Looks like the pill medicine market truly needs the Hall of Healing at the helm. And only the Hall of Healing has this kind of right and bearing."

“I’ve decided. I’m going to apply for a premier membership card at the Hall of Healing tomorrow and be a customer for life!”

The previously neutral guests all naturally stood on the side of the Hall of Healing after receiving Qiao Baishi’s promise.

Even a lot of the Pill King Garden’s old clients couldn’t resist temptation after seeing such enormous profits. They could also fully see that the Garden’s Qi Replenishing Pill was done for!

Chapter 49: Complete Knock Down

Some more meddlesome folks continued asking, “Hallmaster Qiao, I remember that you mentioned introducing three types of pill medicine just now. What else is there apart from the Heavenly Karma Pill and the Vast Ocean Pill?”

“Yes, we trust the products of the Hall of Healing. Out with it, so everyone can rejoice!”

“Hallmaster Qiao, don’t keep us in suspense, speak!”

The crowd of people were all raising an uproar and on their tiptoes in expectation.

Qiao Baishi nodded, smiling with ease. “We have decided to discreetly introduce the third pill medicine after careful consideration. The Hall of Healing will be giving up a great share of profits with the third pill medicine. Our goal is to give back to those who have greatly supported the Hall of Healing over the years.

The third pill medicine is called One Buddha Powder, a type of refreshing, mind calming pill medicine. When compared to the best similar products on the current market, the effects of One Buddha Powder are possibly twice as effective. And yet the price we’re setting for it will be half of the best pill medicine currently on the market!”

Twice as effective at half the price!

Dead silence actually reigned supreme for a moment after Qiao Baishi had spoken. They almost suspected that something was wrong with their ears.

Had they heard incorrectly?

It was already exceedingly odd, and really didn't make much sense, that a pill medicine twice as effective hadn't undergone a price increase, but now its price was actually being halved?

This...

Finally, someone couldn't hold it in. "Hallmaster Qiao, this... you're not joking, are you?"

"The sign of the Hall of Healing is here, how dare I speak nonsense? Each bit of spittle from the Hall of Healing is as if a nail, please be at ease everyone. To be candid, we hadn't planned on earning much from the One Buddha Powder."

This last sentence however, was a bit watered down. In actuality, since the One Buddha Powder didn't need to be refined, waste of materials didn't exist and so its cost of goods sold were only a tenth of the Pill King Garden's Crane Heart Pill.

With such low costs, even reducing the price by one half still raked in money.

To be honest, even if it were sold at the same price as the Crane Heart Pill, that was still absolutely enough to ignite the market, but Qiao Baishi had purposefully slashed the price in half.

The purpose of this was to beat the Pill King Garden down so hard that they had no chance at all in coming back.

In addition, they could make use of this opportunity to craft the image of a virtuous and sincere Hall of Healing, solidifying the Hall's position as the first heavyweight of the spirit medicine.

Qiao Baishi had deployed three successive moves and introduced three kinds of pill medicine. And each was more stunning than the last.

But to the Pill King Garden, Qiao Baishi's three successive moves were the equivalent of three successive heavy punches. Each was more debilitating than the last!

Courtmaster Wang could barely stay on his feet. The skies spun and the ground turned, he was about to faint right then and there as his teeth chattered, betraying his weakness.

He knew that this wasn't a joke. This was a kind of bloodless slaughter in the marketplace. With these three moves, the Hall of Healing had utterly destroyed the foundations of the PIll King Garden.

"Grand Courtmater, what... what should we do?"

“Master Violet, say something. Surely you won’t watch the Pill King Garden go bankrupt?”

“Yes Master Violet, we all work for the Duke of Soaring Dragon, you…”

Master Violet snorted coldly and looked at the senior executives of the Pill King Garden with eyes full of disdain. He swept his sleeves up and left.

“Truly unable to accomplish anything, but good at spoiling things!”

The last bit of faith held by the senior executives of the Pill King Garden collapsed with the flourish of his departure.

The senior executives of the Hall of Healing also felt like they were in a dreamscape at the moment. They too hadn’t anticipated Qiao Baishi’s successive actions.

After all, in an effort to avoid leaks, Qiao Baishi had continuously concealed and not spoken of his intentions with regards to this matter. Even many of the senior executives present hadn’t been in the know.

Apart from a few elders absolutely loyal to Qiao Baishi, who had received hints from Qiao Baishi before the matter, many senior executives had had no foreknowledge, including the second

hallmaster Yue Qun.

But at the moment, what did Yue Qun care about that. Seeing the faces that had been thwarted on the Pill King Garden side, his old face was smiling so hard that it was about to blossom into a flower.

“Number three, you’ve played this hand beautifully!” Yue Qun patted Qiao Baishi’s shoulder. “I had previously thought it a bit odd that the Lord Hallmaster had trusted you so and cultivated you. In this my regard, my insight is truly inferior to the Lord Hallmaster’s.”

“Second hallmaster is experienced and steady, there is much more that I must learn from you.” Qiao Baishi also responded humbly.

The next step was a showing by the Pill Trial Warriors.

The profession of a Pill Trial Warrior was first and foremost to be impartial and speak the truth.

Of course, the spirit medicines from the Hall of Healing could withstand trials. After the repeated tests by the Pill Trial Warriors, these pill medicines had gained complete certification!

Heavenly Karma Pill, Vast Ocean Pill, One Buddha Powder... they were all genuine goods at a fair price!

Under the guarantee of the Pill Trial Warriors, the last bit of

reservations and suspicions held by anyone present were dispelled. All the guests boiled with fervor and surged to the front of the display tables.

“Hallmaster Qiao, I am the son of the Minister of War, Minister Fan. I will be over early tomorrow morning to place my order, remember to reserve a place for me.”

“Old Yue, my brother is Vice Minister Zhang in the Ministry of Revenue. Your relationship with him goes back more than ten years, right? Save a place for a brother tomorrow, I want to place an order!”

All sorts of favor currying and cottoning up to someone came rushing in during the span of a moment.

Although the Hall of Healing had many hands on their side, they too couldn’t fend off the press of people for a bit.

As for Princess Gouyu, who had been invited by the Hall of Healing, her charming face was incredibly grave as she looked at the situation that had taken a complete turn for the opposite. She would occasionally throw a rushed glance at Jiang Chen, her heart filled with questions.

She took another look at Jiang Chen. He had been smiling slightly all along, as if the hubbub in front of his eyes had nothing to do with him.

The more he was this way, the more Princess Gouyu resolutely believed that the Hall of Healing's mindblowing comeback had some elements of this person's influence in it.

Just as Princess Gouyu was sifting through complicated feelings, an elder from the Hall of Healing walked over respectfully, holding a luxurious jade box in his hands.

"Your Highness, this is a dry share agreement. According to young duke Jiang, the Princess was involved in the One Buddha Powder. Here are dry shares of twenty percent, we hope the princess kindly accepts."

Twenty percent dry share, this was basically receiving money without lifting a single finger in effort!

Gouyu was dumbfounded, what involvement? What was the brat Jiang Chen playing at? But she immediately thought of the prescription that Jiang Chen had written for her and suddenly thought of what he had said – if she didn't believe him, she could take that prescription and exchange it for several million silver at the Hall of Healing.

Indeed, the kid's hands could be found behind this matter!

Princess Gouyu further affirmed her internal speculation. She was a royal princess and didn't put on airs. She nodded her head slightly, and one of her servants accepted the agreement for twenty percent dry shares.

She was well aware that the worth of this twenty percent dry share was much more than several million. When this One Buddha Powder was introduced, it was sure to storm the market and, without a doubt, corner the sector.

In terms of long term calculations, the profits of this twenty percent dry share would absolutely be denoted in hundreds of millions.

The Pill King Garden's furious build up had ended up benefiting the Hall of Healing in the end. It had also incidentally pushed itself into the abyss of destruction.

This was basically digging a hole and burying themselves!

The guests present finally left reluctantly, after repeated promises from the senior executives of the Hall of Healing.

The Hall of Healing had emerged victorious on all fronts in this campaign, and had returned home laden with spoils of war.

As the mastermind behind the scenes, Jiang Chen had watched the show that he'd come to watch, and was about to leave with his underlings when he suddenly halted as he passed by the Pill King Garden's display tables.

"Oh right, Courtmaster Wang, I gave you a warning out of the goodness of my heart last time that your days were numbered. You treated my goodwill as ill intent. Ai, I don't even know how to

comfort you.”

Jiang Chen planned on stomping this Courtmaster Wang dead with one foot.

This man had publicly suppressed his Jiang family, and had humiliated Jiang Feng at the Soaring Dragon manor. In Jiang Chen’s eyes, this man was destined to be rotten bones in a graveyard, and he didn’t have much time left.

Cold killing intent shot out of Courtmaster Wang’s eyes as his bloodshot eyes were filled with wildness. He was like a starving wolf driven into an impasse, ready to risk his life at any time.

When he walked out of the Myriad Treasures Palace, Jiang Chen’s tone was frosty. “One will fall victim in return if a snake isn’t beaten to death. If we’re to do something to this Pill King Garden, then we must destroy and pull them down!”

The four Sheng battalion brothers all nodded and felt that Jiang Chen’s words made a lot of sense.

“Jiang Chen, wait a moment.”

At the entrance to the Myriad Treasures Palace, Princess Gouyu, wearing light green leather body armor embedded with a natural body scent, rushed in front of Jiang Chen.

She pushed the box forward, “I’m giving this twenty percent dry

shares back to you.”

“What are you giving them back to me for?” Jiang Chen smiled. “Wasn’t this a red envelope for you?”

“Humph. Don’t think I don’t know that you were certainly involved in the Hall of Healing’s turnaround. Do you think I don’t know the origins of this One Buddha Powder?” Princess Gouyu’s face was flushed faintly red.

“If they gave it to you then just accept it, what’s with all the extraneous words?” Jiang Chen rolled his eyes. “Besides, you were the first to take this One Buddha Powder. You were a Pill Trial Warrior, receiving a red envelope would be quite normal, no?”

“What? Jiang Chen you brat. How dare you treat this princess as a Pill Trial Warrior!” Princess Gouyu couldn’t hold in her inexplicable anger.

“Look at you, you’re fine!” Jiang Chen chuckled. Please, he – Jiang Chen – was the most renowned alchemy master beneath the heavens. The pill recipes he took out were advanced recipes from even more lofty realms. They had undergone forging by hundreds and thousands of truths. What need was there for a Pill Trial Warrior?

“Don’t be so hot tempered, I know you’re internally grateful to me. If you want to pay me back, then send the set of flying daggers to me earlier.”

Jiang Chen squeezed his legs after he'd finished speaking and left on a galloping horse.

The four Sheng battalion brothers were under orders to protect Jiang Chen. They could only look with resignation at the princess, before rushing off in hot pursuit.

Only Princess Gouyu was left, staring off in the distance as she clutched the jade box. After the events of today, Gouyu could definitely be certain that Jiang Chen was not as simple as he appeared on the surface.

"Jiang Chen..." Princess Gouyu lightly mouthed this name and sank into bafflingly deep thought in that moment.

Back at the Jiang Han manor, Jiang Chen was not overly excited due to the events of the day. To speak frankly, the events of today were just an interlude for him

Endless martial dao was Jiang Chen's ultimate goal.

"Jiang Zheng, make a trip to the Hall of Healing and tell Qiao Baishi to come here." Jiang Chen thought momentarily and had an idea in his mind.

He didn't want to split a portion of his mental energy to think of the affairs of the Hall of Healing. He needed to concentrate more on the path of martial dao.

One had to give it to him, Qiao Baishi was nearing blind worship now when it came to Jiang Chen. Although a multitude of affairs awaited him in the Hall of Healing, he immediately set off without hesitation when he heard Jiang Chen's summons.

Jiang Chen was quite satisfied with Qiao Baishi's attitude.

"Third hallmaster, I only have one sentence. What I've given to your Hall of Healing today, I can take back tenfold tomorrow. Do you believe me?"

Dry shares are shares of ownership awarded to someone who was pivotal to the founding of a company, but when that person wasn't an investor

Chapter 50: Qiao Baishi Acknowledges A Master

Qiao Baishi was aghast and hurriedly stood up. “Young duke, has someone from the Hall of Healing given offense? I will immediately go back and investigate. Whoever has offended the young duke, I will throw them out on the streets immediately!”

Jiang Chen spread his hands downward and smiled, “Don’t be agitated, I was just saying. I’ve asked you to come today because I wish to speak a few words from my heart.”

“Baishi listens most devoutly and respectfully to any instructions that the young duke will give.” Qiao Baishi had humbled himself greatly in front of Jiang Chen. He knew, better than anyone, that the glories and honor of the Hall of Healing which belonged to him today, were all courtesy of Jiang Chen.

It was just as Jiang Chen had said: What he could give the Hall of Healing today, he could take back tenfold tomorrow.

Jiang Chen nodded. “I’ll speak frankly. I have no time to visit your Hall of Healing once, twice, or even thrice a month. I need a confidante, a follower. Or to put it in better sounding terms, a disciple-in-name who will listen to what I say.”

Qiao Baishi’s thoughts raced. How could he be an idiot if he was a Hallmaster? He naturally understood the meaning behind Jiang Chen’s words.

This was a desire for Qiao Baishi to prove his loyalty and announce his allegiance!

“Third Hallmaster, you’re a smart man. I’ll only say this: If there comes a day when someone who’s a hundred times greater than you kneels in front of me and licks my toes, I might not even accept him as a disciple then. What I can give you is ten times, a hundred times beyond the limits of your imagination!”

Qiao Baishi’s breathing become rushed. How would he not believe him? Jiang Chen had changed the entire landscape of the Eastern Kingdom’s spirit medicine market with just three random pill recipes.

Given enough time, the pill medicines of the Hall of Healing making their way to the neighboring sixteen countries and making staggering profits was absolutely not out of the question.

And all of this had been bestowed by Jiang Chen.

When his thoughts traveled here, how could Qiao Baishi hesitate? His two knees immediately hit the floor, “Honored master, Baishi kowtows in greeting. Baishi is willing to spend his life following master, and learn of the boundless dao of alchemy.”

Following his words, he kowtowed as respectfully as possible, and fully fulfilled the courtesies of formally becoming a disciple.

Jiang Chen didn’t put on any airs, and fully accepted Qiao Baishi’s ritual.

“Baishi, there will come a day in which you discover that you made a wise and brilliant decision today. If you had hesitated a moment longer just now, you would’ve lost my trust. The aid I’ve rendered you would’ve also halted today.”

Qiao Baishi was exceedingly fearful.

“Since you’ve acknowledged me as your master, I will thus pass to you the core secrets of the three pill recipes. This way, it saves me the trouble of visiting your Hall of Healing every month.”

What?

Qiao Baishi was utterly dumfounded. He hadn’t thought that such amazing benefits would befall him after acknowledging a master. He was directly receiving the core techniques of these three types of pill recipes!

This was an extravagant hope that he hadn’t even dared dream of!

“Don’t be astonished. These three pill recipes are strokes of great fortune in your eyes. In my eyes though, they’re not much better than trash.”

Jiang Chen wasn’t blustering. With his attainments in the dao of

alchemy in his past life, these pill recipes were street vendor goods that were ordinary beyond belief.

These words weren't meant as an empty bluster, but to take Qiao Baishi down a notch and prevent him from overweening pride after receiving the core secrets of these three pill recipes.

Qiao Baishi was even more fearful. "Master, your disciple is afraid that he is unlikely to master these three pill recipes. In the Hall of Healing..."

"Since I am passing them onto you, then I am unafraid of you being unable to master them. Remember, you're different from before. You have me as your backer. If anyone dares raise a hue and cry at you in the world of spirit medicine, then you have the right to pulverize them to dust. If you are unable to do so, then you have no qualifications towards being my disciple.

You must be quite aware that if I was willing, the line of those who would beg on both knees to be my disciple would stretch from my Jiang Han territory all the way to the capital."

Qiao Baishi hurriedly said, "Your disciple is a believer. Master possesses marvelous resources, and must be the reincarnation of a great and ancient alchemy master. How could your disciple not believe? Being able to attract the favorable attention of my master is the result of the karma from my hundreds of years of training."

Jiang Chen laughed lightly. Reincarnation of a great, ancient alchemy master? Qiao Baishi had guessed quite daringly! But he

had been too conservative even with such a daring guess!

Of course, Jiang Chen would naturally not reveal his own secrets and only smiled mysteriously. “Great and ancient alchemy master? Baishi, if you have enough good fortune, the longer you follow me, the more you will learn about how high the heavens are, and how big the world is.”

For Qiao Baishi, this was destined to be a sleepless night.

This evening, he had made a decision that would change the trajectory of his life.

Jiang Chen bore no suspicions about his people, and had fully passed on the mysteries and secrets of the three pill recipes to Qiao Baishi. This made Qiao Baishi commit himself even more fully to Jiang Chen.

After sending off Qiao Baishi, Jiang Chen entered the Jiang Han secret training room, and continued training.

Although Jiang Chen had been quite busy during this time, he had never neglected his nightly homework of training.

After these last few days of familiar practice, he had fully entered the training state of the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans”. Under the aid of this strong method, his vast waves true qi had improved with marvelous speed.

His six meridians true qi were like six hungry tigers – full of hunger towards the next acupoint. They itched for action, and wished to attempt to fight towards seven meridians true qi.

"Who would've thought that the power of the "Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans" would be this much greater than I'd imagined. I thought ascending to seven meridians true qi wouldn't be that easy. Yet, the "Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans" has enabled the quality of my vast waves true qi to greatly increase. With such a supreme method, breaking through to seven meridians true qi can be a matter achieved without any extra effort or the need for additional buildup."

Jiang Chen discovered that he had underestimated the quality of the "Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans". In the days that he'd practiced the "Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans", his vast waves true qi had noticeably improved by quite a bit.

"Alright, since this vast waves true qi is so hungry, it indicates that there's no need for me to linger in the intermediate realm of true qi. Let's give it a go!"

Jiang Chen was a man of action, and immediately manipulated his six meridians true qi. His six currents of concentrated vast waves true qi were like six rivers converging into the great seas.

It was easier than Jiang Chen had imagined. When the six hungry wolves of vast waves true qi rushed towards the seventh acupoint, a warm current circled the acupoint.

True qi surged forward like electricity in an unstoppable onslaught at that moment, instantaneously clearing the seventh meridian without a hint of hesitation, or the slightest feeling of an obstacle.

“Hoo!”

Jiang Chen slowly exhaled a breath of murky air. Who would’ve thought that breaking through to seven meridians true qi was so much easier than he’d imagined.

“It looks like it’s not that the practitioners of this common world possess inferior potential, but that they truly lack decent training methods. With this Jiang Chen as an example, if he’d been willing to train studiously, then he would’ve been at least at six meridians true qi. Even seven meridians true qi wouldn’t have been a farfetched thought!”

Jiang Chen knew that he had broken through so easily and had entered the advanced realm of true qi at least partially because the potential of this body was quite good, but that the main reason was because of an advanced training method.

If one looked throughout the entire Eastern Kingdom, it would be impossible to find another method superior to the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans”.

Even the royal family’s entire founding method of “Eastern Amethyst Qi” would still pale far in comparison to the “Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans”.

A breakthrough in the area of true qi greatly increased Jiang Chen's confidence.

With the aid of his vast waves of true qi, Jiang Chen began to combine his martial art technique training. With his current true qi foundation, Jiang Chen didn't choose the techniques that were overly deep.

The set of "Vast Ocean Current Splitter" was the upgraded version of "Wave Breaker".

And the set of "Divine Aeons Fist" was the upgraded version of "Sea God Fist".

The original owner of Jiang Chen's body had previously practiced "Wave Breaker" and "Sea God Fist". But he'd counted as someone who'd just set foot in the halls of training, and hadn't fully gotten a handle on the core components.

Therefore, Jiang Chen was basically starting from the beginning, now that he was practicing these two upgraded versions of the martial arts techniques.

There were seven forms in total to the "Vast Ocean Current Splitter". Once the seven forms had all been successfully practiced, the sword form would be like the currents of the vast ocean, and fully display the true colors of a hero.

It was said that once the seven forms had been successfully practiced and were well versed through a comprehensive study of the subject, that one in the true qi realm would have a fighting chance with an ordinary spirit dao practitioner.

The true qi realm being able to counter the legendary spirit dao… it could be seen from such rumors what a dominant technique the “Vast Ocean Current Splitter” was.

Within the Jiang Han manor training field, Jiang Chen used his hand as a blade beneath the moonlight. His steps were as if stepping upon the backs of waves. Each motion encompassed the concept of roaring waves.

One had to say, equipped with the memories of his past life, Jiang Chen possessed an extremely strong grasp and understanding of martial arts techniques.

At this moment, his palm became a blade, and it was as if there truly was a blade in his hand with each step he took. The concepts layered upon each other, causing his entire body to be filled with the light of brilliant dominance.

“First form of ‘Vast Ocean Current Splitter’ — Wave Slash!”

Jiang Chen stepped out and his arm slashed downwards. It was a clean and neat cut without any embellishments, utterly lacking extraneous movements. Simple and fast, charging towards the main subject!

True qi like frost filled the air with frigid light.

Accompanied by a strong metallic sense, true qi flowed straight through where the hand-blade pointed and landed on a stone lock.

After the crisp sound of rock shattering, the stone lock broke neatly down the center. The two sides were as smooth and shiny as a mirror – as if a knife had cut through it like tofu.

It was as if a real blade had cut through it with this move.

Jiang Chen's interest was greatly piqued as he repeatedly moved his feet. His arm continued to slash downwards, like layers upon layers of waves.

Klang, klang...

Jiang Chen slashed downwards nine times in one go.

Nine neat currents of true qi flowed through him, as the row of stone locks successively broke apart down the middle, following a neat rhythm. The sides of each broken stone lock were as neat as mirrors.

"'Vast Ocean Current Splitter really is something alright!" Jiang Chen retracted his steps and gazed upon the row of neatly split stone locks. He was very satisfied as he gazed at the surface of the stone locks broken.

“Such power in the first form, and this is still only the first form. If I were to slash seven times in one go, it’s unlikely that there would be many who could take my seven slashes within the realm of advanced true qi.”

Jiang Chen was quite satisfied as he looked upon the amazing destruction brought upon by the first form of the “Vast Ocean Current Splitter”.

“An upgraded method accompanied by upgraded martial arts techniques. In such a small kingdom of a common status, one would definitely have the basis to look upon peers on the same level with disdain!”

“The final exams of the Hidden Dragon Trials are about to arrive. The easy and comfortable days of the capital are likely to be gone without a trace.” Jiang Chen very calmly perceived that, along with the start of the final exams of the Hidden Dragon Trials, great upheaval was sure to occur for the bigger picture of the capital.

The situation of a raging storm had already been formed, and Jiang Chen didn’t dare slacken the slightest bit!

Chapter 51: Layered-Feather Throwing Daggers

During the next several days, Jiang Chen spent every day training in the Jiang Han manor, and consolidated the results of having trained to seven meridians true qi. He would never be careless in the area of strengthening meridians.

Compared to his peers, Jiang Chen placed much more of an importance on strengthening his meridians. Only by strengthening them to an unassailable stage, would he be on the safe side when vying for the next step.

As his cultivation continued to increase, it was inevitable that the difficulty in taking each step forward would markedly increase. The risks he would meet would also steadily increase.

If he greedily sought after speed and advanced rashly, it was very possible that his haste would not bring success.

With the aid of seven meridians true qi, Jiang Chen had quite a few breakthroughs on the two martial arts techniques.

There were seven forms in total for the “Vast Ocean Current Splitter”, and he had already successfully practiced the first two.

The first form “Wave Slash”, and the second form “Wave Breaker”, layered upon each other as they advanced, with each move stronger than the last. Not only had Jiang Chen practiced

these two to the great perfection realm, but he'd also linked the two forms, thus doubling their power.

In terms of mysteries, the "Divine Aeons Fist" was many times greater than the "Vast Ocean Current Splitter".

The "Vast Ocean Current Splitter" was a blade technique, devoting particular care to a dominance that pressed forward with indomitable will. Wherever the edge of the blade swept, all were laid prostrate, no matter friend or foe.

"Divine Aeons Fist" on the other hand, encompassed the theories of heaven and earth, fusing the way of the life and destruction of all creatures beneath the heavens. From one cycle of blooming and wilting, to nine cycles of blooming and wilting, there were the mysteries of nine rounds of reincarnation held within.

With each successful comprehension of the mysteries of each successive cycle of reincarnation, the power of the "Divine Aeons Fist" would double.

One had to say, the "Divine Aeons Fist" was practically tailored for Jiang Chen. The circle of life contained by the "Divine Aeons First" was precisely the way of destruction and growth encompassed by the wheel of life and death.

And Jiang Chen had reincarnated from the son of the Celestial Emperor to the common body of the son of a duke, literally undergoing the wheel of life and death.

Therefore, Jiang Chen's comprehension of the "Divine Aeons Fist" was actually deeper and more extensive than the "Vast Ocean Current Splitter".

If it was said that Jiang Chen had so far trained the "Vast Ocean Current Splitter" to the great perfection realm, then he would've trained the "Divine Aeons Fist" to the legendary realm. However, there were nine levels of mysteries in the cycle of life in the Divine Aeons Fist.

Jiang Chen had currently only grasped three levels.

"This 'Divine Aeons Fist' conforms so well with the trajectory of my destiny, that I've comprehended the mysteries of three cycles of blooming and wilting in just a mere few days. Given enough time, this 'Divine Aeons Fist' is sure to become an overbearing martial arts technique that I can use to vanquish my enemies. If I can train this 'Divine Aeons Fist' to seven or eight levels, then even if I am halted at seven meridians true qi, I would probably be able to fight against true qi masters. If I am able to comprehend the mysteries of nine cycles of blooming and wilting, then it's not impossible that I would be able to resist those legendary spirit dao practitioners!"

Jiang Chen had a particular affixment to the "Divine Aeons Fist". It was as if he had entrusted the spirit of his reincarnation to this martial arts technique.

Jiang Chen did not set a foot outside his door that day, and was practicing in the training field when Jiang Zheng hurriedly came to report that Princess Gouyu had arrived.

Princess Gouyu had kept quite a low profile during this time, apparently making her final preparations for breaking through to eleven meridians true qi. Her appearance now most likely meant that everything was in readiness.

“Looks like I must congratulate you in advance.” Jiang Chen discovered that Princess Gouyu’s spirit was soaring when he saw her, and that she gave off an unworldly feeling of revelling in the joy of the spring wind.[1]

Princess Gouyu was obviously in a very good mood. “Jiang Chen, I’ve especially come to thank you. Oh right, here are the items that were prepared for you.”

Princess Gouyu personally took two boxes from her retinue.

The boxes were opened. A set of soft armor was in the first box.

The nine throwing daggers were in the second box, made from the Layered-Feather Golden Crystal from that day. This Crystal had been an almost transparent crystal to begin with, and was now as thin and transparent as cicada wings after it had been forged into throwing daggers. When the sunlight hit it, it was like ice entering water and melting away into nothingness, thoroughly becoming one with the vacant void.

Princess Gouyu had to give it up to Jiang Chen’s eye for appraisal. Who would’ve thought that the Layered-Feather Golden

Crystal would have this kind of effect when forged into throwing daggers?

"Jiang Chen, this soft armor was made from the skysilk fibers from barbarian territory in the western regions. It encompasses the skin of the large deepwater whale, and can withstand the blow from an ordinary true qi master!"

One had to say, there was indeed quite a lot of sincerity in Princess Gouyu's gratitude. This soft armor even surprised Jiang Chen a little.

"The item is not bad, I'll accept it." Jiang Chen smiled and was in exceedingly good spirits.

Princess Gouyu heaved an easy sigh. She was afraid that Jiang Chen would strut around for a while. This would have made her feel that she'd suffered a setback. Seeing Jiang Chen happily accept, Princess Gouyu was even happier than if she'd received a treasure herself.

"Jiang Chen, there's less than half a month left before the final examinations of the Hidden Dragon Trials start up. This is the final trial of strength, how are your preparations?" Princess Gouyu couldn't resist the urge to assume the demeanor of the organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials.

"Heh heh, what are your expectations of me?" Jiang Chen asked with a smirk.

“Do you want me to speak truthfully?”

“Do you have a habit of lying?” Jiang Chen blinked.

“Alright Jiang Chen, whether it’s me or little girl Zhiruo, we both hope to see you show your capabilities in the Hidden Dragon Trials!”

“Show my capabilities? You’re too vague, be more specific.”

Princess Gouyu paused and a light flashed through her phoenix eyes. “If you can defeat all your opponents and seize the championship of the Trials, we will both be happy for you.”

“Just be happy for me? Are there any rewards?” Jiang Chen laughed heartily.

“Yes!” Princess Gouyu didn’t mince words. “If you can defeat all your opponents, you can have whatever reward you wish!”

“Whatever reward I wish?” Jiang Chen raked a dirty gaze up and down Princess Gouyu’s entire body and wantonly looked all over her sexy body even more so.

“What are you looking at?” Princess Gouyu was a martial dao practitioner and didn’t believe in the nonsense of shyness from a girl. She stuck out her chest and said, “If you can suppress Long Juxue this one time, you can have whatever lewd fantasies you’re thinking of about me. Even if you wanted to take both me and little

girl Zhiruo, that wouldn't be out of the question either!"

Princess Gouyu broke into a laugh herself after these words. Her smile was quite true, very radiant, and utterly unassuming.

"Take both of you?" Jiang Chen discovered that he had underestimated Princess Gouyu's bold fierceness, even though he knew that Princess Gouyu wasn't entirely serious.

However, even if one knew that this was a joke, the mere thought of that kind of scene was enough to make an ordinary person's heart race.

"Indeed, take both of us!" Princess Gouyu nodded her head very affirmatively. "In the world of martial dao, the strong are venerated. If you truly have this kind of ability, then you will soar into the skies with one move sooner or later. At that time, all the women in the kingdom will be lining up for you to take your pick, not just counting the two of us. Whichever girl you choose, she would absolutely be willing to bring her sisters as her dowry!"

Worshipping the strong, clinging to the strong, those were rules that were applicable to any world.

"This is to say that you truly wish for me to be the champion of the Hidden Dragon Trials?"

"If it was a month ago I wouldn't have even thought that anyone could affect Long Juxue from being the champion. But now, if I

must find hope in someone, I hope it's you, and you're the only one that I can think of."

Princess Gouyu was very honest. "I don't wish for Long Juxue to be the champion."

"Because of the strife between the royal family and the duke of Soaring Dragon?" There was a shadow of a smile on Jiang Chen's face.

"Yes!" Princess Gouyu gritted her silver teeth and candidly didn't deny it.

"You can offer yourself up for the royal family – for the profit of the Eastern family clan?" Jiang Chen's tone was cold.

"Jiang Chen, are you belittling me?" Princess Gouyu's expression changed, but her heart suddenly felt beyond bleak and desolate. She was such a proud person and couldn't spare even a glance for any of her pursuers. How could she be someone who offered herself up for profit?

Jiang Chen, ah Jiang Chen. Don't you know that I, Gouyu, am this way in order to encourage you, and provide additional impetus for you?

"Alright, I will also answer you directly. I will use all of my power to block Long Juxue because of the disgusting, dirty things that the duke of Soaring Dragon has committed against my Jiang

family!”

Jiang Chen’s tone was also suffused with a sense of confidence that showed no doubt.

Jiang Chen felt an increased sense of urgency from the Hidden Dragon Trials after Princess Gouyu had left.

Jiang Chen decided to make a trip to the Hall of Healing before the Trials began. He wanted to make even more complete preparations for the Trials that were about to begin.

During this time, the Hall of Healing had been quite busy with trade. Guests visiting the Hall of Healing came to and fro in constant streams from morning to night, almost flattening the Hall’s door threshold.

“Hallmaster Qiao, congratulations.” Jiang Chen immediately said to Qiao Baishi who was shining with happiness after entering through the door.

“Ah, hon.... young duke.” Qiao Baishi almost blurted out the two words of “honored master”. If it wasn’t for his quick reaction, he probably would have actually done so.

“Young duke, honored guest. Please come this way, this way.” Qiao Baishi was naturally overjoyed to see Jiang Chen.

He had been busy with business during this time, and hadn’t had

time to visit and pay his respect to his honored master. He had also been worried if his honored master might've become irate.

It wasn't a matter of Jiang Chen worrying that Qiao Baishi wouldn't listen to him anymore, but of Qiao Baishi worrying that Jiang Chen would turn his nose up at Qiao Baishi, and leave him out in the cold.

To Qiao Baishi, although the business of the Hall of Healing was quite important, when compared with the matter of acknowledging Jiang Chen as his master... the former was just an issue of minor importance.

If it was said that Qiao Baishi placed great significance on his status as the successor to the Hall of Healing before, then his worldview and thoughts had greatly changed after acknowledging Jiang Chen as his master.

He had cared very much for his position as the successor to the Hall previously, but now it seemed a little trivial. It didn't seem like a big thing if he wasn't the successor to the Hall.

If he was able to follow his master and pursue knowledge and direction, gaining great ability, he would have a stage in the future that was more expansive than the Hall of Healing by tenfold, or even a hundredfold. Why would he then worry about lacking scope for his abilities?

His honored master's random three pill recipes had been enough to upend the pill markets of the neighboring sixteen countries, to

speak nothing of anything else.

These days, there had been a steady flow of customers placing orders at the Hall of Healing.

The orders that the Hall had received were already waiting in line for next year's supply. Even so, the people placing orders still had astonishing interest and pleasure, not minding a longer wait at all.

The Hall of Healing didn't wish to take deposits, but their customers wouldn't take no for an answer, and insisted on advance payments.

This kind of trade caused every associate in the Hall of Healing to feel free of mind and happy of heart. This wasn't doing business, this was practically opening a gold mine and having money flow in when one just sat there!

As for the man who had personally created this scene, the events of these days had caused Qiao Baishi to internally contemplate quite a bit. He had realized that his previous worldview had still been too narrow.

He had also become conscious that what his honored master, Jiang Chen, had brought him, would truly change his destiny.

Notes:

1] Chinese saying indicating someone's joy after experiencing the

tutelage of a wise teacher

Chapter 52: Fatty Xuan Seeks Help

“Baishi, is there any sign of movement from the Pill King Garden?” Jiang Chen wouldn’t lower his guard with regards to the Pill King Garden. Although the Pill King Garden’s decline was a foregone conclusion, one would fall victim in return if a snake isn’t beaten to death. Jiang Chen would never permit such a thing to happen.

“Master, the decline of the Pill King Garden is an inevitable development. It is said that all the senior executives of the Pill King Garden are prepared to abandon the Garden and throw themselves under the duke of Soaring Dragon’s banner, in order to become vagabond hang-ons.”

“It looks like we’ve underestimated the people of the Pill King Garden. Those who suit their actions to the time are wise. The Pill King Garden is smart regarding this point. They thoroughly sought refuge with the duke of Soaring Dragon upon knowing that a trend cannot be halted. This way, the duke of Soaring Dragon will surely not be unwelcoming towards them. An alchemy master is absolutely a strong reinforcement for a duke who desires to rebel.”

“Yes yes! Honored master is able to penetrate deeply into all things.” Qiao Baishi nodded, thinking nothing of Jiang Chen’s style of speaking with no scruples.

“Baishi, I’ve come this time to ready some pill medicines. I need some materials – prepare them for me.” As someone’s honored master, enjoying this kind of benefit was a given.

“Honored master, your disciple has already prepared ten “Heavenly Karma Pill”, ten “Vast Ocean Pill” and a couple bottles of “One Buddha Powder”.

One had to say, Qiao Baishi’s thoughts were quite clever and quite caring when it came to contemplating problems. He knew that Jiang Chen would participate in the Hidden Dragon Trials and thus had reserved these pill medicines for Jiang Chen early on.

Jiang Chen was very satisfied by this.

“These are the ingredients that I need, prepare these as well.” Jiang Chen naturally had his uses for these ingredients. His father had been ambushed on the steps of his house last time, and had fallen victim to a wicked poison.

This time, Jiang Chen planned to commence an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth attack, by fighting poison with poison. He too had prepared a few frightening poisons. This was all a piece of cake to Jiang Chen.

Although using poison was an unorthodox way, one still had to prepare some when in the midst of exceedingly poor conditions, and before strength had been built up.

This was being prepared against war.

If the enemy deployed an underhanded move, then fighting poison with poison would be a good thing.

Once all the requisite items had been prepared, Jiang Chen didn't linger around the Hall of Healing for too long. Qiao Baishi was also kept extremely busy, and they both didn't wish to waste each other's time.

After returning to the manor, Jiang Chen discovered that fatty Xuan had waited for him at the Jiang Han manor for quite some time. The heir to the Hubing dukedom, Hubing Yue, had also accompanied him.

"Brother Chen, I've finally awaited your arrival. Your brother is suffering." It was as if fatty Xuan had met a lifesaver when he finally saw Jiang Chen.

"What's going on?" With the Hidden Dragon Trials near at hand, Jiang Chen also knew that fatty Xuan would definitely not idly visit here if there was nothing going on.

Fatty Xuan had a bitter face, "Brother Chen, I was also deeply moved by your words last time and decided to turn over a new life in order to reserve the right for my next generation to be fops. I had planned to use all the fat on my body to keep the dukedom. But –"

Fatty Xuan heaved another sigh when he got to this point.

"Hurry and speak if you've got something to say, hurry and let it out if you've got a fart to release." Jiang Chen couldn't bear to see fatty Xuan speak in such a falteringly way.

“Brother Chen, you should also know that this body of fat makes it more difficult for me to train than other ordinary people. I would’ve been able to slip through the Hidden Dragon Trials with my five meridians true qi. However, some fellow with six meridians true qi suddenly appeared in my family’s clan a few days ago. The conclave of the family elders are now calling for the strongest youth in the clan to participate in the Hidden Dragon Trials. Brother Chen, you know that, if that fellow is allowed to participate in the Hidden Dragon Trials, then it won’t be me that inherits my old man’s Jinshan dukedom, but that bastard!”

“What’s his name?” Jiang Chen asked faintly.

“He’s called Xuan Yuan!” Fatty Xuan revealed an expression that yearned to take a bite out of that person’s flesh when he mentioned this name. “This kid was originally only four meridians true qi but I don’t know if he’s suddenly gone crazy, or if he’s been hiding his strength all along, waiting until the last minute to steal my thunder!”

Fatty Xuan was at five meridians true qi and had lingered at this level for about a year or two. He’d been unable to find the sixth acupoint at all during this time.

Jiang Chen’s forehead furrowed vaguely. “Didn’t I tell you two to come find me before the Trials? Were you planning on not coming at all if this hadn’t happened?”

Hubing Yue’s face flushed red, “Brother Chen, my old man at

home has been keeping a tight watch on me. He says it's because of the Hidden Dragon Trials that are at hand, and that he won't let me come out and act wildly."

"Ah whatever. Since you've found me fatty Xuan, then I'll give you two ideas." Jiang Chen said lightly.

"Brother, you're my brother alright. I can't even think of one idea and you have two? Please hurry and speak, your brother will do as you say." Fatty Xuan beamed with delight as his face full of depression was swept clean away.

"First, I take action on your behalf and surreptitiously get rid of that Xuan Yuan with one stroke!"

Fatty Xuan retracted his head and a cold chill prickled at the back of his head as he looked at Jiang Chen's murderous expression. He chuckled, "This won't do, definitely won't do. Interference from outsiders, particularly from you brother Chen, will result in both our doom if someone successfully investigates this. I'm not afraid, but I can't pull you down with me."

"Then it's the second idea, you beat him fair and square, leaving him with nothing to say." Jiang Chen didn't beat around the bush.

Fatty Xuan however, looked like he'd bit into a bitter gourd. "Brother, would I be suffering so, if I could beat him fair and square? Do you think I'm as abnormal as you to challenge someone above my level and beat that Yan monkey like beating a dog?"

“Fatty Xuan, when did you become so good for naught? Did I say for you to challenge his six meridians true qi with your five meridians true qi?”

“I am five meridians true qi though, you know that brother Chen. I’ve been stuck there for about a year! This sixth acupoint is playing hide and seek with me!” Fatty Xuan was quite dejected.

“If you were able to ascend to six meridians true qi, would you have the confidence to defeat him?” Jiang Chen asked lowly.

“If it was six meridians against six meridians, would I be afraid of him? Brother Chen, I’m still the son of the duke of Jinshan after all, my heritage and potential are all better than him. Besides, the fat on my body isn’t good for nothing. In terms of tonnage, I can crush him to pieces with no questions about it.” Fatty Xuan’s spittle flew wildly.

“Alright, then I’ll help you breakthrough to six meridians true qi.”

“Brother Chen, what did you say? Help me breakthrough?” Fatty Xuan had a look of incredulity on his face and off on the side, Hubing Yue also listened with a face full of shock.

Helping someone breakthrough was a mighty feat that only a true qi master could materialize on occasion.

“Brother Chen, are you a true qi master who’s been concealing

his strength?” Fatty Xuan was agitated with excitement.

“Remember when I told you to come find me last time? I said that I would give you a surprise. Although you’ve come a bit late, the surprise still exists.”

Jiang Chen had no time to engage in idle chatter with fatty Xuan but said seriously, “Before I reveal the surprise, the two of you must swear that only the three of us will know of this matter. Apart from us, this must not be divulged to anyone else! Otherwise, this will be the equivalent of giving me up as a brother!”

Fatty Xuan patted his chest, “Brother, you’re the person that I, fatty, feel closest to. Even my old man can only take his place in line behind you. If I don’t listen to you, I will be struck by lightning!”

“Brother Chen, I too swear to safeguard this secret. If it is disclosed, then let my household be slaughtered!” Hubing Yue wasn’t as serious as fatty Xuan, but his oath was even more ruthless.

“Alright!” Jiang Chen’s gaze moved slightly. He was still rather at ease, and trusted these two best friends.

“Listen up. I am passing a method onto you today. This method can allow you to locate the acupoints within your body, making it unnecessary for you to spend large amounts of time in exploration of the next acupoint before each breakthrough like other

practitioners. My method can allow you to simultaneously locate the next acupoint."

"What?" Hubing Yue reacted even faster as his expression changed drastically. "Brother Chen, how can such a method exist in this world?"

"Brother Chen, are... are you going to say that this was also the result of divine possession?" Fatty's Xuan tongue was tying itself into knots.

"Don't ask me where it comes from, are you willing to learn?"

"Willing, I'm willing! I'm an absolute idiot if I'm not willing!" Fatty Xuan didn't even crease his brow.

"Brother Chen, if this method exists, I'd like to learn too." Hubing Yue was not ambiguous.

"Alright, listen well. This method is called 'True Acupoint Resonance' and is a secret that is not passed on. If knowledge of this method is leaked, it is sure to cause great turmoil in the world of cultivation. You two would also inevitably attract fatal disasters. This is why I had you promise earlier that you wouldn't divulge this."

Fatty Xuan was listening with a parched mouth and scorched tongue. He trusted Jiang Chen blindly. He would unequivocally believe anything that Jiang Chen said. Therefore, he'd already

treated this “True Acupoint Resonance” method as real.

Although a sliver of doubt still existed in Hubing Yue, he too felt great confidence in Jiang Chen.

“Let’s stop chatting and start listening to the formula… ” Jiang Chen also didn’t want to waste time in convincing them and he simply, and directly, started passing on the formula.

Let the truth explain everything!

One had to say, practitioners were all naturally endowed with cleverness. After running through the formula three times, fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue could recite it fluently from memory.

“There’s no use in talking any more. Both of you, try using this method.”

“True Acupoint Resonance” came from an even higher level, but it wasn’t such an advanced method at the end of the day. However, it was impossible for the Eastern Kingdom to possess such a method with its level.

Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue started their experimentation and their expressions started changing after a short while. Joy slowly appeared, surprise, and then glee —

As if one had discovered a precious treasure!

Truly, their emotions right now could only be described, as if they'd discovered a precious treasure!

"Brother Chen, I really located it! This is amazing, I located the eighth acupoint. Brother Chen, I'm... I'm too happy." Hubing Yue was so excited that tears were almost falling.

Hubing Yue looked dignified and strong and his training potential was exceedingly high. Otherwise, with the Hubing dukedom's less than impressive ranking, how would Hubing Yue have trained to seven meridians true qi at such a tender age?

Locating the eighth acupoint meant that he had the chance to breakthrough to eight meridians true qi before the Hidden Dragon Trials!

Breaking through to eight meridians true qi meant that he, Hubing Yue, had the opportunity to contend for the ranking of one of the top ten dukes!

As for fatty Xuan, his body, as rotund as a leather ball, suddenly bounced up with a roar, his entire being almost going mad as his motions were accompanied by the roar of a pig being slaughtered.

"Brother Chen, I want to break through, I'm going to break through!"

Chapter 53: Fatty's Counterattack

Agitation, excitement, overjoyed... they were all inadequate to describe fatty Xuan's current state of feeling.

Because he had successfully located his sixth acupoint! The five meridians true qi that he had strengthened and forged for around a year were actually in full readiness for ascension.

Unfortunately, his level of comprehension had never been enough to be able to locate where the sixth acupoint was.

And now, this "True Acupoint Resonance" method had easily helped him locate the sixth acupoint. This meant that he was almost able to breakthrough where he stood!

Yes, fatty Xuan had truly decided to breakthrough in his immediate vicinity. He gave no thought to what was an appropriate situation, nor paid heed to inconsequential things like closing his doors for training.

With brother Chen and Hubing Yue present, fatty Xuan totally didn't think of any of this. He believed that his two brothers would monitor the premises for him.

Fatty Xuan was sweating profusely after roughly an hour. After a wild circulation of his true qi, it was like his entire being had been steamed. Droplets of water were on his face and head.

“Hahahahaha!” Fatty Xuan laughed heartily. “Xuan Yuan, you’ve been overbearing and arrogant for so many days, just want until fatty goes back and tortures you to death!”

One had to give it to him, fatty Xuan was very proud and felt quite the feeling of exaltation upon fulfillment. The son of a duke being suppressed by some nameless fellow in the family clan – even with fatty Xuan’s obliviousness, he still had a bit of pride that would be affected by a situation like this.

He itched to return immediately and find Xuan Yuan for a thorough beating to vent his frustrations of many days.

“Fatty, don’t have your head turned by success. You’ve only just broken through and haven’t stabilized your realm. You’d be seeking your doom if you picked a fight with a six meridians true qi right now.” Jiang Chen doused his spirits with a pail of cold water in the nick of time.

“I’ll give you some unconventional ways. These unconventional ways, along with the aid of pill medicine, will allow you to strengthen your meridians to a great perfection level in a short amount of time. This way, with your foundations as the son of a duke, you might as well ram yourself to death with a block of tofu if you still can’t beat an ordinary six meridians true qi. And don’t call yourself my brother.”

Fatty Xuan was wreathed in smiles. “Brother Chen cares about me the most. Brother, brothers for a day, brothers for life. Haha, knowing brother Chen is the most exalted thing of my life. Brother Chen, wouldn’t you say that my discerning eyes could recognize a

gem when they saw one? Only Hubing Yue and I were your brothers when you were at the lowest point in your life. Tsk tsk, I'm a bit infatuated with my own foresight."

Hubing Yue's eyes also sparkled with excited and overjoyed light. His current emotions weren't much calmer than fatty Xuan's.

Except, fatty Xuan had broken through immediately and Hubing Yue had yet to do so.

However, to breakthrough or not breakthrough was actually not important anymore. With the "True Acupoint Resonance" method, the amount of time spent training in the future was sure to decrease greatly.

In addition, they would be able to travel a great many less winding paths, and avoid many pitfalls on the future path of their martial daos.

It wasn't that many lacked the potential, but rather encountered bottlenecks when in exploration of the next acupoint and thus were continuously unable to find the location of the next acupoint when training in the realm of true qi.

This was a problem in the power of understanding, and wasn't something that could be remedied by hard work.

But the "True Acupoint Resonance" method could offset the side effects of a lack in the power of understanding. Therefore, this

method was absolutely beyond the existence of the Eastern Kingdom.

“Perhaps only those hidden sects possess such a method? And ordinary disciples are likely not allowed to practice it either?” Hubing Yue thought internally as his admiration and worship of Jiang Chen became even more struck from the depths of his heart.

“Brother Chen, I’ve decided that I’ll go put down Xuan Yuan in three days time. Both of you number amongst my few brothers and must come support me.”

“I’ll attend for sure.” Hubing Yue nodded.

“That works, I’ll also go to watch the show.” Jiang Chen agreed.

Three days later, Jiang Chen came to the Jinshan manor.

It could be seen that fatty Xuan had deeply concealed his intentions. He’d even hid the truth from his old man this time. It looked like that fatty Xuan had hardened his heart, and was determined to thoroughly thwart Xuan Yuan in order to give the entire Jinshan household a major surprise.

The friendship between the Jinshan dukedom and the Jiang Han dukedom spanned more than two generations. The duke of Jinshan was also vaguely surprised to see Jiang Chen attend. Strange and bizarre happenings had been occurring in the capital during this time, like that of fleeting clouds and ripples. The duke

of Jinshan had also heard a few rumors about Jiang Chen, and after the events at the Soaring Dragon manor last time, the duke of Jinshan had personally observed with his eyes Jiang Chen's performance.

Therefore, the duke of Jinshan felt rather complicated feelings towards Jiang Chen. He had originally felt that his son was more or less doing nothing useful by hanging around Jiang Chen.

But given the friendship between the two families, he hadn't said much.

However, Jiang Chen's successive string of changes somewhat befuddled the duke of Jinshan. He too wondered if Jiang Chen was purposefully concealing his true strength?

He had tried to solicit the truth from fatty Xuan a few times, yet, although fatty Xuan was adept at nothing else, he was first in class at playing dumb. No matter how his old man tried, he played dumb until the end, and never spoke a serious word.

After making his greetings, the gravity of the duke of Jinshan's expressions didn't lessen. "Xuan'er, this Xuan Yuan has suddenly shot to six meridians true qi and some of the elders within the family have indistinctly grown close with the people of Soaring Dragon. Your father suspects that a few traitors helping others have secretly already appeared in our Jinshan clan."

The duke of Jinshan's words were shocking. There were no outsiders present here, and thus he decided he might as well

convey the seriousness of the situation to fatty Xuan.

Fatty Xuan chuckled. “Don’t worry, no matter what devious plots they have, today your son will subdue ten with the power of one, and suppress them all!”

“Xuan’er, although Xuan Yuan might not have trained to six meridians true qi through standard means, that doesn’t mean you can think less of your opponent. Don’t linger in battle if you are unable to handle your opponent, we can slowly craft another strategy.”

“I say father, can you have a bit more confidence in your son?” Fatty Xuan protested.

At this moment, an elder within the family clan hurried over with a trace of an odd smile. “Your Lordship, Xuan Yuan has already arrived at the demonstration stage. The conclave of the elders has sent me to invite the young duke to meet his opponent.”

“Huh, in quite a hurry are we!” The duke of Jinshan was a bit displeased.

Fatty Xuan however, bounced up like a rubber ball as his eyes sent out a wild light like that of someone about to torture another. “Has he finally arrived? I can’t wait.”

Fatty Xuan bounced away with surprisingly speed and hurtled towards the demonstration stage, leaving behind a chubby

afterimage.

The duke of Jinshan was a bit dumbfounded and felt that it was a bit strange. Why was his son, who usually dispiritedly avoided battle, suddenly brimming with battle intent? This didn't seem his style.

Clustered in pairs or groups of three, many of the people within the manor had already gathered around the demonstration stage. The Jinshan household was different from the Jiang Han household.

Numbers were thin in the Jiang Han household – Jiang Feng basically decided everything within the Jiang family.

But with the Jinshan household – because of numerous family members – multiple factions and cliques had developed. Many hills stood in great numbers within the entire Jinshan household.

Although the duke of Jinshan held the power, many other powers held him back by the elbow and often caused him to be in a bind.

And the Xuan Yuan who had appeared this time was something that had been drummed up by the conclave of elders.

The duke of Jinshan could have absolutely just refused. After all, it was an unquestionably moral truth that a father would pass a dukedom down to a son. However, the conclave of elders had

thrown out the banner of a righteous cause, and called for the dukedom to be passed on to the strongest youth in the family. This was why such a farce had happened.

If the duke of Jinshan were to refuse, then it would undoubtedly cause great create harm to fatty Xuan's reputation. It would be more difficult for fatty Xuan to successively inherit and control the situation in the future.

Therefore, the duke of Jinshan had wanted to make use of this opportunity to compel his unambitious son.

"Look, the young duke has arrived."

"What young duke. If he loses the demonstration stage today, then he's no longer the young duke, and at most a noble son."

"Hmph, what do you mean by that? Are you in cahoots with Xuan Yuan? How dare a mere descendent from a collateral branch covet the vaunted seat of a duke?"

One indeed had to say, many camps had formed within Jinshan regarding the issue of the dukedom's succession.

At this moment, fatty Xuan had changed from his usual status of muddy slime that wouldn't let itself be helped over a wall. He walked unhurriedly onto the demonstration stage, with his thin eyes that were buried under fat eyelids staring intently at Xuan Yuan.

“Xuan Yuan, why don’t you look at yourself in a mirror? Someone like you wants to inherit the dukedom? Didn’t your mother and father ever tell you not to forget to bring a pillow when you dream?” Since fatty Xuan hung out with Jiang Chen, the foundations of his viper tongue naturally wouldn’t pale that much in comparison.

Xuan Yuan was someone that the conclave of elders had drummed up. When it came to birth, he naturally couldn’t measure up to fatty Xuan. His internal inferiority complex sensitivities made his face darken when he listened to fatty Xuan’s words.

“Xuan Xuan, as the noble son of the duke of Jinshan, you have no desire to make progress. The actions of I, Xuan Yuan, are but for the future of my Jin family.”

“Yo yo, now doesn’t that sound pretty. Don’t tell me that there are no Soaring Dragon dogs amongst you?” Fatty Xuan’s face darkened. “What I, fatty Xuan, hate most in this life are traitors. If you were only aiming for the dukedom, then I could have pinched my nose and bore it. But if someone wishes to betray the Jin family and throw themselves under the banner of those hotly ambitious fellows, then I, fatty Xuan, am the first to disagree!”

“Your tongue wags too fiercely!” Xuan Yuan stoutly denied. “Get the hell off the stage if you’re afraid.”

“Afraid?” Fatty Xuan laughed with a grimace. “What are you to

say that I, fatty Xuan, should be afraid?”

Fatty Xuan’s rotund body abruptly bounced up from the demonstration after his words. His rotund figure was like a fat bird – rising into the air through sheer effort and persistence.

“Xuan Yuan, eat my fist!”

A fatty has a fatty’s intelligence. When fatty Xuan bounded into the air, his entire body had curled into a ball of fat. When this ball of fat had risen to the limits of its speed, it suddenly sprang open like a tightly coiled spring.

This strong punch accompanied that shocking bouncing speed and descended fiercely towards Xuan Yuan.

“Nice boxing skills, but you think to harm me with five meridians true qi?” A sliver of scorn and jealousy flashed through the corners of Xuan Yuan’s eyes.

He envied fatty Xuan’s boxing skills because they were the heritage of the duke of Jinshan’s direct line of descent. He possessed none of the rights to train in the skill.

The scorn was naturally contempt for fatty Xuan’s level of five meridians true qi.

Subduing ten with the power of one! The thing that Xuan Yuan relied on the most in order to stand on this stage was the six

meridians true qi that could stomp firmly on the fatty!

One level of training was one realm!

Xuan Yuan coped with shifting events by sticking to one principle. He watched fatty's punch descend and was ready to maintain a solid and balanced position to confront the tough with toughness.

Suddenly —

An accident suddenly occured.

Fatty Xuan's bouncing speed suddenly accelerated with no forewarning. The trail beneath his hand suddenly expanded and doubled like the Big Dipper. The punch became even more bloodthirsty, and descended with even more frightening speed.

"Layered trail? Six meridians true qi?!" Xuan Yuan's pupils abruptly contracted as they shot out endless looks of shock and astonishment.

Chapter 54: Unique Throwing Dagger Skills

Just as was previously mentioned, a fatty has a fatty's intelligence.

He had purposefully created that hubbub previously, but had shown weakness to his enemy to allow his opponent to think he was five meridians true qi.

As the boxing aura neared Xuan Yuan, fatty abruptly displayed his hidden ace.

This punch concentrated the essence of fatty Xuan's six meridians true qi, concentrated his recent boundless wrath, and concentrated the ambition of a grudge-holding fatty who wanted to make the ultimate comeback!

Xuan Yuan almost had no time to react before he hastily thrust out his palm to meet the incoming attack.

The moment that Xuan Yuan's palm met fatty's fist, Xuan Yuan experienced what was called a disparity!

The boxing aura that encompassed six levels of spiraling power was like a drill, instantly churning his entire arm into broken scraps of chopped meat.

The boxing aura wasn't decreased a single bit, and the punch landed on his chest!

Ah pfff!

A mouthful of fresh blood spewed out like an arrow.

Xuan Yuan's entire body was like a kite that had lost its string as he was driven off the stage, thrown backwards more than ten meters as he crashed into a large pillar.

When people looked at him again, blood was streaming from the seven orifices of his head, and a large hole had been opened in his chest. His head was lolling on his shoulder and it was apparent that he was more than dead!

"What?"

"This... six layers of boxing aura? Xuan Xuan has broken through?"

Even the duke of Jinshan hadn't imagined this scene in his wildest dreams, not to mention Xuan Yuan's supporters. His son had won, and won so easily!

Fatty Xuan stood on the demonstration stage, the fat on his body vibrating from his trembling.

"My Jin family can descend in the world, but absolutely cannot have traitors! Those who betray the family, die!" It was the first

time that fatty Xuan had given off the feeling of killing intent.

What happened next was a bit more bloody. As the duke of a territory, the duke of Jinshan's methods were completely displayed. After fatty Xuan won on the demonstration stage, the duke of Jinshan also revealed the extraordinary parts about him.

He ordered several elders to be fully controlled and displayed the evidence of them flocking to the duke of Soaring Dragon's banner and betraying the family.

Beheaded, house raided!

The inner turmoil within the Jinshan household was quickly handled in a clean and efficient method. This even elicited admiration from Jiang Chen. This duke of Jinshan, whether in terms of ferocity or cruelty, was much stronger than the likes of his old man Jiang Feng's.

Of course, it was understandable why ferocious and cruel ways were employed to settle internal turmoil. With regards to traitors, no family had ever been irresolute when firmness was needed.

The anticipated reversal caused no particular ripples in Jiang Chen's heart. Fatty Xuan profusely expressed a thousand thanks and ten thousand gratitudes, and wanted Jiang Chen to stay as a guest.

However, seeing that so many heads had rolled due to the

Jinshan household settling its inner conflict, it was obviously an inappropriate timing to stay as a guest. Jiang Chen left thereafter.

Back at this manor, he received an astounding piece of news — his father Jiang Feng had emerged from training!

Except, the only ones who knew this secret were temporarily Jiang Ying and Jiang Fu.

Jiang Feng had indeed emerged from training and had successfully broken through, smoothly entering ten meridians true qi, joining the ranks of the true qi masters. The true meaning of this was that he had entered the ranks of the strength of the premier dukes.

“Congratulations Father.” Jiang Chen was still very happy for his father.

“Haha Chen’er, why be so polite between father and son? Not to mention, if it wasn’t for you, your father would likely have reached my limit at nine meridians true qi.”

Jiang Feng had always been quite easygoing in front of his son.

Jiang Chen detailed the happenings of the Jinshan household and also conveniently went over some particulars of the current situation.

Jiang Feng nodded, “It’s best that the duke of Jinshan could

handle his matters this way. According to your words, the duke of Soaring Dragon is likely to rebel within the next half year?”

“Based on my speculations, with his level of patience, it will most likely occur within this half year.”

“Chen’er, on which side would you say our Jiang family should take our place?” Jiang Feng actually asked Jiang Chen.

“We don’t need to take a side. Whether it’s the royal family or the duke of Soaring Dragon, they have all already assigned us to the side of the royal family.” Jiang Chen had a shadow of a smile. “Except, what need does our Jiang family have to need to take a side?”

Jiang Chen didn’t think that the royal family had the qualification to merit an attachment from him, Jiang Chen. He had chosen an opposite side from the duke of Soaring Dragon purely due to the circumstances of the greater picture, and not because that he had chosen the royal family.

He was one of a kind, and wasn’t someone that any power could drive.

The Soaring Dragon manor.

The events that had happened at the Jinshan manor quickly made their way into Long Zhaofeng’s ears.

“Worthless, indeed a useless bunch!” Long Zhaofeng had heard that after failing to seize power in a coup, those elders in the Jinshan family had all been beheaded by the duke of Jinshan.

And the Xuan Yuan that they had painstakingly cultivated had been instantly killed with one move from the son of the duke of Jinshan.

“This isn’t right. The son of the duke of Jinshan is a character as dumb as a pig. As inferior as that Xuan Yuan is, he shouldn’t have lost to someone like that.” The duke of Yanmen, Yan Jiuzhuang, was the first to feel that something was amiss.

“Bizarre. These matters in the capital have become more and more bizarre.” Another duke shook his head. “Haven’t you all discovered that the duke of Jiang Han and the duke of Jinshan all seem to excel at being a wolf in sheep’s clothing? The last time, it was Jiang Chen, and this time it was the son of the duke of Jinshan. Wouldn’t you say that these people are purposely showing weakness to an enemy?”

Long Zhaofeng’s face darkened. “According to my intelligence, this is impossible! The son of the duke of Jinshan has always been hopelessly stupid and a good for nothing. There can be no error or doubt about that. The same goes for that Jiang Chen!”

“Duke Long, I’ve been thinking that the situation in the capital has been quite subtly odd ever since the Rites of Heavenly Worship. Many things that don’t conform to common sense have happened, and it seems that Jiang Chen’s shadow can be found in every matter. I feel that this brat is the source of all misfortune.

It’s said that the brat Jiang Chen was also present for the matters in the Jinshan household today.”

Courtmaster Wang from the Pill King Garden became dispirited whenever he spoke of this matter. “Right, I feel that something is greatly amiss with the brat Jiang Chen. He was also present when we put on the pill exhibition last time. After all the events that occurred were put together and pondered over, I feel that he had long since conspired with the Hall of Healing, and that they were waiting to stomp on my Pill King Garden!”

“Also, the royal family actually sent quite a few strong practitioners in the advanced realm of true qi to protect him. When did this brat become so intimate with the royal family?”

All sorts odd matter having to do with Jiang Chen were all neatly organized. All sorts of questionable points all seemed to revolve around Jiang Chen.

Long Zhaofeng was also quite surprised. “Can it be that we’ve underestimated Jiang Chen?”

“Duke Long, this Jiang Chen must be killed! There’s no news of the duke of Jiang Han right now, I estimate that it’s more than likely he’s dead. If Jiang Chen is gotten rid of, then the Jiang Han dukedom would be thoroughly handed over.”

“Mm, Jiang Chen must die!” Long Zhaofeng nodded.

“Noble father, Xue’er will handle this Jiang Chen.” Long Juxue, standing beside Long Zhaofeng, revealed a cold smile. “I once said in the Hall of Healing that he shouldn’t even think of successfully passing the Hidden Dragon Trials. This time, let your daughter spill blood on the floor, and kill another group of people before entering the sect as a warning to others!”

“Mm, if he is able to enter the final stage of martial demonstration, then Xue’er, kill him. It will be as easy as stepping on an ant.”

The duke of Soaring Dragon was still quite confident in his daughter’s potential and talents. However, his words took another turn. “In consideration of a long night being fraught with dreams and that undue delay may bring trouble, we must make additional preparations. As long as there is an opportunity before the Hidden Dragon Trials progresses to the final stage of martial demonstration, we will not let it go!”

“Long San, I am giving this matter over to your care. You must bring back to me that Jiang Chen’s head!” Jiang Chen had ruined the duke of Soaring Dragon’s carefully laid plans quite a few times, making the duke of Soaring Dragon brim with killing intent.

“Yes.” A cold and sinister underling standing next to Long Zhaofeng responded. Killing intent wreathed his body, he was a practitioner of ten meridians true qi!

Within the Jiang Han manor, Jiang Chen was making his final preparations for the Hidden Dragon Trials.

At this moment, his level of seven meridians true qi was very stabilized. He had also successfully located the eighth acupoint.

The two martial arts techniques “Vast Ocean Current Splitter” and “Divine Aeons Fist” also improved with each passing day. Each day brought substantial improvement.

But Jiang Chen was actually preparing another set of techniques these days. The items he was playing with were the set of nine throwing daggers created by the Layered-Feather Golden Crystal.

“The unique skills of throwing daggers are comparable to the bow and arrow, but are easier to manipulate than bow and arrow and with even higher elusiveness.”

Compared to the bow and arrow, an attack from throwing daggers was absolutely even more secretive. It was also easier to manipulate. After all, in order to manipulate a bow and arrow, one had to first notch the arrow onto the bow.

This process was where the maneuverability of a bow and arrow lost out to that of throwing daggers’.

Throwing daggers — you knew not whence they came from nor when they would be employed. A dagger in hand would have unerring accuracy. They were like an immortal from the heavens — you knew not whence they came from and where they would go.

The advantages of a throwing dagger lay in nimble manipulation – in concealed attacks snuffing out breath with one cold blooded stroke!

“These nine throwing daggers were forged from Layered-Feather Golden Crystal. This Crystal is almost translucent. Aided with some skills when employing them, the daggers will almost melt away into nothingness, thoroughly becoming one with the vacant void.”

One had to say, these throwing daggers forged out of Layered-Feather Golden Crystal encompassed an exceeding degree of covertness and duplicity.

If deployed in sudden attack, the perception of ordinary practitioners might not even be enough to see the true form of the throwing daggers.

Jiang Chen planned to employ these Layered-Feather Throwing Daggers often, and found a unique throwing dagger skill, “Moonshatter Flying Daggers”, after much exhaustive thought.

As its name indicated and implied, Moonshatter Flying Daggers was a powerful force that could pierce the sun and moon and destroy the stars.

Of course, with Jiang Chen’s current methods, it would be quite a hyperbole to think of piercing the sun and moon. But the “Moonshatter Flying Daggers” skill could benefit him like adding wings to a tiger.

“Practicing this ‘Moonshatter Flying Daggers’ will not be the work of a day and night. The remarkable ability of the ‘Moonshatter Flying Daggers’ is many times more brilliant that the ‘Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans’. It’s a method that nears the level of those at a heavenly level. However, the initial portion of the ‘Moonshatter Flying Daggers’ is not that difficult or awkward.”

Four accompanying abilities had to be practiced in the course of practicing ‘Moonshatter Flying Daggers’: “God’s Eye”, “Ear of the Zephyr”, “Boulder’s Heart”, “Psychic’s Head”.

Vision needed to be practiced first before practicing throwing daggers! Hearing, mental ability, and the perception of the seven apertures of the human head all needed to be practiced first!

When vision had been trained to an extreme, a pair of eyes could be used to observe all the planes beneath the heavens. One throwing dagger could cause the enemy to have no avenue for escape whether in the heavens or underground!

When hearing had been trained to an extreme, the ears could discern direction from the wind. Even if you attacked from all directions, all would be beheaded wherever the throwing daggers landed!

When mental ability had been trained to an extreme, the heart would be as firm as a rock. Even if there were a thousand, or tens of thousands of illusions, one would not be entranced by them. One flying dagger would point straight towards the actual body

and behead the enemy!

And when the perception of the seven apertures of the human head were trained to an extreme, the seven apertures would be opened and the entire world would be in your perception. There would be no secrets, no door to heaven, nor crack to the underground, that an enemy could take refuge in!

Of course, who knew how many years it would take to practice the “Moonshatter Flying Daggers” to an extreme level, and how many years it would take to reach an extreme level in the four accompanying abilities.

Chapter 55: The Hidden Dragon Trials

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

One had to walk along the path of training, no matter how long it might be. Only by taking a step forward was there hope of assailing the inexhaustible dao.

This “Moonshatter Flying Daggers” and its accompanying four abilities wouldn’t be trained in the span of a day and night.

However, even if one learned but a crude one out of ten thousandth bit, it would be a layer of extreme protection for the current Jiang Chen.

Out of the four accompanying abilities, “Psychic’s Head” could be temporarily set aside. Before a spirit consciousness was developed for the seven apertures, it would be like trying to catch a fish in a tree for him to train this ability, with no hope of accomplishing anything remarkable.

“God’s Eye”, “Ear of the Zephyr”, and “Boulder’s Heart” on the other hand, could all be practiced as of right now.

Jiang Chen studied assiduously, and immersed himself in the comprehension and training of these three abilities. Even if he only barely reached “minor accomplishment”, it would still be half the effort with double the results when training “Moonshatter Flying Daggers”.

When the manipulation techniques of a unique throwing dagger skill were trained to an utmost, it came down to a contest of vision, hearing, and mental ability!

These days, the sparring partners in the Jiang Han manor were all quite busy.

In order to train his vision, Jiang Chen had the sparring partners continuously release small bugs, such as mosquitoes and flies, and looked for the single small bug that he had marked previously, according to the flight speed, trajectory, and habits of these flies and mosquitoes.

One had to admit, this type of training method neared a consummately intense level.

In the beginning, Jiang Chen basically failed again and again. Even with his eyes continuously staring, he would still be too busy to attend to all the random dances of the several hundred flies and mosquitoes.

However, after persevering for two days, Jiang Chen could basically materialize the probability of one in ten based on his vision alone.

If based on hearing, the probability of one in about twenty would appear.

Training his mental ability was the hardest – the probability there was less than one in fifty.

Three days later, four days later…

Jiang Chen's improvement was quite apparent. On the fifth day, Jiang Chen could actually reach a success rate of fifty percent based on vision alone.

Hearing had also improved to thirty percent.

There wasn't much improvement in mental ability, but Jiang Chen wasn't depressed. He knew that training mental ability would be the hardest, and would need the most amount of patience.

Vision and hearing could be ground out with enough time. But mental ability required being calm and dispassionate, enduring persistently without a single trace of an irritable mindset.

Just as his vision and hearing had improved greatly, so did Jiang Chen's training of the "Moonshatter Flying Daggers" begin in an orderly way.

With the partnership of strong vision and hearing, Jiang Chen displayed astounding potential and status on the manipulation of throwing daggers.

The initial steps of the "Moonshatter Flying Daggers" were

mastered by Jiang Chen with almost no hint of difficulty, and he quickly trained them to the great perfection realm.

"Looks like strong vision and hearing are indeed the biggest guarantee in training throwing daggers. Coincidentally, strong mental ability will allow the unique skills of throwing daggers that follow one's will."

Jiang Chen boasted good eyesight and an exquisite sense of hearing thanks to training his vision and hearing, and although his training in mental ability progressed slowly, it caused his entire bearing to become steady and stately, becoming even more confident and at ease.

In the short span of less than half a month, changes that thoroughly remoulded himself had appeared on Jiang Chen's body again. As his training progressed ever deeper, he could experience gratifying improvement everyday.

And with the passage of time, the final examinations of the Hidden Dragon Trials finally arrived.

On this day, all 108 heirs had arrived in the grand courtyard in front of the entrance to the Hidden Dragon Trials testing site.

Jiang Chen was no exception. He had made so many preparations for these Hidden Dragon Trials that he naturally wouldn't miss out on such a grand occasion.

This could be labelled as the first meaningful challenge that he had met head on since his reincarnation.

The Hidden Dragon Trials were the first stage in which Jiang Chen would prove himself on. He didn't want to lose!

All the various heirs were casting complicated looks to judge one another, and even engaging in a contest with each other.

Everyone wanted to forestall one's opponent with a show of strength on this occasion, no one wanted to be demoralized before things had begun.

Therefore, all sorts of gazes met in a tit-for-tat struggle, and permeated throughout the scene.

Jiang Chen greeted fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue. Fatty Xuan's six meridians true qi were already quite stable. In his own words, it would be at most two months before he broke through to seven meridians true qi.

As for Hubing Yue, he was already at eight meridians true qi. A hubbub arose after he made an entrance in which he didn't exercise restraint in displaying his level of training.

After all, eight meridians true qi was absolutely an existence at the level of the ten great dukes!

If Jiang Chen wanted to assail eight meridians true qi, his

chances of success were absolutely above ninety percent. But he purposely didn't do so.

There was no major difference, currently, to him between seven meridians true qi and eight meridians true qi.

They were patently not the only ones who'd been improving. No matter friend nor foe, all the heirs had been making their final sprints before the Hidden Dragon Trials.

Therefore, everyone's appearance now was more or less accompanied by some improvement.

The heir of Yanmen, Yan Yiming – that catastrophic character that Jiang Chen had crushed beneath his feet twice – had somehow gotten ahold of some miraculous pill medicine and had actually recovered from his injuries, with his training attaining an even higher goal, and breaking through to seven meridians true qi!

"Jiang Chen, you've used sneaky tricks to plot against me multiple times. I, Yan Yiming, will find payment from you during the Hidden Dragon Trials. Now that I've entered the advanced realm of true qi, do you think your sneaky tricks will still be effective?" Yan Yiming glared at Jiang Chen from afar and privately expressed a great ambition, swearing to ruthlessly torture Jiang Chen.

"Brother Chen, look over there, the heirs of the four great dukes! Tsk tsk, the four great dukes get a sweet deal alright. They can have two candidates, that is some special privilege." Fatty Xuan's

tone held some envy.

According to the rules of the Hidden Dragon Trials, if a duke was ranked in the top four, then they could have two candidates in the Hidden Dragon Trials, with the more optimal score being recorded.

This was equivalent to another layer of insurance that allowed the strong to become stronger.

The four great dukes were respectively the duke of Soaring Dragon, the duke of White Tiger, the duke of Vermillion Bird, and the duke of Black Tortoise.

Jiang Chen threw a faint glance in that direction when he heard those words.

The disciples of the four great dukes all knew how to put on a display alright – the heirs to Soaring Dragon in particular acted like they were the main protagonists.

The female one was naturally the hot topic of this time's Trials, Long Juxue.

The male one was Long Juxue's brother, Long Yinye.

Long Yinye was as his name implied, frosty and arrogant, suffused with a wild temperament. His entire being was like a dragon that overturned seas and rivers, full of a wild aura.

Although this man's reputation wasn't as renowned as Long Juxue and her azure phoenix constitution, he was even more mysterious. It was said that his true level of training wasn't less than that of Long Juxue, and that his capabilities in combat were even more than hers.

This was to say that the son and daughter of the duke of Soaring Dragon were practically double insurance, absolutely ensuring that the champion of the Hidden Dragon Trials wouldn't fall into other hands.

The first duke of the kingdom had their capital and their pride.

In contrast, whether it was the heir of White Tiger, Vermillion Bird, or Black Tortoise, all paled a bit in comparison.

When the eight of them walked together, although they all had the characteristics of being a phoenix or dragon amongst men, Long Juxue and Long Yinye gave off the feeling of being head and shoulders above others – like a crane standing amongst chickens, rising above the common herd and allowing others to identify them with one glance.

"Damn it, what are you so cocky about? Sooner or later, I'm going to beat you down one by one." Fatty Xuan showed naked admiration, jealousy, and hatred.

It wasn't that he was narrow minded, but that these people had never treated him as a human being. This was the mindset of

revenge developing from fatty Xuan after he'd been looked down upon by these people.

Jiang Chen closed his eyes after flicking a glance. He was wholly uninterested in these gestures that pretended to be aloof and lofty.

These four great dukes had purposely built themselves up to be one above everyone else. This was undoubtedly a demonstration of strength to the other heirs, and a warning to them not to lightly undertake the challenge to their position.

This was an instinct to protect one's territory, but Jiang Chen turned up his nose at it.

If any of the dukes down below truly had great power, they would never give up the opportunity to challenge the four great dukes due to their display.

A duke's position was won on the basis of battle, and not through a presentation.

"Jiang Chen!"

This time, it was the heir to Vermillion Bird, Hong Tiantong, who spoke first.

"Jiang Chen, I've heard that great happenings have occurred in your Jiang Han manor. What are you doing here?"

Bai Zhanyun was enlightened now, and was no longer Long Juxue's striker. Hong Tiantong had naturally and happily accepted this glorious misison.

"Who are you? What does my brother Chen's business have to do with you?" Fatty Xuan didn't give a damn whether you were the four great dukes or not. In his eyes, if you weren't one of them, then you were a bad guy!

"Damn fatty, didn't your old man ever teach you the manners of nobility?" When faced with such a character as fatty Xuan, Hong Tiantong displayed an instinctive contempt.

Jiang Chen raised his brow as a cold glance swept in front of Hong Tiantong. "Are you provoking me? Then challenge me. If not, scram!"

"Jiang Chen is it?" Standing beside Long Juxue, Long Yinye stared at Jiang Chen with a pair of swift and fierce eyes. That wild killing intent surged without concealment at Jiang Chen.

"I've heard of you, you seemed to have given that worthless Bai Zhanyun a lesson? Very good. I hope you don't disappoint me when it comes down to it."

Bai Zhanyun wasn't standing that far away, and his face convulsed when he heard Long Yinye publicly deride him as worthless, but he controlled his temper at the end.

Jiang Chen, on the other hand, had an obviously much more steady and stately demeanor after training his mental ability.

His eyelids didn't even jump when faced with such a condescending tone from Long Yinye. "A bunch of flies, clamorous!"

"Nice one! Show us what you've got on the Hidden Dragon Trials. Who the hell do you think you are, flapping your lips here?" Fatty Xuan also had a face full of contempt.

Long Yinye's face turned frigid and was about to open his mouth when, in the middle of the courtyard, a beam of astonishing sword aura suddenly descended as if from the heavens. Princess Gouyu's lithe figure suddenly appeared when the rainbow sword aura landed on the ground.

"Rainbow true qi? Eleven meridians true qi master?" The scene was in an uproar as the gazes towards Princess Gouyu were tinged with more fear and respect.

The Eastern Kingdom also had a few true qi masters, but these true qi masters were mostly ten meridians true qi.

Those who'd trained to eleven meridians true qi could be counted on one hand.

And Princess Gouyu had just joined the ranks of the eleven

meridians true qi masters at the age of just over twenty, how could this not astonish and astound people?

Even Long Yinye's wild eyes darted to and fro on Princess Gouyu's body, actually forgetting his conflict with Jiang Chen for a moment.

As for Long Juxue, an undetectable hint of killing intent flashed through that beautiful face. The lips of her mouth immediately resumed a faint sliver of a smile as soon as the killing intent had flashed by.

As if eleven meridians true qi was nothing much to her.

Chapter 56: Face Slapping Interlude

Princess Gouyu's entrance made the noisy din of voices completely disappear.

After all, every single heir present felt a bit of dread and fear towards the identity of the main organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials. If you irritated Princess Gouyu somehow and you faced additional obstacles as a result, the loss would outweigh the gain.

A distinguished vicennial gathering such as the Hidden Dragon Trials was something that the whole nation participated in. Shortly after the appearance of Princess Gouyu, two squads of strong practitioners from the Tiandu army sprinted down the avenue and occupied the two sides of the avenue, cordoning off the area.

This meant that the monarch was arriving.

Eastern Lu was in high spirits and his steps were steady and vigorous. His bright eyes looked around with a stern and an awe inspiring gaze.

"May the Emperor live ten thousand years, long live the Eastern Kingdom!"

The subjects and courtiers all threw themselves down on their knees one after another, awaiting the arrival of the king.

The 108 dukes also all found their areas and took their seats.

Eastern Lu occupied the center of the courtyard and spoke with a strong and resonant voice, “Our Eastern Kingdom, with a heritage of a thousand years, has always emphasized the heritage of martial dao. In order to conspicuously display our martial dao, and provide impetus to the dukes, we – the Eastern Kingdom – highly value the vicennial Hidden Dragon Trials. We happened to come upon this distinguished gathering and we saw heroic bearings and valiant postures from all the nobles, people of exceptional ability in all their majestic variety. We are indeed gratified.

Today, the 108 dukes of our court have gathered in a meeting of the wind and clouds. It is said that each age brings forth new geniuses on this noble land, and each will rule their own domain for years to come. We hope that all dukes present will display a new aspect of themselves, and expound on the highest level of their abilities, continuing to foster and enhance the traditions of the revered might of our dynasty.”

Eastern Lu handed the reins back to Princess Gouyu after speaking only a few simple words instead of a long winded speech. After all, Princess Gouyu was the main organizer of the Hidden Dragon Trials.

“Your Majesty, Yan Jiuzhuang has a matter to report.” Yan Juizhuang of the Yanmen dukedom stepped forward and bowed after Eastern Lu had concluded his remarks.

“Oh? What business does Duke Yan have?” Eastern Lu smiled faintly.

“Your Majesty, your subject has heard that the duke of Jiang Han has fallen ill with a severe disease, and has even heard that he is possibly not part of this world anymore. The Jiang Han territory borders the southern reaches of my territory, and is a military fortress of strategic importance. If the duke of Jiang Han does not reappear for an extended period of time, the thieves and rascals in the southern reaches will take advantage of the opportunity to rise in revolt. Your subject sincerely requests to discuss the jurisdiction of the Jiang Han dukedom before the Hidden Dragon Trials.”

The Jiang Han territory – the rights to a dukedom.

Eastern Lu’s expression froze slightly. No one had certain news of Jiang Feng’s condition. This duke of Yanmen had been the first to jump out in an apparent effort to be the trailblazer for the duke of Soaring Dragon.

Eastern Lu’s gaze flitted towards the Jiang Han dukedom area.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly and took a step forward, “Your Majesty, this duke of Yanmen has no respect for his own seniority to publicly curse my father at such a dignified gathering. As the son, how could I sit idly by and ignore this? Your subject requests that Yan Jiuzhuang apologize to me.”

“Apologize? Jiang Chen, you’re at an age in which you still smell of your mother’s milk, who are you to make I, a vaunted duke of a province, apologize to you?” Yan Jiuzhuang laughed coldly.

“Cursing others without cause or reason is a mouth without virtue. A mouth without virtue is an old dog. Old dog Yan, you’re an esteemed noble, yet you’ll willingly become the falcons and hounds of others.[1] Condemning you as a dog is an extreme offense to dogs.”

Jiang Chen’s viper tongued foundations weren’t made of pure bluster.

“Jiang Chen, you dare publicly insult and deride a territorial duke... this duke will petition to fix on you the egregious crime of slander and insult to a noble!”

“Old dog Yan, just try making a move against my son!”

Suddenly, a voice rang out like thunder from the area reserved for the Jiang Han territory.

This man’s gait was akin to a dragon’s gambol and a tiger’s walk. He strode to the front with frosty looks shooting out of his eyes and stared at Yan Jiuzhuang, “Old dog Yan, where has my son spoken incorrectly? You, duke of Yanmen, are a duke of the first rank, at the end of the day, and have sunk so low as to become cannon fodder for others, what are you, if not the falcons and hounds of others?”

Jiang Feng!

It was Jiang Feng, the duke of Jiang Han who had been missing

for quite some time.

The scene abruptly began bustling with noise and excitement. No one had thought that the duke of Jiang Han would suddenly appear, and even be bursting with the vitality of dragons and the ferocity of tigers.

And judging from his wholly unconcealed aura, it was the frightening aura that only a true qi master boast of!

This Jiang Feng had broken through and become another true qi master!

“Subject Jiang Feng greets Your Majesty!” After Jiang Feng had condemned Yan Jiuzhuang, he genuflected towards Eastern Lu in a very natural and poised way.

“Jiang Feng, We had heard that you were indisposed. So it turns out those were false rumors?” Eastern Lu’s heart had also settled slightly upon seeing Jiang Feng appear at a crucial moment.

As the king of the nation, he did not wish to see the Jiang Han territory change hands under these conditions.

Even if it were to change hands, it would still be up to him, Eastern Lu, to decide who would take over ownership. He absolutely would not let the duke of Soaring Dragon and his henchmen seize ownership with no clear reason whatsoever.

Jiang Feng laughed heartily, “A few thieves and rascals employed some disgraceful and unpresentable tricks. It’s not worth mentioning.”

“Haha, Duke Jiang possesses virtue and patriotism, and naturally has the protection of heaven and earth. It seems that we were overly concerned.” Eastern Lu was also in exceedingly good spirits.

The side of the duke of Soaring Dragon, however, was exceedingly gloomy. Jiang Feng hadn’t died? And had lived with the vitality of dragons and ferocity of tigers to boot? It looked like even his training had broken through.

Long Zhaofeng had a belly full of depression. He was becoming more and more dissatisfied with the competency of his underlings. Not a thing had gone smoothly ever since he had butted heads with the Jiang family father and son.

This Jiang Feng had fallen victim to a fatal poison, how could he be bursting with the vitality of dragons and ferocity of tigers?

Not only had Jiang Feng not died, but his training had gone up a notch. This way, weren’t they asking for ridicule if they sought to seize the Jiang Han territory through devious means?

The duke of Yanmen had a face full of awkwardness, as if someone had landed a hard punch on his nose. He was stuck between a rock and a hard place for the moment, and felt incredibly awkward.

“Duke of Yanmen, I, Jiang Feng, have one bit of advice for you. When being cannon fodder for someone, first look at Du Ruhai’s exit, then think of the straits that have befallen the Pill King Garden.”

The nobles who were the confidantes of and backing up the duke of Soaring Dragon were all deeply moved by Jiang Feng’s words.

Indeed, Du Ruhai had been a trailblazer and pathbreaker for the duke of Soaring Dragon, but had met his end at the duke’s own hands with his house raided afterwards and the family property confiscated.

Although no one had died in the Pill King Garden, their business was in a sorry state due to the Hall of Healing – like fallen flowers being carried away by the flowing waters as they steadily lost ground. There were even rumors that they had completely sold themselves to the duke of Soaring Dragon, and had lost their right of autonomy.

Yan Jiuzhuang was exceedingly depressed, but his tone remained quite proud. “Jiang Feng, don’t be pleased with yourself too early.”

“Why shouldn’t I be pleased with myself?” Jiang Feng laughed quite heartily. “In terms of one on one combat, you would be unable to beat me. In terms of sons, your son has been thoroughly trounced by my Chen’er on two occasions. I have no reason not to be pleased with myself in front of you, wouldn’t you say so?”

Yan Jiuzhuang had nothing to say to that.

Jiang Chen was in exceedingly good spirits upon hearing his father's flashy comeback. One had to admit, everyone had their own rules for survival in order to become a duke.

With the appearance of Jiang Feng, the small interlude naturally ended with Yan Jiuzhuang's losing face with a resounding slap.

Princess Gouyu's phoenix eyes moved slightly as she flicked a meaningful glance towards Jiang Chen.

"Everyone, I now announce the official commencement of the final competition in this year's Hidden Dragon Trials. The rules remain the same: Please begin applying for the exam mission.

This time's exams are still missions divided into nine levels. The missions of different levels represent each dukedom's rank."

There were 108 dukes in the Eastern Kingdom that were divided into nine levels of ranks. Each rank consists of twelve dukes, and so on and so forth.

The duke of Jiang Han was ranked number 14 out of the 108 dukes, and counted as a duke of the second rank.

For instance, dukes ranked one through twelve were all dukes of the first rank, and there were naturally levels within the first rank.

Levels one through four were the four great dukes of the kingdom and honored with the title of utmost first rank.

Levels five through eight were honored with the title primary first rank.

Levels nine through twelve were labelled auxiliary first rank.

When it came to second rank and dukes ranked even lower, there was no title of “utmost”. Each rank was also divided into three levels.

With second rank as an example, they were divided into upper second rank, middle second rank, and lower second rank.

The duke of Jiang Han was a noble of the upper second rank!

And the Hidden Dragon Trials were a contest to determine the rankings of the next generation of nobles.

The 108 heirs could apply for a mission of any rank. Of course, each heir candidate only had two application chances.

If both times didn’t result in a completed mission, that meant one had failed the exam and had to handover the dukedom, to allow the big and powerful aristocratic families to continuously take their place.

Many of the heirs would be exceedingly cautious because there were only two application chances, and sought to make the best out of these two chances.

Some heirs may challenge a higher rank mission with the first chance. But if the first challenge failed, then they would exercise extreme prudence when it came to the second application chance. Otherwise, if they failed the second mission as well, that meant handing over the dukedom.

Every duke's feelings were exceedingly complicated when it came to the Hidden Dragon Trials.

If potential was high, then the concern was which rank was the most appropriate.

If potential was mediocre, then the concern was whether or not maintaining their position was most important?

The higher ranks had to worry about challenges from behind.

The lower ranks also had to worry about their dukedoms being taken by those aristocratic families casting covetous eyes like a greedy tiger.

The middle ranked dukes had to debate whether they wished to take a step forward or remain where they were.

The Hidden Dragon Trials was a time of decisions – indeed, of

extremely difficult decisions.

Many times, some heirs overestimated their potential and strength and challenged high rank missions due to a moment's impulse. The end result was failing twice and the immediate loss of their dukedom.

This would cause extreme feelings of frustration, indignation, and regret.

"Brother Chen, what rank's missions do you intend on challenging?" Fatty Xuan crowded in and it was apparent that the fatty was just a tad bit nervous at the moment.

Jiang Chen glanced at his two best friends and asked in return, "What have you decided on?"

"I've decided to challenge a second rank mission first." A hint of resolution suffused Hubing Yue's fierce expression. He was of eight meridians true qi now and thus had the ability to say so.

He even had the right to challenge a first rank mission.

"I... I'll keep my position first and then see." Fatty Xuan said weakly. The duke of Jinshan was an upper fourth rank duke. His ranking was above average. It wouldn't be a bad thing if he could keep this ranking.

At least, the highest expectations that the duke of Jinshan had

for fatty Xuan was only to maintain their current ranking.

Jiang Chen nodded, “It is right for Xiaoyue to pick the second rank.[2] Brashly assailing the first rank would be too much pressure for you. As for fatty, maintaining your rank would count as success.”

Jiang Chen was rather familiar with the rules of the Hidden Dragon Trials. If the number of people who applied for the missions of particular rank exceeded the quota, then rankings would be decided based on the quality of the missions completed, successively being pushed back appropriately.

This was to say, if fifteen people applied for and completed a mission of the third rank, then the three people ranked in the last of these fifteen would be pushed back to the fourth rank.

And this was the logic that was followed. But the number of 108 dukedoms was eternal and unchanging.

Notes:

1] The hunting animal of another.

2] This is Jiang Chen’s nickname for Hubing Yue.

Chapter 57: Sights Set For Duke Of The First Rank

This kind of competition was quite cruel. If neither application was completed, it was equivalent to directly losing one's dukedom.

This way, there were sure to be many dukedoms that were vacated.

The vacant dukedoms would be filled in by strong aristocratic families. Of course, these filled vacancies would only rank at the bottom.

This was to say, the heirs that successfully completed missions would be ranked with priority in the higher ranks. Those who filled in for heirs who had lost their dukedoms could only compete for the vacated, lower ranks.

Of course, Jiang Chen had no need to consider these rules.

Jiang Chen's goal was clear; he was aiming for the championship. To him, obtaining even the first runner up position on this level of competition meant failing.

"Brother Chen, say something. What rank's mission do you intend to apply for?" Fatty wasn't that concerned about his matters, but cared very earnestly about Jiang Chen's decision.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly as his gaze naturally flitted towards the four great dukes.

Following his gaze, Fatty slapped his thick thigh. “Damn straight. I knew that our Brother Chen either didn’t care to make a move, or would shock everyone when he finally made one!

Heh heh, Brother Chen, I hope you can drag that chit Long Juxue down from her high horse.” Fatty Xuan cackled. “It’d be best if this chit voluntarily offered her body after she was conquered by Brother Chen, and that Brother Chen cast her off after he’s had her. Hahaha, that would truly be too perfect.”

Fatty Xuan’s thin rat eyes had almost formed slits in his laughter as he thought of this scene, fully depicting what “one is invincible when one is base” meant.

Following that, the 108 heirs all lined up according to their current dukedom rankings and prepared to step forward to apply for the missions of this year’s Hidden Dragon Trials.

There was almost no suspense regarding the rank of the missions that the heirs to the first rank dukedoms would apply for.

Each heir had their own self dignity and pride. They would absolutely not tolerate their position being replaced by someone else and being thrown out from the rank of first.

However, it was an absolutely normal thing for the strong to

replace the weak. Strength spoke for everything.

The Jiang Han dukedom was ranked 14 out of the 108 dukedoms, so it was soon Jiang Chen's turn.

"Jiang Chen, what rank's mission would you like to apply for?" Princess Gouyu asked.

"First rank!" Jiang Chen didn't even bat an eyelid.

"You have great aspirations, but I must remind you that everyone ahead of you has also applied for missions of the first rank. The competition between you all will be quite fierce!"

"What is the point of rankings without competition?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

"Very good. According to the rules, each heir must complete three missions to pass this particular exam. If a single mission is failed, that will be deemed as failing this application."

"Understood." Jiang Chen nodded slightly.

"Mm. Head over there to draw your first mission." Princess Gouyu marked down a symbol for the mission of the first rank on Jiang Chen's application tablet.

"Jiang Chen, you're applying for a mission of the first rank.

Correct?”

“Yes.”

“Please come over here. All the scrolls here are missions of the first rank. Please choose whichever one you’d like.”

Jiang Chen nodded, swept his eyes in a circle, and picked one at random.

They were all missions of the first rank and thus, their difficulty should all be similar. Jiang Chen naturally would not be overly selective. Not to mention, these scrolls were all sealed with no hint at their inner contents.

After selecting his mission, Jiang Chen was in no hurry to open it. The organizers of the Hidden Dragon Trials also didn’t demand immediate verification of the mission.

Candidates only needed to complete the mission and hand it in for verification.

“Jiang Chen, what kind of mission did you select?” An heir next to him asked out of curiosity.

Jiang Chen flicked a glance at him but only smiled faintly and left. It was obvious that the other heir wasn’t a friend, and was possibly from the enemy camp, here to elicit some information from him.

Although Jiang Chen was unafraid, he was unwilling for additional people to appear and cause trouble for him when he was completing his mission.

According to the rules, the three missions had to be completed within three months.

When the exams were over and the 108 nobles were present again, after weeding out and replacing the appropriate ones, the ranking contests would commence according to each rank.

This was to say that, when rank were decided, the twelve heirs of the first rank would only be able to challenge others within the first rank to determine the final rankings.

The competitions within each rank were for the final rankings.

The heirs could leave after selecting their first mission. They only needed to come back when they had completed a mission in the future to select their second mission.

“Chen’er, what kind of mission have you drawn?” Jiang Feng asked eagerly upon returning to the manor.

Jiang Chen gave the scroll to Jiang Feng. Jiang Feng took a look and frowned, “This first mission is a bit harder.”

“Hmm?”

“A serial rapist has appeared in the region of the Red Moon county located within the Tianhu territory, collecting the flowers of beautiful girls. His qinggong is extraordinary, and he calls himself “Lotus Harvester”.

He specializes in hunting young girls and is exceedingly cruel. Whenever he harvests a young girl, he even kills them and cuts off the two things in front of the victims’ chest as a momento.”

“Such a frenzied lunatic exists on this world?” Even Jiang Chen was vaguely surprised. Such a villain who had committed his full share of crimes should have been slaughtered long ago. Why was he allowed to thrive until this day and destroy so many lives?

“The level of this thief’s training is said to be between eight meridians true qi and nine meridians true qi. He has weathered hundred of battles because he works alone, and thus his combat ability is incredible. Chen’er, your mission is not simple.”

Jiang Chen was also a bit surprised. None of the missions of the first rank were simple alright. The first mission was to kill a practitioner in the advanced realm of true qi who was between eight and nine meridians.

And this mission had to be completed within a month.

According to the exam’s rules, the participating heirs had to

absolutely keep their identities a secret. They could not mobilize any connections.

If they used any connections without authorization, they would immediately be judged as failing the mission if discovered. As a punishment for cheating, their dukedom would be confiscated.

A few heirs had held the mentality of getting by on a fluke in past years, but would almost always be found out by the Eastern family clan's mighty intelligence network. They would be called out and lose their dukedoms.

Therefore, there were fewer and fewer heirs who held the mentality of getting by on a flukes.

With no time to lose, Jiang Chen made a few minor adjustments to his preparations and set out on his way.

The Sheng battalion brothers escorted Jiang Chen out of the capital and halted their footsteps. According to the rules, if they escorted him another step, it was very likely that Jiang Chen would be deemed as having cheated.

Jiang Chen urged his horse onwards after leaving the capital. He came to a large canyon after galloping 60 km. Jiang Chen urged the horse to give a mighty leap forward, their bodies soaring high up in the air as he allowed the horse to descend into the bottomless abyss as it would.

As for Jiang Chen, he made a flip in midair and dashed towards another narrow winding trail. His figure vanished into the boundless and indistinct open country with a few leaps and bounds.

After roughly ten minutes, more than ten figures abruptly appeared where Jiang Chen had sent his horse jumping off. The person in charge was the Soaring Dragon warrior who was willing to die for his mission, Long San.

Long San's face was covered as his sinister and ruthless eyes patrolled the area. He cursed viciously. "This brat Jiang Chen is so damned devious and wretched. His presence scatters apart here. In front of us is the boundless open country, but we don't know where he's gone."

"Lord San, what should we do?"

Long San looked at the terrain again, "There's only one place to go here. We'll split up into three parties here and chase after him separately. Remember, the duke will award a hundred thousand gold, bequeath land, and award a rank with eight thousand below him to whoever kills Jiang Chen."

Territory and bounty, these were irresistible temptations. Moreover, this mission was merely killing an heir and wasn't too difficult!

The groups for the three different directions were quickly settled upon, and they started searching according to the three different

paths.

Although it was the first time that Jiang Chen had ever walked out of the capital since arriving in this world, the memories of his past life were enough to help him handle such a situation.

There were roughly 2,500 km between the capital and the Tianhu territory. The ordinary steeds of this world could travel 1,500 km in a day. A practitioner in the advanced realm of true qi, if dedicating himself to traveling, could also travel 1,500 km in a day.

Of course, no advanced practitioner would waste true qi on traveling. Jiang Chen was no exception. He'd seen from the map that a larger village could be reached by traveling through this narrow, winding path and traversing a few mountain ridges. This village was one of the more renowned livestock farms for producing steeds in this area.

Jiang Chen had arrived at the road to the village after roughly two hours. He didn't enter the village, but spent a large sum to purchase a steed that could travel 2,500 km a day.

Jiang Chen didn't linger after swapping out his steed, and he dashed towards the direction of Tianhu territory.

To elude observation, Jiang Chen would occasionally choose a few trails off the beaten path. He'd rather take the longer way around, instead of having new complications crop up.

Like this, Jiang Chen covered 2,500 km in four full days before he entered the Tianhu territory.

Jiang Chen didn't just spend these days traveling. Whenever it was nightfall, Jiang Chen would revisit and study the past cases of that Lotus Harvester.

Jiang Chen had made a few gains after a few days.

One thing that Jiang Chen could be sure of was that the area in which the Lotus Harvester would commit his crimes never exceeded the Tianhu territory. There were ten counties within the Tianhu region, and the Lotus Harvester had committed most of his crimes in the Red Moon, Black Forest, and Large Rock counties. There was an occasional incident or two in the other counties, but the frequency wasn't high.

Jiang Chen spread out the map of the Tianhu territory for perusal and mused at the map for a while. From the terrain of these three counties, their location formed the Chinese character "品".

Incidentally, the terrain of these three counties was more complicated and was advantageous to the Lotus Harvester's operations.

"This rapist has extraordinary qinggong, but the distance he can cover should be middling. This is why there are a few cases that involve a long and arduous journey. That is to say, this villain must have a lair within the three counties. It is said that the wily

hare has three holes to its burrow. If I can find one of his lairs, then it will be much easier to capture and kill this villain."

Jiang Chen had more or less deduced a few clues.

Jiang Chen arrived at the Large Rock county on the fifth day. He had his reasons for choosing the Large Rock county, and not the Red Moon county, which had the higher number of incidents.

According to the patterns from the previous cases, the Lotus Harvester had succeeded twice in the Red Moon county. Black Forest county neighbored Red Moon county, so its guard would be raised higher.

There was a mountain between Large Rock and Red Moon. Red Moon was located to the south of the mountain, and Large Rock to the north. The flow of information between the two was blocked due to the mountain.

Jiang Chen speculated that it was possible that this Lotus Harvester would choose to make a move in Large Rock county!

Chapter 58: Competition At Star Argus Palace

“Heh heh, have you heard? The decennial competitions of the Star Argus Palace will begin in three days times. It seems that both the South Sect and North Sect think that their victory is a foregone conclusion.”

“Psht. How could that bunch of broads from the North Sect win out over the beasts of the South Sect. They haven’t won against the South Sect for the last sixty years.”

“What goes around comes around. It’s said that Sectmistress Jade of the North Sect has obtained a few disciples whose potentials are quite good. They’re all beautiful to a fault, and there’s high hope for the sect triumphing over the South Sect this time.”

“Whatever! Whether it’s the South Sect or the North Sect that wins, it won’t be our turn to live in the Star Argus Palace. It’s just be a bunch of men changing to a crowd of women.”

Jiang Chen heard this snippet of conversation from a neighboring table in some tavern.

In the days after he’d arrived in the Large Rock Country, he’d heard the most information about the North and South Sects of the Star Argus Palace.

The winner would be able to take up residence in the Star Argus Palace, and the loser would have to depart and find another location to settle down in.

Of course, this occurred once every ten years. If a sect lost, then they merely needed to stage a comeback next time.

Jiang Chen drank alone, but his hearing was focused on all sides. His “Ear of the Zephyr” was now at the third level and his hearing was at least two to three times stronger than the average practitioner.

All sorts of information and messages flowed in at the moment.

Star Argus Palace, North Sect, broads, beauties...

The useful information was constantly filtered out and listed separately by Jiang Chen.

Resting his wine cup, Jiang Chen put down a few silvers and floated out the door. He’d decided to make a stop at the Star Argus Palace.

If the Lotus Harvester was to commit an incident lately, then there was no location more suitable in the entire Tianhu territory than the Star Argus Palace.

Beautiful disciples, just this item was of enough interest.

The law of rapists was that the higher the level the training of the victim, the better. Therefore, girls who trained were the favorites of rapists.

And where else in the Large Rock province would have more beauties than the Star Argus Palace at this moment? Not to mention the fact that they were all practitioners, it would be one big harvest if these girls were plucked.

Jiang Chen contemplated things from the perspective of the Lotus Harvester and felt that even if the Lotus Harvester didn't commit an incident, he was sure to come out and pluck something or another.

Jiang Chen used a few materials to make a few adjustments and disguise himself after leaving the capital. His current visage appeared as a thirty something wandering gallant.

Vagabond gallants and characters like these numbered at least eight hundred million, if not one billion within the Eastern Kingdom. Jiang Chen's disguise was beyond ordinary. It was the type that wouldn't be picked out if thrown into a crowd.

The Star Argus Palace's topography was exceedingly ideal. A city called Star City had formed in the 50 km around the Star Argus Palace, and it'd been built reliant on the Star Argus Palace.

The existence of a sect, even an ordinary sect, would bring pervasive influence to its local surroundings.

Two days later, Jiang Chen arrived at the Star City to discover that not just anyone could spectate the competition between the North and South Sects of the Star Argus Palace.

There were only three hundred audience members allowed. After eliminating the predetermined quota, there were only roughly one hundred places left for outsiders.

The number of wandering gallants that had surged into the Star City the past couple of days numbered more than a hundred thousand.

More than a hundred thousand competing for roughly one hundred spots was the equivalent of one out of a thousand. This wasn't just an ordinary level of difficulty.

However, Jiang Chen knew that in order to investigate the Lotus Harvester, he would have to obtain an observation spot.

If Jiang Chen revealed his status as the heir to a dukedom, he was bound to cause a ruckus within Star City. It wouldn't be a hard thing to obtain an observation spot.

However, if he did so, that would be in violation of the rules, and he would be directly thrown out of the competition.

Jiang Chen arrived at the Star Argus Palace headquarters stationed in Star City. There was already a sea of humanity and it

was packed full of people.

"I'll pay thirty thousand silver, who's willing to give me a spot?"

"Psht. Pal, did you just awaken from your dream? A hundred thousand silver won't even buy a spot now, how could you offer a price in the tens of thousands?"

"Eh..."

"I'm of five meridians true qi, don't I have the right to spectate the battles?"

"Apologies, our rules are that unless you have the right to enter only if you're of six meridians true qi."

"Brother, I have a relationship with Xie Qiang of the South Sect. Make an exception for me?"

"Who's Xie Qiang? We only recognize relationships with the Sectmaster and the elders."

"Brother, I'm the boss of Thousand Horse Hall. Your Star Argus Palace has also done business with me. This observation spot..."

"Sorry, business is business and relationships are relationships. If you have money, there are still a few spots for sale. A hundred thousand silver for one."

“Gah, I’ll buy one!”

Jiang Chen did an auditory sweep and comments such as these travelled into his ears. The entire scene was in a chaotic uproar. Everyone was trying their utmost and breaking their heads trying to get an observation spot.

“Ai, when a man is poor his ambition is not far reaching. Looks like we’re destined to be without luck for observing this decennial competition between the North and South sects.”

“What can we do, the Star Argus Palace is just that cocky. Apparently the disciples that are participating this time are all disciples of five meridians true qi.”

“Tsk tsk, the strength and influence of a foremost sect in the Tianhu territory alright. These genius disciples probably wouldn’t be inferior even when placed amongst the sons and disciples of the various nobles?”

“This… they’ll probably be on a similar level?”

Jiang Chen was speechless when he heard those words. Five meridians true qi was absolutely the lowest level of existence amongst the heirs.

However, this Star Argus Palace was just a sect in the Tianhu territory. It was a thing worth having pride and dignity in that

they boasted so many disciples of five meridians true qi.

Jiang Chen stood in a corner, debating how to get his hands on an observation invitation.

He'd purposefully disguised himself as a three meridians true qi independent practitioner with humble strength. He had no desire to reveal his talents and attract the Lotus Harvester's attention.

Therefore, he absolutely could not reveal his true strength.

After thinking for a while, Jiang Chen hit upon an idea.

"Brother, my strength in martial dao is mediocre, but my potential in spirit medicine is quite high. I'm also exceedingly adept in the dao of alchemy. I can help out if any injuries from the blade result in the process."

"High potential in spirit medicine? That will only be proven through tests. If you truly have such abilities, then it will be no problem obtaining an invitation."

Jiang Chen sat through a spirit medicine test according to the other's instructions. This was practically as simple as eating to Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen was treated as an honored guest in less than fifteen minutes. His spirit medicine caused even the spirit medicine administrator from the Star Argus Palace, who had assumed

personal command over the area, to even slightly admit defeat.

In this way, an invitation was in hand and “Spirit Medicine Great Master Chen” was written on it.

Jiang Chen had given himself a shake and become “Great Master Chen”.

Jiang Chen’s status immediately increased greatly with the invitation, becoming a distinguished, honored guest. A specially assigned person led him into the headquarters of the Star Argus Palace and arranged a first class guest room for him.

“Heh heh, it looks like one must have expertise in one specialty. One wouldn’t even be able to enter the door without a particular specialty.”

Jiang Chen laughed self deprecatingly and sat cross legged on the bed.

It would obviously not be the thing to do if he started practicing techniques in a powerful and dynamic way whilst on someone else’s territory. Jiang Chen meditated for a while and started circulating vast waves true qi in his body, strengthening his meridians.

After strengthening his meridians, Jiang Chen started training the three abilities of “God’s Eye”, “Ear of the Zephyr”, and “Boulder’s Heart”.

As of now, Jiang Chen had trained “God’s Eye” to the peak of the third level, and “Ear of the Zephyr” to the peak of the third level as well.

Progress was still slow in “Boulder’s Heart”, as he had just entered the second level.

“It’s said that these abilities can penetrate the Thirty Three Heavens, therefore there should be 33 levels. I have only but just started from ground zero.”

Jiang Chen also knew that the earliest stages of training were the easiest. It would unfortunately become more difficult as one progressed.

The range in which the “God’s Eye” and “Ear of the Zephyr” could cover was only a radius of a thousand meters.

Any further would be beyond his power.

The mental strength of “Psychic’s Head” wasn’t able to be defined in quantitative terms, but Jiang Chen could clearly sense that his mental state of being had increased greatly.

A mental state of being could only be perceived in the finest of details. It was an instinctive strength, a sixth, seventh sense that exceeded the five senses...

Jiang Chen woke up early the next morning because the decennial event of the Star Argus Palace was beginning today.

As “Great Master Chen” in the spirit medicine world, he had actually been arranged a second class seat. This seat was quite ideal and was situated behind only the “high and mighty” in the first row.

Jiang Chen used the “God’s Eye” for slight observation and discovered those sitting in front all possessed power that didn’t lose out to the North and South Sectmaster/mistress of the Star Argus Palace.

They were mostly all at seven meridians true qi.

“Looks like the culture of martial dao is flourishing in the Large Rock province. It’s a rare sight to have so many seven meridians true qi practitioners present.” Jiang Chen evaluated silently, but was also slightly worried. “With so many seven meridians true qi practitioners holding down the fort, even with the Lotus Harvester’s eight meridians true qi, he probably wouldn’t dare to brazenly do something impetuous?”

Jiang Chen’s emotions were quite complicated. He both hoped for the Lotus Harvester to appear, but also didn’t wish for female practitioners to be targeted.

Just as he was wavering, a group of people walked out from the hallways on the two sides.

One side wore all black, they were from the South sect.

One side was all female and mostly wore downy yellow clothes, patently the North Sect.

The South Sect Sectmaster was called Shen Rong and roughly forty years old. Long sideburns along with his thin, lean features, gave off a dignified bearing.

Everyone called the Sectmistress of the North Sect as “Madame Jade”. She was a young, married woman who actually looked only roughly 27 or 28. A pair of tapered almond eyes adorned her face and she was exceedingly alluring. No one knew if that was her true age or if she was skilled in making herself look youthful.

As a guest, Jiang Chen couldn’t very well have no respect and observe the two heads of their sects through the “God’s Eye”. But from external appearances, the two were absolutely of the advanced realm of true qi.

As for whether it was seven meridians true qi or eight meridians, Jiang Chen couldn’t gauge it either, without a careful look.

“Heh heh, junior sister Jade, it’s been ten years but your elegance remains the same as before.” Shen Rong chuckled and took the lead in speaking.

“Save the idle chatter Shen Rong. In this time’s competition, my North Sect will absolutely take back control of the Star Argus

Palace.” Madame Jade’s delicate brow arched and her jade like voice sounded.

“Alright, then let our disciples fight decisively!” Shen Rong smiled freely and easily.

Chapter 59: Following The Clues

Both sides agreed to send out five disciples to do battle. The side that won three times out of five would be labelled the victor, and would wrest control of the Star Argus Palace for the next ten years.

Jiang Chen was absolutely disinterested in the competition of those that were five meridians true qi.

Jiang Chen surreptitiously started utilizing his God's Eye when everyone's gaze was locked onto the crowd of youths, and he started observing the seated guests.

If the Lotus Harvester was going to come, he naturally wouldn't brazenly appear undisguised. He would certainly disguise himself as a guest and take advantage of the situation to profiteer, like robbing an owner when his house was on fire.

He had to admit, these guests were all quite entranced. Almost everyone in Jiang Chen's God's Eye range had concentrated their attention on the competition on the field.

This was a competition between the most distinguished disciples of the Star Argus Palace's new generations. These guests of exceptional ability all made their living in the Large Rock Province. They would naturally pay attention to the condition of the Star Argus Palace's next generation.

The first two battles were quickly concluded. The North and South Sect had both won one battle.

Jiang Chen had also completed a round of observations but gained nothing. None of these people looked like the Lotus Harvester in disguise.

Jiang Chen's mind was not quite at rest, and so he made another thorough round of observations. The results were the same, he couldn't find the slightest flaw in these guests.

"Is it possible that the Lotus Harvester really didn't come? Or is it that he's disguised himself so well that my God's Eye can't see through him?"

Jiang Chen questioned his own judgment a bit. Due to his training of the "Boulder's Heart", he'd had a faint instinctive feeling that told him something would happen at the Star Argus Palace today, and it was very likely something to do with the Lotus Harvester.

That was the say, it was possible that the Lotus Harvester was already present.

Except, there was a full three hundred guests spectating the competition. Which one was the Lotus Harvester? Jiang Chen first observed through using God's Eye, then leveraged Ear of the Zephyr to listen to these people's breathing and heartbeat.

In the end, he still gained nothing.

“Is my feeling incorrect?”

Four battles of the competition had been completed as Jiang Chen was musing, and both sides had won twice.

At this moment, a fifteen to sixteen year old girl walked out from behind Sectmistress Jade of the North Sect. She was wearing a downy yellow light petticoat, and had an exquisite and delicately wrought body. She slowly walked onto the stage.

“I am North Sect disciple Wen Ziqi, please grant me your instruction.”

The girl called Wen Ziqi had a head full of hair that was akin to a waterfall of black yarn. Her eyes like lacquer, shone with a purity like that of a mountain spring.

The softly spoken sentence was enough to send her entire face blushing to the backs of her ears.

“I’ve heard of master’s junior Sectmistress Jade of the North Sect obtaining a fine disciple. It must be you, junior sister. I am your foolish brother Lu Boyu and I’ll demonstrate a few moves with you.”

This Lu Boyu was slender and tall, and his thin face emanated a sense of suaveness. His eyes were like a second mouth that could also speak.

He had a few traces of a elegant bearing within his gestures.

What surprised Jiang Chen quite a bit was that both of them were actually six meridians true qi!

For two six meridians true qi to appear in such a small Star Argus Palace, no wonder it caused those spectating the competition to also gasp and exclaim softly.

Sectmistress Jade's originally confident, charming face darkened suddenly. She had held this disciple, the pride of her joy, in reserve and concealed her strength in preparation to soar to the heavens with one feat. She hadn't thought that the South Sect would also play such a hand.

The battle between these two trump cards was indeed much more exciting than those from earlier.

Although Wen Ziqi was gentle and refined, and even blushed when she talked, she wasn't the least bit ambiguous and perfunctory when she entered battle conditions. Her advances and retreats were measured, and she attacked and defended. She actually had quite the authoritative air.

Except, disciple Lu Boyu was patently a character that the South Sect had cultivated with emphasis. No matter what Wen Ziqi did, he could firmly repress Wen Ziqi.

And, with his combat attitude of accomplishing a task with ease,

he obviously was holding his strength back.

Jiang Chen shook his head lightly and privately flicked a glance at the South Sect Sectmaster Shen Rong. A sly old fox was the master at machination and maneuver. It looked like the North Sect would still be unable to win for the next ten years.

Just as the thought flashed through Jiang Chen's mind, Lu Boyu lightly exhaled forcefully and snatched out softly with his hand, grabbing Wen Ziqi's trailing sleeve and brought it for a sniff in front of his nose. "Mm, national beauty and a heavenly fragrance – great commendation, great commendation!"

Wen Ziqi was the epitome of awkwardness as she could neither advance nor retreat in that moment. Her eyes red, tears were already rolling in her eyes.

North Sect Madame Jade slammed her hand down on the table and rose, speaking angrily to Shen Rong of the South Sect. "Shen Rong, are your disciples just as wicked and philandering as you?"

Shen Rong laughed heartily and lightly rubbed his sideburns. "Junior sister Jade, what's the harm in the young making harmless jokes?"

Madame Jade was so infuriated that her alluring body trembled slightly and her pink face was suffused red with anger. She had labored over ten years of preparations but was still one step short in the end. It was easy to imagine the bout of depression she felt.

Lu Boyu cupped his hands at Wen Ziqi, “Junior sister Wen, your foolish brother had no other intention and was purely jesting with you, that was all.”

Tears rolling in her eyes, Wen Ziqi lightly stomped her foot and ran to Madame Jade, starting to cry out of her aggrievement.

“What are you crying for?” Madame Jade was similarly depressed and she lectured, “Your skills were not as good as others, so just go back and train well. How will you bear responsibility for great matters in the future if you only know to shed tears when you run into anything?”

As the victor, Shen Rong didn’t take the advantage to add insult to injury. Rather, he walked in front of Madame Jade and cupped his hands, “Junior sister, the stroke of a brush does not create two Star Argus Palaces. Although you and I are of the North and South Sects, the god of destiny has made fools of people. I have always had a noble ambition during my stewardship of the Star Argus Palace, and that is to merge our North and South Sect and recover the glorious days of yesteryear, strengthening our Star Argus Palace’s reputation, allowing our Palace to become a first rate sect in all of the Eastern Kingdom.”

“Pretentious hypocrite.” Madame Jade wasn’t in a good mood.

“Junior sister, your foolish brother was contemplating in the depths of the mountains a while ago and unintentionally discovered a hidden spot of the sect. It may touch upon the heritage of the founder of our Star Argus Palace. Your foolish brother finds it difficult to do so much single handedly, and would

like to invite junior sister to return to the mountain and discuss a strategy together." Shen Rong's posture was quite low.

"Secret spot of the sect? Founder of the sect?" Madame Jade's refined brows lifted slightly.

"Junior sister, you and I are of the same sect and same origin. Why the need to separate yours from mine on such an important matter? If this matter can facilitate the merging of the two sects, in the future, wouldn't you and I have rendered a great service to the sect?" Shen Rong's tone was exceedingly sincere.

Madame Jade mused in deep contemplation as she felt a bit of dilemma. If Shen Rong's attitude had been haughty, Madame Jade would have surely left with a flourish of her sleeves.

But on the contrary, Shen Rong had humbled himself and every word he spoke was from the basis of the righteous cause for the sect. This tempted Madame Jade a bit.

"Junior sister, there are many people here. Why don't you and I first discuss this in the sect's secret room? I have a few clues that just so happen to need to be discussed with junior sister."

Madame Jade hesitated for a bit and finally nodded. "Shen Rong, if you truly have the intention to help the sect merge as one, then I, Madame Jade, am not a heartless person."

Shen Rong was overjoyed, "Junior sister's magnanimity is the

blessing of our sect. This way please."

He immediately gave orders to Lu Boyu, "Boyu, you look after the assorted honored guests. I have matters to discuss with my junior sister."

"Yes."

Shen Rong expressed his apologies to the guests and moved to the internal areas of the Star Argus Sect along with Madame Jade.

Jiang Chen sat in his seat, rather baffled. A competition had ended just like that, but he had gathered no clues at all.

Instinct told him that there was definitely something out of the ordinary at this decennial event. Yet, he couldn't find any traces of it, no matter how he observed.

"Just where did it go wrong?" The guests were already dispersing in twos and threes. Some intended to leave, while others were preparing to return to their quarters and leave after supping at the Star Argus Palace's banquet.

Jiang Chen was helpless and without a strategy at that moment, as he sank into an impasse.

"Did I really make this trip for nothing?" Jiang Chen was unwilling to concede defeat. He felt sure that he had missed some fine details.

After training “Boulder’s Heart”, he was confident that his intuition was much stronger than that of ordinary folks.

At this moment, another disciple walked out from within the inner doors and spoke to the six or seven female disciples left behind, of whom included Wen Ziqi. “Junior sisters, in accordance with the master’s junior’s orders, I invite my fellow junior sisters to go and pay our respects to the sect’s founding master.”

Upon hearing that it was their master’s orders and that it had to do with paying respects to the founding master, Wen Ziqi naturally didn’t decline and followed the disciple away.

Gazing at the messenger disciple, Jiang Chen’s emotions bafflingly palpated a bit.

“Haven’t I met this person?” Jiang Chen went over the experiences of the past few days in his mind, but couldn’t find any memories with regards to this person.

But, when this disciple had arrived just now, his mental strength had detected a strand of a familiar feeling.

“Who was that person?” Jiang Chen’s thoughts flickered and he walked towards Lu Boyu. “Brother Lu.”

Lu Boyu took in Jiang Chen’s appearance as a wandering practitioner and smiled faintly, “What instructions does this

honored guest have?”

“Brother Lu, the disciple that came by with a message just now, who is he in the Star Argus Palace?”

“Oh, that was one of master’s honorary disciples. I can’t remember his name. What, do you know him?”

Jiang Chen shook his head. “Just curious.”

An honorary disciple, obviously someone with no particular reputation, yet, he’d given Jiang Chen a familiar feeling. Jiang Chen instinctively followed them outside.

But, when he chased out after them, there were no traces of those people outside.

The most peculiar thing was was that the female disciples should’ve had a particular body scent. But at this moment, a strange smell permeated the air, making it impossible to discern the scent of the female disciples.

“No, this isn’t right.” Jiang Chen immediately employed God’s Eye to the extreme and looked around his surroundings, but still came up empty handed.

It was as if that honorary disciple had vanished into thin air with those female disciples.

Jiang Chen found a South Sect disciple and asked him where the temple of the founding master was. When he swiftly hurried there, the locks were hung upon the doors to the temple. There were obviously no rites of worship to the founding master.

"Indeed, something's wrong with that honorary disciple!" Jiang Chen calmed down and went over the entire matter again. Suddenly, the South Sect Sectmaster Shen Rong's sideburns floated in Jiang Chen's mind.

"Hmm? Shen Rong! Right! I'd actually detected Shen Rong's presence on that messenger disciple just now. Although that person consciously concealed his presence, a few minute movements and subconscious habits were unable to escape from my God's Eye's notice!"

"Is something amiss with this Shen Rong?" Jiang Chen hesitated no longer when his thoughts arrived at this point, and he deployed God's Eye, Ear of the Zephyr, and Boulder's Heart to their utmost.

Chapter 60: The Splendor Of Spring And Killing Intent

Once he had deployed all three abilities to their utmost, he finally found a tiny sliver of a clue in a clump of shrubbery. This clump of shrubbery was slightly different from the ones in front of it.

This shrubbery all vaguely leaned in the same direction. It was obvious that something had passed by here and caused this bit of change.

With The God's Eye careful discerning ability, Jiang Chen finally found a few footprints in the surrounding grass – so faint that they could barely be detected.

These footprints were concealed very well. Jiang Chen quested all along the way and followed them to a sea of bamboo. Jiang Chen's body was like an ape's as he swung through the sea of bamboo, continuously hanging onto this clue and not letting go.

Finally, after half an hour, Jiang Chen appeared in front of an entrance to a secret underground chamber, deep within the sea of bamboo.

Jiang Chen took out one Layered Feather Throwing Dagger, and surreptitiously followed the course of the underground chamber.

There was actually a world of its own the further he went into the secret chamber. The entrance was small, but a vast expanse

came into view after threading through a long hallway.

What Jiang Chen had wholly unanticipated was that this vast expanse was actually an underground palace. The palace wasn't large, but all the furnishings that should've been there were all present.

A large jade bed was installed at the end of the palace.

But an even more astounding scene was present on the jade bed.

Madame Jade was presently naked and had been placed in the center of the jade bed. There wasn't a shred of clothing on her body, and all of her places of importance were on full display.

The six female disciples of the North Sect were placed on both sides, three on each side. The three on the left had also been similarly stripped with not a scrap left on their bodies.

The silk robes of the three girls on the right had been partially unfastened. Although they hadn't been completely unrobed, important places disappeared and reappeared like smoke. Including Wen Ziqi, all of them bore expressions of fright and horror as they looked at the person standing at the head of the bed.

That person was that honorary disciple who had been the messenger.

Jiang Chen did not rush to reveal himself. Separated by such a

distance, the honorary disciple hadn't discovered him either.

"Tsk tsk, it is indeed the greater the risk, the greater the reward. Haha, the old and young of the North Sect of the Star Argus Palace have all been captured in one net by me. Ah, this is excellent indeed!"

The person's voice carried a few tones of abnormal betwitchingness. A pair of evil eyes swept over the tempting bodies as he emitted a low roar like that of a beast's.

These North Sect girls were all martial dao practitioners, each with lithe and graceful figures. Particularly Madame Jade – her figure was even more superior compared to those of the female disciples.

If these female disciples were mostly budding flowers, then Madame Jade was a blossomed fresh flower full of the amorous feelings of a young married woman.

"Should I eat the old one first or taste the young one first?"

The person smiled evilly, but his gaze stopped on Wen Ziqi. "This lass is genteel and refined, and blushes even when she speaks. She must have a particularly distinctive flavor when tasted. She's the one."

The person bent down as he spoke and began to undo Wen Ziqi's clothes.

Wen Ziqi's eyes displayed a desperate, horrified fear as her tears rolled down like beads.

Jiang Chen knew that it would be rather unkind if he continued watching like this.

Coughing lightly, he walked out from the shadows and said with a trace of a smile, "Brother, you know how to enjoy amorous happenings alright. How could you relish such wonderful things by yourself?"

The person was as if struck by lightning and his body suddenly dashed away, landing in a corner. His hand had already grabbed the hilt of a short sword as his sinister eyes pierced towards Jiang Chen.

"Who are you?"

Jiang Chen laughed faintly. "Are you Shen Rong? Or Shen Rong's honorary disciple?"

The person laughed heartily. "Shen Rong? Honorary disciple? Haha, they're but bodies I use when I hunt and pluck flowers. If you want to find them, you can only go to the netherworld."

"This is to say that you've already killed the Star Argus Palace's South Sect's Sectmaster Shen Rong? You were disguised as Shen Rong from the very beginning?" Jiang Chen understood

everything all at once.

Shen Rong and that honorary disciple who had carried the message were actually all the same person, and that was the person standing in front of him. It was more than likely that this person was that Lotus Harvester.

“Haha, just who are you? Don’t you think that you’re asking too many questions?” The person’s tone was dark and cold as his eyes locked onto Jiang Chen, seeming to want to seal off all avenues of retreat with his gaze alone.

“Lotus Harvester, you’ve got some nerve in hunting and plucking flowers in a sect’s sphere of influence.” Jiang Chen snorted coldly.

A sliver of surprise flashed through the person’s gaze. “You know me? Huh. Are you also from those interfering busybodies at the Six Panel Door? Trying to enforce justice on behalf of heaven?”

“You’re correct.” Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

“Blockhead. Fool.” A trace of an odd smile suddenly appeared on the Lotus Harvester’s face. “If I haven’t met a thousand people trying to carry out justice on behalf of heaven, I’ve met at least eight hundred. All these people are now sleeping soundly in the netherworld, you’re the next one.”

“You’re quite confident.” Jiang Chen also smiled.

“Why wouldn’t I be confident towards someone who’s already half dead? Do you know why these women are lying here without being able to move at all? I didn’t seal their acupoints.” The Lotus Harvester smiled leisurely.

“What? You mean, the… the smoke from the candles are poisoned?” Jiang Chen’s face changed drastically.

“At least you’re not a complete idiot. You should die, must die, for disturbing my sexual pleasure. Give me your head in apology!”

The Lotus Harvester suddenly moved and his figure dashed forward like a ghost or a goblin.

It was said that the Lotus Harvester’s qinggong was extraordinary, and his movements indeed lived up to its reputation. The short blade in his hand turned into a flash of cold light as it chopped towards Jiang Chen’s neck.

Jiang Chen’s body wavered and tottered, as if he might fall down at any moment.

To the Lotus Harvester, this looked like the struggles of its prey and it further stimulated his wildness.

“Die!” The Lotus Harvester waved his blade and stabbed downwards.

The anticipated scene did not occur.

The short sword didn't land in a chop on the neck. More accurately speaking, the short sword chopped empty air.

That wavering and tottering opponent suddenly vanished where he stood.

"Ah, not good!" The Lotus Harvester's reaction was quick as he abruptly turned his body, sweeping his short sword out in the space behind him.

At this moment, a flash of cold light came from an unknown location. It was like it didn't need to follow the rules of space as it instantaneously shot to his throat.

A flying dagger!

A perfect angle, a perfect hit.

Jiang Chen's Layered Feather Throwing Dagger was as thin as a feather as it melted into the thin air. It cleaved space apart as it flew into the Lotus Harvester's throat.

The Lotus Harvester clutched his throat in a death grip as his eyes bugged violently like a dead fish's. He stared at Jiang Chen with a face full of incredulity.

He had never thought that he would perish in such a place like

this.

He didn't understand. Why was the other fine after falling victim to the poison in the candle smoke? Why had the other been able to find this place and easily, thoroughly understand his identity?

But, the Lotus Harvester would have no chance to find the answers to all these in this lifetime.

How would he have known that for a great master of alchemy who had occupied all the various planes such as Jiang Chen in his past life, the poison methods of him, the Lotus Harvester, was akin to child's play.

Jiang Chen walked up and relieved the Lotus Harvester's body of its head with a light stroke of a blade. He enveloped it in a cloth bag at his waist with a smooth motion and rolled the Lotus Harvester's head inside.

He picked up the Lotus Harvester's short blade as well, and searched out a few other things from the Lotus Harvester's body.

According to the requirements of the mission, the head of the Lotus Harvester was required for inspection after killing the Lotus Harvester, and he also needed to obtain some sort of token from the Lotus Harvester. This short sword was naturally a type of token.

Jiang Chen rolled all the random things on the Lotus Harvester's

body into a cloth bag, and hung it on his waist in a fluid motion.

Walking to the front of the big bed, the seven females from the North Sect were all staring with wide eyes. Their expressions were both awkward and full of the desire to be saved.

Jiang Chen had seen countless women in his past life, and naturally wouldn't lose his composure in such a scene with naked bodies lying all around. His gaze sweeping past all the ladies, Jiang Chen shoved a pill into Wen Ziqi's mouth.

"Swallow it."

Wen Ziqi's limpid eyes blinked. There were still traces of tears hanging on her long eyelashes, but she swallowed the pill obediently.

This pill was the antidote to those substances that would numb the nerves.

Jiang Chen had fully prepared these basic equipment the last time he'd visited the Hall of Healing.

Pills produced by the Hall of Healing would naturally not be an ordinary product.

A moment after Wen Ziqi had taken the pill, her hands and feet regained some of their movement. She struggled to sit up, and her hands subconsciously moved to put her clothes on.

Except, the pill had just taken effect and she didn't have enough strength in her hands. With a shake of her hands, the robe slipped down and ended up revealing, in detail, the splendor of spring that was her chest.

A pair of jade peaks as adorable as doves fell right into Jiang Chen's view.

What a beautiful sight. Jiang Chen's heart also lurched slightly as he turned around and didn't stare continuously instead.

Wen Ziqi's elegant face had already blushed to the back of her ears at this time. It was a good thing that Jiang Chen had turned his back so that she didn't continue to wallow in awkwardness.

She hastily wrapped her clothes around herself and said lowly, "It's alright now."

Jiang Chen turned around and placed a bottle of pills in front of Wen Ziqi. "Give these to your master and your fellow sisters. You've fallen victim to the Lotus Harvester's schemes. It was great fortune amongst unfortuitous circumstances that you were unsullied."

"He... he was the Lotus Harvester?" Wen Ziqi's face turned pale with fear when she heard the Lotus Harvester's infamous name. Her heart pounded furiously in her fright.

Madame Jade was the first to recover her movement ability after taking the pill.

She had been touched by the Lotus Harvester earlier and the flush of intimacy had yet to fully disperse from her face. There were still traces of lustful desire fading in and out in her charming eyes.

“What is the young hero’s name? Little girl here thanks you for saving my life.” Madame Jade’s tone was young and ignorant, in stark contrast to her stern manner as cold as ice and frost earlier.

Jiang Chen’s thoughts perked. Judging from this tone, he knew that the Lotus Harvester had probably employed some methods on Madame Jade, and her desire had not yet dissipated.

He smiled wryly. “I am a nameless nobody, my name is not worth mentioning. Since you are fine now, I shall take my leave.”

Madame Jade sighed lowly and spoke bitterly, “Young hero, you’ve seen all there is to see from both young and old from the North Sect of the Star Argus Palace. What a philanderer. If you leave just like this, I’m an old woman and thus afraid of nothing. But who will prove the innocence of these girls in the future?”

Jiang Chen rubbed his nose. “I think this is a bit of an exaggeration?”

Madame Jade smiled in a gently and lovely way, “Who was it just

now who was enchanted by my chest and the area between my legs just now?”

Jiang Chen felt greatly depressed and aggrieved. He admitted that his eyes had stayed on Madame Jade’s body for a few seconds just now. That was because her young woman’s body was the most special, the most curvaceous.

But it hadn’t been as exaggerated as she said. Enchanted by her, now what the heck was that?

“Madame, although I am young, I know of the strict rules of conduct between men and women. I absolutely will not speak even half a word of what has happened today after I leave. If I violate my words, then may I die from ten thousand arrows piercing my heart.”

“You... you don’t need to swear such a blood oath.” Wen Ziqi’s face flushed red again as she hastily spoke up, and then added another sentence. “We all believe you, you’re an upright gentleman with strict morals.”

Wen Ziqi thought of the awkward scene just now. The scenery of her chest hadn’t originally been displayed, but her own hands had failed and allowed a thorough look for the other.

When she thought of this scene, Wen Ziqi felt uncontrollable embarrassment.

Jiang Chen nodded his head lightly and took in a deep breath. He knew that it was not advisable to remain in this place for long. If he lingered any longer, and Madame Jade tried seducing him every now and then, he may actually fail to hold his position.

After all, a colorful scene littered with naked, jade bodies, and exuding fragrances such as this one, wasn't one that any male could easily defend against.

Seeing that Jiang Chen could resume a clear and bright heart under such a short time frame and walk towards the outside, Madame Jade also privately admired him. How could an ordinary young man have controlled himself under these circumstances?

"Young hero, I may not have enough face as an old woman, but can I ask for your honored name on behalf of my pathetic disciple?"

Madame Jade was a quick witted person and knew that Jiang Chen was at least somewhat kindly disposed towards her disciple Wen Ziqi, given that he had given her the antidote first.

Jiang Chen's body halted slightly and he responded faintly, "I am Jiang Chen of the Jiang Han territory, here to execute the Lotus Harvester by royal order. Everyone, we shall meet again some day!"

He disappeared from where he stood with a point of his toe, like a wild goose flying to the unseen world, after he had spoken.

Chapter 61: Encountering An Attack

“Jiang Han territory... Jiang Chen?” Madame Jade murmured, chewing over this name. Suddenly, a beam of startlingly bright light shot out of those alluring eyes. “Jiang Han Territory! Jiang Chen!”

Madame Jade slapped her thigh and sighed, “Qi’er, you’ve missed out on quite a bit of fortune that would’ve been the making of you. Could this Jiang Chen be the young duke of the Jiang Han territory?”

“Young duke?” The girls of the Star Argus Palace had all recovered their movement ability by now, and were in no hurry to put their clothes back on since there wasn’t anyone else in the cave.

Upon hearing the words, “young duke”, some of the girls displayed lovesick expressions.

Although they were the disciples of a sect, and even the geniuses of a sect, the Star Argus Palace was after all, just a sect in the Tianhu territory.

The Tianhu territory was ranked in the lower half of the 108 dukes of the kingdom.

Whereas Jiang Han was an upper second rank dukedom, garrisoning the southern border of the kingdom. Its position was high, and its power hefty. When this position was compared to

them, the former was in the heavens, and the other was on the ground.

They had all personally seen that person's methods just now, not mentioning anything else.

Even the Lotus Harvester, who no one on this earth could seem to beat, was as if a child that had just learned how to walk in front of him. One throwing dagger was enough to end the Lotus Harvester, who had rampaged through the Tianhu territory.

"Young duke, really a young duke?" A female disciple on the left rubbed her jade shoulders as her tone turned exceedingly lovesick. "Dammit, why didn't he look at me a few more times? Honored master, would you say this young duke has heavy tastes? He seems to like looking at you, you old woman?"

Madame Jade's face darkened, "Am I old?"

"Hehe, a bit older than us at least." These disciples were obviously very spoiled as they showed no respect for their elder Madame Jade.

As for Wen Ziqi, she had been silent all along and didn't display any particular lovesick appearance. Her easily embarrassed fair face seemed to be deep in thought.

Madame Jade cast a glance at Wen Ziqi and sighed, "Qi'er, a joke is a joke, you must be more carefree. Don't sink into it. Some

people are destined to be an existence that you and I cannot clamber up to."

Wen Ziqi's face flushed red again, "Honored master, what are you talking about! He and us met by chance, like patches of drifting duckweed. He came chasing the Lotus Harvester under orders, and only happened to also simultaneously save us. Your disciple only feels gratitude for him saving our lives, nothing else.

"Is that so?" Madame Jade sighed lightly. "You, the infatuated one, have always had a personality that would sink into infatuation since you were small. As your master, I am afraid that once something takes root in your heart, you will be unable to extricate yourself from it for the rest of your life."

Wen Ziqi didn't say another word, but in her mind, a lingering feeling hovered around the image of a dashing and handsome figure.

"Looks like this young duke Jiang is participating in the Hidden Dragon Trials, and has come here to execute one of the missions of the Trials." Madame Jade was the master of a sect after all, and still had this bit of knowledge.

"Hidden Dragon Trials? What's that?"

"That is held to determine if all the great dukes in the kingdom can retain their dukedoms. The youths who can participate in the Hidden Dragon Trials are all the cream of the crop. Take Qi'er, who, at six meridians true qi is a genius that appears only once in a

hundred years for our sect – it's said that she would be at the bottom of the ladder in the Hidden Dragon Trials."

Madame Jade was also full of awe – as if she beheld a high mountain – when she spoke of the Hidden Dragon Trials.

The lovestruck disciple asked, "Honored master, what level is this young duke Jiang?"

"Your master cannot see clearly either. But someone who can kill the Lotus Harvester should be equal in influence and power... so his training must be at least eight or nine meridians. Taking it one step further, he may even be a true qi master!"

"What? True qi master?" The lovesick disciple was utterly dumbfounded, saying gloomily, "Honored master, I wish the young duke Jiang was a frivolous type. That way, I, Ouyang Fei's, first time, could at least be given to a future true qi master."

"Hehe, Fei'er, continue to be lovesick. Even if the young duke Jiang wished to grace someone with his presence, he would grace the honored master or junior sister Ziqi. You were completely naked just now and he didn't even look twice at you."

"Huh! Qiao'er you're just jealous. Although I didn't give my first time to the young duke Jiang, but I, Ouyang Fei can say proudly that the first man to see me naked was an exalted young duke Jiang, a future true qi master. But you? Your clothes were still on your body just now, weren't they? Do you feel regret? Dejected? Hahaha...."

This Ouyang Fei was indeed a lovesick girl of the first class to actually use this matter to compare, as if having Jiang Chen look at your body was the greatest honor.

Madame Jade could only shake her head and smile wryly. She was the one who knew her own disciples the best.

Except, when the disciple named Qiao'er said that Jiang Chen would grace her, Madame Jade first, her ears grow hot without any cause and it felt as if countless numbers of small insects were crawling all over her body, creating a numbing and ticklish sensation. Several sensitive areas on her body also agitated with hot currents as they all turned as moist as a bog in the span of a moment.

A baffling hint of desire flashed through Madame Jade's eyes as she thought of those scenes, and she even had the feeling of extreme expectation.

Some terribly embarrassing scenes flashed through her mind, like those of Jiang Chen being as depraved as the Lotus Harvester and taking advantage of their perilous state to take both her and her disciples.

If she hadn't known of Jiang Chen's identity, Madame Jade would have surely felt humiliated.

But now that she knew Jiang Chen's identity, the mindset of worshipping and admiring the strong made her feel that even if

she were to service this young genius along with her disciples, it didn't seem to be an entirely outrageous and unacceptable thing.

When she thought of the moments of passion, her whole body shook lightly as if it had been electrocuted. Madame Jade shook her head forcefully and threw those ridiculous thoughts to the back of her mind.

"Jiang Han territory... Jiang Chen..." Wen Ziqi, on the other hand, was beyond innocent. She repeated this name in her mind many times.

She knew that her honored master had been right about her.

Some seeds were planted unknowingly, and could no longer be cast off once it'd taken root and germinated.

But, why extricate herself from it? Wasn't this a type of happiness, to be able to sink into it? Strands of sweet emotions floated up in Wen Ziqi's heart.

There was a dream of a young boyish hero in every young girl's heart. Particularly when she met danger. This young boyish hero would appear in the nick of time, and make vigorous efforts to turn back the tide.

Wen Ziqi also had the same young girl's dream.

Therefore, Jiang Chen's dashing back profile when he left, was

destined to become a brand in Wen Ziqi's heart that would forever be difficult to obliterate.

After completing the first mission, Jiang Chen pushed on his return to the capital without stopping.

Jiang Chen did not relax his guard as he galloped at full speed. The closer he drew to the capital, the more wary he became. He knew that he could employ some methods to shake off his pursuers when he left the capital.

But this was the only portion that must be passed upon returning to the capital, and couldn't be avoided.

"It's most likely that an opponent will lay an ambush for me here, if he wishes to scheme against me."

This was a mountain pass with a dark mass of trees and shrubbery on the sides, an exceedingly easy place to set up an ambush.

Jiang Chen highly deployed his Ear of the Zephyr as he galloped on the horse, partnering it with the mental strength of "Boulder's Heart". Although he was galloping swiftly on the back of a horse, he could fully take in all the potential dangers around him within a thousand meters.

Suddenly, Jiang Chen's arms pressed down lightly on the saddle as he flipped himself like a hawk, his body suddenly shooting

towards the sky from the saddle.

Under habitual urging, the steed actually didn't stop and continued rushing forward.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!

More than ten sharp arrows shot out from the sides of the mountain pass, and they all landed on the steed, covering almost all possible angles.

The horse gave one long scream and fell down with a thud, meeting a violent death then and there.

The long whip in Jiang Chen's hand shuddered as this specially made long whip was suddenly flung out. It was about ten feet long and coiled like a dragon.

The whip oscillated and gave rise to layers of true qi ripples, rippling out with Jiang Chen as the center. The oscillating true qi expanded through the long whip and caused strings of sonic booms to sound in thin air.

"What scoundrels are there, show yourself!"

Jiang Chen stood in the middle of the path with the long whip in his hand, with his aura growing steadily by itself.

With him as the center, the true qi given rise by the long whip had actually formed currents in a true qi vortex, protecting himself.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh...

Five black clad killers leapt out from the sides of the road.

“He’s the one, kill him!”

The five black clad killer were obviously well trained, as they didn’t waste time talking with Jiang Chen. They didn’t waste a single word as they locked onto their target, and rushed towards him without a care for their lives.

Jiang Chen’s long whip danced again as it gave rise to circles of true qi, blocking these five people and keeping them outside the circle.

“Don’t be afraid everyone! At most we’ll be hit once, the long whip can’t kill all of us!”

These people were indeed exceedingly fierce and brave. They actually ignored the damage brought upon by the long whip, and, whilst wielding the weapons in their hand and protecting their vitals, pounced on Jiang Chen with extreme speed.

Bang, bang!

The long whip simultaneously hit two black clad killers.

The two were exceedingly fierce and brave, and they actually entwined the long whip around their arms after being hit and thoroughly hampered the whip's movement.

"Brothers, go, chop him to death with random blows!"

The two hit by the long whip were spewing out blood, but still grimaced in a smile as they waved their companions forward. They absolutely had the posture of pitting their lives against Jiang Chen's.

"A bunch of crazies!"

Jiang Chen apparently hadn't anticipated just how foolhardy the others would be.

However, Jiang Chen had actually already made his preparations before the five had started their attacks. He completed ignored the three's attacks.

His body moved like lightning to evade the attacks from the three, the nameless saber in his hand never made it out of its scabbard, instead materializing its cutting edge out of true qi, flashing past the necks of the two injured killers.

First form of the “Vast Ocean Current Splitter” – Wave Slash!

Pfft, pfft!

Two excellent heads were harvested and repeated by Jiang Chen.

In the switch off between positions, Jiang Chen had executed two, and the remaining three had ended up behind Jiang Chen.

“Being able to activate the blade’s edge without drawing it from the scabbard, this kid is also of the advanced realm of true qi?” The other three killers were all startled.

“Kid, you killed my companions, you must die today!”

“Kill him!”

The three killers had already deployed vanishing body forms as they formed a 品 formation, attacking towards Jiang Chen.

“Huh.”

Jiang Chen laughed coldly as his body wavered, bounding ahead to the front. He darted on without looking back.

“Kid, where are you going?”

Jiang Chen's body abruptly halted as he smiled faintly, "Do I need to tell someone who's about to die where I'm going?"

"Someone who's about to die? Kid, do you think with just you-"

"Oh no, I can't bring up my true qi."

"Poison? The kid had already laid down poison with the first true qi activation of the long whip?"

"Tell me, are you working to the death for the duke of Soaring Dragon?!" Jiang Chen said coldly. "If you answer straightforwardly, then I will also deal with you straightforwardly. Otherwise, you can wait to see each part of your body rot away and turn putrid, dying in slow agony when the poison activates."

Chapter 62: Sharply Counterattacking The Long Family

These three men were all trained warriors who were willing to die for their mission from the Soaring Dragon manor. They were, ordinarily, wholly unafraid of dying – but there was a sense of terror in Jiang Chen's smile that made them shiver all over, yet not from cold.

"Jiang Chen, why ask if you know everything? Deal with us straightforwardly!"

"Kill us!"

"You want to die? It's not that easy. Tell me, how many are there in your operation this time, and who's in charge?" Jiang Chen had no doubt that all of this had something to do with the duke of Soaring Dragon.

Except, what was most important was how many people the duke of Soaring Dragon had sent out.

"You won't be able to escape anyways, so what's the harm in telling you? The person leading the operation to kill you this time is a true qi master. Jiang Chen, although you got rid of us, you're destined to die!"

"True qi master?" Jiang Chen hadn't thought that he would occupy such weight in the duke of Soaring Dragon's heart for him

to send a true qi master!

But, the more the duke of Soaring Dragon was thus, the more it incited Jiang Chen's pride.

"So what if he's a true qi master?"

As strong as a true qi master was, it wasn't as if he, Jiang Chen, was completely without advantage. The "God's Eye" and the other two abilities he had, gave him many advantages that true qi masters did not boast of.

Not to mention many of the numerous preparations he had made before hadn't even been employed yet.

When these preparations and personal advantages were combined, Jiang Chen was confident that he could also contend with a true qi master. If he employed them well, it wasn't impossible for him to kill a true qi master!

After coaxing out the information, Jiang Chen naturally didn't leave the three of them alive. After executing them one by one, he selected a death warrior that was built vaguely like him.

Jiang Chen began disguising himself at the scene. His powers of disguise were not empty bluster.

Very quickly, Jiang Chen had made himself mostly like this person with a shake of his body. He then conveniently took

possession of the person's black colored clothing and facial mask.

After completing his great transformation, an idea grew in Jiang Chen's heart. He disposed of the four corpses and cleaned up the area, continuing on his way.

"This can't be the only ambush, but I don't know if the true qi master will be waiting for me up front... I must catch him unawares, if I'm to take on a true qi master."

However, if it was his purposeful intent against someone else's unformed planning, and he was able to catch the other by surprise, then he would have a sixty to seventy percent surety of this working.

After all, the technique "Moonshatter Flying Daggers", accompanied by the nine unpredictable Layered Feather Throwing Daggers, was most adept at catching an opponent by surprise, and in obtaining the upper hand by catching someone unawares.

After walking roughly fifteen to twenty five kilometers, he had drawn even closer to the capital.

The official road would start after this bit of mountain pass, and if the others wanted to start something, they would have to think twice before engaging him on the official road.

Therefore, this last obstacle would be sure to appear before he circled around this mountain ridge.

Indeed, as he closed within one thousand meters of the mountain ridge, Jiang Chen's "Boulder's Heart" detected a hint of an opposing sensation.

This kind of pressure was concealed quite well, almost to the point of being undetectable.

If Jiang Chen hadn't trained in "Boulder's Heart", he would've never discovered this with purely the instinct of a martial dao practitioner alone. Even a true qi master would have been hard pressed to notice, not to mention his mere seven meridians true qi.

However, the ability of "Boulder's Heart" trained one's mental strength, making Jiang Chen's instinct abnormally sensitive and much stronger than many true qi masters.

"Forget it, if it's a face to face conflict, I'm out in the open whereas the other is concealed. There's no chance of winning. I can only take a risk and make a gamble. I only hope that the other has sent just one true qi master. If there are two true qi masters, then I can only make my getaway and escape to the depths of the mountain."

Jiang Chen had settled on a plan,and didn't drag his feet, sprinting towards the front.

When he'd reached about three hundred meters from the ambush site, a few figures shot out with whooshing sounds from the shadows, halting him in his path.

“Old Ge, number five, why are you alone?”

The person speaking had a tone that cut like the edge of a blade. His eyes seemed to be that of a keen edge which could penetrate metal and stone as it raked over Jiang Chen’s body.

“My Lord, I have intelligence of that Jiang Chen.”

“What intelligence?” The leader was the duke of Soaring Dragon’s confidante, Long San, and the main organizer of the operation to kill Jiang Chen.

“We’ve discovered something along the way.” Jiang Chen respectfully handed over with both hands a package he’d long since prepared.

The leader was obviously quite circumspect as he unwrapped the package with a flick of his longsword.

At this moment, Jiang Chen’s body suddenly moved and his hand tremored, a current of true qi flinging the package directly at the leader.

At the same time, his left hand moved with a powerful, continuous motion.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!

The Layered Feather Throwing Daggers transformed into five beams of cold light and shot towards the five on the side.

With the properties of the Layered Feather Throwing Daggers and the mysteries of “Moonshatter Flying Daggers”, attacking at such a close distance added wings to the tiger that was the throwing daggers.

Apart from one person who was slightly further away and flinched instinctively when he saw the flash of cold light, the other four didn’t have any reaction at all.

When they felt a cold draft on their necks, their throats had already been pierced.

The one who evaded this calamity hadn’t dodged all of it. The Leathered Feather Throwing Dagger shot into his left shoulder.

Of course, Jiang Chen had merely incidentally attacked these five.

His main target was still locked on the leader’s body. The second the package had shook itself open, he had used true qi to agitate the streams of smoke inside to spread out in the span of a moment.

The leader Long San had witnessed many large happenings before. When he saw the smoke percolating through the air, he knew something was amiss with this smoke, and hastily covered

his nose, slight emotion flickering in his eyes. His body rapidly backed up until he was a hundred steps away.

He then took a look at his five underlings. Four were already down, and one was injured.

“You… You’re Jiang Chen!” Long San roared lowly, his eyes like those of a violent beast’s shooting out thick killing intent.

“You’ve guessed correctly.” Jiang Chen stared faintly at Long San. “I saw you in the Soaring Dragon manor.”

“Huh. So what. Your Jiang family is setting yourself against the duke of Soaring Dragon. That’s bringing destruction down upon yourself.” Long San didn’t conceal his identity in the slightest.

“Bringing destruction down upon myself?” Jiang Chen laughed contemptuously. “Do you think that you, someone who’s about to die, has the right to say such things to me?”

“What do you mean?” Long San’s gaze grew nervous.

“You must surely think that you evaded the poisonous smoke because you covered your nose.”

The edges of Jiang Chen’s lips moved slightly as they revealed some hints of mockery. “However, my poison is all pervasive. You covered your nose, but did you cover your ears?

Even if you could cover your ears, could you cover every single pore?

Unless you were prepared well in advance, and prepared a defense of true qi within your body, defending yourself while the poison invaded and used the true qi to force it out."

Jiang Chen's tone was diffident and remote. Whether it was a true qi master or an ordinary practitioner, anyone who allowed Jiang Chen within ten meters of themselves was equivalent to laying half their life in Jiang Chen's hands.

Long San's pupils contracted rapidly as they shot out the violent, brutal light of a wild beast.

Jiang Chen however, was in no hurry to walk up to him. Rather, he stayed a hundred meters away from Long San, walking in circles.

Out of Long San's five underlings now, four were dead and one was injured. A peculiar poison had invaded Long San's body. Jiang Chen would naturally not attack brashly.

He had all the time in the world to dawdle.

However, Long San didn't have the luxury of wasting time. The more time he wasted, the more the poison would seep through his body.

He continually fished out various antidotes from his self, but they were all useless to a fault.

“Zhang Qi, are you a death warrior under the command of me, Long San, or not? Have you lost your will to fight after your shoulder was hurt?” Long San knew that continuing to waste time like this was not the thing to do.

His only point of reliance now was on this injured underlying. An injured shoulder was not a fatal injury.

That Zhang Qi kept circling not too far and not too close.

When he heard Long San’s admonishment, he roared lowly, “Lord San, I will return to pass on this information and bring reinforcements to avenge you!”

When he’d finished, this Zhang Qi actually sprang off the balls of his feet and leapt towards the depths of the trees and shrubbery, making a clean getaway.

Jiang Chen laughed softly, “Why don’t you stay.”

Two Layered Feather Throwing Daggers, one taking the left and the other taking the right, sealing off Zhang Qi’s escape.

Pfft!

Moonshatter Flying Daggers could scatter the sun, moon and the stars.

Although this Zhang Qi was of eight meridians true qi, his will had been seized from him and he was fleeing in abject panic. He was a walking target in Jiang Chen's eyes.

Add to that Jiang Chen's "God's Eye" scanning the surroundings, he could make exceedingly accurate judgments about Zhang Qi's escape path and his next move.

Therefore, there was absolutely no chance of missing the mark this time!

Long San's face was ashen as he muttered, cursing, "Coward, coward. To think that I, Long San, would raise such a coward as a death warrior."

After half a day, some wandering practitioners riding a horse carriage stopped in front of the door to the Soaring Dragon manor.

"Who are you to dare loiter in front of the manor of the duke of Soaring Dragon?" The manor's guards immediately appeared and sought to banish these wandering practitioners.

One of the middle aged practitioners smiled apologetically, "Don't be mad sir, don't be mad. We haven't come to act wildly on this trip. We're purely helping a fellow deliver someone here,

fulfilling the spirit of helping each other while in the outside world."

"Deliver someone? Deliver who?" The manor guard's tone was quite unfriendly.

"The man who entrusts us to deliver this man said this man's name is Long San. He said this is a strong practitioner in your Soaring Dragon manor, and that he was poisoned in the course of executing a mission outside. This is most urgent for us to bring him back. He said to ask the strongest poison master within the manor to take a look. We are also trying our best to do what someone else asked us to do."

"Lord San?" The manor guard was dumbfounded when he heard Long San's vaulted name. "Where is he?"

"In the carriage, please take a look sir guard, and see if he's someone in your manor. If not, then we were the ones played for a fool."

The manor guard jerked at the curtain on the carriage and took a look inside. His expression changed drastically upon seeing the person inside as he hollered, "All of you, wait here. I'll go in and make a report!"

A group of those notable people with power in the Soaring Dragon manor soon surged out. Although Long San was merely a hired thug for the duke of Soaring Dragon, he was one of the strongest five people within the duke of Soaring Dragon's manor.

Although he was just a leader of the guards, he had committed many covert actions for the duke of Soaring Dragon, and thus the duke of Soaring Dragon relied heavily on him.

And now, this Long San had been poisoned and sent back by some wandering practitioners, his status unknown. How could this not bewilder and shock the entire Soaring Dragon dukedom?

Long San was a true qi master! The number of people who could harm him in the Eastern Kingdom could basically be counted on one hand!

Chapter 63: An Eye For An Eye

Within the manor, even the Duke of Soaring Dragon himself was startled and bothered.

The spiritual alchemists in the manor all came forward one by one, including the senior executives of Pill King Garden who had newly given themselves up, to go upstairs and discern Long San's condition.

As for the one whom the Duke of Soaring Dragon relied most heavily on, Courtmaster Wang was also similarly at a loss of what to do.

"Your Lordship, this is not simple. The poison has seeped in through the pores and can be labelled as a tyrant amongst poisons. it's my view... eh, what's this?"

Courtmaster Wang was thinking of ways to excuse his incompetence when he suddenly discovered that there was a small strip of cloth inside the front of Long San's garment.

There were even four words on it – fight poison with poison.

Script as tiny as the heads of flies could also be seen on the back of the cloth – Let the strongest poison master in the manor try this poison.

The Duke of Soaring Dragon was about to reach towards the strip

of cloth when Courtmaster Wang hastily stopped him, “Your Lordship, don’t touch it. I’m afraid that there’s poison.”

The entire manor was akin to birds being startled by the merest twang of a bow string. Upon hearing Courtmaster Wang’s words, the Duke of Soaring Dragon also retracted his hand, and stared at the cloth with a scary expression.

“Your Lordship, you sent this Long San to kill Jiang Chen, and this piece of cloth seemed to insinuate at something. Can it be that this Long San has fallen into Jiang Chen’s hands?” Courtmaster Wang felt quite a measure of dread when it came to Jiang Chen.

“Impossible! How old is that Jiang Chen? In terms of training, at the very most, he can only be at the advanced realm of true qi. How could he have injured Long San to this degree?” Long Zhaofeng shook his head.

“However, it says ‘fight poison with poison here. This plainly means that he won’t suffer losses for more than one night. This is must be revenge for the poison that Jiang Feng fell victim to, no?”

Long Zhaofeng still shook his head. “I thoroughly investigated the inner secrets of the Jiang family. Whether it’s Jiang Feng or Jiang Chen, both of them don’t have such strength. Long San is a true qi master, and not an ordinary one at that. I suspect that someone is secretly helping the Jiang family. Furthermore, it’s very possible that it’s someone from the Eastern family clan.”

The Jiang family and Eastern royal family clan were walking

very closely together now. It was not an impossible thing to say that the royal family had sent strong practitioners to secretly aid him.

It wouldn't conform with logic at all if it was Jiang Chen himself who had the ability to harm Long San.

"Old Wang, you've blathered on for so long. Do you have the ability to cure Long San of his poison or not?" The Duke of Soaring Dragon truly did value Long San highly.

"Your subordinate is merely adept at spirit medicines and truly doesn't have much right to speak when it comes to using poisons. We can now only wait for Master Violet to emerge from training to even have a ray of hope." Courtmaster Wang knew more than anyone as he spoke that there was no way Long San would survive long enough for Master Violet to emerge from training.

Not to mention, the poison was already close to attacking the heart. Even if Master Violet lent a hand, Long San may not even be saved. Besides, although Master Violet was quite adept in using poisons, he may still not be able to penetrate the mysteries of this poison in a short time and resolve it in a timely manner.

The lamp of Long San was obviously expiring as it had run out of oil.

"Jiang family!" A frightening light sparkled in Long Zhaofeng's eyes.

“Your Lordship, what should we do about those wandering practitioners who sent Lord San back?” A core guard captain of the manor asked.

“I don’t want to hear wild rumors outside.” Long Zhaofeng said faintly.

“Understood.” The guard captain nodded, comprehending Long Zhaofeng’s meaning. The duke apparently didn’t wish for details of Long San’s matter to be spread widely.

What kind of men could keep secrets the best? Dead men, of course.

After returning to the capital, Jiang Chen dressed up a bit and and returned to the Jiang Han manor. This back and forth trip had taken precisely half a month.

The first mission had been completed to perfection.

However, Jiang Chen was in no rush to report the completion of his task. Rather, he first explained to his father, Jiang Feng, the matter regarding Long San.

“Long San?” Jiang Feng’s eyes shot out looks beyond belief after listening. “Chen’er, you’re saying that you used poison to cripple Long San?”

“To be more accurate, he should be dead.” Jiang Chen was an

alchemy master of all planes beneath the heavens in his past life – an unorthodox branch such as employing poison was a piece of cake.

He naturally had calculated precisely when he had sent Long San back.

He would absolutely not allow the possibility that the others would be able to save him!

Jiang Chen wasn't a particularly grudge carrying person, but he also wasn't someone at the mercy of others. Today, Long San was merely the first step in his counterattack for what the Soaring Dragon dukedom had done to his father last time. This could at most only be counted as interest. He would be sure to present even more of the principal in the future!

He had purposefully put the words onto the small strip of cloth in order to take a jab at the Soaring Dragon dukedom.

As for those wandering practitioners, Jiang Chen would naturally not send innocent people to their deaths. Those fellows had all fooled around together on the outskirts of the capital. They appeared to be wandering practitioners on the surface, but had in actuality raided homes and plundered houses covertly, committing acts of murder for personal gains.

To put it frankly, they were a bunch of robbers and bandits.

Jiang Chen had sent them to the Soaring Dragon manor because he was betting that the Soaring Dragon manor would kill anyone who might become an eyewitness against them.

“Chen’er, Long Zhaofeng is a fierce and ambitious person who will seek revenge for the smallest of grievances. Long San is one of his confidantes that he relies most heavily on. Long San’s strength can also absolutely be ranked in the top five of the Soaring Dragon dukedom. If this man dies, then the duke of Soaring Dragon will inevitably visit an even more ferocious vengeance upon you.”

Jiang Feng’s tone was prudent. He already wasn’t using conventional vision to measure up this son.

“Mm. One cannot be without a cautious heart.” Jiang Chen nodded. “However, we cannot halt in hesitation merely because they wish to take revenge, right? I will train for a few days first and fight to breakthrough eight meridians true qi this time, thereby taking another step forward towards increasing my strength!”

In the training of martial dao, one would sometimes face bottlenecks if he relied solely on training behind closed doors.

Traveling in the outside world and toughening up from experience would often lead to new inspiration and understanding, priming the pivotal turning point for a breakthrough.

This time’s travels in the outside world for executing the mission had also resulted in a greater step of improvement for Jiang Chen,

both in terms of mentality and experience. The knowledge and experiences that he had encountered during his travels had all been distilled down to their essence for him to absorb, providing great benefits, becoming the catalyst for his martial dao breakthrough.

Jiang Chen successfully broke through three days later.

After breaking through, Jiang Chen had the capabilities of eight meridians true qi. He could clearly feel that his strength had risen yet another level again.

After entering the advanced realm of true qi, the difference between increasing each meridian true qi and improving each personal level would become more and more apparent. One would be able to feel the distance increasing with each additional step taken upwards.

Along with Jiang Chen breaking through to eight meridians true qi, he also indistinctly comprehended many of the mysteries of the techniques that he was training in by drawing parallels from inference.

Of course, Jiang Chen had still only trained up to the second form of “Vast Ocean Current Splitter”. It would take some time of contemplation and a critical turning point for him to train to the third form.

As for “Divine Aeons Fist”, Jiang Chen had still halted on the third level of reincarnation, in the third cycle of blooming and

wilting. But he had a better comprehension of the true meaning of this boxing technique.

If these comprehensions and advancements were used in actual battle, they would greatly enhance his personal battle capabilities.

That day when Jiang Chen was on the path of returning to the capital and met the first wave of ambushes, Jiang Chen hadn't even unsheathed his nameless saber when he'd chopped off the other's head.

This was the true meaning of the martial dao contained within, and also the astounding mysteries of, the "Vast Ocean Current Splitter".

And now that he possessed eight meridians true qi, Jiang Chen was confident that even if he confronted Long San face to face now, he would absolutely not be afraid of the other.

Whether it was "Vast Ocean Current Splitter" or employing "Divine Aeons Fist", either would be enough to directly contend with Long San, someone at the true qi master level of training.

The benefits brought to Jiang Chen from breaking through to eight meridians were quite apparent.

"God's Eye" and "Ear of the Zephyr" both smoothly broke through to the fourth level. As the "Boulder's Heart" that had previously progressed at a slow level, also showed signs of

loosening up in the second level, allowing for a greater likelihood of advancing to the third level.

Jiang Chen would absolutely not become lax about these three abilities. Not only were these three abilities highly useful in actual combat, but they were also prerequisites for the training of “Moonshatter Flying Daggers”.

Jiang Chen had basically fully grasped the initial steps of “Moonshatter Flying Daggers” by now.

However, the strength of “Moonshatter Flying Daggers” lay in the mysteries of those unpredictable and constantly changing moves, and Jiang Chen had currently only practiced some foundational movements.

As of now, he didn’t even possess the qualifications to begin practicing and comprehending the profound meaning of those truly strong moves.

In order to practice the first move of “Moonshatter Flying Daggers”, he would have to train “God’s Eye” and “Ear of the Zephyr” to the seventh level.

“Boulder’s Heart” would also have to be at least the fourth level.

The most profound ability “Psychic’s Head” would have to be trained to the second level.

The current Jiang Chen was still a long shot away with his four abilities. Particularly the “Psychic’s Head”, he hadn’t even started that yet.

When he reviewed his personal strength, Jiang Chen felt a sense of urgency.

“It looks like in order to receive the qualification to train in the mysteries of the moves of ‘Moonshatter Flying Daggers’, I must first practice these four accompanying abilities to a satisfactory level.”

Although Jiang Chen felt a certain urgent need, he would also not do something utterly beyond him, like forcing a duck onto a perch.

On the road of martial dao training, going about things steadily and surely was the only proper way forward.

The next day, Jiang Chen went to the testing site for the Hidden Dragon Trials to turn in his first mission.

“Jiang Chen, mission of the first rank, to kill the rapist Lotus Harvester in the Tianhu territory.” An organizer for the Hidden Dragon Trials started to verify his mission.

“According to verification, this head is indeed that of the violent and wicked Lotus Harvester. This short sword and these personal effects are all authentication tokens that are up to standard.”

The organizer nodded and proclaimed, “Jiang Chen, first mission of the first rank, complete!”

Following this organizer’s proclamation, Jiang Chen’s first mission was thus completed.

“Jiang Chen, according to the rules, you still need to complete two more missions of the first rank to be able to enter the first rank. The remaining two missions are both fixed.”

These were old rules and Jiang Chen didn’t have too much to stress about. He conveniently picked up the scroll for the second mission and prepared to leave.

“Jiang Chen, a moment.”

Jiang Chen didn’t even need to turn his head to know that Princess Gouyu had arrived.

In actuality, his “Ear of the Zephyr” had already captured Princess Gouyu’s unique breathing when he had first set foot into the Hidden Dragon Trials testing site.

In the entire testing site, this was the only unique breathing that belonged to a true qi master of eleven meridians true qi.

“Your Highness, what instructions do you have?”

“Come with me.” Princess Gouyu acted with a bit more reservation in front of others.

After he’d followed Princess Gouyu into a private secret room, a ray of astounding splendor shot out from her phoenix eyes. “Jiang Chen, I’ve heard that something’s happened to Long San?”

“Is that so? What does that have to do with me? Who’s Long San?” Jiang Chen riposted with three questions in a row and had a face of complete disinterest.

“Ai!” Princess Gouyu was a bit disappointed. She had really wanted Jiang Chen to thump his chest and admit to this matter.

Chapter 64: The Second Mission

Upon seeing that Jiang Chen was noncommittal, Princess Gouyu didn't overly compel him. She also knew that he could be persuaded by reason, but not cowed by force.

She herself had suffered many losses in front of him before, in this regard.

"Jiang Chen, the amount of time you've taken to complete the mission of the first rank counts amongst the faster candidates, you've spent only twenty or so days. Up until now, only the two candidates from the Soaring Dragon dukedom have completed their first mission, and that was just two days ago."

This was to say, Jiang Chen was the third to hand in his first mission amongst the group vying for first rank.

"Heh heh, initial success doesn't mean one will succeed in the future, only one who succeeds in the end has the true ability. It doesn't mean much to allow them to be first. If there's nothing else, I'll be leaving now."

Jiang Chen was indifferent to the question of who came first. If he hadn't shut his doors for training at home for a few days and broken through to eight meridians true qi, stabilizing his martial dao foundations, he could have actually reported in three days ago. These rankings of who was early or late actually had no significant impact on the greater picture.

In the end, the final rankings were determined by the martial arts demonstration.

Gouyu didn't say much upon seeing Jiang Chen's indifferent attitude. She knew very well that beneath that seemingly completely unconcerned exterior, his heart had more magnanimity than anyone else's.

Gazing at the figure that had already left, Princess Gouyu suddenly obtained courage from some unknown place, "Jiang Chen, our agreement from earlier still stands!"

Jiang Chen's body halted briefly as he laughed involuntarily, thinking, "This lass is stubborn alright! If Zhiruo, that little girl, knew that her idiotic aunt had already promised her to Jiang Chen without obtaining her approval, I wonder if the girl would be at a loss of whether to laugh or cry?"

The second mission was more complicated in comparison to the first mission, but it looked to be a bit more interesting.

Mission of the first rank: Recruit eight personal guards.

Mission requirements: Each personal guard had to be at six meridians true qi or higher, with the potential to continue ascending.

Age requirements: No lower boundary, but may not exceed twenty years old.

Identity requirements: Member of the personal guard must be a practitioner from the Eastern Kingdom, with no other nationality.

Mission criteria: An inspection will be conducted when the mission is over and personal guards must pass the final martial arts exam.

Jiang Chen found this mission rather innovative.

At least this wasn't a mission that could be completed through brute force and acting rashly. Due to the peculiarities of this mission, candidates weren't barred from revealing their identity.

This was to say, candidates were strictly barred from revealing their identity, mobilizing family and personal connections in other missions.

However, this mission was quite unique in that it was a mission open the public. One had to reveal their identity and use their network and connections. Otherwise, with the pride and motives of a practitioner, who would be willing to be a personal follower of an unknown somebody?

"Chen'er, this mission isn't a simple one. Of course, if you want to assail the position of a first rank duke, you must have this kind of personal guard."

Every duke needed to have a batch of death warriors who were

willing to offer their lives up for him.

And this lot of death warriors was basically the equivalent of the core layer of power beside the duke in future days. The duke's power would continuously expand from this core.

As for the age requirement of not exceeding twenty years, that was only par for the course. Any person with six meridians true qi over twenty years old wouldn't have much potential.

And as for the identity requirement, that was even easier to understand. Identity verification was nothing but to guarantee that spies from another country wouldn't permeate the people who were by the side of the dukes.

This mission wasn't as simple as merely recruiting eight personal guards.

At the conclusion of the mission, these eight personal guards would have to go through a strength examination, and specific tests at that. If they didn't pass these tests, this mission would count as a fail.

'Chen'er, our Jiang family has managed the Jiang Han dukedom for hundreds of years, we have quite a bit of local prestige. I have strong relationships with some local powers, and they support and endorse me a great deal. Although your mother passed away early, there are also some fine young disciples on her mother's side. Make a trip back to the Jiang Han territory and I can help you fill four or five places."

It was as Jiang Feng said, his mastery over the Jiang Han territory was quite well. In the few hundred years of the Jiang family ruling over the Jiang Han territory, they had long since forged the local territory into a solid sheet of iron support.

Jiang Feng had great prestige in ordinary times to begin with – no matter which local power engaged in a conflict, they were sure to ask the Duke of Jiang Han to make a ruling.

Jiang Feng conducted himself in an upright manner and was honorable and impartial. His judgements oftentimes compelled not just mere obedience, but submission with good grace.

Therefore, although Jiang Feng was greatly suppressed by the Duke of Soaring Dragon in the capital, he was a greatly beloved leading personage in the Jiang Han territory with high prestige.

If the next Duke of Jiang Han was recruiting for his personal guard, there would undoubtedly be innumerable volunteers answering the call. After all, coming under the Duke of Jiang Han's banner meant forming a relationship with an absolute power, and was the equivalent of taking a step into layer of the core power in the Eastern Kingdom. This was a completely separate matter from being an absolute local power.

The exceeding power and influence of a duke of the nation was not something that a local power could imagine.

The time allotted for completing each mission was one month.

Jiang Chen had saved ten days out of his first mission. That meant he had forty days during this second mission. There seemed to be quite the sufficient time, yet that might also not be the case.

“Looks like you and I need to make a trip back to the southern frontier.” Jiang Feng had also left the Jiang Han territory for quite a while, and he felt rather nostalgic about his home.

“Father, the situation in the capital is quite complicated. A slight move in one part may affect the situation as a whole. Why don’t you stay in the capital, your son can make the trip back.”

Jiang Feng was startled briefly, then thought of something immediately after. He smiled, “Chen’er, you wish to go back alone?”

“I will go back alone.” Jiang Chen nodded very firmly.

“Alright, I have always respected your wishes as your father. Then, you shall go back alone, and make use of this opportunity to test your control of the greater picture.” Jiang Feng chuckled.

A true Duke of Jiang Han was very different from being a young duke.

The Duke of Jiang Han was very illustrious in his territory, but that didn’t mean that the young duke would similarly received the same treatment. Particularly as the previous Jiang Chen was a

rather useless dandy. His reputation of having neither learning nor art was renowned, not only in the capital, but also quite famously in the Jiang Han territory.

Therefore, for Jiang Chen, there would be a certain degree of inherent difficulty for him to achieve certain deeds and successfully recruit eight personal guards in the Jiang Han territory without his father coming forward on his behalf.

“Chen’er, I’ve decided to hold a private banquet tonight and invite some dukes we have friendly relations with, in the hopes that they will advertise a bit for us and cast a wide net when recruiting talent.”

It would actually be quite difficult to suddenly find eight promising youths with six meridians true qi in a mere Jiang Han territory.

It wouldn’t be difficult to merely find eight youths with martial dao potential.

But to recruit personal followers, strength and potential weren’t the only questions to be asked. One had to also consider temperament, willingness, and competency, amidst a host of other questions.

Putting all of these factors into consideration made for a more difficult search. Asking a few dukes that they were more friendly with to spread the word in their territories would actually be an ideal channel.

Jiang Chen didn’t object. After all, the more venues the better now. As for what type of person they recruited and whether or not they were dependable, that would still be up to him.

That night, the Duke of Jiang Han held a banquet and invited seven or eight dukes with whom their friendships were quite solid and firm.

It was a common thing for dukes to visit frequently with each other and to have harmonious dispositions.

Even when they knew that the relationship between the Duke of Soaring Dragon and the Duke of Jiang Han wasn’t good, it still hadn’t affected the relationship between these dukes and Jiang Feng.

After all, there was a large number of conflicts between the dukes. It wasn’t as if the Duke of Soaring Dragon would be able to shut out the heavens with one hand.

Not to mention that the situation regarding the Jiang family was lost in the mist and clouds, and many didn’t understand it. The always good-for-naught Jiang Chen had suddenly shot to the skies with one amazing feat, and had continued to commit many astonishing acts.

Many even suspected that the Jiang father and son had long since harbored ambitions, and had concealed their strength in order to not attract attention. They were actually aiming for the position of

the four great dukes!

Jiang Chen's selection of a first rank mission this time had corroborated the speculations of many sides.

Therefore, when the Duke of Jiang Han summoned them, even those with a previous lack of relations wouldn't openly deny Jiang Feng face, not to mention those who did have a pre-existing relationship with him before.

When the banquet was over, the news of Jiang Chen recruiting for his personal guard also began to spread.

One had to say, the speed in which news traveled in the capital was a lot faster than Jiang Chen could imagine.

The resulting cascading reaction also came with a swift speed.

Important figures began to call upon Jiang Chen early the next morning.

The first one to arrive was Qiao Baishi.

"Honored master, your disciple has two nephews within his family clan. They're twin brothers and have always trained within the family, with an occasional bit of guidance from me. With the aid of my spirit medicine, they have also trained to six meridians true qi at the age of seventeen this year. It would be a waste of the prime of their lives if they stayed where they were. Baishi has

heard that honored master was recruiting for his personal guard, therefore…”

Jiang Chen understood, Qiao Baishi was recommending candidates to him.

“Twin brothers? This is actually quite nice. It’s rare for you to have such thoughts Baishi. I will leave two spots for your two nephews. Write them a letter and tell them to convene with me at the Jiang Han territory.

Qiao Baishi was overjoyed upon hearing these words. Although he called them nephews from the family clan, Qiao Baishi actually had an ambiguous relationship with their mother. He had committed his share of ridiculous acts when he was young.

Qiao Baishi’s relationship with these two nephews was that of an uncle and his nephews, but in actuality Qiao Baishi viewed them as his sons.

He had the desire to help these two nephews advance in life, but unfortunately these two fellows had not the slightest interest in spirit medicine business. They only wanted to train well and flock to a royal or noble banner in the future, rising head and shoulders above the others.

Jiang Chen’s mind was at ease when it came to the people that Qiao Baishi had recommended. At least there wouldn’t be any problem whatsoever in terms of loyalty.

After Qiao Baishi had left, Princess Gouyu came again. Even she had come to recommend someone to Jiang Chen.

“Jiang Chen, I come to recommend someone with my personal guarantee. He is the eldest grandson of my first martial dao teacher. His family is in an abject financial situation now, but he is an honest, sincere, and tolerant individual.”

Princess Gouyu also came straight to the point.

Chapter 65: First Candidate For The Personal Guard

The Capital, Qingyang Lane.

The morning's sunshine spilled into a yard, as a youth wearing coarse hemp with sweat pouring down his face trained a set of blade techniques.

The yard was exceedingly roomy, as the red lacquered main door, strong and tall walls, with it's spacious layout overall, all spoke of the great fortune and prosperity that had once graced this yard.

Except, much of the red lacquer had been chipped away from the main door under the erosion of time, appearing rather in mottled disorder. The strong and tall walls also showed some tattered gaps, and seemed to be unable to withstand the wind and rain from the outside.

The spacious internal layout appeared empty and deserted as well, with no trace of any decent furniture to be found.

No matter how illustrious and wealthy this house had once been, the owner who lived here now had absolutely come down in the world. This was verified by every detail.

Except, the youth in the yard didn't seem to want to accept this harsh reality. He trained in an exceedingly desperate fashion, with the emotions of his family once again prospering inspiring him. He

had practiced this set of blade techniques whenever he heard the rooster's crow, everyday, for no less than eight years.

He had no other choice. He seemed to wish to regain the lost splendor, and find the illustrious eminence of this house through the blade in his hand once again.

The red lacquered doors were banged open.

A crowd of nefarious servants like a pack of tigers and wolves barged in, gathered around a youth around twenty years old.

"Guo Jin, you're keeping your poise alright. You're still in the mood to practice? Today is the final deadline. Are you giving up this house and its surrounding yard or not?"

The youth's smile was sinister and ruthless, and his tone was that of complete confidence in that the practicing youth was at the former's mercy.

The youth Guo Jin stopped and rested his blade on his shoulders, saying coldly. "You, with the Zhuo surname, this house and its yards have been passed down from my forefather, and his forefathers, and is the honor and glory of my Guo family. We can discuss anything else, but you should forever drop the idea of having me sell my ancestral home!"

"Not willing?" The Zhuo surnamed youth smiled threateningly. "Then let's tally up our accounts clearly. You came to my financing

house last year to borrow ten thousand silver. It's been one full year by now. Combining both principal and interest, you need to return fifteen thousand silver. Either you immediately pay up, or I'll immediately make a statement to the local authorities to impound your house.

Don't blame me for not telling you that the local authorities will swallow you whole, without leaving not much behind. I, Zhou Tan, am willing to pay eighty thousand silver to you right now. If we go to the local authorities, if there's even ten thousand or eight thousand silver left to you, it'll be because you were lucky enough that the auspicious sign of green smoke rising from your Guo ancestral graves appeared."

This 'Zhou Tan' was the young boss of the biggest firm for exchanging and transferring money in the capital, and he had methods for both legitimate and shady ways. He had taken a fancy to this house and had no doubts in his mind that he could handle this friendless and helpless youth whose family fortunes had declined, whether through the local authorities or through other methods.

Young man Guo Jin only shook his head, "Zhou Tan, kill me if you want, but I will never betray my ancestors or give up this house."

"Betray your ancestors?" Zhou Tan laughed a rather meaningful laugh. "You think too much. You're a youth who simply doesn't know any better. How could you still have the face to mention your ancestors with your infamous father, that army deserter? If it was me, I would have left the capital long ago and found a remote

backwater location to hide in.”

Deserter!

It was as if that word was like lightning, causing the youth Guo Jin’s body to slightly convulse all over. His originally somewhat restrained eyes shot out killing intent like that of wild beasts gone mad.

“Zhou Tan, just try saying what you said again!”

The hand clasping the blade’s hilt trembled lightly as Guo Jin’s eyes filmed over with red, as if ready to leap forward and fight to his death at any second.

His father was a taboo subject that could not be touched in Guo Jin’s heart!

“Huh. To speak of this matter or not, this reputation already exists in the capital. Even if you forbid me from saying it, can you stopper all the wagging mouths in the capital?” Zhou Tan obviously didn’t take much notice of Guo Jin’s ferocity.

However, he was here to scheme and seize the house, and didn’t wish to fight until one of them died.

“Bullshit, this is all bullshit! I’ve said that my father wasn’t an army deserter, he isn’t a deserter! I’ll fight whoever says he’s a deserter. Zhou Tan, just try saying that one more time!”

The veins on his neck bulged out as the youth roared, his black face flushing scarlet, apparently angry to the utmost.

Zhou Tan's face darkened, "Guo Jin, I have no interest in your father's affairs. I'm here today to give you a final ultimatum. Either transfer the house to me or I'll go through the local authorities to impound your house! You only have these two choices! Don't think you can fool me by putting up a death defying front. That little bit of fortune and glory your ancestors had is long gone by now. And even if it was still present, so what?

I, Zhou Tan, am giving your Guo family face in taking a fancy to your house. If it was another one, and you were begging me to accept your house, I might not even be willing to!

Kids, get ready. If that kid Guo is insensible like a block of wood, then throw him and the old one out with random blows from your staves. Don't hold back, feed them to the dogs if they die!"

It was apparent that Zhou Tan was pretty much out of patience.

The crew of nefarious servants were all rubbing their fists and wiping their palms upon hearing their master's order. They started hovering closer with malicious intentions.

Guo Jin gave a great wave of his blade and raged, "Whoever dares come forth dies first!"

Zhou Tan said coldly, “Kid Guo, looks like you refuse to give up until all hope is gone. Rush him, it’s on me if you beat him to death.”

Papapapa!

At this moment, a round of ear piercing applause suddenly sounded from outside the great door.

That was followed up with someone laughing as they clicked their tongue, “Daring to enter someone’s home and kill them in broad daylight. Are we still in the Eastern Kingdom’s territory?”

This scene was outside of Zhou Tan’s expectations. He hadn’t thought that there was anyone who dared to poke their nose in his Zhou family’s business in the Qingyang Lane. Was there someone who felt that they had lived too long?

“Who are you? This is a debt dispute between my Zhou financing house and the debtor. What business is it to you?” It was obvious that Zhou Tan was accustomed to running wild in the capital.

“It originally was none of my business, but now I’m making it my business.” A youth with a confident, unhurried smile, and clear eyes strode in leisurely with four underlings.

This person was naturally the young duke from the Jiang Han Dukedom, Jiang Chen.

Whoosh!

The band of nefarious Zhou servants immediately formed a circle and surrounded Jiang Chen and his Sheng retinue.

Jiang Chen ignored the gleaming of the blades and shadows of their swords. Instead, he remained calm and composed while handling pressing matters, and flicked a glance at Zhou Tan. “How much does he owe you?”

Zhou Tan laughed coldly. “What does it matter to you? It’s not an issue of money now, but that he used this house as collateral and has defaulted on his loan. I’m here to take this house. Sir, no matter your background, I advise you to not meddle in this business. Some businesses, you’re unable to meddle in. Some people, you’re unable to suffer the consequences of provoking them!”

“Oh?” Jiang Chen smiled. “Judging from your tone, you seem to be quite a character.”

“Huh. My Zhou financing house numbers amongst the elites in the entire kingdom. Who are you? Who is your father? Is he an official or in business?”

Jiang Chen completely ignored Zhou Tan’s existence and instead turned his head to ask Guo Jin, “Your surname is Guo?”

Guo Jin was also surprised to see someone flagrantly interfere.

Seeing that this person seemed to have quite the intention of protecting him, he nodded honestly.

"Your grandfather is Guo Shun, tutor Guo?"

"Yes." Guo Jin's chest puffed out upon hearing his grandfather's name and a trace of pride flowed through his eyes. There were still people of great ability who numbered amongst the Guo ancestors, and they had once enjoyed riches and honor.

"Alright, how much money do you owe the Zhou financing house?" Jiang Chen asked again.

"I'd originally borrowed ten thousand silver to cure my mother's illness. Interest compounded, and now, combining the principal and interest, it amounts to fifteen thousand silver." Guo Jin was also a bit downcast when he spoke of the debt that was as heavy as a mountain.

"Fifteen thousand silver." Jiang Chen nodded and said to Sheng One by his side, "Sheng One, count out fifteen thousand silver to them."

In the time that the four brothers from the Sheng battalion had followed Jiang Chen, they had witnessed all sorts of miracles and amazing feats from Jiang Chen. Their relationship with Jiang Chen now had been built up to that of a deeper superior and subordinate relationship.

No longer the mere original relationship of completing a mission.

Notes for fifteen thousand silvers were counted out, and Sheng One directly handed it to Zhou Tan. “Count them up! The young master of my house is repaying the money for him. Don’t come here in the future seeking to make a fuss!”

Sheng One hailed from the army and naturally had a threatening presence.

His step forward caused Zhou Tan’s heart to tighten. He stared at Jiang Chen, the thought occurring to him more and more that this youth seeming to have quite a background.

However, Zhou Tan had never been afraid of anyone since he was small.

He didn’t accept the notes, but rather smiled queerly. “I seemed to have said quite clearly just now that he’s defaulted on a loan. I want the house now, and not silver.”

“Default? Do you have evidence?” Jiang Chen didn’t erupt in anger.

An underling brought out the certificate of indebtedness with a wave of Zhou Tan’s hand. Of course, this certificate was riddled with various traps and had Guo Jin’s signature and personal mark.

Jiang Chen twisted his hands smoothly and directly shredded

this certificate. “Now, do you have more?”

Zhou Tan had been completely caught off guard by this motion. He hadn’t thought that this youth who had an uncommon air about him would suddenly be deliberately dishonest and destroy the evidence!

It had always been him, Zhou Tan, committing dog eat dog acts. To think someone would do the same to him today!

“You… you’re courting death!” Zhou Tan’s temper flared completely in that moment.

Jiang Chen walked into the yard without turning his head, saying noncommittally, “Sheng One, take the notes and people and throw them out together!”

The four brothers from the Sheng battalion were all of the advanced realm of true qi and strong men who had long trod the battlefields. They naturally captured these villainous servants easily.

A few rises up and down and they’d thrown the master and his servants outside the great door.

Throwing the notes for fifteen thousand silver after them, “My house’s young duke is a man of reason. Take the silver, if you still want to create a ruckus, think over it again.”

Young Guo's heart was filled with all sorts of emotions as he watched the Sheng battalion brothers beat the Zhou servants into a hideous state of disorder, as if they were wolves or tigers.

On one hand, he was very grateful that this group of people had offered timely assistance, like offering fuel in snowy weather. Their demeanor was uncommon and caused the malicious looking Zhou group to be completely unable to act wildly in front of these people.

On the other hand, he was anxious and fearful as he didn't know what motives this group of people from an unknown origin had.

As he looked at the figure of Jiang Chen walking in, a strand of unusual emotion rose in his heart. "They're both young men, but this is true noble bearing. These are the methods of the truly strong! I, Guo Jin, must be like him and become heads and shoulders above others, causing these powerful local despots to take the long way around when they see me!"

Jiang Chen felt that the surroundings were familiar even though it was his first time visiting. As he walked into the inner courtyard of the Guo house, he saw that the tablets honoring the past succession of Guo ancestors were sitting in front of the hall.

Upon seeing this situation, Jiang Chen walked up and lit a stick of incense, piously paying his respects. When he stuck the incense into the incense burner, he happened to see some dust on the burner. Jiang Chen waved his sleeve and swept away at the burner.

Such a simple ceremonial gesture – just a few very ordinary movements – were enough to cause Guo Jin's heart to burn up with boiling heat, as a glut of emotion choked his throat, giving him the feeling of being moved to tears.

Chapter 66: Return To Jiang Han Territory

No matter the other's purpose in coming, and no matter what intentions the other had, these few motions served to win the greatest amount of goodwill from Guo Jin.

This also caused Guo Jin's lines of defense to slightly crumble a bit.

"Who would've thought that only slightly more than a decade after Guo Shun, tutor Guo, had gone to travel the heavens, the Guo family would wither and fall. It is surely true that the god of destiny makes fools of people, and that heaven's way is unjust."

Jiang Chen sighed lightly.

When Guo Jin heard these words, his shoulders trembled in defeat as uncontrollable tears trickled out of his black eyes.

"Sir..."

"Guo Jin, let's cut to the chase. I'm the young duke of Jiang Han, Jiang Chen."

"Jiang Chen? You're the Jiang Chen that farted during the Rites of Heavenly Worship?" Guo Jin started and immediately scratched his head in awkwardness. "I was wrong, perhaps I should've said the Jiang Chen who swore at the various influential officials and nobles at the Soaring Dragon manor?"

“Haha.” Jiang Chen laughed heartily. “Whether good or bad, you’ve named them all. That’s right, I’m that Jiang Chen.”

Upon knowing the other’s identity, Guo Jin’s heart softened as more of his defenses were dispelled. However, he didn’t know what to say in the heat of that moment.

When he saw Jiang Chen burn incense to pay his respects to the Guo ancestors, Guo Jin spoke haltingly, “Young duke Jiang, the entire capital and the kingdom as well says that my father is a deserter. Why… why do you pay your respects to him?”

“A wise man does not believe in rumors. Either ulterior motives are hidden in some things, or the mind is slow-witted. Your father returned from a bloody battle and brought back important intelligence, rendering outstanding service. I’ve heard this a long time ago from Princess Gouyu. This is also the reason why I’ve come to find you today.”

Guo Jin had never heard such an assessment from others before. He was first astounded upon hearing Jiang Chen’s words, then immediately broke out into bitter sobs, throwing himself upon his father’s memorial tablet.

“Father, did you hear that? Young duke Jiang spoke out boldly to uphold justice and says that you are a meritorious subject of the kingdom, acknowledging your efforts. Can your spirit in heaven hear these words?”

When his words stopped, tears were already roiling in Guo Jin's eyes as he was choked with sobs and unable to speak.

It was apparent that comments such as "deserter" and "shame of the kingdom" had caused Guo Jin to shoulder many burdens that didn't belong to him since he was little.

He toiled and trained, yet ran into a wall no matter where he went.

Wherever he went, others would immediately respond when they heard of his family background — you're the son of that shame of the kingdom?

Guo Jin lived through his childhood and youth with this ignoble infamy on his shoulders.

The censure and contempt of the common people caused him to become more and more isolated, more and more depressed. Apart from a mother whom he mutually depended upon, the blade in his hand was almost the only thing left in his life.

And yet —

The contempt and scorn of the common people didn't lead him to belittle himself. He refused to give in. He was going to prove to the world, using the blade in his hand, that his Guo family was absolutely not the shame of the kingdom!

Only, until now, Guo Jin had never been able to find a chance to free himself from misery.

Not a single noble family of power was willing to give him a chance to prove himself!

Jiang Chen was deeply affected by Guo Jin's dejection, as if he had experienced it himself. To be treated unjustly by others, belittled by others, oppressed by others – it was truly not an easy thing to live through such treatment since he was little.

He lightly patted Guo Jin's shoulder, "To make a long story short, my Jiang family is competing for the position of duke of the first rank this time. I've drawn the mission of recruiting personal guards in the Hidden Dragon Trials."

"You... you've settled on me?" Guo Jin's fierce body trembled slightly as he lifted his head, sending out looks of disbelief.

In all these years, he had suffered from everyone's eyerolls and ran into walls everywhere he went, offering his services to others in vain. He had thought that only his blade would accompany him in this life, and had prepared to become a first class independent practitioner wandering the outside world.

However, destiny was truly amazing. Someone had unexpectedly extended him an olive branch when he was at the lowest point in his life!

“I choose you not only for you, but also for the loyalty of your Guo family clan.”

Guo Jin became choked up and found it hard to speak when he heard those words. Even though he knew that Jiang Chen might be speaking these words to buy popularity, he was still so touched in the moment that he almost became a blubbering mess.

It was said that “a kind word is remembered for a long time”, and Jiang Chen’s words of “loyalty of the Guo family clan” happened to touch precisely the weakest, most delicate part of Guo Jin’s heart. It was also the area that most needed warmth.

“Young duke, based on those words alone, I, Guo Jin, am willing to pledge my life to follow you eternally, in life and in death!”

Guo Jin was not good at heroic utterances, but an exceedingly resolute voice in the depths of his heart told him that he should do so, that he must do so!

Jiang Chen never stinted on his people.

He immediately ordered for Guo Jin’s mother to move to the Jiang Han manor and asked the alchemists from the Hall of Healing to personally look after her. At the same time, he had Guo Jin lock the main doors of his house and have the neighbors pass on a message to the Zhou family.

“If that Zhou family wishes to create a disturbance, then do so at

my Jiang Han manor. If he feels that it's still not satisfying enough to make trouble there, then he can go to the palace courtyard and make a fuss at Princess Gouyu's !"

Jiang Chen left these words behind before he departed.

Since Princess Gouyu had recommended this Guo Jin, then Jiang Chen naturally didn't mind borrowing some effort from Princess Gouyu.

In any case, the royal family owed this much to the Guo family .

Guo Jin's father had originally been the personal follower of Princess Gouyu's older brother, Eastern Jun. At that time, Eastern Jun was the exalted crown prince.

Eastern Jun wished to accomplish a military feat during a skirmish with an enemy kingdom once, but fell victim to an enemy ambush. Only Guo Jin's father emerged from the bloody battle and sent a piece of important intelligence back to the capital, dying from exhaustion afterwards.

The current king, Eastern Lu, was only made heir apparent due to the crown prince accidentally falling in battle.

When Eastern Lu was made the crown prince instead, there was even a rumor within the kingdom that the death of the prior crown prince Eastern Jun was very likely because someone had traitorous relations with a foreign country, betraying the former

crown prince. When Eastern Lu was initially made crown prince, his foundations were shaky and thus he was cautious and prudent. In order to cast off suspicious circumstances, he even ignored the Guo family who had sent back important intelligence on pain of death. He didn't even publicize what had gone on behind the scenes.

As time went on, the rumors of Guo Jin's father being a deserter started circulating.

On account of the love and kindness from her respected martial dao teacher, Guo Shun, Princess Guoyu had appealed several times for Eastern Lu to redress Guo Jin's father's grievances and rehabilitate his honor.

Eastern Lu was not swayed by her speeches.

From his perspective, inaction was better than taking action. Eastern Lu was also unwilling to go to battle and reopen matters of many years ago for a family like the Guo family that had withered and fallen.

The pity was that in doing so, Guo Jin was the one who suffered.

Princess Gouyu harbored great remorse and regret in her heart, but couldn't openly help the Guo family due to Eastern Lu. She could only covertly pay attention to Guo Jin. She had traveled often for training the past few years and neglected to pay attention as time went on.

In this manner, Guo Jin's room for survival became even narrower and thus he had fallen into his present day circumstances.

Princess Gouyu was ashamed and uneasy but couldn't take action. She could only entrust the matter to Jiang Chen and recommend Guo Jin to him, making amends for her previous faults through good service.

Except, Guo Jin had no way of knowing the twists and turns of this matter.

One had to give it to him, Guo Jin was indeed a different sort when it came to training. Although he had the martial arts techniques and methods of his family's heritage, his potential was astounding.

With the Guo family's current economic level, Guo Jin had absolutely no spirit medicine complementing his training. There were, of course, no pills available for him to take either.

However, he had made it to six meridians true qi based purely on his own great willpower.

One had to know, even many of those nobles sons and disciples, with the favor of tens of thousands focused on them alone, couldn't make it to six meridians true qi!

"Although it's quite cruel to say so, but one has to admit that

sometimes one's birth can truly decide one's destiny..." Jiang Chen felt even more keenly the truth of this harsh reality through Guo Jin.

High potential and great willpower, was as insubstantial as the reflection of a flower in a mirror or the moon in the water, if one didn't boast of an illustrious birth or the ways to become head and shoulders above others.

Out of the eight spots for personal guards, the first one had gone to Guo Jin. Add to that the two nephews that Qiao Baishi recommended, he had already filled three slots.

The remaining five would most likely necessitate a trip back to the Jiang Han territory.

The mission was pressed for time and Jiang Chen wasn't the sort to drag his heels. After taking in Guo Jin and explaining the situation to him, they set out for the southern frontier in the afternoon of that day with a crew of underlings.

After the experience of being ambushed by the Soaring Dragon manor last time, this time both the royal family and the Jiang Han household placed abnormal emphasis on this trip, and sent out all sorts of hidden guards along the way to scout out the path.

Under such arrangements, the Soaring Dragon manor had nowhere to insert even a needle if they had the desire to make a few moves. They couldn't do anything unless they wanted fall out with the Eastern family clan at this very moment.

Spurring on their horses, Jiang Chen's crew successfully reached the southern frontier after three days.

The southern region was drastically different from the capital. It permeated with the thick atmosphere of the southern border. Unique overtones colored the region, whether in terms of atmosphere, human sensibilities or geographical style.

Many memories of the southern border were preserved in his past self's memories.

At least he had a clear grasp of the relations of the Jiang family clan.

The family welcome entourage outside the River Wave City was rather sparse, with not that many people.

"Indeed, the treatment of returning a young duke is different to that of the return of the real duke." A trace of a contemplative smile leaked out on Jiang Chen's face.

Jiang Chen also knew that no one could be blamed for this. The previous Jiang Chen had committed fabulously absurd sins when he was in the Jiang Han territory, and the ridiculous things he had done once he'd travelled to the capital had all made their way back home.

The extraordinary things he'd done recently rather, hadn't had

time to travel back home.

Therefore, it was quite normal to receive the cold treatment on his return.

“Third uncle, Xiaoyu.” Jiang Chen warmly greeted the first two people in the front as he hopped off his horse.

In the entire Jiang family clan, they were probably the extreme minority who could tolerate the previous Jiang Chen’s fantastically silly existence.

The middle aged man Jiang Tong was Jiang Chen’s third uncle. His personality was honest, sincere, and contained. He scrupulously abided by his duty and was the younger brother that Jiang Feng relied most heavily on.

The slim and fragile youth next to him was Jiang Tong’s son, Jiang Yu.

“Chen’er, you’ve been at the capital for the last two, three years. You’ve grown quite a lot.” Jiang Tong patted Jiang Chen’s shoulder as a feeling of happiness exuded from his eyes.

“Brother, you’re back!” Jiang Yu was younger than Jiang Chen by a year or two, and they’d been close since little. Although they were cousins, he’d always called Jiang Chen “brother”.

Jiang Chen smiled, “I’ve returned with a mission this time. Let’s

speak of it when we get back.”

Although a small amount of people had come and it was apparent that the others in the family had deliberately not come in order to put on airs, Jiang Chen did not become angry over this.

Jiang Tong was a bit surprised upon hearing Jiang Chen’s words. Seems like Chen’er has grown more mature in his years at the capital.

If it was the previous Jiang Chen, upon seeing that his family members weren’t giving him face, he most likely would be cursing furiously by now.

In fact, it was Jiang Chen’s personal steward, Jiang Zheng, whose face darkened upon seeing this scene. He seemed ready to erupt a few times, but finally controlled himself in the end.

River Wave City was the largest and most prosperous city in the Jiang Han territory, and also the core location of the Jiang Han dukedom. The Jiang family’s control over the Jiang Han territory radiated throughout the territory, with the River Wave City as the core.

Compared to the capital, the prosperity level of River Wave City lacked a bit in comparison. But as the largest city in the southern frontier, it had its own unique geographic flavor.

Jiang Chen traveled slowly and gently on the back of his horse,

viewing the flowers along the way, laughing and chattering with the Jiang Tong father and son duo. However, he didn't say a single word regarding the mission.

They returned to the Jiang Han manor after a short while.

But who would've thought that the Jiang Han manor doors would be bustling with noise and excitement at this moment.

Chapter 67: Provoking The Young Duke?

“Don’t try this with me! Jiang Tong wasn’t out earlier, and wasn’t out later, but he’s out when I come?” A voice like a bronze gong rang out loudly.

Jiang Chen and the others heard the hue and cry before they had even drawn near.

“Chief Jing, he really has gone out. Apparently the young duke is coming back, and the third lord went to the outskirts of River Wave City to greet him.”

One could tell that the servants of the duke manor were still quite polite when they dealt with people.

“Young duke? Huh! That ridiculous dandy Jiang Chen?” That voice like a bronze gong carried quite a few traces of disdain.

“I don’t give a damn where Jiang Tong’s gone, I’m going to wait here!” The man surnamed Jing had an extremely dominant tone.

Jiang Chen’s brow creased when he was still far away. Now that he was training in the “Ear of the Zephyr”, his hearing was stronger than even Jiang Tong’s, and could naturally hear the conversation from afar with crystal clarity.

“The chief surnamed Jing? Can he be Jing Man from the Redbud Tribe?” Jiang Chen knew from his past self’s memories that there

were ten large tribes under the jurisdiction of the Jiang Han territory.

The Redbud Tribe was one of the strongest tribes, and numbered amongst the foremost out of the ten large tribes in Jiang Han.

Therefore, this Jing Man had always been more domineering. Apart from the Duke of Jiang Han, Jiang Feng, who was able to cow this person, everyone else in the entire Jiang Han territory had to somewhat accede to his wishes.

One only had to hear his wild and arrogant tone today, and listen to him directly saying Jiang Tong's name, to know that this person was quite domineering.

Jiang Tong smiled wryly and shook his head slightly. "Chen'er, only your father is able to rein in Jing Man. Go directly into the manor later, I'll take care of him."

One could tell that Jiang Tong had a measure of dread when it came to this Jing Man.

A few thorns in one's side would pop up in every territory, Jiang Chen understood this rather well.

He also didn't really mind coarse language and an overbearing demeanor, but if this Jing Man went overboard with his domineering attitude, Jiang Chen would absolutely not sit by idly, and remain indifferent.

No one wanted such a recalcitrant thorn under their rule – one that would stir up trouble at any time.

“Let’s head over!”

Jiang Chen’s tone was diffident as he took the lead in riding his horse over.

“Eh? The third lord is back!” The servants in the manor immediately saw Jiang Tong and his son when the horse entourage appeared.

Except, Jiang Tong and his son were clustered around another youth. This youth had the strong arms of an ape, and the flexible waist of a wolf. A familiar yet strange sense of dignified prestige emanated from his eyes.

Jiang Tong shouted out, “Pay your respects to the young duke!”

Young duke?

After three years, the changes that’d occurred in Jiang Chen had resulted in him casting off his old self and being reborn anew. Apart from his features still somewhat resembling those in former times, he was drastically different in all other areas compared to when he’d left the Jiang Han territory three years ago, whether it was in terms of presence, or of body.

“Greetings to the young duke!”

The servants in the Jiang Han manor had undergone strict training, and immediately fell to their knees to pay their respects.

As for Jing Man and his group, they all looked to their leader, Jing Man, and didn’t bother kneeling in respect.

Jing Man placed his hands on his waist and looked askance at Jiang Chen. His motions were quite rude and ungracious, and he flicked a glance at Jiang Chen, sizing him up from head to toe.

“Young duke. Excuse me, I, Jing Man, only greet the Duke of Jiang Han. Forgive me for not kneeling without seeing the Duke of Jiang Han in person.”

Jing Man’s people also smiled superciliously behind Jing Man as they took their measure of Jiang Chen. Not only did their expressions lack the proper respect requisite upon seeing the young duke, but some of them even lifted their eyebrows and winked as signals to each other.

“Jing Man is it?” Although Jiang Chen was slightly enraged inside, he didn’t wish to have a public falling out where they stood. “I am the young duke of the Jiang Han territory, whether you pay your respects or not. I only ask you, for what matter have you brought people to cause a hubbub at the manor doors? Where is your decorum and propriety?”

Jing Man laughed heartily. “For what matter? Then you need to ask Jiang Tong!”

Jiang Tong’s expression was a bit awkward. “Jing Man, let’s talk privately about personal matters. The young duke has just returned today, let’s not disturb him.”

“What disturbance? It’s even better that he’s come back, he can be a witness.” Jing Man leered with his big mouth.

“No matter what, let’s go inside to talk. Stop throwing away the face of nobility by standing here and making a public outcry.” Jiang Chen’s face darkened as he took the lead in entering the manor.

Jiang Tong was slightly surprised to see Jiang Chen’s uncommon bearing, and followed him inside.

Jing Man chuckled but brazenly had no respect for anything as he followed them inside.

Jiang Chen cast his gaze upon Jing Tong after entering the manor, tea had been served, and everyone had taken their seats. “Third uncle, what’s going on. You tell me.”

“Ai, Chief Jing. We have more than decades in our relationship, and you accepted the betrothal gift ten years ago. Must you really commit such an act as tearing up the marriage contract? Not to mention…”

Jing Man waved his hand, “Stop right there! I was not going to bring the children into this, but since you’ve mentioned them, then let’s be frank and put our cards on the table. It isn’t that I’m going back on my word, it’s truly that the child is unwilling. You also don’t wish for the two to not get along, and cause such utter confusion that everyone goes crazy after the two get married?”

Betrothal gift, marriage contract, child is unwilling.

Jiang Chen quickly grasped the heart of the matter.

Indeed, this Jing Man was here to rip up the marriage contract.

“Chief Jing, speak frankly – are you dissatisfied with the betrothal gift? Do you think it’s too little? This can all be discussed. In what regard would my Jiang family be unworthy of your beloved daugher?”

Jiang Tong restrained his fury and didn’t adopt a hard tone as he tried to redeem something from the situation.

“I’ve heard these words many times and I’m not here to listen to your blather this time. I’ve brought back the betrothal gifts, you can take an inventory of them.”

Jing Man obviously didn’t want to continue this conversation. He was here to return the betrothal gifts, and to void the marriage contract.

With a wave of his hand, Jing Man's servants immediately brought up six large trunks.

"The betrothal gifts are here, not a single one of them is missing. Take an inventory Jiang Tong. If there's nothing else, I'm going back to my tribe." Jing Man ignored the young duke Jiang Chen through this entire matter.

Jiang Tong's face flushed vaguely red. Jing Man's arrogant attitude had obviously deeply wounded the placid middle aged man.

The hand in his sleeve curled tightly and formed a fist. His voice trembled a bit as it rasped out, "Chief Jing, you can break the betrothal, but you cannot do so in such an obscure manner! Tell me, why? In what manner has my Jiang family wronged your Redbud Tribe?"

Jing Man smiled faintly, "Whether or not the Jiang family has wronged my Redbud tribe is not the point. First, you, Jiang Tong, are not the Duke of Jiang Han. Your son will never become the Duke of Jiang Han. Secondly, I've already said the child is unwilling. Cai'er, they're unwilling to cancel the marriage contract. Why don't you say a few words?"

A thirteen or fourteen year old young girl was behind Jing Man. She wore the jewelry of her tribe, and wore her hair in a bun, with three peacock feathers stuck in her bun.

The young girl's features were brightly colored and beautiful, with a natural gentle and lovely air. She also possessed a sense of shrewdness that did not conform with her age.

"Jiang Yu, Cai'er believes that you would not seriously agree to a ridiculous marriage that the older generation agreed to when they were all drunk?"

Jing Cai'er brows moved faintly as a natural sense of gentleness and loveliness permeated her crisp voice.

Jiang Yu was younger than Jiang Chen by a year, but he wasn't muddled when it came to important matters. Although a bit bashful, he responded, "I can pretend it wasn't true. But, the manner in which you're approaching this matter completely brushes off the face of my Jiang family. Have you ever thought of where my Jiang family's face would be, if you do this in such a manner?"

"Face?" Jing Cai'er laughed lightly. "Face is earned and not given to you. Jiang Yu, since you've brought it up, I ask you only one question. My training now is at seven meridians true qi, and has a chance to breakthrough to eight meridians true qi in a year. How many meridians of true qi are you now?"

This was the point! Seven meridians true qi was indeed a very extraordinary level of existence for a disciple born from a tribe.

After all, even amongst the heirs in the Hidden Dragon Trials, not that many possessed such training.

Not to mention Jing Cai'er was younger than Jiang Chen and his peers by one or two years.

"You're only five meridians true qi. Do you know what a difference of two meridians true qi means between peers?

In addition, just as my father said, your father isn't the Duke of Jiang Han, and you'll never be the Duke of Jiang Han."

Jiang Yu's mouth was agape and tongue tied. He said haltingly, "Although I won't be the Duke of Jiang Han in the future, the Duke of Jiang Han is still my brother."

He regretted his words as soon as he said them. Why? Why did he explain such things to this snobbish girl?

"Heh heh, your brother?" Jing Cai'er flicked a glance at Jiang Chen with a few traces of scorn. "Jiang Yu, don't be naive! Do you think with your cousin's paltry bit of ability that he's usually displayed, that he can hold onto this dukedom in front of opponents that are like wolves and tigers?"

Jiang Chen laughed. This Jing family had revealed their dagger after unrolling the map of their plans, and had voiced the true reality.

In terms of potential, Jiang Yu was far below Jing Cai'er.

In terms of status and position, the Jiang family could very well lose their dukedom. Jing Yu wasn't a direct descendent of the Jiang family, what future would he have then?

In such a way, the meaning for the Jing family reneging on the marriage contract was clear as daylight.

A tea cup was suddenly flung viciously to the floor!

Someone finally couldn't bear it anymore on the Jiang family side, and had lost their temper!

Except, the person losing his temper was neither Jiang Chen nor Jiang Tong and his son, but the personal steward behind Jiang Chen, Jiang Zheng!

He had seen so many various aspects of society in the capital, and even the influential powers in the capital were obedient, submissive, and obsequious to the young duke. But now that they'd returned to their own land in the Jiang Han territory, they were faced with such ridiculousness?

This was the Jiang family's territory to begin with. The Jiang family kept their word, and everyone was reverent and deferential in front of the Jiang family.

This Jing family was too unbridled!

Thus, Jiang Zheng was infuriated!

“Jing Man, you father and daughter are putting on show, but have you figured out some things yet? This is the Jiang Han manor and this is the territory of the Duke of Jiang Han!” Jiang Zheng was filled with righteous indignation.

Jing Man laughed coldly. “Your master hasn’t spoken, what is a dog of a servant like you making a fuss for?”

“I’m a servant alright! But, you seemed to have forgotten that you’re also a servant in the Jiang Han manor. We’re all servants of the Jiang family in the entire Jiang Han territory!

You do not pay your respects when you see the young duke – do you even understand the difference between master and servant?

You tear up the marriage contract – do you even understand the concept of the honor of nobility?

Your daughter does not respect the young duke – do you even comprehend the notion of due regard for precedence?

You disrespect your master, tear up the marriage contract, and speak irreverently. Who gave you this courage? Where did you get this nerve from?”

Jiang Zheng’s tongue was like a spear, and his lips like daggers, as he fired off a string of questions, getting out of hand as he started.

Jing Man’s mouth was agape and he was tongue tied, at a loss for what to say during this moment.

Chapter 68: Increasing Your Knowledge

In terms of bearing and strategy, it was inconvenient for Jiang Chen to speak up. Jiang Zheng on the other hand, said everything on his mind in one go.

Jiang Tong and his son nodded repeatedly as he spoke, agreeing fully.

As for Jiang Chen, he smiled faintly and stood up, walking up to Jiang Yu. “Xiaoyu, your brother only asks you one question, do you have any feelings for this woman?”

Jiang Yu’s handsome face blushed, “Brother, I’ve only seen her once or twice a year since we were young. I’ve never had any deep conversations with her, and don’t have any sort of feelings for her. And, I don’t really like pushy and bossy women, they’re not virtuous.”

“Alright!”

Jiang Chen smiled, “A thousand taels of gold won’t purchase love. Since you don’t like her, then I’ll make the decision for you today. This marriage contract is pronounced dissolved starting from this moment henceforth.”

“Chen’er.” Jiang Tong stood up.

Jiang Chen waved his hands. “Third uncle, I’m the young duke.

When my father isn't here, I make the decisions in the Jiang Han household."

Jiang Tong's throat moved vaguely, as he wished to say something, but he finally heaved a sigh of dejection and sat down again. His arm trembled slightly, the depths of his anger apparent.

But, what else could he do apart from this?

Jing Man laughed heartily and stood up proudly, his tone carrying notes of scorn, "Young duke, haha. They say that a tiger father doesn't beget a dog son. The young duke has increased my knowledge today."

The connotation behind this wasn't a compliment for Jiang Chen, but rather jeering at Jiang Chen for having cold feet. If Jiang Feng were the one here, how could he have given way here?

Jiang Chen smiled lightly and did not avoid looking at Jing Man in the slightest. "I increased your knowledge so easily? Looks like Chief Jing truly lacks knowledge and experience."

"Oh? How do you say?" Jing Man's face darkened.

"The marriage contract is dissolved alright, but this matter isn't over yet." Jiang Chen's face darkened as his tone abruptly grew frosty. "You are of a tribe, yet tear up a marriage contract and challenge the authority of the duke's manor. This is one crime. As a subordinate, you didn't greet the young duke when you saw him.

This is another crime. Raging and roaring at the duke's manor, with no respect for your superiors. This is a third crime.

Combined punishment for three offenses! Take them!"

The four brothers from the Sheng battalion immediately leapt upon Jing Man like wolves and tigers as soon as Jiang Chen had finished speaking!

Jiang Tong started and then quickly woke up to reality. He also immediately gave an order, "Jiang family premier guard, seal off the manor. Do not let a single person who has come today leave!"

Jing Man had also been overconfident, or it might be better said that he had acted recklessly with no scruples at all. Although he had brought a pack of personal guards with him this time, in terms of absolute strength, there was still a large gap between his guards and the premier guard of the duke's manor.

He had dared come because Jiang Tong had always been weak and feeble, and would never move to arms. It was even more impossible that he would dare draw swords against him, a big tribe chieftain.

However, he had never reckoned that Jiang Chen, this devil incarnate, would return to the manor at this time. He hadn't thought even more so that this Jiang Chen would take action when he had been smiling merrily and staying calm and collected!

The worst thing was that the Sheng battalion four brothers were all experts from the capital. Sheng One and Sheng Two were even of nine meridians true qi.

They were even able to contend against Jing Man evenly in a one on one battle.

The four of them combined their efforts to force Jing Man into an extremely passive situation.

Jiang Chen's new follower, Guo Jin, was also the epitome of agility and bravery. His blade thoroughly preoccupied Jing Cai'er. Although he was only six meridians true qi, he was actually able to beat Jing Cai'er to the point at which she didn't know what to do with her hands and feet when he went all out.

Jiang Tong also entered the fray afterwards.

Jiang Tong was also of nine meridians true qi. There were no doubts about the conclusion of the battle once he joined the battle.

Jing Man and all his followers were taken within the span of an hour.

"Jiang Chen, even your old man doesn't have the guts to do anything to me! You dare plot against me! The Redbud Tribe will feud with you until the end of time now that you've done this to me!"

Jing Man was truly angry. He had run amuck through the Jiang Han territory all his life. Apart from giving way in front of Jiang Feng, he had never been the one to suffer losses.

He had been restrained by others today and even tied up. This was an extreme disgrace to him.

“Third uncle, convene all the members of the family clan together. I want to call for a clan meeting!”

Jiang Chen flicked a glance at Jing Man. “Put these people secretly behind bars. Sheng One, make them take these pills so that they’re not too noisy.”

Jiang Tong called together the family clan members in the name of the duke. No one dared to slight him then.

They hadn’t gone to meet Jiang Chen because Jiang Chen was a good-for-nothing. He was a useless person with not much to his name in their eyes, this is why they had dared act so wildly.

Although Jiang Tong had a weak and passive personality, he was the person that Jiang Feng had personally entrusted to be acting duke. None of the Jiang family clan members dared be disobedient when he employed the power of the duke.

After all, Jiang Tong’s level of training made him first after Jiang Feng, not to mention his identity!

All of the members of the Jiang family clan numbered between one to two hundred people at the end of the day.

However, the main hall of the duke's manor was spacious enough. It was still quite expansive even when one to two hundred people stood within it.

Jiang Tong and his son stood to the right of Jiang Chen, and Jiang Chen's followers stood to his left.

"Greetings to the young duke!"

"Why did no one notify us that the young duke had come back?"

"Indeed. I happened to be away two days ago, and didn't receive the news. It was my fault in failing to meet the guest."

These clan members were all quite shrewd. They hadn't gone to greet Jiang Chen, because they wished to covertly play a petty trick in trivial matters. However, no one dared act atrociously when they actually saw Jiang Chen in person.

Jiang Chen swept his gaze over those assembled and nodded slightly.

"Jiang Zheng, you speak."

Ever since following Jiang Chen, Jiang Zheng's entire presence

and composure had thoroughly changed after the matter at the Hall of Healing. He now paid utter servile obeisance to Jiang Chen.

"Everyone, I'd first like to report one matter. Jing Man and his daughter from the Redbud tribe were causing an uproar in the duke's manor just now. They had no respect for their superiors, and disrespected the young duke. They've already been captured by the young duke and are being held secretly!"

He delivered a heavyweight of a news as soon as he opened his mouth.

"What? Jing Man's been captured and locked behind bars?"

"This... We just saw Jing Man behaving atrociously at the manor doors."

"Jing Man, captured?"

The Jiang family clan members were all shocked and baffled when they heard this news. They thought it was incredible. Jing Man had been captured? The most important thing was, they heard overtones of another implication.

Jing Man had caused an uproar at the duke's manor and had no respect for his superiors. He disrespected the young duke. These crimes all made the fine hairs on their bodies stand up when they heard of them.

One had to know, that as members of the Jiang family clan, none of them had gone to greet the young duke. This could also be counted as huge disrespect to the young duke.

When their thoughts traveled down this trail, these people all started becoming a bit nervous, no matter what their status or position.

If Jiang Chen wished to make a big issue of this, they would all likely be hard pressed to escape this calamity.

Jiang Zheng smiled faintly. “As members of the Jiang family clan, we are all of the same origin. Blood is thicker than water, and when the Jiang family runs into a problem, we are either united as one or are cautious in order to save our own skin. The young duke would like to make use of this opportunity to witness your character!”

Jiang Zheng’s words also gave them a way out.

The clever ones immediately realized the error of their ways. A clan elder more than fifty years old smiled, “My Jiang family has always been united as one under the leadership of this duke. This Jing Man has often come to the manor to behave wildly. Capturing him is the right thing to do, we endorse this wholeheartedly!

“Right, Jing Man, the chief of a tribe dared to affront the authority of the duke’s manor, he should be captured!”

“The young duke is wise and brilliant!”

“He is the duke’s son alright, we support the young duke!”

They were all quick on the uptake. Upon seeing that Jiang Chen had removed even a thorn such as Jing Man, they knew that it would be as easy as blowing away a speck of dust if he wanted to deal with family members.

Judging from Jiang Chen’s current state, if this devil incarnate grew confused and charged them with crimes as well, then things would be grave indeed.

Hence, they all hastened to declare their support. Firstly for self insurance, and secondly as members of the Jiang family clan, they truly had no reason to defend Jing Man.

The Jiang family members also severely despised Jing Man’s arrogant attitude. Jiang Tong had no methods to deal with Jing Man, and so they’d naturally been unable to say anything.

Now that Jing Man had been captured by Jiang Chen, they firstly felt great satisfaction as they’d vented a breath of ill feelings; they also felt confused as well. How had Jiang Chen gained such daring and resolution in the two, three years that he’d been away?

Except, seeing his personal guards behind him who looked around with the fierce gaze of fiends, the hearts of these clan members pounded like drums and they didn’t dare say much.

Jiang Chen had no desire to strut around in front of his clan members, and said with a diffident tone, “Third uncle, pass on an order from the duke’s manor, and convene all the tribes within the territory. Tell them to come to River Wave City to attend a tribal convention. I have an important matter to announce. Failure to come within three days will be viewed as treason!”

The various tribes naturally didn’t dare give the cold shoulder once the duke’s order was given.

They all traveled to River Wave City at the fastest speed possible.

That night, Jiang Chen summoned the seniors who possessed more prominent positions and reputations and treated them to a banquet within the manor.

If it hadn’t been for the issue with Jing Man, these elders might not have all shown up for Jiang Chen’s banquet. However, the former days were not the ones of today, and they all felt that something was bizarre regarding this matter, after seeing the young duke Jiang Chen today.

With that said, the six elders all arrived promptly. These people were all highly experienced, and very shrewd. When they met each other at the doors of the manor, they all looked at each other and smiled, a bit awkward and a bit unable to fathom the current situation.

“Elder Xi, what does this Jiang Chen have up his sleeve?”

“Ai, I cannot see it clearly. I too cannot fathom it. Have you all discovered that Jiang Chen seems to have changed greatly in the three years that he’s been out of sight?” An elder with graying hair spoke. He was the elder with the longest record of service in the Jiang family clan, and everyone called him Elder Xi.

“Ai, I’ve heard that this Jiang Chen has been ridiculous beyond belief in the capital. Rumors say that he couldn’t even pass the foundational exams. If this kid is allowed to continue to fool around like this, how is my Jiang family to keep the dukedom?”

“It doesn’t seem like it, really doesn’t seem like it!” Elder Xi shook his head. “When I look at Jiang Chen, I don’t see someone who can’t pass the foundational exams.”

“Heh heh, what’s the use in saying so much. Let’s go inside and see what he has to say!” A relatively younger elder floated by and took the lead in walking into the manor.

The banquet was exceedingly sumptuous. Jiang Chen sat at the main seat, with Jiang Tong on his left.

Everyone took their seats according to the record of service. Jiang Zheng was proactive as he poured wine for them in that order.

“Gathered elders, I, Jiang Chen, would not like to mention previous matters. I will speak of only one matter today. I am competing for the duke of first rank in this time’s Hidden Dragon

Trials, and I've come back to execute the second mission of the first rank this time. I need everyone's help in this matter. If the elders are willing to help, please drink their cup of wine!"

Jiang Chen lifted his cup, the aura of one superior arising spontaneously.

What?

Duke of the first rank? Mission of the first rank?

This news stunned even Jiang Tong. His arm shook, so surprised that he almost spilled his wine.

Chapter 69: Changes In Attitudes

These elders couldn't help but lean forward slightly, wishing to hear more clearly. Their reactions were all extraordinarily in unison, as they all thought they'd heard incorrectly.

One had to know that, a genius who was overflowing with talent such as Jiang Feng, his grasp over the Jiang Han territory so strong, had only won a position of duke of second rank.

Out of all 108 dukes in the kingdom, being ranked at 14 seemed to be the limit of the Jiang family.

These elders all had to admit that Jiang Feng's role couldn't be overlooked in the Jiang family's current day development. It wouldn't be hyperbole to say that he had achieved the greatest accomplishment for the Jiang family to date.

Their highest expectations for Jiang Chen during this time's Hidden Dragon Trials were merely to retain their current standing. Even if their ranking descended a few places, it would be nice if they didn't lose the title of duke of the second rank.

However, based on Jiang Chen's usual performance, they all knew that this was all pure folly. The bigger question was whether or not he'd be able to keep the Jiang family's dukedom, not to mention the position of duke of second rank.

After all, his usual reputation was simply too poor.

However, the affairs of the world are thus inconstant.

Just when they had deemed that Jiang Chen wouldn't do – when they had long since given up in their hearts – Jiang Chen suddenly announced that he was competing for duke of the first rank.

And, he had even returned this time to execute the second mission of the first rank.

What did this entail?

This meant that Jiang Chen had already completed a mission of the first rank!

A mission of the first rank corresponded to the position of duke of the first rank.

Being able to complete missions of the first rank, no matter if one could only complete one, how could the person in question be a mediocre person of the masses?

The Hidden Dragon Trials were no game, and the rules were harsh. Every single mission of the first rank was strictly partitioned – it was impossible for anyone to be opportunistic or gain an advantage by trickery.

To think that Jiang Chen had already completed a mission of the

first rank!

There was no need for boasts, no need for theatrics. Jiang Chen merely raised his cup, spoke a few words, and gave transparently delineated particulars of all matters.

If this crowd of old geezers lacked even this bit of comprehension, then it wasn't a matter of them debating whether or not to support Jiang Chen, but rather Jiang Chen contemplating whether or not they were worthy of him!

"Duke of first rank, duke of first rank..." Jiang Tong turned over these words again and again in his mouth. Suddenly, a gleam of surprised light shot out from his unfocused gaze. "Chen'er, you mean that you've already completed the first mission?"

"Yes, and this second mission rather needs some connections. I will need to impose on the networks and face of the various seniors in the clan."

Jiang Chen was neither prideful nor impatient, and there was a complete lack of a desire to flaunt himself in his tone. There truly was nothing for him to make a display about in such a small matter.

Jiang Zheng, on the other hand, couldn't help but speak up when he poured one. "A scholar who has been away for three days must be looked at with new eyes. Our house's young duke is the man of the hour in the capital. Those from the palace are common visitors, and even spiritual medicine heavyweights such as the Hall

of Healing need to curry favor with our young duke.”

There were no outsiders here, so Jiang Zheng couldn’t contain himself and had to say a few words. He truly couldn’t hold it in anymore. He had been ignored and passed over by others ever since he had started following Jiang Cheng. Now that he’d finally found the chance to hold his head up high. Where else could he make a display if he didn’t put on a show within the family?

Those from the palace were common visitors?

Even the Hall of Healing curried favor with the young duke?

How could this be? Those elders were all surprised beyond expression, not to mention Jiang Tong. They all inhaled sharply, extremely uneasy in their seats.

Jiang Chen however, smiled faintly. “There’s no need to always speak of these small things, Jiang Zheng. Assembled elders, I have need of your efforts at the tribal convention tomorrow.”

Elder Xi had the longest record of service, and the fastest reactions. He hastily smiled and said, “It seems our Jiang family has produced a genius such as the young duke, and us old geezers probably would’ve never known if Jiang Zheng hadn’t said anything. Haha, the ancestors and forefathers of the Jiang family in the heavens above have bestowed upon us such a genius as the young duke. Our Jiang family is sure to attain our goals with further efforts. I’m going to use these old bones in my body to strive mightily for some results. I’m sure to attend the tribal

convention tomorrow with these old bones!”

“Go! We’ll naturally go! Our Jiang family has always been united as one in our control over the Jiang Han territory. Otherwise these tribes will really think that our Jiang family is one to ride roughshod over.”

“Indeed, we can’t allow a thorn such as Jing Man to appear within the tribes again!”

The elders all expressed their stances, and each one was more cooperative than the last. They were all experienced, and could naturally tell that the changes that had occurred in Jiang Chen weren’t false.

Besides, Jiang Chen would never lie about the Hidden Dragon Trials.

Some elders couldn’t help but think, “Could it be that this Jiang Chen has been a foppish dandy since young just as a disguise to deceive the outside world, and that his sights were set for the duke of first rank all along?”

Almost all the elders had the same thoughts as their gazes upon Jiang Chen changed. They no longer capitalized on their seniority, but instead held a few more traces of respect and modesty.

In this way, everyone made merry to their heart’s content, and returned home with satisfaction from this banquet.

At the end of the day, the elders of the clan were delighted to see and hear of Jiang Chen's strength. A strong heir with mighty strength would support the family and even bring it to higher prosperity.

Elder Xi had partaken of a bit wine because he was happy, so he returned home slightly tipsy.

"Grandfather, I'm going to go shopping with Xiaoqian tomorrow. I won't be going to the tribal convention."

"Father, I'm going to purchase some spirit medicine tomorrow. I also don't want to go to the convention."

"Granddaddy, tomorrow I..."

Elder Xi slammed a heavy palm onto the table as his long mustache bristled from his anger.

He had originally been in fine fettle, but so many people had popped out of the woodwork to request time off as soon as he'd sat down. Every single one of them wished to shirk their duties, obviously not paying attention to tomorrow's convention at all.

How could he not be enraged at this!

"Who is it that's not going? I'll break the damned legs of whoever

doesn’t go!” Elder Xi was truly enraged, and poked his finger angrily at a middle aged man. “Jiang Xiong, you’re my son. Just try saying again that you won’t go! Purchase spirit medicine? Don’t think this old man doesn’t know that you have a mistress in the Qinghua Alley, and that you rush there to fool around everyday!

And you, Jiang He! You’re my direct grandson, do you have any prospects for a future ahead of you? Spending your days tied to that chit of a girl at such a young age, do you have any aspirations at all?

And you, Li You, you’re my daughter’s son[1]. If you have no loyalty to the Jiang family at all, then what are you doing here?”

The elderly lord frothed at the mouth and glared with rage, pouring out such a torrent of abuse that the recipients didn’t even know where to look.

“Father!” Elder Xi’s son Jiang Xiong felt that he had lost quite a bit of face.

“Save your blather, all of you must go tomorrow. And, resolve all those inconsequential matters starting from tomorrow. As a disciple and son of the Jiang family, and as clan relatives, what use are you if you can’t resolve the difficulties and anxieties of the family?”

Elder Xi spoke with an awe inspiring sense of self righteousness.

This actually caused those present to be at a complete loss. They were this undisciplined and scattered usually, and they'd never seen the elderly lord object.

What was wrong with him today? Why had his tone changed after a bout of drinking wine? Had he been brainwashed by that Jiang Chen?

Jiang Xiong asked timidly, "Father, it's not like you don't know that our Jiang family will be unable to retain the dukedom. Even if you say this much, you will be hard pressed to stop this trend. Didn't you say that you'd long since let it go?"

"Bullshit! When did I ever say those words?" Elder Xi denied vehemently. "All of you remember this well. Not only will our Jiang family retain our dukedom, but we may even take another step forward and ascend in the ranks, to that of a dukedom of the first rank!"

Elder's Xi's tone was also vaguely agitated when he spoke of this.

Duke of the first rank was completely apart from those of the other ranks.

A duke of the first rank had the power to enfeoff others. The sons of the family could then be granted land and flourish!

The wealth and prosperity then, would be absolutely different from the current situation.

“Eh? Father, have you grown confused from the wine?” Jiang Xiong couldn’t hold his laughter in.

Elder Xi flung a huge slap across his face and rapidly stood up. “You bumbling idiot who hasn’t learned your lesson! I’m reminding for you for the last time that you must go to the convention tomorrow. And, you must display full courtesy and utmost deference. I won’t be able to save you if you offend the young duke!

And all of you, where’s your sense of propriety? Looking down on the young duke? Thinking he’s good-for-nothing? Bullshit! That’s him being a wolf in sheep’s skin, concealing his strength, and numbing the opponent! The young duke is attempting the rank of first this time, and he’s already completed the first mission. He’s already killed the once infamous rapist, the Lotus Harvester!”

“What?” Jiang Xiong was flabbergasted, his hand covering his face without a trace of temper.

He had killed the rapist, the Lotus Harvester?!

Although the Tianhu territory was quite far from here, information flowed between various territories. The were quite a few rumors in the Jiang Han territory regarding the infamous name of the Lotus Harvester.

It was said that this Lotus Harvester possessed training between

eight and nine meridians, and that he was adept in using sinister poison. His qinggong was excellent, and his being wily. He was an extraordinarily difficult person to handle.

The young duke had killed this rapist?

And had taken not even a month from receiving his mission to do so?

“All of you crawl back to your places and think carefully! If you no longer wish to be here, then get out of this family as early as possible. If you still want to be here, then look sharp and serve the young duke well!” Elder Xi huffily threw down these words and left.

Similar scenes were repeating continuously in the various homes of the elders.

All of those negative, sluggish fellows who wanted to layabouts were thoroughly rebuked by the elders without exception. Some were even subjected to a beating, like Jiang Xiong.

The next morning, titanic changes had occurred in the entire atmosphere of the Jiang family. A family clan that had been like scattered sands was suddenly tied together with an invisible rope.

Those who usually slept in, and those who usually slipped out early to fool around, all unusually showed up in the core areas of the Jiang Han manor. All of them were alert and ready for action,

dressed up finely.

Some of them with more clever minds hastened to step forward and greet Jiang Zheng with a smile when he walked out, “Jiang Zheng, has the young duke risen yet?”

“Risen? The young duke gets up at midnight every day to start training, and you ask if he’s risen yet?”

“Oh oh, my mistake, my mistake! Apologies, my apologies!”

Jiang Chen walked out from inside at this moment and smiled, “Everyone’s nearly here. The tribes should also be nearly here by now?”

Notes:

1] A daughter’s son isn’t considered a direct grandson in Chinese culture, because the daughter has married into another family and her children bear another surname.

Chapter 70: Vying With Each Other To Sign Up

There were ten major tribes within the entirety of the Jiang Han territory, and there were many more smaller tribes beneath each of the major tribes.

Each of these tribes was controlled by a family clan.

The Redbud Tribe, for instance, was controlled by the Jing family.

The Yinglan Tribe, for instance, was controlled by the tribe of Jiang Chen's mother, the Lan family.

Of course, each tribe would have many subordinate family clans apart from the core family clan. They would thus jointly form the ruling power.

Therefore, several hundred family clans had gathered in the main square of River Wave City today. Every single family clan was represented by at least twenty or thirty people – the gathering was truly great in strength and impetus.

Jiang Feng wasn't in the Jiang Han territory, so Jiang Tong was the acting duke. However, he naturally wouldn't steal his nephew's thunder today. Jiang Tong clearly knew that his nephew Jiang Chen was the star of today's show.

“Everyone, we have called you here today in the name of the duke because we have a joyous event of cosmic proportions to announce to everyone!”

A faint smile creased Jiang Tong’s face as his gaze swept in a circle, sweeping past the face of every tribe’s chief.

“Heh heh, the third lord has even mobilized the name of the duke to summon us here, this joyous event must be very important.”

“Indeed, third lord, don’t keep us guessing. Out with it, so everyone can share in the joy!”

Jiang Tong smiled, “Alright, then I won’t keep you in suspense. Everyone knows that the duke and his son have gone to the capital to participate in the Hidden Dragon Trials. The young duke has suddenly returned this time for none other than to come back and recruit for his personal guard. Once this guard is formed, it will form the basis of core power of the Jiang Han dukedom in the future!”

The young duke was recruiting for his personal guard?

That seemed nice, but none of the tribal family clans were tempted. All of them lowered their eyes, not wishing to exchange gazes with Jiang Tong, deathly afraid of Jiang Tong taking a fancy to them.

If any other young duke was recruiting for his personal guard,

the powers under his rule would have vied for the chance to sign up. However, this young duke had always been a good-for-nothing. If any of their sons or disciples associated with him, it was more than likely that they would end up facing disaster in the future.

Everyone was jittery in the Jiang Han territory now. Nine out of ten people all felt that Jiang Chen would be unable to retain his dukedom.

Therefore, how could they possibly be excited about the young duke recruiting for his personal guard? They couldn't avoid it like the plague fast enough!

Their reactions were within Jiang Tong's expectations.

"The requirements for these personal guards are also high. Not everyone can sign up. First, personal training must be at six meridians true qi. In addition, your age cannot be greater than twenty, and it would be preferable if the mind is both intelligent and smart..."

The people beneath the stage all snickered inwardly as Jiang Tong listed out a long list of requirements. You should be thanking the heavens and earth if anyone signs up when the young duke of your Jiang family is recruiting for his personal guard, and you've even got a list of requirements to boot?

There was naturally no response from anyone for a while. It was so silent that even a pin drop on the ground could be heard.

“These are the requirements, who would like to sign up?” Jiang Tong asked in a clear voice.

After Jiang Tong asked this question, whenever he swept his gaze in their direction, everyone ducked their heads or looked in another direction, afraid to meet his eyes and be called upon.

The atmosphere of the scene was beyond bizarre in the span of a moment.

Jiang Tong’s clan members all had grave expressions. They wanted to laugh, but didn’t dare to. They knew that Jiang Tong was doing this on purpose, wanting to test the influence of these tribes.

Jiang Tong circulated his gaze three times, and still no one responded.

Jiang Tong sighed and was about to say something when suddenly, an enigmatic voice rang out from outside the square. “Ah would like to sign up!”

Another voice also sounded, “Ah would also like to sign up!”

Two male youths who looked to be strong as a bear in the hips, and with a back as supple as a tiger’s, walked out with large strides towards Jiang Chen. One of them wore a large axe on his back, and the other wore a brass rod.

“Young duke Jiang! Ah am Qiao Shan, this is mine brother Qiao Chuan. The Qiao Third Hallmaster of the Hall of Healing is mine uncle. He introduced us’ns to come here.”

Qiao Shan, Qiao Chuan. Those twin brothers had arrived!

Jiang Chen chuckled, “You have also arrived. This is Guo Jin, the direct grandson of royal tutor Guo Shun. His training is at six meridians true qi. You will be fellow comrades in the future, and should be close to each other.”

The nephews of the third hallmaster of the Hall of Healing, the direct grandson of royal tutor Guo Shun.

These identities immediately became sensitive information in the ears of those tribal chiefs.

“Hmm? Something’s not right. The Hall of Healing has such a renowned reputation, and its hallmasters also have awe inspiring reputations. How would one let his nephews fool around with the son of a duke? The direct grandson of a royal tutor was an existence that could be connected all the way to the royal family, why would he be hanging around Jiang Chen?”

Some of the more sensitive tribal chiefs seem to have vaguely caught onto a few hints of something.

Guo Jin was a bit infuriated and walked out after he greeted the Qiao brothers. He swept his gaze over the crowd and said coldly,

“My surname is Guo. I was born in the capital and grew up in the capital. I’ve seen quite a few royal and noble sons. I find it rather odd though, now that I’ve arrived in the Jiang Han territory. The followers of other princes and noble sons all fawn over and curry their master’s favor. They’re extremely deferential and subservient. But all of your attitudes are as if being too close with your master is a type of disgrace?

Guo Jin smiled coldly. “However, according to my knowledge, those who can compete with our young duke in the Eastern Kingdom are as rare as the feathers of a phoenix and the horns of a unicorn. Even the heirs of the Duke of Soaring Dragon have quite a bit of dread when it comes to our young duke. I wonder what sort of mighty existence is worthy of your servile obeisance?”

Guo Jin came from the capital, and his words naturally carried some weight.

“My grandfather was a tutor at the royal court. The king and princess have all once benefited from my grandfather’s tutelage. These four big brother from the Sheng battalion are the elites of the Tiandu army, and are the personal guards that the princess herself picked for the young duke. I’m rather curious, even the elites of the Tiandu army are willing to acknowledge their allegiance to the young duke. Can it be that in your eyes, the young duke is still unworthy for you to declare yourselves for him?”

Guo Jin’s voice rang out clearly, thundering through the gathering like resonant bell, causing the blood of these tribal clans to thrum loudly.

No one dared suspect that Guo Jin was speaking falsely at such a gathering.

Besides, the aura of the four brothers from the Sheng battalion were right there. They were a presence that the duke himself, Jiang Feng, may not have even been able to suppress!

But at this moment, these four people were obediently standing beside Jiang Chen, awaiting his orders without the slightest hint of non acceptance or rebellion.

“Eh? Is this to say that us two brothers have made it here in time for a good show? Now this is hilarious. Even my uncle, at his level of existence, has committed himself irredeemably to the young duke. Do all of you think you’re more awesome than a hallmaster of the Hall of Healing?” Qiao Shan also spoke up.

“Heh heh...” Jiang Tong stepped out chuckling at this time. “Everyone, forgive me for not speaking clearly just now. The young duke is actually competing for the position of duke of first rank at this time’s Hidden Dragon Trials. He’s returned this time to execute the second mission and recruit eight personal guards.”

Duke of the first rank, mission of the first rank, and this was the second one!

The gathering was in an uproar when the news percolated through the crowd. Which of those present wasn’t a wily old fox? How could they not understand such sensitive connotations?

“Damn it, damn it. I misjudged and missed the prime opportunity to express my loyalty.”

“That damned Jiang Tong, why didn’t he say this earlier? He’s making us look bad on purpose!”

All the tribal chieftains were privately depressed. They didn’t blame themselves for their attitude of keeping discreetly out of harm, but rather blamed Jiang Tong for not being clear with his words.

“Everyone, the young duke is recruiting for eight personal guards this time, and three of the slots have been filled. There are five left. If you fulfill the requirements, then hand in a signup form.” Jiang Tong announced loudly.

In the span of that moment, all of the tribes started discussing amongst themselves

If it was a direct son of the tribal chieftain, they may not be willing to be a personal guard, even to a duke of the first rank.

Therefore, it was still a good thing if they could fight for a spot for their non direct descendents.

Around twenty applications were quickly handed in.

One had to say, a territory still had many young talents. There were quite a few youths under 20 years old with six meridians true

qi.

This didn’t even include the direct heirs of the tribal chieftains.

“Third uncle, help me go through the names on the list. Although potential is important, personality is even more so. My Jiang family doesn’t need the allegiance of those cowards who would get cold feet at critical times.”

Recruiting eight personal guards was still just a small interlude to Jiang Chen at the end of the day. His ambitions did not halt here.

Executing this mission was just going with the flow and the bigger picture. He merely didn’t wish to lose to anyone on the Hidden Dragon Trials!

With the aid of the Jiang family clan elders, Jiang Tong quickly decided upon three names.

These three were ones that they all felt were more dependable. They were all powers that were absolutely on the Jiang family’s side, whether in terms of birth or reputation. These three people were also not within the core center of power in their families. This would give them the impetus to make great efforts in forging ahead.

“Chen’er, the name has been erased from this application. There’s something fishy about this.” Jiang Tong frowned. “From the traces that were erased, this application should be the one for

your cousin, Xue Tong, also the son of your mother's younger sister?"

Xue Tong?

Jiang Chen had very few memories of this person in his past self's memories. He seemed to faintly recall a vague, thin figure. In his impressions, this person was someone on the sidelines who his grandmother didn't love, and his father didn't care for.

"Has anyone signed up from my mother's side of the family?" Jiang Chen was curious.

"Yes, Lan Yizhou, the son of your oldest uncle. However, his training is only at five meridians true qi and hasn't met the requirements at all. He's messing around, and we aren't considering him."

"Then what about Xue Tong?" Jiang Chen asked.

"Xue Tong is of six meridians true qi, but seems to be quite dismissed in your mother's side of the family. It looks like someone has tampered with his application."

"What are their reputations?"

"Lan Yizhou is the second son of the chief of the Yinglan Tribe. His personality is a bit proud and ungovernable. As for Xue Tong, he's always been a character on the sidelines, and has been bullied

by Lan Yizhou since young. He's the type that holds his tongue but has a lofty and unyielding character."

"Then it's Xue Tong." Jiang Chen settled on the seventh spot.

If he recruited a proud and ungovernable character like Lan Yizhou, it would only be providing an unstable factor for the team. Jiang Chen didn't wish to create such unnecessary trouble for himself.

It didn't matter if he was of five meridians true qi, Jiang Chen had ways for him to breakthrough.

But issues with personality, that was out of the question. A bad apple would ruin the bunch.

"I'm sorry I'm late, can we still sign up?" Just as Jiang Chen decided on the seventh spot, a weak and gentle voice sounded from the side. It seemed a bit familiar.

Jiang Chen tilted his head to the side, also slightly startled.

A young girl pushed through the crowd. She was wearing a downy yellow robe, had fair, translucent skin, and beautiful features. Because she had been traveling in a hurry, her face was red from exertion. She eep'ed when her gaze met Jiang Chen's as her charming face blushed even redder.

"You?"

Jiang Chen was astonished and baffled. This girl was the disciple of the Star Argus Palace North Sect in the Tianhu territory, Wen Ziqi!

She was also one of the young girls that Jiang Chen had rescued from the Lotus Harvester not long ago in the Tianhu territory. Jiang Chen involuntarily thought of the scene in the cave when he saw her.

Wen Ziqi was weak and lacked strength as her clothes accidentally dropped down, allowing Jiang Chen to gaze fully upon the two orbs in front of her chest...

Chapter 71: Aweing The Tribes

When Wen Ziqi saw that Jiang Chen had recognized her, she felt both shy in her heart and a kind of sweet joy.

Screwing up a courage that she had gotten from somewhere, this young girl who liked to blush gathered up her pluck and spoke lowly in the voice of a mosquito, “I heard that you were recruiting for your personal guard, so I hurried over to see if I could help you.”

Princess Gouyu had leveraged the power of the royal family to announce this news far and wide throughout all the territories. Jiang Chen hadn’t thought that Wen Ziqi would set out on this long trek from far, far away.

Judging from her body covered in dust from the road, she must have started on her way as soon as she heard the news.

Jiang Chen blanked momentarily and asked, “Has your honored master agreed for you to come?”

When her honored master was mentioned, Wen Ziqi’s body trembled slightly. Her right hand lightly twisted the bottom of her shirt, her fingers twisting around each other and appearing as if she was quite conflicted.

Jiang Chen smiled involuntarily. It looked like Wen Ziqi had snuck out behind her honored master’s back.

Wen Ziqi hastily spoke upon seeing Jiang Chen's smile, "Honored master wouldn't stop me even if she knew. She dotes on me the most."

Jiang Chen nodded. "Ah well, I happen to be short one person here. If Miss Ziqi doesn't feel that it's beneath you, then you can fill in this spot."

"Really?" Wen Ziqi was overjoyed upon hearing this words. She had been worried all along that she would be too late, worried that all the spots would be taken and there would be no place for her.

Who would've thought that she would make it just in time for the last spot.

Jiang Tong smiled upon seeing the gentle and refined Wen Ziqi, "Chen'er, do you know this young lady?"

"Mm. We were acquainted with each other that day when I was executing my mission in the Tianhu territory. We've met several times now. Her identity and personality are pretty dependable."

"Alright, since this is the case, we have successfully decided on all eight spots." Jiang Tong also heaved a sigh of relief. He hadn't been satisfied with any of the applications for the last spot.

It was naturally for the best that someone Jiang Chen approved of could fill the spot.

“Chen’er, they say that an acquaintance may not sow discord amongst intimate friends. You would rather recruit an outsider than have the son of your uncle. Where is the logic in this? Have I, your aunt, offended you somehow?”

Just as Jiang Chen was speaking, a luxuriously dressed, heavily made up woman swiftly dashed to the front of Jiang Chen and started complaining to him.

Jiang Chen recognized this woman from his past self’s memories. She should be his aunt, and the birth mother of that Lan Yizhou.

“Aunt, Uncle is a vaunted chief, younger cousin Yizhou will be able to make a name for himself in ways other than being in my personal guard. Why not give the the opportunity to those who need it more?”

Jiang Chen had to nicely persuade her as he had no desire to be entangled with a shrew.

“So what if he’s a big chief? That can only be passed onto one son, then the second son’s fortune and prosperity will be out in the cold. If he hangs around you, it will be the work of only a word from you to bestow a tribe onto your cousin Yizhou to rule over when you’re a duke in the future. Chen’er, let me tell you something. Your uncle spent quite a bit of effort into looking after your mother before she married. Now that your mother isn’t here, seeing your aunt is the same as seeing your mother. Although Yizhou is your cousin in name, what’s the difference between that

and your younger brother by blood? You can't disregard his matters. Can you bear to..."

"Aunt, younger cousin Yizhou is only of five meridians true qi. I'm powerless to take action even though I have a mind to help him accomplish his aims. I won't be able to satisfactorily complete my mission. If you love this nephew, Aunt, then surely you won't let me suffer defeat in the Hidden Dragon Trials? If I'm defeated, then how will Uncle hang onto his position as a big chief?"

"Eh?" The woman was momentarily dumbfounded upon hearing that her man may not even keep his position as a big chieftain.

Jiang Chen smiled and took this opportunity to leave.

Jiang Tong pronounced the shortlist of candidates at the scene.

"Guo Jin from the capital, the direct grandson of royal tutor, Guo Shun.

Qiao Shan, Qiao Chuan, nephews of the third hallmaster of the Hall of Healing.

Wen Ziqi from the Star Argus Palace of the Tianhu territory, old acquaintances with the young duke Jiang Chen.

Xue Tong, Yinglan Tribe of the Jiang Han territory, maternal cousin of the young duke.

Ke Mu, Summer Tribe of the Jiang Han territory, six meridians true qi.

Shen Yifan, Jade Dragon Tribe of the Jiang Han territory, six meridians true qi.

Bi Yun, Iron Mountain Tribe of the Jiang Han territory, six meridians true qi.”

The recruiting meeting was over when Jiang Tong concluded his announcement. Many of the families whose sons hadn’t been selected were all secretly dejected.

They had had a prime opportunity, but missed it.

“Will the chiefs of the ten big tribes please adjourn to the duke’s manor for a banquet. The families of the other smaller tribes are discharged. Travel back to your areas with no loitering.” Jiang Tong pronounced afterwards.

The convergence of all these powers on River Wave City was also a latent danger for the city. Since the mission was concluded, they naturally had to disperse.

Apart from Jing Man, the chiefs of the ten large tribes were all present. They naturally wouldn’t give up the chance to repair relations when they heard that the duke’s manor was even feting them with a banquet.

Except, the nine chiefs were all curious as to why the chief of the Redbud Tribe, Jing Man, was nowhere to be seen when even the name of the duke had been brought out?

This Jing Man was normally imperiously domineering, but had he dared openly defy the duke's name this time? This was really out of line!

One had to know that if a tribe defied the orders of the duke, then they would be punished!

The tribal chiefs brought these doubts with them to the banquet. Apart from the young duke Jiang Chen, all the Jiang family elders, including Jiang Tong, were present.

"Everyone, this time's banquet is first to reward you for always rushing about on Jiang Han territory business, and secondly to announce a matter of great importance to everyone."

Jiang Chen personally raised his glass as he one by one met the eyes of all the chiefs with a cool gaze, showing a relaxed confidence of superiority flowing through his eyes.

All of the chiefs felt a cold shiver travel down their backs when they were swept by Jiang Chen's gaze. They felt a vague hint of something big about to happen.

"Jing Man has had no respect for his superiors and has come to

the duke's manor on multiple occasions to behave wildly. He has even gone so far as to publicly challenge the duke's authority this time. He has been captured on my orders and is being held secretly!"

"What?"

"Jing Man, held secretly?"

This news also caused the faces of the chiefs, rulers of their own locality, to change drastically.

This was Jing Man! In the entire Jiang Han territory, Jing Man was the cream of the crop when it came to being domineering. Apart from Jiang Feng being able to suppress this person, even the other chiefs had to display a certain weakness in front of him.

Even Jiang Feng, the Duke of Jiang Han, had to think twice before taking action against Jing Man. But the young duke had taken Jing Man without the slightest change in his voice or composure.

"Well done! This Jing Man has always been domineering without boundaries, and his reputation is exceedingly poor amongst all the great tribes!" The first to speak up was naturally the chief of the Yinglan Tribe, Jiang Chen's uncle Lan Tianji.

"Right, it isn't the first time that Jing Man has gone to the duke's manor to behave atrociously and make a scene. He is receiving his

just desserts in being punished. Something was bound to happen sooner or later if he wasn't taken care of."

"The young duke is brilliant and wise! However, the influence of the Jing family of the Redbud Tribe is widespread and far reaching. Since Jing Man has been captured, the Jing family and local powers are likely to cause trouble."

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "This is why I've summoned you here. The Jing family has been able to be a tyrant for so long partly because they are truly a powerful local power, and partly because they do quite a bit of business. In addition, the land with the spirit vein in our Jiang Han territory runs through their tribal lands."

The big chiefs all nodded and looked at Jiang Chen with fresh eyes. How was this the young duke that they knew? How was this the original useless good-for-nothing?

This was absolutely a wolf in sheep's clothing, and a noble son who played the games of politics extremely well!

They finally believed in this moment that Jiang Chen had absolutely been playacting in order to confuse others before. This child most likely had had his sights set on duke of the first rank since he was young!

They had misjudged him. Everyone admitted that in their hearts now. They had truly misjudged the young duke Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen watched the performances of these people out of the corner of his eye, but said in an unhurried and not too slow fashion, “I have no interest in words expressing your loyalty. I say only this, this time, each tribe must send out fifty thousand men and horses. The duke’s manor will send out an army of a hundred thousand strong. We will ambush the Redbud Tribe as swiftly as a peal of thunder, leaving one with no time to cover their ears. We must make a clean sweep of all of Jing Man’s remaining confederates.”

Plucking up evil from the roots was common sense. The chiefs weren’t unduly surprised.

“After the remaining confederates of the Jing family are exterminated, I will send Elder Xi to personally oversee the Redbud Tribe region. I will also take out twenty percent of the profits from the land with the spirit vein and split it equally amongst the nine tribes.”

If his earlier words could be labelled as coercion, then the twenty percent profits would be temptation.

Coercion and promise of gain, both the carrot and stick were present.

How could the great chiefs hold out against this? Chief Lan Tianji of the Yinglan Tribe was the first to stand up, “I, Yinglan Tribe, will protect and support the Jiang family unto the death! We are willing to fight those traitors to the death!”

“We are willing to join our forces with the duke’s manor and exterminate the traitors!”

The ten large tribes in the Jiang Han territory had competed amongst themselves, with the Redbud Tribe lorded over everyone. This had been the situation for many years, and Jing Man was extremely domineering to boot.

Under these circumstances, these people would likely add insult to injury by dropping stones down a well even without coercion and temptation, not to mention when there was gain to be had.

Jiang Tong looked at Jiang Chen with a meaningful glance, secretly astonished. This young duke didn’t do things by half measures alright. His boldness of vision was astounding. He had given out twenty percent profit just like that.

Tying the dukedom together with the tribes via profit, how would the tribal chiefs not work together with care and energy? This was far more useful than any form of threats.

“Everyone, our Jiang Han dukedom has worked together with the Pill King Garden before. Our cooperation partner is now the Hall of Healing. This is also to say that our profits with the Hall of Healing will be double those of when we worked with the Pill King Garden. What looks like twenty percent to you is actually forty percent in terms of original profits.”

Under the circumstances, Jiang Chen didn’t mind revealing a bit of core intelligence to them.

The Hall of Healing!

This wasn't the first time that these people had heard the name of the Hall of Healing today. The Hall of Healing was the benchmark of the spirit medicine world in the Eastern Kingdom. How could they not be aware of the biggest heavyweight in the spirit medicine world?

"Heh heh, you probably don't know? The Hall of Healing relies on our young duke for many things. Also, another thing that you may not know is that the royal princess Eastern Zhiruo's illness was yet to be resolved after seeing many famous doctors, but the symptoms lessened when the medicine took effect after our young duke made a move!"

One had to say, Jiang Zheng was a very useful steward. Whenever his master needed it, he would voice the thoughts that his master was not at liberty to say. He would employ such a method at just the right time and say it.

What did these words mean? This meant that the young duke's backer was the royal family themselves, and the Hall of Healing!

All the chiefs present were dumbfounded and astounded when they heard these words. They looked at each other, at a loss of what to do.

Jiang Chen, however, smiled. "Come, drink! Jiang Zheng always likes to task his lips and tongue over some small matters. Everyone

can listen to these matters of the royal princess, but let it stay in your heart. Don't spread this around."

"Yes yes, who dares to brashly spread information regarding the royal family's secrets?"

Each one of them mumbled "yes, yes" as they raised their glasses, but had no appetite for food. How could they still be in the mood to taste the niceties of the exquisite wine? Their minds were filled with the young duke Jiang Chen's marvelous changes, and all sorts of news that broke through the limits of their expectations. They didn't know what sort of approach they should be taking towards this young duke.

But one thing was for certain, and that was that the young duke Jiang Chen would outdo his father Jiang Feng!

Chapter 72: A Grand Gift For The Personal Guard

Without their leader Jing Man, although the remaining confederates of the Redbud Tribe raised a loud hue and cry, many of the internal powers that the Jing family had originally suppressed all turned their coats in the face of a large army pressing on the border. They worked in collusion with the army, one from within and the other from the outside. The army took over the Redbud Tribe region with almost no slaughter at all.

The remaining confederates of the Jing family were all rounded up and locked behind bars.

At the same time, a predetermined power from the Jiang family clan took up residence within the Redbud region.

Jiang Chen had made a simple agreement which had to be observed by all the elders of the family clan, and had stuck the son of his third uncle, Jiang Yu, into the Redbud region. Jiang Chen exhorted the clan elders to treat Jiang Yu as a crucial center and cultivate him.

Although jealous, these people all knew that Jiang Yu was the one most intimate with Jiang Chen within the Jiang family clan.

Jiang Chen was Jiang Feng's only child and son. This meant that Jiang Chen had no other blood brothers or sisters. In this way, since they had been close since childhood, Jiang Yu undoubtedly became like Jiang Chen's blood brother, just as if Jiang Tong was

the same as the Duke of Jiang Han.

Upon seeing Jiang Chen employ lightning-fast methods to cow the various chiefs into submission and quell the Redbud Tribe rebellion, Jiang Chen's young followers were all privately overjoyed. To have such methods and be able to take on such burdens at this tender age, they all felt that they had done the right thing in following this young duke!

Jiang Chen's newly recruited eight guards were demonstrating their knowledge of martial dao within the training fields of the Jiang Han manor. Since they were comrades now, none of them wanted to admit to being inferior. All wanted to demonstrate their strength in front of their comrades to avoid being underestimated by others.

Jiang Chen merely observed and didn't make any evaluations.

After the demonstrations had run through once, he already had a few thoughts in mind.

"From today onwards, the eight of you will eat at the same table now. I won't ask too much of you but only want to remind you of one point. You can retain your own personalities and your own thoughts. However, from this moment on, you're all in the same boat and thus are all in this together. You are comrades in the battlefield, which means you are a partner in which one of the others can entrust their back to. If anyone can't do it, then say so now. There's still time to back out!"

Jiang Chen’s tone was severely grave.

What was a personal guard? At the heart of the matter, it meant to be death warrior, a type of existence that was willing to die at any time for their master.

Personal guards were often the ones that a master trusted the most, and were entrusted the greatest amount of matters to.

Personal guards were the most intimate battle companions to each other. They were a mutual interdependence and would live and die together!

No one backed out. Resolute determination was written on their faces.

“Good, this is also why I’ve chosen you. I only hope that none of you will disappoint me.”

“And I, Jiang Chen, will absolutely not let you down!”

Jiang Chen was confident and at ease as he swept his gaze over the eight faces. “In order to prove that your decision was correct, I’ve decided to give you a welcome gift in this moment.”

A gift at the first meeting?

Qiao Shan scratched his ears and cheeks, smiling honestly, “Mine

uncle says that the young duke is too deep to be fathomable. Looks like uncle he didn't lie to us'ns!"

Guo Jin was indifferent to the idea of a greeting gift. When he saw Jiang Chen burn incense and pay his respects to his ancestors, he had sworn an oath to himself that he would follow this master until death.

As for the others, Wen Ziqi's personality was easy going, without greed for anything in particular.

Although traces of expectation flowed in the eyes of others, they didn't lose their composure.

Jiang Chen nodded, "You must remember that when you accept my gift, it will be as if your body is now imprinted with my brand. You must not reveal this gift to anyone without my permission, even to those you are closest to. Otherwise, I will personally end you."

These people felt quite perplexed by the increased gravity of Jiang Chen's tone. It was only a greeting gift, was it really that serious? But seeing that the young duke was acting with such due care and solemness, their hearts tightened as they vaguely guessed that this greeting gift was no ordinary gift!

"Don't think wild thoughts. The weight of this gift is absolutely beyond your speculation. Even in the entirety of the Eastern Kingdom, no one else would be able to give another gift such as this."

What?

Everyone was visibly moved. No one else could afford to give such a gift in the Eastern Kingdom? This... can it be that even the royal family would be unable to give such a gift?

Just what was this?

Qiao Shan was quite impatient and could scarcely wait! His eyes stared unblinkingly at Jiang Chen, full of ardent fervor.

“All of you are currently of six meridians true qi right now, but I can help you breakthrough to seven meridians true qi within ten days!”

“What? Breakthrough to seven meridians true qi within ten days?” Qiao Shan was the first to cry out. “Young duke, don’t bluff us’ns. Ah have been stuck on six meridians true qi for around half a year.”

Even the gentle and refined Wen Ziqi shot out looks of incredulity from her eyes.

Guo Jin, on the other hand, had heard many rumors regarding Jiang Chen previously because he was from the capital. He was rather a believer, “Since the young duke has spoken, how could there be falsehood?”

“Six meridians true qi, all of you here have spent either two or three months to half a year to a full year after reaching six meridians true qi. There is no other reason for your inability to breakthrough other than being unable to sense the seventh acupoint, because there is a bank between the intermediate realm of true qi and the advanced realm of true qi. This moat needs to be explored, to be perceived in due time. Have you stopped at six meridians true qi because you cannot perceive the seventh acupoint?”

“That is truly the case.” Qiao Shan complained.

“The seventh acupoint is fleeting and intransient, and indeed hard to sense.” Guo Jin also nodded.

Wen Ziqi didn’t say anything, but her expression as if deep in thought already verified the accuracy of this statement.

The others all nodded as well.

“I have a set of methods that can teach you how to locate the acupoints. You will no longer have to fret over being unable to locate the acupoints when training in the realm of true qi in the future. You will be able to easily locate the acupoints with this method, allowing you to achieve double the results with half the effort on your path of training!”

The eight guards were noticeably moved after these words were said.

Easily locate acupoints!

Was… was this true?

One had to know that the most difficult thing when training in the realm of true qi wasn't clearing the meridians, but locating the acupoints. If the acupoints couldn't be located, then there was no way of clearing the meridians, how could be a breakthrough be achieved then?

It could be said that the most amount of time in training martial dao was spent on perceiving the acupoints. If the process of locating the acupoints could be skipped, how could this only be doubling the results with half the effort?

This would be saving tons of effort compared to others!

The method of "True Acupoint Resonance" was without a doubt, a revolutionary secret method for the entire Eastern Kingdom. However, it was only a lowly sort of existence in Jiang Chen's memory banks.

Jiang Chen was the epitome of cautiousness not because of how valuable "True Acupoint Resonance" might be, but because if word of this matter got out, many hidden troubles would lurk in the background.

Jiang Chen had previously passed on the "True Acupoint Resonance" method to his father and his two best friends.

These eight personal guards were the third set of people worthy of receiving this inheritance.

“I will be passing on this method to you. If any of you secretly pass it on and word of this travels out, the others will rise together and attack the person in a group, and I, Jiang Chen, will not go easy on this person!” Jiang Chen once again issued a warning.

“The young duke treats us so kindly and generously, how could we dare to fail and let him down?” Ke Mu from the Summer Tribe of the Jiang Han territory was the first to step forward and make a pledge.

The others all stepped forward and swore an oath afterwards.

“Perk your ears up and listen carefully, I will only verbally pass on this inheritance and won’t give you any books to record this down in. How much you can comprehend and remember will be up to you. I will only say this three times.”

Only three times!

The faces of the eight personal guards all became quite grave. Three times, but they needed to receive the method with their strong memories and comprehension abilities.

Just as he said, Jiang Chen went over the method three times.

What Jiang Chen hadn't expected was that the first person who seemed to think of something and sit down cross-legged where he stood to contemplate theory was Xue Tong, that thin, young man buried in oblivion.

Afterwards, Guo Jin and Wen Ziqi also seemed to be deep in thought as they sat down cross-legged.

Brothers Qiao Shan and Qiao Chuan, Ke Mu, Shen Yifan, and Bi Yun all sat down cross-legged as well, meditating on the theory and using the newly learnt method to perceive the seventh acupoint.

There truly was a difference in potential when it came to martial dao training.

Xue Tong was the first to contemplate and the first to see results.

Xue Tong's eyes opened after an hour, with various sorts of incredulous looks shooting out of his eyes. His gaze at Jiang Chen was suffused with endless gratitude and admiration.

"Elder cousin Jiang Chen and I have never interacted much since we were young. To think that cousin Jiang Chen would rather offend aunt and uncle to choose me instead of Lan Yizhou. What do I, Xue Tong, have? My parents died early and I was bullied by Lan Yizhou since I was young. Compared to Lan Yizhou, I have nothing, and yet elder cousin still chose me, trust me, and bestowed upon me this great change in fortune. If in this life I, Xue Tong, don't follow elder cousin to accomplish something grand, then how could I face my parents in the other world? How would I

be worthy of elder cousin's generous treatment of me?"

Although Xue Tong appeared cold and aloof, he was only cold on the outside and actually warm on the inside. He would remember steadfastly the drops of kindness from others. Jiang Chen had practically helped him be reborn by choosing him and changing his fortunes. How could Xue Tong not understand the concept of gratitude?

Lan Yizhou's training wasn't enough? Not up to standard? These were all pretexts that elder cousin had used to fob off his aunt. Elder cousin was so capable, would he worry about not being able to raise Lan Yizhou's training to six meridians true qi?

What did this mean?

This meant that in elder cousin's heart, the position of him, Xue Tong, was greater than Lan Yizhou's!

A gentleman is ready to die for his bosom friends!

Xue Tong's blood was thrumming ardently at this moment as he was filled with gratitude and adoration towards Jiang chen.

Jiang Chen flicked a glance at Xue Tong, knowing that Xue Tong had already located the seventh acupoint and was merely waiting for the prime opportunity to breakthrough.

He smiled faintly and nodded at Xue Tong, indicating for him not

to speak anymore, less he affect other people's comprehension.

A single glance made Xue Tong feel as if he was bathed by the spring wind and his heart surged with emotions.

After not too much longer, the others also successfully located the seventh acupoint.

"Wonderful, awesome, haha, to think that it would really work!" Qiao Shan capered in his extreme delight. "Haha, Ah finally have the chance to assail seven meridians true qi!"

Although the others didn't lose their composure like Qiao Shan, happiness was written all over their faces and their looks towards Jiang Chen changed as well.

If it was said that they had the respect and loyalty of a subordinate to the young duke before, then they absolutely worshipped Jiang Chen like paying homage to deities or Buddha now.

They were well too aware of what this method meant.

Such a method in defiance of nature was likely the only one of its kind in the surrounding sixteen kingdoms, not to mention the Jiang Han territory or Eastern Kingdom!

Chapter 73: Legacy Of Formation

Jiang Chen made a motion, “No matter what method you use, you must break through to seven meridians true qi within ten days.”

Jiang Chen had given a non-negotiable order, and created a bit of urgency amongst the eight personal guards.

Only five or six days had passed from when Jiang Chen had selected his second mission until now. He still had quite a bit of time left.

After some calculations, he had decided to set a reasonable timeframe of ten days. It gave a slight sense of urgency, but wasn’t too hasty. It would be a time limit that would be just enough to stimulate their potential.

Jiang Chen planned on using these ten days well.

First, the changes in the Redbud region of the Jiang Han territory needed some time to be fully digested.

Second, Jiang Chen also didn’t want to let this time idly slip by. He wanted to undergo a solid bout of training in the Jiang Han territory.

Time was money, and every minute, every second after he’d reincarnated was beyond precious to him.

In the next ten days, Jiang Chen consistently and persistently held on to an extremely regulated schedule every day. However, he would always take some time out of each day to handle some matters of the territory and to review some intelligence sent back from the Redbud region.

He had created this mess and must clean up after it, lest it affect the greater picture and shake the Jiang family's political foundations. This was one thing that Jiang Chen didn't wish to see.

It was a good thing that the Jing family's tyrannical domineering performance in ordinary times had caused them to lose the hearts of many people. After exterminating the Jing family, the reactions from various parts of the Jiang Han territory were actually quite calm, with no backlash whatsoever.

"Xiaoyu, I hope you can make use of this opportunity to become more mature." Jiang Chen held this expectation deep within his heart. He knew better than anyone that if the Jiang Han territory was to continue to reside within the Jiang family's control in the future, then Jiang Yu must become the future Duke of Jiang Han.

He, Jiang Chen, possessed far-reaching ambitions. It was impossible for him to give up pursuing martial dao for a mere dukedom.

Ten days time passed by peacefully.

“Time indeed passes quickly. Ten days have flown by so calmly and speedily. Although I have yet to break through to nine meridians true qi, I already possess the qualifications to assail that level. I wonder how the eight of them have done?”

Indeed, none of the eight had let him down. They had all ascended after ten days of hard work.

Xue Tong had been the first to break through on the fourth day.

Wen Ziqi and Guo Jin had spent six days.

The Qiao brothers had broken through on the seventh day.

The remaining three had all broken through on the eighth and ninth days!

“Very good, you haven’t disappointed me.” Jiang Chen nodded. “My mission is not only to recruit eight personal guards, but also to pass a test. This test will surely be pertain to martial dao. All of you now possess seven meridians true qi, and thus, logically speaking, should have no problems handling the test. However, in the case of any unexpected developments, I will pass onto you a set of martial arts techniques according to each of your characteristics. I will also pass on one set of offensive and defensive techniques, so that when you face enemies, you won’t have to fight separately and will instead be able to demonstrate an astonishing group fighting competency.”

Jiang Chen had spent quite a bit of time and effort thinking about how to arrange these eight personal guards during this time.

Of course, Jiang Chen wouldn't be overly radical at this stage and pass onto them some nature-defying methods. The techniques that he had chosen were all according to each person's unique characteristics. He'd chosen ones that would register as amongst the elite in the Eastern Kingdom repertoire of methods, but none that would exceed the Eastern Kingdom's range of acceptance.

Although they were his personal guards, Jiang Chen still didn't wish to spoil their growth through excessive enthusiasm. Firstly, because one couldn't reach towards the sky with merely one step of martial dao training, and secondly, that it was actually a form of protection in not passing onto them any nature defying methods.

Of course, Jiang Chen had many more choices to choose from when it came to battle formations.

Jiang Chen had chosen a deeper method to combine eight people as one.

"This set of 'Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation' is a battle formation that can be used to both attack and defend. When faced with an enemy, its changes are numerous. Its iterations are even harder to predict when attacking and defending. If you are able to comprehend sixty or seventy percent, with your current abilities, even a few true qi masters will be unable to break your formation. When the opponents are your peers, you will be able to handle even a hundred with ease."

“A few true qi masters? Eight against a hundred peers?” Qiao Shan’s large eyes blinked, astounded again.

“Qiao Shan, stop being so wound up and overreactive as a result. The young duke must have his reasons for saying so.” The eight personal guards had thoroughly become familiar with Jiang Chen’s strength and mysteriousness after the matter of locating the acupoints.

“Heh heh, Ah was shocked. Being able to battle against several true qi masters is enough to make anyone’s blood boil.”

“That’s under the conditions of you being able to comprehend sixty to seventy percent. If you can comprehend eighty percent, then it wouldn’t be an impossible thing to kill a true qi master. If you comprehend ninety percent, killing a true qi master will be as simple as killing a dog.”

Jiang Chen was actually being a bit conservative when he spoke like this.

“Then.. what if we comprehend a hundred percent?” Qiao Shan asked haltingly.

“A hundred percent?” Jiang Chen smiled. “Let’s put it this way, if the eight of you are able to comprehend a hundred percent, then you would be invincible within the realm of the Eastern Kingdom, apart from the spirit dao practitioners. If you are able to ascend to the realm of true qi masters in the future, even those who have just

set foot into spirit dao will have to keep their distance from you!”

“Spirit dao practitioners keeping their distance from us’ns?” Qiao Shan’s tongue was about to tie itself into knots as a fervent light shone in his eyes. He itched to immediately start practicing this formation and find a spirit dao practitioner to to test and corroborate this!

“Qiao Shan, you’re barely retaining your composure again. The young duke is saying that all of us need to join the ranks of the true qi masters and fully comprehend this formation before we have the qualifications to battle spirit dao practitioners.” Guo Jin dumped a timely bucket of cold water on him.

“Heh heh, true qi masters, we will surely be able to advance! But Ah’ve yet to see one of those legendary spirit dao practitioners. Mine uncle’s position is so high and he’s hung around the capital for so many years – he doesn’t seem to have ever seen a spirit dao practitioner either.”

No wonder Qiao Shan was so excited. For a common, ordinary kingdom, the existence of a spirit dao practitioner was basically on the same level as divine myths – living on only in legends.

Although there were rumors that the Eastern Kingdom did have spirit dao practitioners, not that many in the entire Eastern Kingdom had ever enriched their knowledge by actually seeing what one of the spirit dao practitioners looked like.

Therefore, in the hearts of all the youths pursuing martial dao in

the Kingdom, the existence of spirit dao practitioners were that of legends, as if symbolic totems.

To try and think about it, how great a temptation would it be to battle a spirit dao practitioner under these circumstances? How honorable would it be? No wonder Qiao Shan utterly lost his composure.

A spirit dao practitioner was an absolutely divine existence to those ordinary practitioners.

“Formation training is not the matter of one day and night. The pressing matter for all of you at the moment is training your true qi and martial arts techniques. Guo Jin, focus on the dao of the blade. Qiao brothers, one of you take the axe, the other familiarize himself with brass rods. Both are heavy weapons that can fully display your strength. Wen Ziqi, Ke Mu, and Bi Yun, you all use swords, but the dao of the sword is broad and profound. Each of you will walk your own different path. Shen Yifan, you take the spear. It’s domineering and direct, a tough and fierce path. Xue Tong, you’re different from them as your technique does not fall into a set pattern.”

Xue Tong’s expression became downcast. Although he was the younger cousin of the young duke, he had been bereft of parents since young and lived in the house of the family from his mother’s side. He had been bullied by his older cousin since young and sought survival in the cracks. It had already been quite difficult for him to train his true qi to six meridians.

As for martial arts techniques, the Lan family of the Yinglan

Tribe had never given any thought of preparing any for him. It could even be said that the Lan family either by design or by accident, even oppressed Xue Tong.

They didn't want Xue Tong to become too prominent and outshine the sons of the Lan family. After all, Xue Tong was also a relative of the duke's family. What if his potential was too strong, resulting in preferment from the duke's manor? Wouldn't it turn into the Lan family being suppressed in the future?

Because of these reasons, Xue Tong had had an exceedingly difficult existence in the Lan family. Therefore, his martial arts techniques were quite simplistic and crude.

"Xue Tong, what do you like? Or rather, what weapons are you most disposed towards?"

"I like concealed weapons, particularly the bow and arrow."

"Bow and arrow?" Jiang Chen's thoughts moved. There was indeed a lack of someone skilled at surprise attacks amongst these eight. Xue Tong's potential was the highest, it would be a nice choice if he concentrated on the way of surprise attacks.

"Alright, when we return to the capital, I will purchase a fine bow for you at the first opportunity. You will begin practicing the bow and arrow from this day forth."

"Bi Yun, I've heard that you like to research poisons. You can

also spend more effort and thought in this regard. You are my personal guards and thus should be widely practiced in all sorts of ways. Additional skills are never considered an increased burden on the body. The more skills you have and the more practiced you are, the better you will be able to retain your lives in the future."

The eight of them all nodded their heads as they felt the young duke made quite a bit of sense.

On the path of martial dao, the more skills and talents one had meant an additional layer of guarantee. After all, the world of martial dao was filled with strange and treacherous currents. Many times, it wasn't the strongest one who was the last person left standing.

Just as Jiang Chen was training his eight personal guards, Jiang Tong came to visit and was in an extreme hurry.

"Third uncle, what matter has caused you to be in such a rush?"

"Chen'er, an urgent message has just come from the Redbud region with three feathers stuck to it. This represents urgent intelligence of the highest grade."

"What intelligence?"

"The letter didn't say, just that a bizarre matter has occurred in the Redbud region and requests that the young duke must hasten over to take charge of the situation!"

“Could this letter be a deceit?” Jiang Chen asked.

“No deceit. The letter contains my Jiang family’s secret code and the handwriting is also Xiaoyu’s handwriting.”

Something large had happened but the letter didn’t offer an explanation.

Mutiny from his troops? That shouldn’t be the case. The remaining confederates of the Redbud region had been fully exterminated. The other tribes temporarily couldn’t find an excuse to rebel.

Besides, if the other tribes rebelled, it wouldn’t be the Redbed region sending urgent intelligence back.

Invasion from a strong enemy?

It didn’t seem like it. If a strong enemy invaded, there would be no need for secrecy in the letter.

“Since this is the case, I will set out immediately. We should be able to make it there before noon on the backs of fast horses.”

Jiang Chen wasn’t an irresolute and hesitant person. He immediately summoned his troops and prepared fast horses, setting out on his way.

Jiang Chen was unafraid of any conspiracy developing in the Jiang Han territory. Judging from the letter, it must be that some bizarre development had occurred in the Redbud region, and it was a change that must be kept secret.

Otherwise, Jiang Yu could absolutely speak clearly in the letter.

Galloping quickly on the backs of horses, they sped along the way. Jiang Chen and his retinue entered the Redbud region before noon.

“Brother, you’re here.” It was as if Jiang Yu had seen a savior when he saw Jiang Chen, and he welcomed Jiang Chen into the secret room.

“Xiaoyu, what is going on?” Jiang Chen furrowed his brow.

“Brother, bizarre happenings. The strangest thing. I’ve already given orders to seal this news. Even the elders of the family clan, apart from Elder Xi, are being kept in the dark right now. I dare not announce it.”

“Oh?” Jiang Chen’s interest was piqued upon seeing Jiang Yu so solemn.

“Brother, our medicine boy went to the land with the spirit vein to water the plots last night at dusk as usual, but the spirit medicine in the fields suddenly spontaneously matured!”

Chapter 74: Odd Happenings At The Spirit Medicine Garden

“Ripened? Instantaneously?”

“Well, it can’t be said that it was instantaneous. There was originally still half a year left in the spirit medicines’ maturing cycle. There was at least a month left until they ripened. But these spirit medicines suddenly ripened yesterday, and they were full of spirit energy. In terms of quality, they were actually a grade higher than the spirit medicines that had matured before!”

This was indeed an odd happening!

Although the cultivation of spirit medicines was more particular than that of ordinary crops, it was impossible for a miracle such as ripening overnight to occur.

However, such a bizarre occurrence had indeed happened.

“Take me to it,” Jiang Chen was unable to make much of a judgement without actually seeing things for himself.

Jiang Yu hadn’t spoken a single false word. When Jiang Chen saw that batch of spirit medicine, he saw that they had indeed matured and exuded a thick sense of spirit energy. They were indeed a grade higher in quality than those that had matured before.

Jiang Chen once again creased his brow, but something didn't add up in this matter no matter how much he thought about it.

Even with his plentiful knowledge of spirit medicine from his past life, he didn't have the answer nor did he know how to respond..

A same batch of spirit medicine was planted roughly one kilometer away from this patch, but it was still a patch of green shoots and was at least two months away from ripening.

But the spirit medicines on the two sides were of the same breed and planted at the same time. Even the methods and process in which they'd been raised were the same.

"Collect a few samples of soil for me. I'll test the soil." Jiang Chen was a connoisseur of spirit medicines, and the first problem he thought of was that of the soil changing.

But, after testing the soil collected from various corners, they discovered that there was not much difference in the soil. It was practically the same.

"Is someone playing a malicious trick and applying spirit fertilizer to this patch?" Jiang Chen thought of this point but then immediately discarded this possibility.

There was a natural rhythm to cultivating spirit medicine. Spirit fertilizer could help the spirit medicine grow better and shorten

the cycle of growth, but it wouldn't make the spirit medicine mature overnight.

If one wanted to make spirit medicine mature overnight, then the amount of spirit fertilizer needed would absolutely exceed the value of this spirit medicine by ten times, or even a hundred times.

No one would commit such a boring act.

"Or could it be that a strong practitioner passed by carrying a strong spirit weapon, and the spirit energy from the weapon leaked out, unintentionally benefiting this patch of soil?"

This possibility seemed triflingly insignificant.

Putting aside the fact that it was impossible for a practitioner on such a strong level to appear in this common, ordinary kingdom. Even if such a practitioner did pass by, there would be noticeable traces of such a strong spirit energy. It would be impossible for only this patch to benefit and nowhere else.

"Could it be that some secluded practitioner is playing a prank?" Jiang Chen even thought of such a farfetched possibility.

A light wind breezed over as Jiang Chen lightly shook his head, throwing those random, laughable speculations to the back of his mind.

"Xiaoyu, you have handled this matter properly. Temporarily

seal off news of this and harvest the spirit medicine as they've ripened. Continue to sow the seeds and observe what other changes occur. I will spend a few days here and wait and see what occurs."

Jiang Chen ordered.

Jiang Yu nodded and hesitated momentarily, asking, "Should we ask the duke to come back..."

Jiang Chen waved his hand, "No need. The winds and clouds of the political situation change rapidly within the capital, and a slight move on one part may affect the whole. He will absolutely be unable to leave at this moment."

Even if Jiang Feng returned, he was sure to be at a loss of what to do. Within the Eastern Kingdom, if he, Jiang Chen, couldn't understand something behind spirit medicine, then it would be futile for anyone else to come.

Jiang Yu told the medicine boy to harvest the spirit medicine according to Jiang Chen's instructions, and to begin sowing seeds in the late afternoon.

"All of you take notice that the matters of the spirit medicine garden must not be revealed to the outside world. Otherwise you will be subjected to the family rules!" Jiang Yu warned severely.

It was a good thing that the plots were independent of each other

within the spirit medicine garden, with mutual noninterference. The matters that had occurred within the spirit garden hadn't made their way out yet.

Due to Jiang Yu's timely information blockade, the true status of the situation had yet to spread.

After a night, Jiang Chen came to this plot of land early next morning. His eyes fell on the seeds from yesterday. They had already sent out young shoots, and were already two to three inches tall.

This... this was an insane speed of growth!

"Brother, this..." Jiang Yu was also dumbfounded by this scene. The medicine boys were also bewildered. They had the most dealings with spirit medicine and had a thorough understanding of the cultivation cycle of spirit medicines.

This scene was absolutely incredible.

"Jiang Yu, seal off all information flow and allow no one to approach this plot of land."

Jiang Chen also had a head full of questions. Although it looked like it was absolutely a good thing for the spirit medicine garden to be so miraculous as to shorten the cultivation period, Jiang Chen had a foreboding feeling prickle down his back.

One had to remember that in his past life, Jiang Chen was widely experienced and had seen all the various theories beneath the heavens. Something falling from the heavens into one's lap like this often concealed a hidden mystery and danger!

Jiang Chen felt slightly frustrated that there was something he couldn't resolve.

"Brother, this isn't a bad thing, don't worry about it. The wind is mild and the sun is bright today. Why don't you and I amuse ourselves and scale Purple Cloud Peak to survey the beautiful scenery of the Redbud region?"

Purple Cloud Peak was located not too far from the spirit medicine garden and the distance in a straight line did not exceed five kilometers. After scaling its heights, looking out would open one's mind and heart.

Jiang Chen brought his personal guards and scaled the Purple Cloud Peak with Jiang Yu's accompaniment. They looked out after climbing to the peak, and all that fell within sight belonged to the Redbud region.

Jiang Chen deployed his "God's Eye" and his vision stretched out even further in a continuous stream, without boundary or end.

Suddenly, Jiang Chen's eyes dropped onto the spirit medicine garden and his gaze abruptly halted.

When viewed from above, the spirit medicine garden was actually shrouded in a light, misty haze. If he hadn't viewed it from afar, he never would've detected the abnormality when he was close to it.

But gazing out whilst standing from a high vantage point, he was able to discern the differences.

There was actually a thin layer of smoke clouding the air above the spirit medicine garden. It seemed like fog, yet wasn't. It was muggy and indistinct, unable to be described or explained.

"Xiaoyu, look at that medicine garden!"

Xiaoyu followed the sound of his voice and also saw the strange phenomenon. "Brother, what is that? Is it the legendary spirit energy? Tsk tsk, this is too amazing."

"Look carefully. This smoky haze is encircling the medicine garden. When considering it as a whole, does it look like an image or anything in particular?"

After perusing it carefully, Jiang Yu also spoke in surprise, "Brother, I wouldn't have been able to make it out if not for your reminder. This actually does seem like something after a careful look."

"What does it look like?"

“Talons, it looks like the talons of a large beast. Look, the four raised patches of soil in the spirit medicine garden looks like the four sharp talons of a large beast. This part in the back looks like the palm behind the talons. And this part, it looks like where the base of the talons connects to the leg. It really does look like it! Tsk tsk, the divine force that created nature is amazing, too amazing!”

Jiang Yu expressed many astonished sounds, but he didn’t see Jiang Chen’s expression become more and more frozen in seriousness.

“Jiang Yu, hasten down the mountain, quickly! Destroy the spirit medicines in that patch of land. Sow no more seeds in that patch of land, quickly!”

Jiang Chen’s entire body sprang up like the bowstring of a bow as he stood up.

“Brother, what’s the matter?”

“Don’t ask me questions, just do as I say!” Jiang Chen’s face was darkened as he beckoned to his subordinates. “We go down from the mountain!”

Jiang Yu had followed Jiang Chen since he was young and now that he knew that Jiang Chen was of a mind to foster him, he naturally had the utmost faith in Jiang Chen’s words now.

Once traveling down the mountain, Jiang Yu instructed the

medicine boys to destroy all the spirit crops within this patch of land. He reminded the medicine boys over and over again not to breathe a hint of what had happened here, upon penalty of death!

None of them dared to ask much, seeing that Jiang Chen's face was gravely solemn.

Jiang Chen took several turns around the four corners of the spirit medicine garden and looked around. His brows became more and more knitted together, as if he was remembering something and wanted to prove something.

After a long while, Jiang Chen walked over in Jiang Yu's direction.

"Xiaoyu, come here. I'll hand draw a map for you. Send some men to investigate the directions according to the distance and scale of this map. Find out whether or not spirit medicine is being planted in the soil in these areas."

Jiang Chen started drawing. He didn't draw a shape, but dotted various regions in numerous corners.

He then confirmed the direction and distance between each of these dots.

"No need to go to the other regions, pick the three closest locations to investigate. You must report back within three days, the sooner the better!"

Jiang Chen’s tone became more imposing.

“Brother, has something significant happened?” It was the first time that Jiang Yu had seen such a sense of urgency from Jiang Chen.

Even on the day of capturing the traitor Jing Man, his cousin, Jiang Chen’s performance had been carefree, at ease, and he had gone on talking and laughing as if nothing had happened.

Today’s matter was a bit bizarre, a bit out of the ordinary.

But Jiang Yu’s biggest redeeming quality was that he listened to Jiang Chen. He immediately invited some clan elders to personally set out and start investigating the directions that Jiang Chen had pointed out.

The three clan elders started returning after two days, and the news they brought back made Jiang Chen’s heart even heavier.

As Jiang Chen expected, there were indeed plots of land permeated with spirit energy in the regions that Jiang Chen had estimated, and spirit medicine was being grown on them! Some of these regions were within the Eastern Kingdom borders, and others had already traveled into the lands of other kingdoms.

“Brother, just what is going on?” Jiang Yu had been exceedingly curious over the past couple days.

Jiang Chen sighed lightly, “The creator of fate has preordained every sip and bite, there is no one who doesn’t have a predefined destiny. How could this spirit land appear in such a common kingdom without rhyme or reason? Why would such fertile spirit land appear? Xiaoyu, if my guesses are correct, this is an ill omen – an extremely foreboding sign!”

“Extremely foreboding sign? Brother, is something amiss with this spirit land?”

Jiang Chen shook his head, “This matter will not be resolved by the power of you or me. In order to verify my speculations, unless you and I both enter the realm of spirit dao and fully grasp the abilities of flying through the earth to travel deep into the ground for investigation and exploration, otherwise any speculations will remain speculations.”

Jiang Chen didn’t wish to explain much. The more he explained, the more uneasy Jiang Yu would become.

“Xiaoyu, do not do anything to that patch of spirit medicine garden at all costs. It’s a good thing that although the ill omen has faintly materialized, it has yet to reach a stage of breaking out. I do hope that my guesses are incorrect. Otherwise, this will be a disaster that a common kingdom can absolutely not defend against.”

Jiang Chen sighed faintly. His experience was broad and he had actually come to a sort of conclusion in his heart already. Except,

he knew that he would be unable to share knowledge of this matter. Who knew what frightening consequences would occur once word spread.

Although he was the son of the Celestial Emperor in his past life, he was no longer that now, as he had reincarnated. He no longer had the ability and foundation to have his own way when fooling around in this common world.

He had to take into account all considerations behind every step and move, lest he be embroiled in it as well.

Chapter 75: You Defy Me?

According to Jiang Chen's calculations, although the events of the spirit medicine garden were an ill omen, it was an omen yet to be fulfilled. The most pressing matter of the moment was for Jiang Chen to hurry back to the capital and complete his mission.

"Xiaoyu, remember my words. Seal off that patch in the medicine garden and don't let anyone enter or leave." In Jiang Chen's eyes, this extremely foreboding sign could come to fruition any time between two to eight years. There was still time to think of a plan.

He took his leave from the Redbud region and returned to the River Wave City, bidding farewell to Jiang Tong. He brought a crew of old and new subordinates, setting out on the path to return to the capital.

Along the way, Jiang Chen travelled during the day and supervise the training of these guards by night, giving them pointers on martial techniques and teaching them the formation.

A trip that was originally three or four days long took a full ten days before reaching the capital.

Except, during these ten days, whether it was Jiang Chen or the eight personal guards, their level of training all advanced another level.

Back in the capital, the completion of this mission had only taken around twenty six to twenty seven days.

“Jiang Chen, second mission of the first rank, recruit eight personal guards. They must be less than twenty years old with strength higher than six meridians true qi!”

“This is the list of my personal guards. It also contains their information, identity, and origin.”

Jiang Chen handed over the information of his eight personal guards.

Once verification of the information showed that all was in order, the examiner continued, “This mission requires that each personal guard also pass the requirements of the martial arts exam.”

“How will the exam be administered?”

“There are two tests . The first test is for them to one by one undergo the test of six meridians true qi. This test is relatively simple.” The examiner responded.

“The second test is for them to go to the arena and fight against eight level six wooden puppets. They must defeat the eight wooden puppets within the allotted time. The time allotted is quite short, at only half an hour.”

The first test was a set matter with no skills whatsoever. When Jiang Chen had participated in the foundational exams, he had also

undergone the test himself.

This procedure was simple and unable to be faked.

The second test was a bit more complicated. After all, it was a bit difficult to defeat eight wooden puppets, equivalent to six meridians true qi, in half an hour.

If Jiang Chen hadn't made his preparations and rushed to complete his mission after filling his eight slots, he may very well have failed this exam.

Now, however, Jiang Chen was well prepared. Not only had he risen all eight of his personal guards to seven meridians true qi, but he had also passed on the formation and given them pointers regarding martial arts techniques.

In this way, they had a great deal more assurance regarding this second test.

Under Jiang Chen's indications, the eight people didn't reveal their strength and only released six meridians of true qi in the first test. They stopped when they reached six meridians and didn't reveal all their hidden cards at once.

A successful pass.

Princess Gouyu had been paying attention to the entire proceeding, and breathed a small sigh of relief when she saw that

Jiang Chen's eight personal guard recruits all passed the six meridians true qi test.

She had been continuously worried that Jiang Chen's control and charisma would be insufficient to recruit the required number of guards. It would seem that she had been worried in vain.

Princess Gouyu was rather unworried about the second test. What kind of character was Jiang Chen? He had been able to give pointers to even a true qi master such as she. How much easier would it be for him to give pointers to a couple of six meridians true qi followers?

When he arrived at the arena, Jiang Chen discovered that this location was extraordinarily bustling.

He discovered at the same time that he wasn't the only one executing the mission of recruiting personal guards.

Almost all of the heirs competing for the position of duke of first rank had to execute this same exact mission. Familiar faces dotted the arena, and all forced a smile when they saw Jiang Chen.

In this place, everyone was competition.

The brother and sister pair Long Yinye and Long Juxue were naturally found amongst their ranks.

Hong Tiantong, heir to the Vermillion Bird dukedom, was also a

staunch Long Juxue supporter. As one of the heirs of the four great dukes, he was naturally present in the arena.

In addition, Bai Zhanyun, the heir to the White Tiger dukedom, and Yi Taichu, the heir to the Black Tortoise dukedom, were all present and both renowned heirs in the Eastern Kingdom.

When these people saw Jiang Chen, some were full of hostility, and some smiled faintly in a form of greeting.

In particular, Yan Yiming, the heir to Yanmen dukedom, no longer dared to provoke Jiang Chen now. Rather, he turned his head vehemently and looked in another direction, observing but not paying attention to Jiang Chen.

“Foundations, this is what’s called foundations!” Hong Tiantong’s inopportune voice rang out to the side behind Jiang Chen. “Us dukes of first rank have long since completed the task of recruiting eight personal guards, unlike some new money upstarts who, without much of a foundation, seek to reach the sky in a single bound. They’ve only barely managed to complete the mission at this late hour, but it’s still unknown as to whether or not they’ll pass the second exam!”

Bai Zhanyun and Yi Taichu had by now seen through Long Juxue, and understood what a fool they’d been previously to be a weapon for Long Juxue.

But, even if Hong Tiantong weren’t willing to be a weapon for Long Juxue, he was more than happy to be of service.

Even if he didn't gain Long Juxue's heart, Hong Tiantong would still be quite happy to enrich his relationships with the Soaring Dragon family. He did so not to merely curry favor with Long Juxue, but also to put on a performance for Long Yinye.

Afterall, Long Yinye was the legitimate son of the Duke of Soaring Dragon, and was sure to inherit his position in the future.

Hong Tiantong's words, laced with acid and abusing one person while pointing to someone else, were obviously aimed at Jiang Chen.

Except, at this moment, Jiang Chen had no interest in verbally sparring with these kinds of boring people.

He handed over the exam token to the examiner. The examiner took a look and said, "Arena seven. The exam will begin in one hour."

"Jiang Chen, Hong Tiantong speaks correctly. A family clan's heritage and foundation still matters for some issues. From what nooks and crannies of some rural backwater country did you find your personal guards? They look awkward no matter how much I look at them. Can these country warriors be dependable and reliable in important matters?"

Long Yinye was different to Hong Tiantong. He would never beat around the bush about anyone he wished to provoke or suppress – he would always make a direct attack on the subject.

“Haha, it would be a bit harsh to compare them to ugly plants that didn’t grow properly. But, brother Jiang Chen, the people you’ve found are truly a bit too uncouth? Oh, this person looks a bit familiar. Isn’t he that guy? The grandson of royal tutor Guo? If I recall correctly, his father is that deserter that is renowned in the capital?”

Hong Tiantong was spurred on to greater heights upon seeing that Long Yinye was also taking a stand, and walked over as well.

“Hong Tiantong, do I understand correctly that you’re provoking me?” Jiang Chen smiled lightly.

Hong Tiantong stood behind Long Yinye, and feeling the reassurance of a strong back up thus puffed out his chest, “If you really must think that way, then let it be so! I just can’t bear jumped up upstarts like you. People carry out business according to what position they have. On what basis or ability does your Jiang family dare to compete for the position of first rank?”

Flaunting their qualifications or displaying their position, these were the usual methods employed by the so-called nobles.

However, Jiang Chen had never been one to play his cards according to predefined expectations.

He flicked a carefree, sidelong glance at Hong Tiantong, “What’s the point of so much blather? You look down on my personal guards? It’s very simple, call out your eight personal guards and

let's have a little competition. There's an hour left until the exam anyways. Rather than standing here in boredom and waiting, why don't we put on some entertainment for everyone. Wouldn't you all say so?"

How could Jiang Chen not see that Guo Jin's eyes were just about ready to spit fire. Hong Tiantong's appraisal of "deserter" had bore deeply into Guo Jin's nerves.

As someone's superior, Jiang Chen naturally had to protect the dignity of his subordinates.

"A match?" Long Yinye's eyes gleamed slightly as he looked at Hong Tiantong, "Tiantong, at the end of the day, your Vermillion Bird dukedom is one of the four great dukedoms. Would you be scared by an inferior duke?"

Hong Tiantong's carefulness went quite deep as he thought cautiously for a bit. Of his eight personal guards, one was at eight meridians true qi, three at seven meridians true qi, and the remaining four at the peak of six meridians true qi.

This kind of allocation was sure to be some distance away from Long Yinye's personal guards, but would definitely not be subpar to the heirs of the other four great dukes.

Jiang Chen, a mere duke of the second rank and hailing from the out of the way Jiang Han territory – how many young geniuses would he be able to recruit?

Jiang Chen couldn't make a move in a match between personal guards, why should Hong Tiantong fear him?

Now matter how Hong Tiantong calculated things, he felt that he had full assurance of success. After all, after casting a glance upon them, none of Jiang Chen's troops stood out.

On his side, one eight meridians true qi was enough to trample over three or four six meridians true qi. He also had three more of seven meridians, and they weren't pushovers either.

As his thoughts travelled around, a notion struck Hong Tiantong as he revealed a trace of a sinister smile. "A match is not out of the question, but the exam is about to start. How will things be handled if something untoward was to happen?"

Long Yinye said impatiently, "Fists and feet have no eyes, if anything untoward does happen, then you'll have to admit that you were unlucky, wouldn't you agree, Jiang Chen?"

Although Long Yinye appeared brashly violent, his thoughts were actually quite malicious. He was goading Jiang Chen into action by sarcasm.

Jiang Chen privately felt that this was funny, but purposefully said angrily, "Admit that I'm unlucky? You guys are merely trying to make my Jiang Han dukedom lose face and make me fail the exam."

Long Yinye laughed heartily, “Jiang Chen, it’s no big deal to admit your defeat if you’re afraid of affecting the exams. After all, this match is completely voluntarily, and no one can be coerced.”

“Getting cold feet is the action of a coward.” Yan Yiming on the side suddenly interjected this sentence out of the blue.

Jiang Chen chuckled, “Hong Tiantong, they’re pushing you and I onto the grill over the fire, what say you?”

Hong Tiantong thought that Jiang Chen was appearing to have second thoughts. He was even prouder and smiled, “How could my Vermillion Bird dukedom be so disappointing as to throw a wet blanket over things? Since people are so interested, let’s have a competition!”

“Have a competition?” Jiang Chen asked, playing along with Hong Tiantong’s tone.

“A match!” Hong Tiantong spoke with a heroic air and sidled a look at Long Juxue. He seemed to see Long Juxue’s head vaguely incline, appearing to approve of his actions.

With this, Hong Tiantong’s fighting spirit became even more full of flight.

“There’s still one more hour. Everyone clear a patch of land. The heirs to Vermillion Bird and Jiang Han will be sending out their personal guards for a demonstration for everyone’s

entertainment.”

Long Yinye’s words had the effect of clearing the area. Everyone else’s entourage all backed up, vacating a large patch of land.

“What are all of you doing? The Hidden Dragon Trials are no trifling matter!” Princess Gouyu had appeared with a dignified and imposing manner at the same time.

With eleven meridians true qi, Princess Gouyu was undoubtedly the cream of the crop within the kingdom. Her appearance immediately put a complex twist in the atmosphere.

Hong Tiantong had originally been arrogantly overbearing and full of fighting spirit, but he too now subconsciously stood behind Long Yinye, hoping to make use of Long Yinye’s presence to ward off Princess Gouyu’s flames of anger.

Chapter 76: Make Them Suffer Thoroughly

“Heh heh, your Highness, a demonstration between the heirs doesn’t affect the greater picture. The princess is of a higher status, and wields great power. Many large and small matters are awaiting your attention, why be bothered with these small things?” Long Yinye smiled faintly, and could actually so speak boldly and with confidence in the presence of Princess Gouyu.

“Huh. Do you think I have no eyes or ears, nor have an idea of what’s going on here? Ever since Jiang Chen appeared, all of you have jeered and mocked him, backing him up against a wall, undoubtedly to make Jiang Chen embarrass himself. The so-called dukes of the first rank of the kingdom have this breadth of mind? Afraid of the competition posed by those beneath you, and thus must use these methods to oppress the competition?” Princess Gouyu had snatched at the opportunity to argue a point to death.

Her string of words made Hong Tongtian force a wry smile.

“So the princess had been listening from the shadows for quite a while. Then you should’ve heard clearly that it was Jiang Chen who issued the challenge, not others.” Long Yinye shrugged his shoulders.

“Yes, I also remember that it was Jiang Chen who first proposed the idea of a match. He said it was to provide entertainment for everyone.”

Hong Tiantong spoke with a bit more authority since he had

others backing him up. “Your Highness, it’s not that I’m starting something, but that this Jiang Chen truly is a bit outrageous. We were only joking with him when the first words out of his mouth were to have a competition, as if his Jiang family really is something.”

These so-called nobles were each more shameless than the other. They were the ones who first instigated matters, but provocation had turned into a joke in their mouths, and Jiang Chen’s counter had turned into starting a fight!

Princess Gouyu was similarly at a loss for words and she looked at Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen rubbed his nose, smiling, “Don’t look at me Princess. I don’t like to argue. Since Hong Tiantong says I’m outrageous, then I really will be outrageous. Everyone is prone to outrageous behavior when they’re young. Your Highness can treat it as a good show.”

“Excellent, such simple and direct words, I like it!” Long Yinye was overjoyed to see that Jiang Chen was stubborn and reluctant to admit defeat. He had been truly worried that Jiang Chen would take advantage of the circumstances to find a way out and avoid the competition.

Seeing that Jiang Chen sought face, Long Yinye immediately added fuel to the flame, “Your Highness, both sides are willing. Surely Your Highness will not put a dampener on things?”

Princess Gouyu took a careful look at Jiang Chen and saw that he continued to sport that lazy, small smile. She felt a bit irritated, thinking I brought up the demeanor of a princess to rescue you from a siege, but you continued to climb up someone else's pole. Don't you know that this is a trap?

"A match, a match!"

Those in the surrounding crowd, here for a good show, started a noisy clamor.

From ancient times to present, those watching a good show were unafraid of things getting out of hand. They didn't care that if someone was injured on either side, they might be unable to pass the exam later.

What did these things matter to people who were here for a good show? The bigger things got, the more of a show they could watch!

"You there, are you ready? Someone is looking down on the personal guards of the four great families. Don't lose my face when you're in the ring!"

Hong Tiantong purposefully lectured in a loud voice.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, "Do you hear that? That's the rhythm of wanting to make you suffer thoroughly. I shouldn't have to say much more about what you should do?"

After this period of time, these personal guards were well acquainted with Jiang Chen's personality. The calmer his smile was, the hotter the flames of his anger were most likely burning.

This wasn't mentioning that this Hong Tiantong had just insulted Guo Jin. This was equivalent to insulting their band of personal guards, and humiliating their master.

When the master is shamed, the subject dies. They were well aware of what this battle represented!

"When we're in the ring later, don't lose your position. Guo Jin, you must contain yourself no matter what they say." The always reticent Xue Tong actually spoke up then.

"Xue Tong, you're the calmest. You should be the leader in this time's battle." Ke Mu suggested.

"I concur." Shen Yifan said.

"I too agree." Wen Ziqi said in a soft voice.

The Qiao brothers didn't care at all about matters like a leader. They just wanted to rush in and beat someone to vent their feelings of frustration.

In their eyes, the people in front of them were all bastards. The young duke had bestowed upon them the grace of rebirth, and these people dared to provoke the young duke. What were they, if

not bastards?

"Brothers, let's go! Us'ns will thrash these animals!" Qiao Shan roared out, as his enormous axe danced, taking large strides into the battle ring.

Qiao Chuan dragged his copper rods as he followed close behind.

Guo Jin and Wen Ziqi followed shortly thereafter.

What looked like a disorderly and messy order of entrance actually encompassed the mysteries of the "Eight Trigram Assimilation Matrix". Except, in the eyes of those who didn't understand this formation, these eight people appeared entirely without cooperation, and didn't look the slightest bit a team. It basically looked like a motley crew with no discipline.

Hong Tiantong laughed. How could Jiang Chen have dared raise a hue and cry with this kind of team. He would make use of the opportunity today to thoroughly subdue Jiang Chen's spirits. The most perfect result would be to beat these fellows until they had serious wounds all over, making them unable to take part in the succeeding exams.

If Jiang Chen couldn't pass the exams, that meant he'd failed his attempt for the position of first rank.

This was the best way to suppress the Jiang family.

If he was able to suppress them in this way, then those of Soaring Dragon were sure to look at Hong Tiantong with fresh eyes!

Hong Tongtian became more excited the more he thought, and threw a glance at the eight personal guards. These eight guards stepped into the ring like wolves and tigers, spreading out and encircling Jiang Chen's guards.

At this moment, Long Juxue seemed to be thinking of other matters. She retracted her unexpected glance from Jiang Chen and walked next to Hong Tiantong, speaking lowly, "Don't underestimate your foe. This Jiang Chen knows every sort of wicked guile, it's necessary that you be on your guard!"

A warm feeling engulfed Hong Tiantong's heart upon receiving a beauty's reminder next to his ear. How he wished to fan and burn the flames of his ardor, and fight for Long Juxue to the end!

In these ten short days, Jiang Chen's guards had only comprehended twenty to thirty percent of the "Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation".

But, under these circumstances, twenty to thirty percent of the formation's mysteries was enough.

After all, grasping sixty to seventy percent would enable them to directly battle against several true qi masters.

Grasping twenty to thirty percent and with eight acting as one,

that would enable them to barely handle a true qi master. The combined fighting abilities of Hong Tiantong's personal guards paled far in comparison to a true qi master.

The lowest level of training for a true qi master was ten meridians true qi.

Their highest level was merely eight levels true qi.

Of course, it wasn't the thing to do to speak in generalities for a group battle like this. The victor would still depend on improvisational reaction.

On Jiang Chen's side, the calm Xue Tong was coordinating the formation with the Qiao brothers providing a fierce offensive. Although the connections of the formation were a bit stiff, it didn't fall into disarray.

For someone coordinating a formation for the first time, not falling into a disorganized mess was equivalent to success.

Particularly in a large scale pitched battle like this – if you kept order and successfully threw the other's tempo into disarray, then that would be a huge success.

Although, Hong Tiantong's side did indeed occupy the advantage of being preeminent amongst his kind with the eight meridians true qi, but apart from that, his team had no advantages at all.

Three of seven meridians true qi?

Worthless!

Jiang Chen's personal guard were all of seven meridians true qi.

In this way, Hong Tiantong's personal guard became more and more lacking in self confidence the more they fought. The eight meridians true qi practitioner had been giving off a majestic looking air in the beginning, attacking with force, teasing in all directions.

But he discovered, tragically, that after a while any two of his opponents could form a small team after quick communication and dispel his attacks.

And, their formation that seemed messy and disorderly, actually enabled any two or three people to form a small team at any time. They could attack if they advanced, and could defend if they retreated.

The "Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation" combined the power of eight into one, drawing aspiration from the eight cardinal directions. This power could be broken and could be united, going through endless iterations of changes.

Those assembled had thought that it would be a scene of Hong Tiantong's band crushing their opponents; who knew that the situation would be completely upended after a few rounds.

Particularly that eight meridians true qi practitioner, he was complaining incessantly without ceasing at this point.

The Qiao brothers and Guo Jin, three people with extremely high offensive power, had formed an attack team and were crazily focusing their attention on him.

The other three seven meridians true qi practitioners were entangled by the three sword users Wen Ziqi, Ke Mu, and Bi Yun.

Shen Yifan's spear thrust and swept in grand movements, partnering with Xue Tong, and easily handled the other four who were of six meridians true qi.

And, the most ingenious part of this formation was that the small teams weren't isolated from each other. Their every step and every move could take concerted action together, or rush to the rescue of each other.

In the beginning, those not in the know of the formation's mysteries couldn't make sense of it. They only thought that the eight had great cooperation. As the battle dragged on, those with expansive knowledge could seem to read something from the situation.

Except, the mysteries of this formation were exceedingly complex, how would they be comprehended with a mere few glances?

Suddenly, the eight meridians true qi practitioner gave a ghastly yell as Qiao Chuan's bronze rods landed solidly on his back. Fresh blood spewed from his mouth as his spine was directly broken into several pieces, and he flew back like a kite with a snapped string.

The fighting spirit of the others immediately dissipated with the fall of the eight meridians true qi practitioner. The flames of fury in Guo Jin's heart had obviously not been dispelled yet. Light danced from his blade as he removed the right arm of a person of seven meridians true qi.

Qiao Shan was unwilling to lag behind as he waved his great axe and chopped towards waist level. A slightly chubby, relatively slower, seven meridians practitioner was chopped in two at the waist, blood and flesh flying everywhere.

Hong Tiantong's band disintegrated in the span of a moment as cries of agony filled the air.

"Stop, I concede, I concede the match!" When Hong Tiantong reacted, pain filled howls had already sounded out a few times.

He took another look at the scene. Two had died in battle, another two were deeply wounded, and one of them was missing an arm. The remaining three were all injured and had pale faces drained of blood.

If Hong Tiantong had been just a bit slower to call out, then this match would have surely ended in complete annihilation of his

troops.

Qiao Shan grinned broadly and shouldered his large axe, laughing, “Happiness, great happiness! Who else remains unconvinced? Come on in and let’s play.”

Guo Jin’s blade pointed as he said to Hong Tiantong, “You with the Hong surname, you insulted my father. Even if you’re one of the four great dukes, I will have my revenge on you for this slight sooner or later.”

“You… Jiang Chen, your subordinates dared to be so cruel in an exhibition match!” Hong Tiantong was at a loss for words. He had never thought of this scene developing.

Jiang Chen spoke faintly, “If I recall correctly, someone said that one would be responsible for his own consequences if something untoward was to happen?”

Hong Tiantong’s face had been drained of all blood, and his heart hurt so much that it was like blood dripped from it when he thought of the fact that a great half of his personal guards had been destroyed, indicating that he would be unable to pass this particular exam of the first rank.

Once he thought of the disastrous consequences of this, Hong Tiantong’s eyes grew bloodshot as he became like a mad tiger. “Jiang Chen, you have ruined my affairs, you must pay for this!”

Long Yinye flung a slap onto his face just as he was about to make his move. “Idiots that can’t afford a loss, move to the side!”

A large slap was directly fanned onto Hong Tiantong’s face, flinging him out a distance of several meters.

Chapter 77: Limelight Surpassing The Four Great Dukes

Jiang Chen didn't think that Long Yinye's slap was to help Jiang Chen out of a sticky situation. It was obvious that Long Yinye didn't wish for Hong Tiantong to rush over to his death.

In reality, if Hong Tiantong had closed to within three meters of Jiang Chen, the latter's personal guards would absolutely have ripped Hong Tiantong apart.

Therefore, although it looked like Long Yinye had slapped Hong Tiantong, he'd actually saved Hong Tiantong's life.

Jiang Chen was as indifferent as the wind and clouds, merely smiling faintly at Long Yinye's action, and being noncommittal. The eight guards retreated to behind Jiang Chen.

After this battle, the other heirs who had originally sought a place with the Long brother and sister were all internally aghast. They were thinking over if there was a need for them to plunge into the mix when deities fought, and if they had the ability to join in.

Hong Tiantong was a living lesson dripping with blood, to speak of nothing else.

And going back further, when had the Duke of Soaring Dragon ever truly occupied the high ground when it came to contending

with the Duke of Jiang Han?

At the banquet at the Soaring Dragon manor, all sides had purposefully created difficulties for Jiang Chen, but Jiang Chen had been the one to soar to the skies in the end with a single amazing feat.

The Duke of Soaring Dragon had propped up the Pill King Garden to befuddle the pill medicine market situation within the capital, but had been defeated with a loud crash by the Hall of Healing.

He had sent men to assassinate Jiang Feng, the Duke of Jiang Han, and rumors abounded in the outside world that the latter had been murdered. However, Jiang Feng had suddenly appeared and actually broken through the shackles of the martial dao, and had ascended to the ranks of the true qi masters!

He'd afterwards sent strong men to slaughter Jiang Chen, but Jiang Chen had emerged wholly unscathed. Instead, it had been the true qi master from the Soaring Dragon's side who had been crippled and sent back, dying shortly thereafter.

And now, Hong Tiantong had been a weapon for the Soaring Dragon contingent, but had ended up in these straits.

Although there was no clear evidence connecting Long San's death and the Hall of Healing crushing the Pill King Garden to Jiang Chen, combining all the rumors together made it difficult for one to eliminate Jiang Chen from the list of causes.

This was to say, that in the various open and underhanded conflicts between the Duke of Soaring Dragon and the Duke of Jiang Han, the so-called first duke of the kingdom actually hadn't gained any bit of an advantage, and had rather suffered heavy casualties in the form of losing his generals and soldiers instead. Even the true qi master, Long San, ranked in the top ten of the Soaring Dragon household, had died with no clear reason whatsoever.

After careful thought, many of those who wished to cling onto Soaring Dragon all privately halted their plans, deciding to wait and see whilst avoid offending either.

After all, from the situation at hand, the Duke of Soaring Dragon, with his ferocious momentum, may not have the assurance of success within his grasp.

At least, this Jiang Han dukedom wasn't an easy target.

Bai Zhanyun, heir to White Tiger, had provoked Jiang Chen several times, and ended up with a face full of dust for his troubles.

Yan Yiming, heir to Yanmen, had also provoked Jiang Chen several times, and now walked in another direction whenever he saw Jiang Chen.

Everyone had seen what had befallen Hong Tiantong, heir of Vermillion Bird.

As everyone looked at that Hong Tiantong wailing bitterly, having a mental meltdown, they also felt a subtle pleasure in someone else's misfortunes. Hong Tiantong failing his exam meant that out of the contenders for the position of first rank, one of the stronger candidates was out of the running!

At this moment, the examiner in charge of the arena announced, "The time for the exam is here. All contestants please enter your respective arenas!"

"Keep a cool head, display yourselves well, and don't feel any pressure." Jiang Chen didn't give too many reminders. With the calm leader Xue Tong in charge, and the aid of the "Eight Trigrams Assimilation Foundation", there shouldn't be that many problems in the second test.

Defeating eight wooden puppets equivalent to six meridians true qi within half an hour.

Jiang Chen believe that this test wouldn't be too difficult, unless something affected their mentality. The "Eight Trigrams Assimilation Foundation" had just been put into practical action with the battle against Hong Tiantong's crew just now, naturally greatly increasing their chances of victory.

After all, it was very important whether or not a formation had had actual battle experience.

When battling Hong Tiantong's crew, Jiang Chen's team had been unpracticed with the formation in the beginning, and thus

hadn’t swiftly occupied the high ground.

When Jiang Chen’s team grew accustomed to the formation, their frightening level of prowess was displayed, and they practically trampled over Hong Tiantong’s team.

“Everyone guess, will be it young duke Yinye’s team finishing the test first, or Miss Juxue’s team finishing first?”

Someone still couldn’t resist the chance to stand out and offer a few fawning words.

“Heh heh, Duke Long’s pair of heirs are dragons and phoenixes amongst men. It is hard to discern a difference between the two. This question truly stumps all of us.”

“Look, one third of the time has already elapsed.”

“Ai, I hope that my personal guard team can successfully pass.”

“Yes, I still admire the four great dukes. Although Hong Tiantong’s team has collapsed, the four great dukes have two candidate slots. Although Hong Tiantong’s team has failed, it’s still fine if the other team succeeds.”

This advantage was enormous for the four great dukes.

Time ticked by steadily as the hearts of those candidates

relatively weaker in strength became increasingly nervous.

They too knew that this test was quite difficult. Unless the crew of personal guards possessed overwhelming strength, it would be difficult to defeat eight wooden puppets at six levels of true qi within half an hour.

Apart from the heirs of the four great dukes, who were relatively more at ease, the heirs of the other dukes were all more or less a bit worried.

As for Jiang Chen, his heart was as settled as still water.

Half of the allotted time quickly passed. Many of the heirs' breathing started to increase in pace. Jiang Chen's "Ear of the Zephyr" could even hear their hurried breathing.

At this moment, the great doors to the arena opened —

This meant that a team had completed the test and was coming out!

"Look, the great doors are open, a team is coming out! Is it young duke Yinye or Miss Juxue's crew? The answer will be revealed soon!"

"What's the point of speculating about this? If it's not young duke Yinye, then it'll be Miss Juxue's. The most outstanding amongst the Eastern Kingdom are without a doubt, the heirs of

Soaring Dragon.”

“Right, no matter whose team finishes first, they all represent the Long family.”

The great doors opened and footsteps sounded out from inside.

A hearty laugh was heard before a figure was seen, “Haha, this test wasn’t that hard! I wonder what place in line our exit falls under?”

“It doesn’t matter what place we are, it’s not like rankings are decided here.”

“Heh heh, although that’s the case, it would still be a damned good feeling if we could firmly sit on those suckers. I, Qiao Shan, was pissed off seeing those suckers put on airs in front of our young duke.”

A crowd of eight people walked out following their voices.

It wasn’t Long Yinye’s team, nor was it Long Juxue’s team.

Neither was it any of the teams of the four great dukes.

It was the team of Jiang Chen of the Jiang Han dukedom!

Everyone was dumbfounded, and even Long Yinye and Long Juxue felt that it was slightly incredible. Both of them exchanged glances on the alert with each other.

They seemed to have suddenly, truly, become conscious that Jiang Chen, and this Jiang Han, were absolutely not a slight defect of small importance, but a true threat!

“This Jiang Chen must be eliminated at the first opportunity!” Long Yinye formed the motive to kill in that moment.

Brother and sister shared an understanding between their hearts. A fierce beam of killing intent also flashed through Long Juxue’s phoenix eyes at this moment.

The education provided at the Soaring Dragon manor since young was that of domination, eradicating all threats that might possibly form, and using one’s strength to bully the weak.

Even Princess Gouyu felt vaguely surprised. Jiang Chen’s team was the first to complete the test!

As the main organizer in charge of the Hidden Dragon Trials, she was well aware of how difficult this level was. Jiang Chen’s team had indeed displayed a strong fighting competency when they triumphed over Hong Tiantong’s team, but none of them had particularly displayed overwhelming power.

As for Long Yinye and Long Juxue’s teams, there were strong

practitioners of nine meridians true qi present in both of them.

A nine meridians true qi would mangle a six meridians true qi as the former rolled over the latter.

This was a surprising development, an extremely surprising development.

Jiang Chen ignored the complex looks from all sides and walked towards Princess Gouyu. “Your Highness, here are the results of the second test. Please look over and accept them.”

Princess Gouyu nodded, “Jiang Chen, well done. I have to admit, you’re the biggest dark horse in this time’s Hidden Dragon Trials.”

A big dark horse, absolutely a big dark horse.

One had to know that even just a few months ago, jokes about Jiang Chen still abounded in the capital. Jiang Chen had even been the butt of all the jokes of the Hidden Dragon Trials, a unique character who couldn’t even pass the foundational exams!

However, the affairs of the world are inconstant!

They say that changes in prosperity and decline were capricious in their rise and fall, such as feng shui being favorable on the east side of the river for thirty years, and being favorable on the west side for the other thirty years.

This Jiang Chen had such a rapid change in prosperity and decline, that feng shui had shifted to the other side of the river in three months!

Multiple teams also completed the test after Jiang Chen's team had passed the tests and walked out of the arena.

Long Yinye and Long Juxue's team were close behind Jiang Chen's, with the rest of the four great dukes following afterwards.

There was still quite a basis for talk of family foundations and strength at times like these.

Compared to the other dukes of the first rank, the advantages of the four great dukes were quite apparent.

The Duke of Soaring Dragon had even more apparent advantage out of the four great dukes.

Of course, there was no point in contrasting any of this at this moment because Jiang Chen had appeared. This caused the four great dukes, even the heirs of Soaring Dragon, to be overshadowed and eclipsed.

This was unprecedented that the limelight of the heirs to Soaring Dragon had been suppressed by someone!

One had to know that the Duke of Soaring Dragon had occupied the position of duke of first rank for far, far too long. Almost no powers had appeared in several hundred years to challenge their existence.

Even the existence of someone close to them didn't exist, not to mention someone who could challenge their position.

However, an unexpected development had appeared today.

An unexpected development that hadn't been present for hundreds of years had appeared!

Although this small test wasn't a pivotal one, and just a minor detail that had nothing to do with the greater picture, a general observation of previous Hidden Dragon Trials would reveal that the existence of Soaring Dragon heirs stood out like a crane standing amongst chickens. They were far in the lead, whether in terms of the greater picture, or in the smallest details.

And now, even though they had been surpassed by someone else in the smallest of details, this was still a first in hundreds of years!

News travelled fast, as if it had grown legs and ran along the wind. It had traveled through almost the entire capital in fifteen minutes.

This news was simply too shocking.

The heirs of Soaring Dragon had been surpassed by someone on the Hidden Dragon Trials!

As for the person in question, Jiang Chen, he didn't feel smugly satisfied at all. His sights were set directly on the third mission after completing the second.

Only after successfully completing the third mission would it be the equivalent of pronouncing that the Jiang Han territory had successfully attempted for duke of first rank.

The succeeding ranking battles would determine the internal rankings of the dukes of first rank.

The ranking battles were the true goal of Jiang Chen's participation in the Hidden Dragon Trials this time.

These so-called missions were all just warm-ups and appetizers.

His reaction was diffident, but he couldn't stop the spread of the story behind this time's upset. The reactions from all sides were greatly beyond his forecasts.

When the Soaring Dragon household received this news, all those present burst into an uproar. Long Zhaofeng, the Duke of Soaring Dragon himself, was silent for quite a while. He had given the order previously that no matter what the methods, Jiang Chen had to die and could not be permitted to grow into his power.

Within the palace, Eastern Lu was similarly speechless for quite a while when he received immediate updates of this. He tragically realized that in the tussle between the royal family and the Duke of Soaring Dragon, Jiang Chen, this originally nameless kid, had become the greatest weapon that the royal family had no choice but to rely on.

Chapter 78: The Third Mission

“Tiandu, pass on my royal decree. Send more men to lay in wait around the Jiang Han manor during the Hidden Dragon Trials and protect the Jiang Han Manor. Attend to this matter yourself and personally ensure Jiang Chen’s security from the shadows. Don’t let any threats approach Jiang Chen.”

“Understood.”

Eastern Lu had never thought that this youth who had once made him feel extremely vexed and upset would, cause him, the ruler of a nation, to use the greatest manpower at his disposal to protect him on this day.

“Jiang Chen... just what kind of person are you?” Eastern Lu sank into deep contemplation for a while.

Severe reactions abounded in the capital at this moment.

The Hall of Healing was naturally beyond overjoyed. After all, the greater the strength that Jiang Chen possessed, the more they felt that their partnership with Jiang Chen was even more stable with an even brighter future..

However, there was no one happier than Jiang Feng. He had held down the fort alone in the capital during this time and had also been subjected to a lot of pressure.

Due to interference from the royal family, although the harassment from the Duke of Soaring Dragon had yet to become flagrantly blatant, it had still caused Jiang Feng to feel an inordinate amount of pressure.

Jiang Chen had been able to firmly suppress both Long Yinye and Long Juxue once during this mission. Even if it was only suppression on a minor detail, this still caused Jiang Feng to be quite happy.

“Chen’er, well done!” Jiang Feng had been not that optimistic with regards to Jiang Chen’s second mission, and hadn’t particularly known how things stood when Jiang Chen made a trip back to the Jiang Han territory.

He was very aware that he represented a sheet of iron in the Jiang Han territory, and that no one dared to create a disturbance when he was around. But when Jiang Chen went back, it was an unknown as to whether or not even the clan elders would listen to his arrangements, much less the big chieftains.

However, the truth had proven Jiang Feng’s worries to be extraneous.

Not only had Jiang Chen successfully controlled the situation, he had also conveniently wiped out Jing Man, who had been a big thorn in his side. One should either not make a move, or make a thorough and decisive move if one takes action.

Jiang Feng had to admit, with such boldness and methods, his

son was even a bit stronger than himself when he was of a similar age.

Jiang Feng was very happy to have his son surpass him.

Jiang Feng had discovered that ever since that encounter at the Rites of Heavenly Worship, Jiang Chen's entire being had undergone a change that was akin to turning the world upside down.

The Hidden Dragon Trials proceeded like a raging fire.

The time had finally arrived for the third mission. This mission was one in which all the participating heirs took part in.

The third mission: trials in the Boundless Catacombs.

The Boundless Catacombs were an amazing underground world in the northeast of the Eastern Kingdom.

Throughout the entire history of the Eastern Kingdom, these endless catacombs had never been fully excavated.

Even the most distinguished of practitioners in the Eastern Kingdom had never fully explored the Boundless Catacombs to the end.

No one knew if the Boundless Catacombs even had an end.

No one knew either where this end to the Boundless Catacombs was.

It was an underground world, and a heaven for the existence of underground creatures.

What was a heaven for underground creatures could very well turn into a one-way trip to hell for practitioners.

Jiang Chen was attempting a mission of the first rank and therefore the difficulty of this mission was the highest.

“Collect either one hundred green spirit pearls, ten silver spirit pearls, or one gold spirit pearl!” Jiang Chen was completely confused by the mission requirements.

It was a good that there was an introduction to the Boundless Catacombs at the bottom of the mission scroll.

All sorts of underground creatures lived in the Boundless Catacombs, one of which was a green winged swordbird, which had a spirit pearl glowing with a green light in its forehead.

Since the Boundless Catacombs were an underground world, they were dark and dank with exceedingly poor vision. The green spirit pearl in the forehead of the greenwing swordbird would give it a great advantage in this environment.

The silverwing swordbird was a variant of the greenwing swordbird, with the pearl on its forehead glowing with a silver light. The silverwing swordbird was the evolved form of the greenwing swordbird, and only one could be found for every hundred greenwing swordbirds.

The goldwing swordbird was the once again evolved form of the greenwing swordbird, the king of the greenwing swordbirds. Any single one of them possessed a strength that would be on par with a true qi master.

After perusing through the information on the Boundless Catacombs, Jiang Chen had formed a pretty good idea of what was going on.

Except, the information had also mentioned a numerous variety of creatures within the Boundless Catacombs. The greenwing swordbirds were merely one of the more common spirit creatures.

“All the heirs participating in the Hidden Dragon Trials listen carefully. Convene here tomorrow morning to head towards the Boundless Catacombs. The third mission will officially start in three days time.”

Princess Gouyu spoke loudly, “Remember the quota for your respective missions. The time allotted is one month. The mission will be deemed as a failure after one month. If you reach your quota early, you can leave ahead of time. Your lives and deaths are up to the will of the heavens in this mission. If you are afraid or cowardly, you can forfeit.”

The Hidden Dragon Trials had to do with the dukedom, it was impossible for anyone to forfeit.

The matter of life or death was never able to be avoided in the world of martial dao. Only through experiencing the trials of life and death was one able to grow.

“Alright, I’ve said all that needs to be said. Return to your manors tonight and convene here in the morning. Remember the time to gather, we will not wait if you are late!”

Jiang Chen shut himself in the secret training room upon returning to the manor.

This time’s mission was relatively more complex, and he had to make several preparations.

Jiang Chen was currently at the peak of eight meridians true qi. He would be able to break through to nine meridians true qi in three days at the least, and half a month at the most.

The second form of “Vast Ocean Current Splitter”, Wave Breaker, was becoming more and more familiar. Full of a pleasing quality, its battle capabilities were astounding when deployed.

The practice of “Divine Aeons Fist”, when compared to “Vast Ocean Current Splitter”, was progressing at a slightly faster pace. He had already trained to four cycles of blooming and wilting, the

mysteries of four cycles of reincarnation.

Jiang Chen had also quite adeptly grasped the foundational movements of “Moonshatter Flying Daggers”.

Jiang Chen’s training in these four accompanying abilities had already progressed a bit, but he was still a far ways off from employing the mysteries of the “Moonshatter Flying Daggers” in an attack.

This so-called using the mysteries to attack was the true great move of this method.

“God’s Eye” was the most prominent ability that Jiang Chen had trained the fastest. As of now, he had already trained it to the fifth level .

“Ear of the Zephyr” was on the same level as “God’s Eye”. Jiang Chen had also trained it to the fifth level.

In the month that he’d trained in the Jian Han territory, “Boulder’s Heart” had finally broken through to the second level and successfully entered the third level.

There was no way that Jiang Chen could even attempt “Psychic’s Head” before entering the realm of spirit dao.

Jiang Chen took stock of his various methods and techniques, confident that even if he met a true qi master, he would be able to

directly confront him.

Did a true qi master truly exist amongst all the heirs?

Jiang Chen didn't dare think too optimistically, but neither was he overly pessimistic. Even if Long Yinye and Long Juxue entered the ranks of the true qi masters, Jiang Chen would still be able to exchange a round or two with them by himself.

"The ranking of the dukes will commence after the third mission is complete. No matter if it's Long Yinye or Long Juxue, they are sure to have many trump cards, as they are heirs to the Duke of Soaring Dragon. How will I fight them in the ranking battles if I don't improve my training to the best of my abilities?"

Jiang Chen discovered that even though the speed of advancements in his training since reincarnation could be described as miraculous, he still had to expend great effort in catching up to the gaps that had formed previously.

"There's still one more month and anything is possible. The Boundless Catacombs are the first true trials of my life. Perhaps my potential will only be stimulated to the next level in the midst of a real battle?"

Jiang Chen was in high and vigorous spirits as he fully made his preparations.

Apart from the advantages in martial dao methods, Jiang Chen

also took inventory of his equipment.

The Layered Feather Throwing Daggers that Princess Gouyu had gifted him, as well as the Skysilk Armor were necessary items to take along, as well as the nameless saber raided from Du Ruhai's house. It was Jiang Chen's personal weapon now, and naturally never left his side.

In addition, Jiang Chen would not give up the dao of poison. Until his martial dao had reached perfection, this was one of his advantages.

Some of his specially mixed poisons would have life-saving effects in critical moments.

After finishing his inventory count, Jiang Chen sat down cross-legged and once again started circulating his qi, forging his meridians, and training his true qi.

Peak of eight meridians true qi. Jiang Chen tried continuously to assail and find that moment of inspiration for a breakthrough.

When training in martial dao, a breakthrough wasn't as easy as eating or sleeping. Even those with extraordinary potential needed a bout of comprehension and a catalyst to set a foot through that threshold.

Breakthroughs would never come knocking randomly.

He spent the first half of the night tempering his true qi and the second half of the night meditating with closed eyes. A night quickly passed by.

Jiang Chen walked out of the secret room early next morning, taking his leave from his father and arranging all his personal guards within the manor.

The third mission did not allow for the presence of personal guards.

He arrived at the convening point and, escorted by the royal army, the entire entourage set out for the northeast part of the kingdom, the location of the Boundless Catacombs!

Within the Soaring Dragon manor.

“Your Lordship, your subordinate has already come to a covert agreement with Hidden Hand. They will send four true qi masters and we’ll pay double the rate.”

“Four true qi masters? Good!” Long Zhaofeng nodded and smiled. “Hidden Hand isn’t an assassin organization from Eastern Kingdom. Even if Eastern Lu wishes to pursue the matter afterwards, he won’t be able to trace it to us.”

“Heh heh, the duke is wise and brilliant.”

“Long Yi, my apologies to you in this matter. Long San was your

brother and you should've been the one to take revenge for this matter. Don't take it badly that you'll be unable to personally take your revenge."

"The duke's great plans take precedence over everything." Long Yi was a thin man with a gaze like that of knives, but exceedingly humble before Long Zhaofeng.

"I promise you that when my matters succeed in the future, the Jiang family will be handed over to you for you brothers to dispose of. They will be one Jiang Chen short, but the rest of the Jiang family clan will be unable to escape."

"Jiang family!" A cold killing intent shot out from Long Yi's eyes.

"Oh right, Long Yi, have you finished selecting the candidates yet? This matter must be kept airtight, with people having no evidence, even if they speculate it is us."

"I've selected them, four unremarkable heirs. Hidden Hand always conducts their affairs in a clean and crisp manner, without revealing any traces. The results of the matter will be that the four heirs failed in their trials and were eaten by fierce beasts."

Long Yi's voice was remote, as if other people's lives were less than those of ants in his eyes.

Long Zhaofeng laughed heartily. "Jiang Chen, let's see how you'll be able to avoid the all extensive nets above and snares

below! Eastern Lu, you're pointing at the Jiang family to be your foot soldiers, looks like you're out of cards in your hands?"

Chapter 79: Trials In The Boundless Catacombs

Although he was under the escort of the elite troops of the royal family, Jiang Chen still didn't relax his guard along the road. He understood very clearly that the feud he had formed with the Duke of Soaring Dragon had reached the level of life and death.

The Duke of Soaring Dragon was overweeningly ambitious, and would never allow any obstacles to be present on his path towards seizing power, whereas it was patently obvious that Jiang Chen had already become the Duke of Soaring Dragon's obstacle.

Except, what was vaguely surprisingly to Jiang Chen was that this entire trip proceeded smoothly without obstructions. Jiang Chen paid attention, but there wasn't even covert observation, much less attacks or bizarre ambushes.

"Can it be that the Duke of Soaring Dragon has had a change of heart, and doesn't intend on making a move? Or does he have other motives instead?" Jiang Chen felt a bit surprised, and couldn't quite get a grasp on things.

The entourage reached the outskirts of the Boundless Catacombs two days later.

The Boundless Catacombs were located on the outskirts of a patch of mountain valleys in the northeast of the kingdom. The army made their camp for the night.

Princess Gouyu stood high atop a temporarily erected tent. “We will camp here tonight. You will enter the mountain range early tomorrow morning, and the entrance to the Boundless Catacombs are located within these mountain valleys. There are numerous entrances, but they’re all within this patch of mountain valleys. You must search for the entrance and exit yourselves within this terrain.”

“Remember, no matter whether you’re lost within the mountain valleys or within the Boundless Catacombs, the kingdom will not send people to rescue you. You hold your life and death in your own hands once you enter the Boundless Catacombs, so be more than a hundred percent on full alert.”

Jiang Chen chose to sit cross legged next to a large tree as they made camp.

Of course, although he was aware that the center of Princess Gouyu’s defences would revolve around him, he wasn’t accustomed to entrusting the great matter of personal security to someone else.

That night, Jiang Chen didn’t relax his “Ear of the Zephyr” even once. Not even the slightest rustle in the grass from the wind could escape his hearing.

However, this night was still baffingly calm.

Jiang Chen even had a feeling of a misconception – had the Duke

of Soaring Dragon truly decided not to make a move? Or should he say that in the eyes of the Duke of Soaring Dragon, he, Jiang Chen, still came up short?

After thinking about it back and forth, Jiang Chen decisively decided he was too lazy to continue contemplating the matter.

The next morning, the rays of the morning sun shone down on the outskirts of the mountain valleys. All the heirs were in high spirits as they looked into the mountain valleys, their gazes suffused with concentrated expectation.

“Brother Chen, I want to tell you some good news. I broke through again last night.” Fatty Xuan closed in and said excitedly.

Fatty Xuan had only been of five meridians true qi two or three months ago, and belonged to the lower tier of existences amongst the heirs.

When Jiang Chen had passed onto him the “True Acupoint Resonance” method, it had aided fatty in breaking through to six meridians true qi. However, fatty had broken through again and gained seven meridian true qi, successfully entering the ranks of the advanced realm of true qi!

Fatty Xuan had chosen to keep his position, that of a duke of the fourth rank. Thus, he was executing the mission of the fourth rank.

Seven meridians true qi was enough for the missions of the fourth rank.

After Hubing Yue had broken through to eight meridians true qi last time, he had chosen not to break through again. However, he had already located the ninth acupoint and was not too far away from nine meridians true qi.

“Brother Chen, many thanks to you this time.” A concentrated sense of gratitude emitted from Hubing Yue’s eyes. He was vying for the position of second rank this time.

He had successfully completed the first two second rank missions earlier.

If he successfully completed the third mission, then his Hubing clan would rise through the ranks to a second rank dukedom!

“Do well, and be careful!” Jiang Chen counseled them.

The various heirs were clustered together in groups of two or three. It was apparent that many were still a bit nervous with the impending commencement of the final mission.

Standing together was a form of psychological reassurance.

Princess Gouyu seemed to have purposefully dressed for today. She hadn’t worn the sexy leather armor, but rather put on a demure court outfit, adding a few traces of royal nobility to her

presence.

“I’ve said all that needs to be said. I hereby announce that the third mission is about to commence. You will enter the mountain valleys one by one, according to your current dukedom ranking, starting from the lowest. One person will enter every fifteen minutes.”

This arrangement was obviously to avoid malicious competition between the heirs, and to prevent schemes against each other whilst still in the mountain valley.

Those who were ranked lower had relatively weaker strength, and thus they entered first.

It was an exceedingly reasonable thing to go from the bottom upwards.

Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue all entered one after another. The Jiang Han dukedom was ranked number fourteen, so it was quite some time afterwards that Jiang Chen entered.

“Jiang Chen, the Boundless Catacombs are endless and ever reaching. You must be careful. You will be able to move freely within the first and second level, but will have to be exceedingly alert and wary on the third level, because it’s very like that king level violent beasts will appear. Their battle strength is on par with human true qi masters at the very least. You mustn’t set foot into and beyond the fourth level at any costs. That is a forbidden zone. Countless numbers of geniuses have once brashly ventured in, and

no one has ever emerged. The odds would be stacked against even a spirit dao practitioner. So remember this well, remember this very well!”

Princess Gouyu admired Jiang Chen, and was thoroughly unabashed as she gave Jiang Chen a few pointers in front of everyone.

The relationship between Jiang Chen and the royal family was no longer a secret now. Even so, those who saw Princess Gouyu pay special attention to Jiang Chen still felt vaguely envious.

Jiang Chen nodded as his body sprang up and shot off into the mountain valleys.

The second he entered the mountain valleys, Jiang Chen immediately deployed “God’s Eye” and “Ear of the Zephyr”.

One should not have the intention to harm others, but cannot lack the intention to defend oneself against others.

Although none of the heirs that had entered previously could harm him, Jiang Chen was someone who had reincarnated and had the experience of two lifetimes. He knew when he should be prudent.

Random shrubs and patches of grass abounded within the mountain valleys. The sunlight was blocked by all sorts of big trees that couldn’t even be spanned with both arms, making the

environment appear deep and serene.

Jiang Chen was neither in a rush, nor too lazy, as he began to search for the entrance to the Boundless Catacombs.

After a while, he found an exceedingly small entrance about 1.5 to 2 kilometers away. The entrance was twisting and winding, with many forks in the path.

Jiang Chen twisted and turned, following one path to who knew how far in. He only felt that the light was becoming duller and duller, and that the temperature kept dropping.

He finally lost all of the light as the soil beneath his feet became more and more wet. Jiang Chen realized that he had unwittingly already entered the Boundless Catacombs.

“There were endless forks in the road along the way, as if a maze. Add to that the numerous entrances... it would be difficult for the hundred or so heirs to purposefully lie in wait to ambush someone.”

Jiang Chen was in no hurry to make time once he’d arrived underground. He took the time to observe his surroundings, only relaxing when he was certain that he’d arrived beneath the ground.

“This should be the so-called first level?”

If an ordinary person stood here, he would surely be like a blind person, and be unable to see his fingers when he stretched out his hand.

The vision of a practitioner was naturally many times stronger than an ordinary person.

And since Jiang Chen practiced “God’s Eye”, his eyesight was many times stronger than a practitioner of the same level. Add to that “Ear of the Zephyr” and “Boulder’s Heart”, and he held quite a bit of advantage in the Boundless Catacombs.

“One hundred green spirit pearls.” Jiang Chen continuously reminded himself of his mission.

“Ah!”

Suddenly, Jiang Chen seemed to hear an agonized wail deep in the depths of the catacombs. The sound was hurried and ghastly. He was unable to discern the distance of this wail, due to various sounds echoing throughout the catacombs.

“Has someone already fallen victim in the first level?” Jiang Chen was shocked.

At this moment, Jiang Chen felt a breeze at the back of his head.

This is bad, an ambush!

Jiang Chen's ears moved as he flung his sleeve. A Layered Feather Throwing Dagger drew a cold arc through the air – as if there were eyes on the back of his head – forming a beautiful rainbow in the darkness of the catacombs.

Whoosh!

A tragic hiss sounded as something fell when the throwing dagger connected with its target.

A greenwing swordbird!

The wings and mouth of this greenwing swordbird were all as sharp as knives, much sharper than the swords of ordinary practitioners.

"The wings and mouth of the greenwing swordbird are indeed much sharper than a sword's edge."

Jiang Chen collected his throwing dagger and took the green spirit pearl protruding from the bird's forehead, storing it into his sack.

"Heh, victory from the first battle has arrived quite swiftly." After Jiang Chen's first contact with the greenwing swordbird, he had a good understanding of the swordbird's capabilities.

“The battle capabilities of the greenwing swordbird are akin to a human practitioner of four meridians true qi. However, its speed is fast, and it possesses the advantages of favorable climate and topography within the darkness of its territory. If a practitioner’s level doesn’t exceed it, then it would indeed be difficult to handle the swordbird.”

Jiang Chen’s heart was much more at ease with the experience of his first battle.

He didn’t increase his speed but rather continued on the same pace, deploying “God’s Eye” and “Ear of the Zephyr” to the utmost.

Leveraging his advantages, Jiang Chen collected twelve green spirit pearls after a day.

“Collecting twelve spirit pearls in a day. This speed is neither fast nor slow. If I can continue at this level everyday, I’ll be able to leave in eight or nine days.”

Jiang Chen’s confidence was greatly boosted after rich rewards within a day.

However, Jiang Chen discovered the second day that the frequency of greenwing swordbird appearances within the five or so kilometers he was moving around in had decreased overnight.

“The greenwing swordbird is a spirit animal, and thus possesses intelligence. Looks like they’ve gone into hiding because they

know that a large numbers of human hunters have come down."

More than a hundred heirs had suddenly appeared. Even with everyone killing just a few, this number would still be staggering.

Therefore, Jiang Chen didn't find it odd that the numbers of greenwing swordbirds had greatly decreased.

"What the hell; do these greenwings swordbirds have greater intelligence than humans? I killed two the first day, but I haven't even seen a feather the second, much less than kill one of them!"

"Damnit, have all the swordbirds been killed by the stronger dukedom heirs? I don't want to risk my neck in the second level."

Jiang Chen heard an earful of complaints along his way.

It was as if all the greenwing swordbirds had been slaughtered cleanly in the span of a single night.

Even Jiang Chen, with his numerous advantages, only killed three greenwing swordbirds during his entire second day.

If Jiang Chen was thus, then it would be easy to imagine how the others fared.

"Looks like I can no longer linger in the first level. I must be the first to enter the second level, or maybe even the third!"

Jiang Chen speculated that this greenwing swordbird possessed extraordinary intelligence. He who strikes first gains the advantage, and those who strike second gain nothing at all.

When his thoughts traveled here, Jiang Chen increased his footsteps and rushed towards the depths of the Boundless Catacombs.

It was pitch black within the Boundless Catacombs, with marshland and bog underfoot. It was rather risky to proceed at a fast pace.

Chapter 80: A Successive String Of Bizarre Occurrences

Except, Jiang Chen possessed superb skills and was quite daring. He put his apprehensions to the side.

Indeed, after proceeding roughly fifty to one hundred kilometers, the depth of the Boundless Catacombs became noticeably deeper. The various underground creatures within the catacombs also became more lively.

Jiang Chen's hauls became rich again on the following third and fourth days.

Eleven green spirit pearls on the third day...

Eight spirit pearls on the fourth day...

The sum total at the end of the four days was 34 pearls in total.

"Four days and 34 pearls. At this rate, I can still complete the mission ahead of time." Jiang Chen calculated that there was still a difference of 66 pearls between his current gains and the requirements of the mission.

However, a bizarre thing happened again on the fifth day.

The number of Greenwing Swordbirds in the surrounding fifty to

one hundred kilometers had once again decreased.

"Do the Greenwing Swordbirds really possess this level of intelligence?" Jiang Chen was a bit confused. There was no such detail included in the introduction from the official information in the Hidden Dragon Trials.

In addition, according to the experience of those who'd gone before him, there should be enough numbers of Greenwing Swordbirds in the first and second levels for everyone.

Only a mission of the first rank would need occasional venturing into the third level.

Yet, according to Jiang Chen's calculations, he should've already entered the second level, and it was quite apparent that the Greenwing Swordbirds had all been slaughtered.

"Damn it, someone's screwing with me! When did the Greenwing Swordbirds become so hard to find? The information was all lies! It said that the most common creature underground was this Greenwing Swordbird, but I haven't even seen a freaking feather these days."

"Seriously. I'm only attempting a mission of the seventh rank, and only need ten green spirit pearls. Are the heavens preventing me from completing even such a simple mission?"

Jiang Chen once again heard similar complaints.

He too felt that it was odd. Logically speaking, if the Greenwing Swordbirds were this hard to find, then the quota set by the mission wouldn't be this high.

Could it be that someone had driven away the Greenwing Swordbirds through man made measures?

Jiang Chen's brow creased faintly at the thought of this possibility. This wasn't outside the realm of possibility. With Long Yinye and Long Juxue's domineering traits, they could absolutely commit this sort of action.

"If they had some sort of special methods to drive away all the Greenwing Swordbirds, or to release a signal that the Swordbirds were afraid of, they could absolutely drive all the Greenwing Swordbirds into the depths of the catacombs."

Jiang Chen cursed inwardly when his thoughts traveled down this path. He felt that his speculations were right on target.

"If it truly is as I've speculated, then the Long brother and sister are simply being too ruthless. They're cutting off the path of survival for the heirs of the low ranked dukedoms!"

The strength of the heirs of the low ranked dukedoms were mediocre. They didn't have the ability to wander into the third level of the catacombs, and could only flit around in guerilla warfare in the first and second levels.

If all the Greenwing Swordbirds were driven away from the first and second levels, then it'd a disaster of annihilation for these people!

"But what benefits would this bring to them?" Jiang Chen thought carefully.

To make it more convenient for them to hunt? Although that reason was possible, it couldn't be the main reason. With the strength of the Long brother and sister, they wouldn't spend so much effort to kill Greenwing Swordbirds.

To suppress other dukes? This possibility was also likely. After all, the Duke of Soaring Dragon had overweening ambitions. Suppressing the dukes that weren't on his side, and helping those under his banner to achieve their aims, thus causing the various dukedoms to come under his jurisdiction... this was highly likely!

"Mm! If the Long brother and sister killed enough Greenwing Swordbirds, those under their banner could receive green spirit pearls from their hands, while the heirs that were an eyesore in their eyes would receive faces full of dust and nothing at all, even losing their dukedom!"

Such vicious malice! Indeed, a malicious scheme for the purposes of extinction!

"There is indeed nothing that the Long family won't do. However, how would I, Jiang Chen, be led by the nose by you?"

Jiang Chen was also thoroughly infuriated by the Long family plots.

Jiang Chen simply decided not to proceed any further. Four or five days worth of hunting had given him a great deal of training. The portents of an imminent breakthrough had repeatedly appeared at the boundaries of his eight meridians true qi.

Jiang Chen found an isolated corner, and simply decided to start training.

If Jiang Chen had the intentions to conceal himself, he actually wouldn't be worried that anyone would come disturb him in the Boundless Catacombs. However, just because no one could find him, didn't mean that it was absolutely safe.

The most frightening things in these catacombs were the underground creatures.

Jiang Chen prepared a few simple setups, and cleverly arranged all sorts of poison, forming a self preservation trap.

Whether it was man or underground creature, as long as they ventured into this ring, they would be poisoned.

Two days passed.

Jiang Chen opened his eyes. He firmly suppressed each current of raging true qi within his body. Nine meridians true qi were as if

nine overflowing rivers, with extensive momentum, as they ran rampant throughout his body.

"Further progress has been made, another step has been taken forward." A satisfied smile was shown on Jiang Chen's face. "Nine meridians true qi is the peak of the advanced realm of true qi. Another step forward will allow me to become a true qi master. Except, with my current training, what need would I have to fear of a true qi master of ten meridians true qi?"

It wasn't that Jiang Chen was over confident, but that he truly had the capital to be arrogant.

After entering nine meridians true qi, one's battle strength was bound to increase in spades when accompanied by strong martial techniques.

Particularly "God's Eye". After surviving in the catacombs for six or seven days, Jiang Chen could clearly feel that the realm of "God's Eye" had risen again, and had entered the sixth level.

"It looks like my 'God's Eye' is the most remarkable out of the four great abilities. It's pitch black within the catacombs, but it's actually benefited the training of 'God's Eye' the most."

The sixth level of "God's Eye" was indeed on a much more advanced level when compared to before. There was no difference between a dark and gloomy day during the daytime and these dark catacombs to Jiang Chen's eyes.

Although his vision wasn't as wide as it would be on a sunny day, it was already a potent advantage when compared to the other practitioners.

A breakthrough and an increase in strength. This made Jiang Chen feel even more assured.

"Long brother and sister, I wonder what kind of mess the two of you have created now! Huh, no matter what kind of disturbance they create, all will still have to come to a head in the third level. The fourth level is a forbidden zone. Princess Zouyu has emphasized and repeated her warnings that we can't enter it. Therefore, as much as they create havoc, the third level is their absolute limit!"

Jiang Chen was different from the lower ranked dukedom heirs. Those people were unwilling to venture into the third level, but he, Jiang Chen, had the capability to do so.

When Jiang Chen walked out of this isolated corner, he discovered that he had underestimated the intelligence of others. He discovered from the random comments and remarks of the outside world that the heirs had already discovered that someone was up to mischief. The heirs had all now formed into groups of two or three, and were heading into the third level.

The power of one was limited, but a team would work, right?

As for who was up to mischief, most speculations pointed to the Long brother and sister.

However, there was another frightening sort of rumor that splashed this pail of dirty water onto him, Jiang Chen!

“Looks like the Long brother and sister have spent some effort, and thought about targeting me?” Jiang Chen smiled coolly. He was weary of the game of the cat catching the mice.

Since there were so many boring speculations in the outside world, Jiang Chen decisively decided not to conceal himself anymore, and not avoid crowds as he had done before.

One day later, Jiang Chen felt that the temperature in the catacombs had decreased even more. The marsh and bog beneath his feet also felt ripe with danger.

“Looks like I’ve entered the third level.” Jiang Chen became prudent and cautious with where he set his feet.

Monsters would occasionally bubble up from the depths of this marsh. There were tentacled monsters, evil plants, and all sorts of armor eating demonic bugs...

Even Jiang Chen’s progress forward noticeably slowed down.

However, the amount of Greenwing Swordbirds noticeably increased after entering the third level.

Except, Jiang Chen had to spend quite a bit of time handling the numerous threats beneath his feet. It was bound to affect his hunt of Greenwing Swordbirds.

Jiang Chen killed another twenty three Greenwing Swordbirds after three days.

In this way, he'd collected 57 green spirit pearls.

Precisely ten days had passed.

"57 pearls in ten days. This is a bit slower than I'd thought. Except, oddly enough, why hasn't there been a single Silverwing Swordbird along the way?"

Jiang Chen was a bit tired of killing Greenwing Swordbirds. One had to know that one Silverwing Swordbird would result in one silver pearl.

One silver pearl was the equivalent of ten green spirit pearls.

Jiang Chen only had 43 green spirit pearls left to collect, but if converted into silver spirit pearls, that was only five silver spirit pearls.

"Look, that's Jiang Chen!"

"Yeah, this Jiang Chen has finally appeared. But why is he still

collecting green spirit pearls?”

“This means that he shouldn’t be the one causing trouble. If it was him, he would’ve long since collected enough!”

Jiang Chen had purposefully revealed himself to prove this point to the outside world, and to force the Long brother and sister duo out from the corners.

“Brother Jiang Chen.” Bai Zhanyun walked out from a dark corner.

“Brother Bai.” The two of them had formed a friendship after an exchange of blows. Jiang Chen didn’t harbor any ill intent towards Bai Zhanyun, and at least the latter was aware of his error, and was being responsible for it.

“You must also know that someone is causing trouble within the Boundless Catacombs, and has driven all of the Greenwing Swordbirds to the third level. This has caused everyone to have a very difficult time in hunting. Ten days have passed, but most are quite far off from reaching their quota! How has brother Jiang Chen fared?”

“I’m still half off.” Jiang Chen didn’t bother concealing anything.

“Then this means that brother Jiang Chen isn’t the one causing trouble?”

“Do you think I’m that bored?” Jiang Chen’s tone was remote. “Some people are obsessed with ambition, and seek to dictate the competition through control of the Greenwing Swordbirds, thus controlling the jurisdiction of the dukedoms. This is an act of ‘Those who adhere to me will ascend, and those who defy me will die’.”

“This... can the Long family really be behind this?” Bai Zhanyun’s face grew slightly cold.

Others immediately detected the abnormalities in this when everything was laid out. They called out, “Right, look everyone! Who are amongst those unable to hunt down Greenwing Swordbirds? Have you seen any of the heirs that are close to Soaring Dragon?”

“That’s right, we haven’t seen any of them! This Long family is indeed manipulating the competition!”

“Damn it, too despicable and utterly shameless! This is still the dominion of the Eastern Kingdom! Aren’t they afraid of arousing public anger with their actions?”

The pent up range and anger of these heirs were unleashed in the span of a moment.

This matter was quite clear now. Those who weren’t close with the Duke of Soaring Dragon, or hadn’t come under his banner were basically empty handed, with no gains whatsoever.

Those heirs close to the Duke of Soaring Dragon were conspicuously absent from the premises.

Even idiots could see that the Long brother and sister were behind this!

However, they also tragically discovered that the rules of the Hidden Dragon Trials didn’t seem to prohibit such things from happening.

Chapter 81: The Law Of The Jungle In The Catacombs

A din of curses sounded out as more and more dejected heirs gathered together.

“Everyone calm down, calm down. The heirs of White Tiger and Black Tortoise are here. They’re all heirs of the four great dukes, and the leader of us all. We must have a plan to combat against the Long family manipulating the contest. Otherwise, when we leave in a month’s time, we’ll all lose our dukedoms!”

“Yes, we must unite together and can’t allow them to do as they will.”

“That’s right. We don’t want to form factions, but don’t force us down the desperate road of disaster either!”

The heir of White Tiger, Bai Zhanyun, and the heir of Black Tortoise, Yi Tiachu, were both elected as representatives.

“Everyone, although I am one of the heirs to the four great dukedoms, I also think that everyone can see the prospects of the dukes within the kingdom in the future will surely change because of one person.”

Bai Zhanyun spoke loudly as his gaze rested upon Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen?

“Brother Jiang Chen, I, Bai Zhanyun, will concede only to you.” Bai Zhanyun had been foiled by Jiang Chen several times, but rather submitted with good grace.

“Brother Jiang Chen, I, Yi Taichu, also concede to you.” The heir of Black Tortoise, Yi Taichu, also nodded.

“Brother Jiang Chen, you have firmly suppressed the heirs of Soaring Dragon in your challenge for duke of the first rank. We also concede to you, please give us a few pointers.”

Jiang Chen was someone who could be persuaded by reason, but not by force.

“Everyone, I, Jiang Chen, am not someone who issues orders. However, my conjectures are that the greenwing swordbirds must be within the third level. Even with the many methods that the Long brother and sister have, they still wouldn’t dare to go to the fourth level. Therefore, no matter if they are willing or unwilling, the final battle is sure to be within the third level.”

“Everyone’s chosen strategy is correct. At this moment, the only suggestion I have for you is to form and hunt in teams. Moving about alone will force you to be very passive in the third level.”

This was all that Jiang Chen could say.

“Brother Jiang Chen, does this mean that we still have hopes of completing the mission?”

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, “I can only say that you will have a bit of hope when you form a team. However, if everyone has their own selfish motives, then it will be difficult to say.”

“Right, form teams, form teams!”

“I want to form a team, who’s willing to hang around me?”

“Brother Jiang Chen, are you willing to form a team with us?”

“If you don’t want the Long family to hold a grudge against you or don’t wish to be caught in the crossfire, the best choice is to keep away from me.”

Jiang Chen spoke the truth. The Long siblings had done so much, and he would never believe it if there wasn’t the slightest hint of a sinister plot against him in all this.

Of course, on the other hand, Jiang Chen had always preferred to come and go about freely and naturally didn’t wish to move in conjunction with these other heirs.

After he finished speaking, Jiang Chen sprang off both feet and his figure vanished in the darkness.

No matter what sinister plot the Long brother and sister were planning, Jiang Chen decided to cope with shifting events using one fundamental principle. He wanted to complete the mission first before contemplating other things.

His plans made, Jiang Chen made straight for the heart of the third level.

After penetrating roughly fifteen to twenty kilometers, Jiang Chen suddenly halted his footsteps and his nose vaguely twitched a few times.

Jiang Chen caught a baffling familiarity in the hint of presence that faded in and out.

“What presence is this?”

He sniffed carefully, but gained nothing.

At this moment, Jiang Chen’s pupils abruptly contracted as his “God’s Eye” suddenly sent out a beam of concentrated light. It swept over a small forest of rocks and a flock of swordbirds. There were three or four in the lead, and their foreheads all emanated a faint silvery light.

“Silverwing swordbirds?”

Jiang Chen flung away all those random thoughts and raised his speed to the extreme, shooting towards that flock of swordbirds.

This was the first time he'd seen a flock of swordbirds since entering the Boundless Catacombs.

There were roughly forty or fifty swordbirds in this flock, with the four silverwing swordbirds in the lead. They were originally flying in another direction, but suddenly turned back and flew towards Jiang Chen's direction.

Just as Jiang Chen's body approached, several figures suddenly shot out from the corner directly opposite him. They split up into several directions and blocked off the path of the flock of swordbirds.

"Don't let this fat target escape from our hands, go!"

The three figures that had appeared all flung attacks at the swordbirds.

How could Jiang Chen let such a prime opportunity pass him by? His body leapt out as he dashed up, the nameless blade cutting through the air!

It was as if the vast seas flowed backwards, as if the milky way hung upside down!

The second form of "Vast Ocean Current Splitter" – Wave Breaker!

A strong blade aura transformed into tempestuous billows and frightful waves, sweeping over a huge number of the swordbirds.

Jiang Chen reached out and snatched with a smooth motion, and two silver pearls immediately landed in his hands. His sleeves waved again, and he brought another nine spirit pearls into his sack.

The other three people also split up the spirit pearls with the fastest speed possible.

“Jiang Chen, you’re profiting off of someone else’s hard-earned effort! We’ve arduously laid in wait here and driven this flock of swordbirds, but you’ve picked up the biggest gains.”

One of the heirs was a bit unwilling to accept this outcome.

Although the other two didn’t make a sound, they watched Jiang Chen like a tiger casting covetous eyes on its prey.

Jiang Chen truly had profited the most this time. Two silver spirit pearls and nine green spirit pearls, it was the equivalent of gaining 29 spirit pearls in one stroke.

Add these 29 pearls to the 57 green spirit pearls that he had gained earlier, and that made for 86 pearls. He was now only 14 pearls away from completing the mission.

“Huh. If I didn’t make a move, would you have the assurance of

keeping all these swordbirds here?" Jiang Chen laughed coldly and raised his foot, about to leave.

If he hadn't made a move just now, it was very likely that the vast majority of these swordbirds would have escaped. After all, the speed of the swordbirds was exceedingly fast, and they were in the dark to boot. These three people could only surround three directions, and this flock had come barreling in Jiang Chen's direction.

If Jiang Chen hadn't made his move, they would have only been able to keep a few swordbirds.

At the end of the day, they had gained more from Jiang Chen's actions.

"Jiang Chen, leave the silver spirit pearls, you can take the green ones."

"Yes, we'll let you profit a bit, but don't be too greedy."

"This is our bottom line!"

"Come and get it if you have the skills to." Jiang Chen didn't want to blather on and directly leapt into the boundless darkness. Jiang Chen had no plans to reason with a bunch of fellows who didn't understand the concept of gratitude.

With Jiang Chen's speed, the three of them naturally wouldn't be

able to make Jiang Chen stay if he wanted to leave.

In some remote corner on the third level, four figures were meeting.

One of them asked with a raspy voice, “Any news of Jiang Chen?”

“Boss, that kid has hidden himself well, but he’s finally shown himself in the past couple of days. With the cooperation from the Long siblings, all is proceeding according to plan.”

“Mm. I wonder how that kid has done for himself under these circumstances?”

“According to intelligence two days ago, the kid has already collected half or so of the required green spirit pearls.”

“Half? Looks like this kid has some abilities for him to be able to hunt so many green spirit pearls under these circumstances. It looks like there was a reason for the Duke of Soaring Dragon to pay us double.”

“Heh heh, of course there would be a reason. Otherwise, with the current strength of the Long siblings, what need would they have of us?”

“Mm. If the kid collects enough spirit pearls before reaching this area, then our plan will have to be modified.”

“Mm. Seems like it needs to be modified. We have other plans anyways.”

“Number three, you’re more clever, you go. Since he won’t come to this area, you go lure him here. Proceed according to our plan.”

“Yes boss!”

“Number two, number four, prepare yourselves. If we’re to act, put on a good act. Make sure that this kid doesn’t take the slightest bit of precautions.”

“Don’t worry, with our four brothers making a move together and scheming against the unwitting Jiang Chen, how will be we worthy of our reputation as the Hidden Hand if we can’t get rid of this kid?”

As Jiang Chen penetrated deeper into the third level, he indeed began to hunt more swordbirds.

“It looks like I’ll be able to collect enough green spirit pearls without having to go to the fringes of the third level.” Jiang Chen calculated and felt that he would be able to complete his mission in another half-day at this pace.

Just as Jiang Chen was musing, one of his eyelids suddenly twitched, sending out a sign of alarm. “Who is it, come on out! What are you doing skulking around?”

Jiang Chen deployed his “God’s Eye” in the darkness and saw an heir run out from behind a patch of broken rocks.

“Brother Jiang Chen, is it really you?” A look of surprise and happiness shot out from his eyes when he saw Jiang Chen.

“You?” Jiang Chen thought this person looked familiar, but couldn’t remember his name.

“I’m Ouyang Ping of the Sunchaser dukedom. Brother Jiang Chen, I’ve searched for you all over this level. Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue have formed a team with a pack of heirs and got into a conflict with some other heirs. They’ve taken quite a beating. I’m friends with Fatty Xuan and with my strength, couldn’t help at all, so I’ve come out frantically looking for you.”

In his memories, this Ouyang Ping seemed to really have a bit of a friendship with Fatty Xuan.

“Where are they? Lead on!”

Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue were Jiang Chen’s only best friends. He was unable to sit idly by and ignore any matters that pertained to them.

At the same time, he felt that it was odd. With Hubing Yue’s strength, who else could threaten him apart from the heirs of the four great dukes?

“Can it be the heirs of the four great dukes?”

Ouyang Ping led the way as Jiang Chen followed behind, but he didn’t ask further questions. It had already been no easy feat for this Ouyang Ping to come bring him this message.

After roughly fifteen minutes, the two threaded past a patch of marshland, with a patch of thorns and thistles in front.

“They’re right past this area of thorns and thistles.”

Jiang Chen nodded, “Lead the way.”

After passing the thorns and thistles, they arrived at an expansive grassland. The surroundings were all made up of sinister, shiny, slippery, and wet crag walls. The jagged, oddly shaped rocks ahead appeared exceedingly sinister.

“Brother Jiang Chen, just up ahead.”

Jiang Chen nodded and suddenly asked, “Ouyang Ping, how many meridians true qi are you now again?”

“Heh heh, my prospects aren’t as good, I’m only at six meridians true qi, pretty much the same as Fatty Xuan.”

“Oh!” Jiang Chen mused upon something and nodded.

“Brother Chen, you’ve finally come!”

Jiang Chen followed the sound of the voice and saw Fatty Xuan sit dejectedly against a rocky wall. His face was pale and his breathing heavy. He seemed to have suffered injuries.

Hubing Yue wasn’t that well off either. He sat cross legged beside Fatty Xuan, and revealed a trace of joy upon seeing Jiang Chen’s arrival.

“Fatty, what’s going on?” Jiang Chen frowned. “You’re hurt?”

Fatty Xuan cursed dispiritedly, “It’s Yan Yiming and those bastards. Damn it, he bullied us because he had strength in numbers. It was a good thing that I, fatty, have thick skin and flesh.”

“Are you heavily injured?” Jiang Chen took out two Heavenly Karma Pills.

“A bit of an internal injury. Good thing I broke through to six meridians true qi or I may not have been able to withstand it.” Fatty complained.

Jiang Chen’s arm halted vaguely in thin air, but he still flicked his fingers, sending the two pills over. “This is the newest healing panacea refined by the Hall of Healing.”

“Brother Chen is the best!”

Fatty Xuan was wreathed in smiles.

Chapter 82: Falling Prey To A Plot

Jiang Chen nodded, asking, “How were your gains?”

“They were alright originally, but Yan Yiming seized them all.” Fatty Xuan’s face was suffused with anger as he gritted his teeth.

“Just hunt more if your spirit pearls were stolen. The greatest outcome is that you’re alright.”

Jiang Chen turned his head and spoke to Ouyang Ping, “Ouyang Ping, many thanks to your message today. I’ve got two extra green spirit pearls, here, take it as your reward.”

Ouyang Ping scratched his head, “This… how can I accept this?”

“Take it!” Jiang Chen’s forehead creased.

“Heh heh, then, I will accept deferentially as opposed to declining courteously?” Ouyang Ping carefully walked forward with the jitters and an arched back. He accepted the two green spirit pearls, and thanked him continuously, “Thank you Brother Jiang Chen.”

Fatty Xuan cried out and said, “Brother Chen, my shoulder blade still hurts. Can you come and see if it’s been dislocated?”

“Dislocation is a small matter, is it really worth making a big deal

of like this? You're still six meridians true qi. At the very least, can't you even handle such a small thing?"

"Heh heh, that's because Brother Chen is here!" Fatty Xuan had an exceedingly thick skin.

"Damned fatty." Although Jiang Chen cursed outwardly, he still walked over and stretched out a hand towards Fatty's shoulder blade.

Suddenly, the nine meridians true qi in Jiang Chen's body roared to life, bursting out of his palm and reaching towards Fatty in the form of a fist. The abrupt punch crashed down onto Fatty Xuan's chest!

Fatty Xuan cried out and hastily retreated, but he was still a beat too slow.

The punch that encompassed the mysteries of four cycles of blooming and wilting landed solidly.

Fatty Xuan's tubby body smashed violently into the rock walls, as he spewed out fresh blood from his mouth.

Almost at the same time at which Jiang chen made his move, Hubing Yue at his side also shifted. A short sword had appeared in his hand at some point, and came piercing down towards Jiang Chen's ribs like a viper.

There were no fancy flourishes to this strike – it was like the attack of a viper, directly aiming for the critical points.

Jiang Chen had obviously come prepared, so that when his fist punched out towards Fatty Xuan, his other hand clasped the sheath of the nameless blade, halting the attack of the venomous blade.

Jiang Chen's body retreated rapidly, wanting to dodge to the side.

At this moment, a surge of strength without the slightest forewarning shot rapidly through the air in the darkness.

A bow and arrow!

"True qi forming currents, a true qi master?" Jiang Chen was greatly startled and wanted to dodge, but it was already too late.

The arrowhead landed on Jiang Chen's back with a loud crash like a shooting star.

A dull thud sounded out. The arrowhead was uncommonly sharp, and it contained the accumulated strength of a true qi master. It should have pierced through Jiang Chen's chest, but that scene didn't happen.

The arrowhead connected with Jiang Chen's bag with a dull thud, and the force from the strong true qi sent Jiang Chen flying

more than ten meters, crashing heavily into another rock wall.

A mouthful of fresh blood sprayed out.

Even with the protection of the skysilk armor preventing the arrowhead from piercing through his body, the impact of the tremendously strong true qi permeating throughout Jiang Chen's body was enough to send tremors through his organs to the point at which they almost shifted places.

After spitting out the mouthful of fresh blood, Jiang Chen's right hand grasped the nameless treasured blade as he pushed himself up off the ground. His God's Eye was deployed to its maximum strength as he scanned the surroundings.

He actually wasn't that worried about the people in front of him. The bow and arrow attack from the shadows was what he feared the most.

If he was hit by another arrow, he'd at least suffer heavy injuries, even if he didn't die.

And a true qi master existed in the enemy's camp!

"Just who are you?" Jiang Chen's tone was calm but he didn't dare let up his guard even a little. All sorts of weird stones came into view as his God's Eye swept the area.

"This won't do, there're too many obstacles here. I'll have to use

Ear of the Zephyr.” Since God’s Eye was unable to discover the target, Jiang Chen once again deployed Ear of the Zephyr.

Ear of the Zephyr could catch any rustle in the grass within a radius of five kilometers.

Nothing to the east!

And nothing to the west!

Apart from the sound of underground creatures disturbing the marshland to the south, nothing as well!

Jiang Chen perked his ears up to the north and listened carefully, capturing the slightest hint of a breathing sound. It was suppressed to the extreme, and he wouldn’t have heard it if it wasn’t for his Ear of the Zephyr.

“There’s an archer at the level of a true qi master to the north!” Jiang Chen was a bit reassured after capturing his opponent’s position.

“Jiang Chen, you’re quite strong! You could discover our flaws when you’re in the mere advanced realm of true qi. You’re not simple, not simple at all.”

The person pretending to be Ouyang Ping threw the two green spirit pearls to the side, and the trace of a sinister smile was revealed at the corners of his mouth. “What a pity you’ll be dead

without a doubt today.”

“Dead? My single death for all of yours? Even if I die, I’ll bring down a few others with me to cushion the road.”

“Huh. Your punch would have at most harmed number four. With your level in the advanced realm of true qi, there’s no way you could’ve killed him!”

“Is that so? You’ve rather overestimated your companion’s ability to take a beating.” Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

A punch that encompassed the mysteries of “Divine Aeons Fist”… even if the other was a true qi master, he’d be dead without a doubt if his chest suffered a blow.

Jiang Chen still had this little bit of confidence.

“Number four, are you alright?” The killer who had faked Ouyang Ping called out raspily.

The killer pretending to be Fatty Xuan only murmured lowly, the breath of life in his body wispy and tenuous.

“No need to call out to him. There’d be no hope for him even if the immortals descended to the mortal realm.”

The fake Hubing Yue also dashed out from the shadows,

“Number three, we’ll attack him together. Boss, lock onto him with your bow, and torture this kid to death!”

Jiang Chen’s figure wavered as he dashed beneath another rock wall, covering his body, and just so happening to stay out of attack range of the hidden archer.

“Kid, stop hiding, you’ll be unable to escape, even if we fight three against one.” The fake Ouyang Ping leered.

“Three against one? Are you sure you still have such combat ability?” Jiang Chen laughed in contempt.

“What do you mean?”

“Oh no, number three, you took his green spirit pearls just now! They were probably poisoned! According to the intelligence from the employer, this kid may be adept at using poison!”

The fake Hubing Yue was number two, and immediately spoke up to issue a reminder to the fake Ouyang Ping.

Jiang Chen took advantage of their confusion to once again leap up and dash into the darkness like a ghost. He vanished without a trace with only a few rise and falls of his body.

“No, this kid is escaping!”

Although Jiang Chen had fled, he didn't get very far. Firstly, these people had provoked him, and Jiang Chen wasn't the type to easily let them off the hook.

Secondly, since they had faked being Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue, this caused Jiang Chen to be slightly concerned. Were Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue safe and sound at this moment, or had they already been killed by these fellows?

"Judging from their skills, they must be professionally trained killers. Except, wasn't the entrance to the Boundless Catacombs sealed? How did these fellows make their way in?"

How would Jiang Chen have known that the Duke of Soaring Dragon had spent a large amount of money to hire these four killers? They had long since targeted four heirs, and secretly disposed of them on the day that everyone had left for the catacombs. They then disguised themselves with the appearance of those four heirs, and made their way into the Boundless Catacombs.

And all of this was an arrangement from the Duke of Soaring Dragon – the plan of Long Zhaofeng!

They had originally used a few special methods to partner the Long family brother and sister together, in order to attract as many Swordbirds from the first and second level to the third level.

This location was the place they had set up to lure Jiang Chen to within the third level.

However, Jiang Chen's hunting skills were great, and he had obtained enough green spirit pearls in spite of their plans.

Jiang Chen would even be able to complete his mission early, and leave without setting foot into the area they had set up.

Therefore, they had started executing another plan, which was to disguise themselves as Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue. They had planned on acting out the ruse of inflicting an injury on themselves to win the confidence of Jiang Chen, and attack unexpectedly when Jiang Chen was looking at Fatty Xuan's injuries.

Except, never in their wildest dreams did they think that Jiang Chen would be able to see through them! This was outside of their expectations.

One had to know, the killers of Hidden Hand were all masters of disguise. Even if they had to disguise themselves as a chubby character like Fatty Xuan, they portrayed him with a living resemblance.

Actually, Jiang Chen hadn't even suspected that this was a trap in the beginning.

When the fake Ouyang Ping had led the way, Jiang Chen had only thought that it was vaguely strange. This Ouyang Ping was only six meridians true qi, how could he keep up with Jiang Chen's pace?

This little bit of strangeness had bothered Jiang Chen, but it didn't cause him to become suspicious.

The flaw that Jiang Chen truly did pick up on was the sentence the fake Fatty had said, when he said that he was of six meridians true qi.

One had to remember that on the bright morning before they had entered the catacombs, Fatty Xuan had come to specially tell Jiang Chen, gleefully, that he had broken through to seven meridians true qi.

Jiang Chen still remembered this matter vividly.

Except, the breakthrough had happened the night before they'd entered the catacombs. How was the killer pretending to be Fatty Xuan supposed to know?

However, even with this sentence, Jiang Chen had only suspected that maybe Fatty Xuan had said the wrong thing when he was injured.

But when he'd probed afterwards — You're still six meridians true qi, at the very least, can't you even handle this small thing?

Jiang Chen had once again emphasized six meridians true qi, and tested with his words.

This fake Fatty Xuan once again didn't offer a rebuttal and didn't correct him.

After twice in a row, as well as Jiang Chen's God's Eye, he finally discovered that there were still some differences in detail between the fake Fatty and the real one.

Many of the differences in detail were concealed by the boundless night. However, to Jiang Chen's God's Eye, they were as clear as looking at fire.

If you added the flaws in speech, it allowed Jiang Chen to discern that this was a trap.

So Jiang Chen turned the trick into something of his own use, and covertly applied poison to the two green spirit pearls, and then used the excuse of checking Fatty Xuan's shoulder to lay a lethal blow onto the killer pretending to be Fatty Xuan.

The end goal of his continued steps of plotting was to decrease the other's battle capabilities.

In this way, he had used one punch to kill number four who was pretending to be Fatty Xuan, and had employed poison to finish off number three who was pretending to be Ouyang Ping.

With this, there would only be the killer boss lying in wait from the shadows, and number two , who was pretending to be Hubing Yue, left.

“Heh heh, I was truly naive to think that the Duke of Soaring Dragon wouldn’t move against me here! Who would’ve thought that the Long family would go to such extremes to take care of me. They think highly of me indeed.”

Killing intent also surged within Jiang Chen’s heart. The Duke of Soaring Dragon had overstepped his bottom line again and again.

“Boss, this kid is strange. He killed number four with one punch, and number three with poison.”

“Hold your ground. He’s been injured by my true qi and won’t make it far. Remember, be on your guard against this kid’s poison!”

“Huh. He plotted against number three. How would I fall for the same thing, knowing that he’s adept at using poison?” The tone of the fake Hubing Yue was filled with a depth of hatred that reached the sky.

Chapter 83: A Fight To The Life And Death In The Catacombs

Previously, the enemy had been in the shadows and Jiang Chen in the light.

But now, Jiang Chen was in the shadows and the enemy in the light!

Jiang Chen deployed “Boulder’s Heart” and tried his utmost to adjust his mentality to the level of being impervious to desires and passions. He even held his breath.

Even so, the heart of Jiang Chen’s palms still sweated vaguely.

“If it wasn’t for the opponents revealing their flaws with their words this time, I would likely be a corpse by now.” Jiang Chen’s heart still palpitated with fright.

It was obvious that the Duke of Soaring Dragon had truly gone to great efforts this time, and had actually hired four true qi master killers.

Even if they hadn’t tried the trick of torturing themselves to win his confidence and surrounded him on all sides, they would’ve had at least a seventy to eighty percent chance of slaughtering him.

“The only thing to find fault in, is that these killers were too

cautious and wanted to be assured of their success too much." Jiang Chen could understand how things stood from their perspective.

After all, this wasn't the outside world – it was the Boundless Catacombs. It was an endless night – an underground world – that extended in all directions, and had a complicated terrain.

Once the ambush failed, and the target escaped, it would be exceedingly difficult to capture him within the Boundless Catacombs.

The opponents had overly sought to be assured of their success, but had instead given Jiang Chen the chance to snatch his life from the jaws of death.

However, Jiang Chen didn't relax his guard. He had schemed and gotten rid of two out of four of the true qi master killers, but two remained. One was skilled at close quarters combat, and the other at ambush. It looked like their strength would be even stronger than the two that had died.

Jiang Chen was nine meridians true qi now, and with his knowledge of strong methods, he wouldn't be at a disadvantage even he directly confronted a true qi master.

But to face off against two at the same time, and for them to both be cold blooded killers, was still a very big risk for Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen might not've been afraid of close quarters combat, but it was impossible to guard against that archer with surprising facilities.

If it hadn't been for the protection of the soft armor against that arrow just now, Jiang Chen's corpse likely would have long since been found on the scene. Even so, the strong true qi had still caused a certain degree of injury to him.

Jiang Chen's back leaned lightly against the rock wall and his Ear of the Zephyr was turned up to the maximum.

The sound of water dripping from the crag wall... the sound of bubbles arising in the marsh... all sorts of movement from underground creatures in the ground below – various minute sounds all travelled into his ears.

Whoosh!

A strong sound pierced through the air without any warning, and suddenly violently attacked Jiang Chen's location.

Another arrow!

And it was very accurate as it made its way straight towards Jiang Chen's hiding place.

It was as if the arrow would pierce through gold and shatter rock – it had an imposing manner as if the true qi was burning.

It directly came piercing through, flying through the rock wall.

“He’s discovered me?” Jiang Chen was startled as his body slightly wavered in that crucial moment.

It was a good thing there was a wall of rock in between. Although this arrow had an unparalleled momentum, but piercing through a wall of rock still offered a layer of obstruction, and its speed slightly slowed down that tiny bit.

Jiang Chen evaded it in this tiny beat of decreased speed!

The strong true qi pierced through the rock wall, and brought with it the arrow to the wall on the other side, sinking into the wall from the tip to the tops of the fletching!

When the arrowhead shot into the opposite wall, it emitted an ear piercing humming throb, shaking the rock wall and sending rock dust flying everywhere, the wall cracking open like a spider web.

“Such strong true qi!”

Jiang Chen was awed. The true qi carried by this arrow was absolutely not something that a true qi master of ten meridians true qi would possess.

“An eleven meridians true qi master?” Jiang Chen became more and more shocked. This Duke of Soaring Dragon had spared no expense, and had hired even an eleven meridians true qi master?

There was a marked level of difference between the existences ten meridians true qi and eleven meridians true qi.

Within all of the Eastern Kingdom, the number of eleven meridians true qi masters probably didn’t exceed 20!

No time allotted for Jiang Chen’s musing, the arrows broke through the air with unparallelled dominance like shooting stars. Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Three continuous currents of exceedingly strong arrow auras all shot towards the rock wall that Jiang Chen was hidden behind.

“Damn it, an eleven meridians true qi master alright. If I can discover him, he can also discover me!”

Jiang Chen suddenly discovered that his advantages gained from God’s Eye and Ear of the Zephyr were all completely negated in front of an eleven meridians true qi master.

It was a good thing that jagged rocks of grotesque shapes were all around the area that Jiang Chen had chosen to hide in. There were all sorts of rock walls for him to hide in.

His opponent wanted to shoot him, and would sometimes have to

pierce through multiple walls in order to do so.

However, though the rock wall could stop his opponent, it could also stop Jiang Chen's counterattack.

A Layered Feather Throwing Dagger in his hand, Jiang Chen tried valiantly to control his tense emotions.

The advantages of training "Boulder's Heart" began to become apparent. His emotions could become calmer the more he was faced with a critical situation.

The rhythm of Jiang Chen's emotions slowly became one with the jagged, grotesque rocks. The weird rocks didn't move, and thus his mental state didn't fluctuate either.

"You can't hide Jiang Chen!"

The boss-killer's raspy and sinister voice sounded like a demon from hell within the darkness.

The cold blooded killer was like a demon that pursued relentlessly. Not only did his methods of killing give one a hair raising feeling of horror and fright, but so did his voice as well.

Except, such emotional oppression was without effect in the face of Jiang Chen's "Boulder's Heart".

“Heh heh, Jiang Chen, I see you! Taste my sword!”

Another voice sounded. The fake Hubing Yue had already traveled to within twenty meters of Jiang Chen under the cover of the arrows!

Another arrow flew out with wily true qi, making for Jiang Chen’s hiding place again!

Jiang Chen was resigned. His opponent’s targeting abilities were strong to the point of being abnormal. No matter how he dodged, he’d never escape out of the other’s firing range.

In the moment that he moved once again, killer number two had already rushed up and stabbed fiercely towards Jiang Chen’s stomach.

“Die, kid!” With a hideous laugh, number two’s sword stance suddenly shifted.

Another stab towards Jiang Chen’s right rib!

This number two was well versed in close combat. The sword technique that he was displaying had obviously gleaned its true meaning from viper attacks.

Every move was as accurate, cunning, and ferocious as a viper’s attacks!

If it was direct combat, then Jiang Chen's "Vast Ocean Current Splitter" could absolutely match up to this wily sword technique.

However, there were two on the other side. Although this close quarters combat looked vicious, it was only to drag down Jiang Chen. The truly lethal threat was from the arrow attacks of the eleven meridians true qi master!

"What a frightening killer combination! I'll be dead without a doubt if I get entangled with this person. The attacks from the arrows can absolutely slowly torture me to death!"

What to do?

Jiang Chen had no avenues of retreat and no time to contemplate. In those critical moments, an exceedingly bold – even risky – thought flashed through his mind.

The nameless blade in his hand struck straight out!

"Eat my blade, first form of Wave Slash!"

Nine meridians true qi accompanied a blade that was as if a reverse ocean current, hewing straight towards number two.

The strength of one triumphing over ten. This Vast Ocean Current Splitter was the tyrant amongst blades, and possessed an

extremely imposing momentum. It was a technique of utilizing the strength of the blade to the utmost!

This simple and unadorned slash was enough to cause number two's wily sword techniques to halt briefly!

"Go!"

Jiang Chen forced number two to retreat with one move and immediately turned to leave, not tarrying for even a moment.

Number two was gleeful upon seeing this scene. This Jiang Chen was still inexperienced after all. He also knew that Jiang Chen had no desire to continue fighting because he was afraid of the boss's arrow attacks.

However, with the way that Jiang Chen had turned to leave, this was equivalent to him leaving his back open to number two!

"This kid is looking for death!"

Number two's sword aura churned, as a vicious sword struck for Jiang Chen's back like a viper!

"Die!"

A cunning curve and terrifying true qi once again struck Jiang Chen's back!

Jiang Chen's body stumbled as he rushed to the fore, the strong true qi almost causing him to fall in a dead faint. It was a good thing that he had raised his speed to the extreme. His forward momentum had more or less decreased the power of this strike.

"Boss, I hit him! This kid is dead for sure!"

Just as number two called out loudly to his companion, a cold light flashed in front of his eyes, during his moment of pride. A scary thought suddenly streaked through his mind.

Except, at this distance, it was too late for him to make any sort of reaction in this critical moment.

Pfft!

The moment that cold light lit up in his eyes, it had already sunk into his throat!

Layered Feather Throwing Daggers!

Jiang Chen had taken one of his hits in order to turn back and return the favor!

Although this strike wasn't an attack that encompassed the mysteries of "Moonshatter Flying Daggers", it was the basic attack of the technique. Its strength was astounding as it skipped a level

to kill with its attack, making it impossible to guard against!

One had to say, Jiang Chen had taken such a risky move out of resignation.

A bold plan, resolute execution, and the slightest chance of assurance had to accompany this unerring strike of throwing dagger technique!

A perfect knife was the satisfactory conclusion to this time's daring plan.

The eyes of number two bugged out like those of a dead fish. His face was filled with incredulity as he grabbed his throat, emitting raspy, hoarse sounds but unable to ever speak a single word again.

Another true qi master once again fell down.

Jiang Chen had no time to spare for retrieving his throwing dagger. He didn't even pause as his body dashed away and once again sank into the piles of grotesque rock shapes.

It was now one on one!

The boss of his opponents was adept with the dao of bow and arrow.

And he, Jiang Chen was also versed in the technique of throwing

daggers!

Long ranged attacks versus long ranged attacks. Without the existence of helpers, the pressure on Jiang Chen immediately decreased by quite a bit.

Except, the original bit of injuries he had suffered had worsened after taking the other's slash.

His stomach and lungs roiled like overturning rivers and seas, and he wanted to throw up several times.

"This killer is indeed professionally trained. If I had hesitated even a moment just now, or been briefly entangled by number two, then the person lying down now would likely be me."

Close quarters combat combined with long range attacks... This type of combination was indeed the most frightening. Jiang Chen had taken a few turns on the edge of life and death, but his emotions had in fact become more and more steadfast and persevering.

Jiang Chen circulated his true qi after swallowing a Heavenly Karma Pill, dispersing the medicinal effects into his various meridians. After taking two hits in a row, it was a good thing that he had the soft armor protecting him, otherwise he wouldn't even have the chance to take the pills right now.

At this moment, the stubborn and headstrong face of Princess

Gouyu suddenly flashed through Jiang Chen's mind. He thought that if it wasn't for her thoughtful considerations, this Boundless Catacombs would probably have become the place where he died unavenged.

"At the end of the day, it's that my strength isn't enough. If I was the level of a true qi master, and employed various methods, how would I be in such a difficult position that I'd have to expend so much effort with this duo?"

Hidden in the darkness, Jiang Chen once again realized that the insufficiency of absolute power would bind both his hands and feet when faced with such a situation.

Chapter 84: Cornered Into Desperate Circumstances?

“Jiang Chen, I’ll admit that you’re a genius!”

In the darkness, the raspy, bloodcurdling voice of the boss sounded once again. His tone was remote, without any emotions, as if the death of his three companions were like three ants being stepped on, and didn’t serve to elicit any ripples of emotion in his heart at all.

“Killing three true qi masters, although you used a bit of trickery, I have to admit that I’ve underestimated you.”

“However, you’ve been injured twice and you are now an arrow at the end of its flight. These catacombs are destined to become your burial place. I swear in the name of the Hidden Hand that I will kill you and torture you slowly, letting you taste true despair before you die!”

“Kill me?” Jiang Chen’s voice also sounded out coldly in the dark. “There were four of you just now and you still haven’t succeeded, what makes you think you can kill me with just one?”

“Four? One?” The boss sneered. “Do you think it’s a numbers game when killers kill people? Sometimes too many are a burden.”

“Being a slick talker? Forgive me for not being in the mood!”

Jiang Chen had once again raised his foot as he talked, using the strong intuition of “Boulder’s Heart”, he could already perceive that the other’s bow had likely once again locked on the area that he was in.

It was a good thing that there were countless grotesque rocks, intersecting stone walls, and row and rows of protruding stones that impacted the other’s movement.

However, Jiang Chen’s heartstrings dared not slacken.

The pressure from an eleven meridians true qi master was like a sharp blade that hung over his head, able to fall down at any time and kill him!

He couldn’t let down his guard, especially since his injuries were not yet fully healed.

The bow twanged again.

Jiang Chen subconsciously moved his foot, but then halted his movement afterwards.

The instinct of the Boulder’s Heart didn’t capture the traces of a great strength coming to attack in that delicate moment.

“No arrow? He only pulled the bowstring?” The notion flashed through Jiang Chen’s mind.

The bow sounded once again.

Jiang Chen remained as unmoving as a mountain, having entered the finest realm of the Boulder's Heart. It was as if all minute changes were unable to escape the perception of his mind.

Jiang Chen thought of a story, the story of birds being startled by the merest twang of a bow string.

"Is the boss thinking of me as a frightened bird? He only pulls the bow without shooting an arrow in order to wear away at my fighting spirit and to test my nerves?"

Jiang Chen suddenly understood something, and traces of a cold smile leaked out from the corners of his mouth. "If I hadn't trained 'Boulder's Heart' and my mental strength wasn't steadfast enough, I would have been affected by this parlor trick."

Twang, twang!

Consecutive bow twangs!

Jiang Chen moved this time!

Truth and falsehood mixed in with the bow twangs, two false and one true. The one in the middle was the attack of an arrow!

Truths and falsehood, truths and falsehood.

One had to say, the boss had a thorough understanding of attacking the heart, and a deep grasp of the way of hunting.

What a pity that he'd met Jiang Chen, an opponent with an exceedingly strong heart.

A rock wall was utterly demolished into rock dust by this arrow.

"Currents of true qi, an explosion of true qi! He's an eleven meridians true qi master alright!" Jiang Chen was also privately astounded by the power of this arrow.

He had to admit that his opponent was quite strong.

Even if he hadn't been injured, the only way out would most likely have been to make a clean getaway if he was faced with this person in combat.

It was a good thing that the Boundless Catacombs led in all directions, and was an endless underground world with no end.

"With my strength, it would be incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to kill this person in return. He's a killer, and has more than enough time to play with me. I have a mission to execute. Although I'm only a few green spirit pearls short, almost half of the month's time has passed already. If I'm dragged down by him, it would be quite severe if I'm unable to complete the mission."

Although Jiang Chen held an abiding hatred for this person, his reason told him that it would only waste his time and effort if he continued to be entangled with him. He was beset with danger on all sides and it'd be difficult to have any results.

Out of the thirty-six stratagems, running away to fight another day was the best policy.

"It's also a bit difficult to shake this person off. The terrain within the third level is dangerously precipitous and thus easier to hide in. The terrain becomes less complex back in the second and first level. It would then be even more difficult to shake him off."

Jiang Chen was in a dilemma.

If he stayed and was unable to kill the other party, then he'd only become his prey.

Leave? With this killer's tracking abilities, it would be tough to free himself from this killer once the latter had their sights set on him. Besides, as Jiang Chen still had a bit of spirit pearls to collect, this was as difficult as climbing up to the sky.

Two days afterwards, Jiang Chen lurked behind a hidden wall, his breathing a bit hurried. The wild goose chase and battle over the previous two days had greatly expended his energy.

This opponent was strong enough to the point in which Jiang

Chen felt prickles down his back.

In these two days, Jiang Chen used many tricks and thought of many plans.

However, this person was like a ghost from beginning to end, always able to hang over Jiang Chen, following him at a distance not too far away and not too close.

Jiang Chen had also tried to counterattack, but his attacks had always been a beat behind. The other's bow and arrow attacks were accurate, wily, and could always firmly restrain his counterattacks.

If he wanted to throw the other off on the basis of strength, the speed of the other wasn't faster than him, but it also wasn't slower than him.

He'd been unable to befuddle the other by concealing his body, scurrying this way and that, and disguising his features or his pace.

Jiang Chen suspected that the other must have a special method to follow his tracks.

He couldn't shake him off, and couldn't beat him in battle.

After two days of this, Jiang Chen felt a bit weary. It was a good thing that he'd prepared many heaven defying medicines.

The Heavenly Karma Pill allowed him to recover seventy to eighty percent of his injuries.

The Vast Ocean Pill facilitated the timely recovery of the true qi he'd expended.

With the aid of these pill medicines, although Jiang Chen continuously resided in the face of danger, he had yet to be beaten by the other.

"Jiang Chen, doesn't it feel grand to be in a constant state of anxiety and on tenterhooks?" The raspy voice like a ghost or a ghoul sounded once again.

"Who would've thought that you'd be able to hold out for so long. I greatly admire and am excited by you. You are the kind of prey that makes the hunt and torture more meaningful."

"However, it ends here today."

The boss never forgot to attack his prey's heart at any given time. In his eyes, prey that constantly existed under a state of fear was no different than birds frightened by the merest twang of a bowstring.

Attacking the heart, undermining the fighting spirit, until the prey finally suffered a mental breakdown in the end and was tortured to death by him.

Jiang Chen's heart was as if a boulder. Although the circumstances were exceedingly disadvantageous to him and he was extremely bedraggled, these wretched conditions made his courage mount as the battle progressed.

"You're a killer, but have the flapping mouth of a woman. Come kill me if you really have the skills to. If you don't, then we'll continue whiling the time away in the Boundless Caverns. Let's see who lasts longer."

Jiang Chen didn't bother concealing his body anymore. He didn't fear being ambushed by the bow and arrow of the other as long as he kept the proper distance.

After all, both were quite familiar with the other's ways after multiple days of chasing.

"Lasts longer? What qualification do you have to while away time with me? There's not much left of the allotted one month's time. Can you afford to waste time?" The boss killer laughed leisurely.

"A month? Didn't you just say that it ends today? You're slapping yourself in the face?" Jiang Chen sneered.

"You have a glib tongue!" The raspy laugh sounded out in a sinister fashion. "However, you probably don't even know that you've already walked into your final resting place?"

Jiang Chen's thoughts raced. Instinct told him that there seemed to be some truth to the other's words.

Suddenly, Jiang Chen's heart sank. The Ear of the Zephyr twitched slightly. There were two sets of footsteps quickly approaching from the east and west.

And, a frightening power was also contained behind these footsteps, a strength that didn't pale in comparison to true qi masters!

Familiar, a feeling that became more and more familiar.

"It's them!" Jiang Chen was startled.

Jiang Chen hadn't seen the two ever since entering the Boundless Catacombs. Were they finally going to reveal themselves at this moment?

Long Yinye, Long Juxue!

The two heirs of the Duke of Soaring Dragon!

"Jiang Chen, you're looking a bit bedraggled." Long Yinye's voice sounded from within a hundred meters to the east.

"Jiang Chen, I gave you a chance that day in the capital." Long

Juxue's lofty tone belonged to one high on top. "You didn't cherish it and decided to be my enemy."

"We can only crush you if you move against my Soaring Dragon dukedom. Jiang Chen, face your death!"

The Long siblings echoed each other as they circulated their true qi with awe inspiring momentum. They were both true qi masters!

"Long siblings, my three subordinates have all been killed by Jiang Chen. I've decided to double the price for this transaction."

The boss killer spoke with a leisurely voice.

Long Yinye's tone was cold. "Xue Sha, don't reach for more after getting what you want. The price we've given you is already double."

"Yes, you've given us double, but my brothers have lost their lives. Some compensation is appropriate?" The boss continued to speak in a voice as diffident as the fleeting wind and clouds.

"Are you trying to break the contract?" Long Yinye's voice lowered.

"The decision is yours. You can choose not to accept. I can give up this job. Not that I'm boasting for Jiang Chen, but as soon as I let up here, he is sure to escape like a slippery eel. You have no idea how much energy I've spent the past three days just to pin him

down!”

Long Yinye and Long Juxue looked at each other, with Long Juxue finally nodding, “Alright, then we’ll do as you say. We’ll double the price again, but you cannot drag your heels when completing your work!”

“Drag my heels? Do I, Xue Sha, look like someone who takes money without doing work?”

As he spoke, he notched an arrow and sent it flying like a shooting star directly where Jiang Chen had hidden himself.

“Jiang Chen, die!”

“Kill him!”

Long Yinye and Long Juxue cooperated together and came at him from both sides.

The depths of an expert’s skills are revealed when he makes a move.

Subtle runes shimmered over Long Yinye’s broadsword, emanating rays of dark gold light, appearing exceedingly sinister.

Long Juxue had a short sword that sparkled with a remarkable green light. The surface of the short sword was encompassed by a

green current of air, vaguely forming the shape of an azure phoenix.

When the boss killer saw this, he rasped out, “Spirit weapons! You, you have two spirit weapons!”

Jiang Chen was also abruptly enlightened when he heard the words “spirit weapons”, his face changing slightly. These Long siblings actually had spirit weapons on them!

In the span of a moment, Long Yinye’s broadsword had already started cleaving through the air. The golden runes on the exterior of the broadsword started expanding endlessly, swirling out a golden splendor and forming a frightening momentum. It was as if a five clawed golden dragon was imbued on the blade’s edge as it came viciously chopping down.

Long Juxue’s short sword was suffused with green light, turning true qi into the shape of an azure dragon. It formed a beam of falling light and stabbed straight towards the critical parts of Jiang Chen’s stomach and chest.

Beseiged on three sides.

To the front was an arrow shot out with the full strength of eleven meridians true qi!

On the left and right were two newly ascended true qi masters and the terrifying blows from their spirit weapons!

Desperate circumstances. Jiang Chen had been cornered into desperate circumstances in the blink of an eye!

Chapter 85: Plunging Into The Forbidden Zone Without Hesitation

His strength, it still wasn't enough.

Faced with desperate circumstances, and armed with the will of a boulder, he could no longer worry about the small things.. The true qi in his body was all concentrated on the nameless treasured blade.

"Treasured blade, I barely caught a glimpse of the passing beauty that was your splendor that night. The spirit strength that passed as quickly as a white pony's shadow across a crevice, the aura that once pierced the stars, the secret that palpated hearts... will you awaken at this moment?"

Jiang Chen had thrown all the random thoughts in his mind to the back of his mind in this moment of life and death.

Whether he lived or died would be decided in this pivotal moment.

The true qi within his body surging up like the tidewaters, as he circulated the true qi currents of the "Secret of the Nine Laughing Oceans" to the utmost.

Coalescing nine meridians true qi as one.

Surging to the treasured blade in his hand.

“Second form of Vast Ocean Current Splitter – Wave Breaker”

At this moment, an astounding scene happened. That simple and unadorned nameless saber suddenly awoke — like an ancient deity reviving from its slumber, breaking free of the shackles of heaven and earth, and trampling the rivers and mountains of the world.

The dusky splendor of stars and a dim sun and moon.

In that moment, the vast waves true qi around the nameless blade concentrated into the vague shape of a deity from time immemorial, holding the skies and the earth.

The aura of this stroke was as if it carried the representation of the ancient deity — as if it held the terrifying power to destroy the heavens and earth.

A crisp crack sounded out twice.

The blades had connected. Under the edge of the nameless saber, the golden runes on Long Yinye’s broadsword flickered out like a candle being snuffed, and the shadow of the grimacing five clawed dragon was as if scattered by the wind.

A crisp sound like ripping silk rang out from Long Juxue’s azure phoenix short sword.

True qi drained out in the next moment.

Long Yinye's broadsword cracked in the middle, breaking into two pieces.

Long Juxue's azure phoenix short sword had been broken into many pieces, and been turned into scrap metal.

As for the nameless saber, its remaining prestige was ceaseless. The sounds of the blade howling were emitted in continuous succession as beams of bright light emanated from it, completely unharmed.

Long Yinye was dumbfounded. Long Juxue was similarly dumbfounded.

Even Jiang Chen was quite astonished by this scene. It was obviously outside of his expectations. One had to know, his opponents were using spirit weapons.

Even true qi masters couldn't dream of obtaining a spirit weapon.

"Die!" The boss killer's long readied arrow shot towards Jiang Chen at the best possible timing.

The perfect moment, an incomparable arrow.

It had inserted itself into this delicate timing without the slightest error.

Jiang Chen's strike had been deployed. Although he'd broken through the blows from the Long siblings' spirit weapons, he still couldn't avoid this terrifying arrow.

The arrowhead crashed viciously into Jiang Chen's chest. Although the strong true qi still didn't pierce through the Skysilk Soft Armor, it still sent Jiang Chen flying.

The arrow that Jiang Chen had taken before was on his back.

This arrow connected solidly with the crucial area of his chest. As he was sent flying, fresh blood spewed wildly. Every meridian was invaded by strong true qi, as if he'd been electrocuted, nearly destroying every single one.

It was a good thing that the soft armor had already blocked more than half of the power.

Jiang Chen had also spent a lot of effort during normal times to strengthen his meridians, and had used unique methods to forge them, nurturing them with spirit medicine over long periods of time.

This was why his meridians weren't churned to pieces.

However, even if they weren't churned to pieces, they were

heavily injured, and could no longer circulate the slightest bit of true qi.

After he landed, Jiang Chen almost couldn't catch his breath. He vomited up three mouthfuls of fresh blood in a row and finally crawled up, sustained by burning his life energy. His body jerked as he ran in a stumbling dash into the endless darkness.

"After him."

Long Yinye was the first to rush over, with Long Juxue close behind him. The emotions of the two at the moment were both astounded and enraged. They had prepared so long for this time, and had even brought out their spirit weapons. They had thought that they could easily crush Jiang Chen.

Who would've thought that the two spirit weapons would be made worthless by Jiang Chen's unassuming blade.

The boss killer of the Hidden Hand was in no panic or rush, always keeping his calm as he rounded up the rear, chasing at an appropriate speed.

Ever since Jiang Chen had entered their ambush zone, he'd had a unique way to plant some sort of brand on Jiang Chen's body, making it so that no matter where Jiang Chen walked, he would be unable to shake off the killer's pursuit.

He'd been unconcerned about losing Jiang Chen previously, and

was naturally even less rushed now that Jiang Chen had been severely hurt, and could fall down at any time.

"To think that Jiang Chen's blade is that strong and domineering, thoroughly trouncing two spirit weapons. I must have it. These Long siblings..." A killing intent flashed through the boss killer's heart. Even if the Long siblings were to do something impetuous within the Boundless Catacombs, he wouldn't mind getting rid of them.

The desire of all the practitioners in the world held for a divine weapon was enough to drive someone mad.

Even spirit weapons were unable to contend with Jiang Chen's blade. This was enough for the boss killer to take the risk of forming the intention to kill the Long siblings.

"Jiang Chen, you can't escape!"

Although Long Yinye's spirit weapon had been destroyed, his didn't lose his footing.

"We've already surrounded the way out of here. If you continue any further, that'll be the taboo area. You have no path to heaven, and no way to fly through the earth."

Jiang Chen was actually also pouring out his grievances as he ran. He was already dancing on the edge between the third and fourth level beneath his feet right now.

With every few hundred meters he took, he could deeply feel that he had entered a terrifying abyss.

The frightening aura exuded by the fringes of the fourth level, the subtle terrifying presence, was already enough to cause all of Jiang Chen's hairs to involuntarily stand on end.

"You mustn't set foot into and beyond the fourth level at any costs. That is a forbidden zone. Countless numbers of geniuses have once brashly ventured in, and still no one has ever emerged. The odds would be stacked against even a spirit dao practitioner. So remember this well, remember this very well!"

Princess Gouyu's repeated admonishments from that day seemed to ring by within Jiang Chen's ears.

Proceeding further would be entering the fourth level, the forbidden zone.

Even when spirit dao practitioners had entered, their way was fraught with grim possibilities. No one below the realm of spirit dao had ever walked out again.

But, to turn back?

The way back led to the Long siblings, who were eying him like tigers to prey.

There was also a frightening cold blooded killer.

Any of those three could kill the heavily injured Jiang Chen as easily as snuffing out an ant.

Proceeding forward was the forbidden zone of the fourth level. There basically would be no return from it. Yet, retreating and finding the way back was already barred. Those three would never let him off.

There were only these two choices left for Jiang Chen. Either of them seemed to lead to death and desperation.

“Haha, Jiang Chen, why aren’t you running anymore? Keep going.” Long Yinye’s vision could already catch sight of the Jiang Chen circling around the fringes of the fourth level.

“Jiang Chen, I’ve said that you must die for fighting against my Soaring Dragon.”

Jiang Chen’s gaze shifted. The boss killer had also arrived within five hundred meters of his vision.

“Long siblings, I want to say first that the blade in Jiang Chen’s hand will belong to me.” A domineering sense that was beyond all question suffused the boss killer’s tone.

“Belongs to you? On what basis? You seek to take advantage of the situation to profiteer with four times your usual rate already?”

Long Yinye was outraged.

“Heh heh, young duke Long. If you don’t agree, I still have a hundred ways to obtain this blade, and can make your hunting plan all for naught as well.” The killer’s tone was leisurely.

“You!” A violent light peaked in Long Yinye’s eyes.

“Forget it. When I enter the sect in the future, a spirit weapon will be nothing much.” Long Juxue understood the importance of observing the times and judging the occasion.

“Haha, Miss Juxue is highly educated and reasonable alright. Then it’s happily decided. Jiang Chen is a rat in a case now, he can’t get away.”

Jiang Chen’s face was expressionless as he gaze swept fully across the three of them. “I’ve remembered you. Come on in as well if you want to kill me. Don’t forget that the day I, Jiang Chen, reappear is the moment that you will pay back ten, a hundred times.”

With that said, Jiang Chen’s feet pushed off the ground as he rushed into the darkness. He didn’t even turn his head back as he rushed towards the forbidden zone of the fourth level.

“This… Jiang Chen, you’re dead without a doubt if you go in!” Long Yinye called out.

“Jiang Chen, if you come out, we promise not to involve your

family clan. Only death awaits you if you still insist on going in. We will be certain to bathe Jiang Han manor in blood afterwards." Long Juxue knew the strategy of attacking the heart.

A bloodbath at Jiang Han manor?

Jiang Chen's heart shuddered vaguely, but remained as solid as a boulder, resolutely rushing into the depths of the forbidden zone.

Would they let the Jiang Han manor off the hook if he surrendered?

Just like a promise from a tiger to a lamb, there was no credibility in it at all.

"Father, my apologies. To think that after my reincarnation, I would still be unable to help Jiang Han walk out from a difficult situation?" A few traces of bitterness were found in Jiang Chen's smile.

"Ai, this kid is quite stubborn." The boss killer also sighed.

Long Yinye said wrathfully, "And isn't it all because of you? If you hadn't mentioned killing him and taking his blade, it might not have been enough to upset him enough to take this path."

"Heh heh, young duke Long, your words demonstrate that you don't understand your opponent at all. Pardon my candor, if it wasn't for the situation of today, the Duke of Soaring Dragon's

position of first duke beneath the heavens was sure to be lost if you had competed with Jiang Chen in an open and straightforward way.”

The boss killer’s tone was bluntly candid.

“You…” Long Yinye flared into a burst of anger.

“Forget it, what’s the use of quarreling with mouth and tongue? Should we unite together and continue pursuing him, or guard this place?” Long Juxue spoke up and mediated.

“If you don’t want to live any longer, you can pursue him inside. But I won’t keep you company.” The boss killer hadn’t lost his composure even when his underlings had been killed. However, when his gaze looked into that yawning blackness with no end that was the fourth level, he actually revealed the hint of a wary and shocked look.

“Then do we keep waiting like this?” Long Yinye asked out of sorts. “We don’t have that much time to wait.”

“I can wait.” The boss killer smiled faintly. “The payment of four times the usual rate is unchanged. I’ll wait here a few months”

“How do we know that you won’t go easy on him?” Long Yinye laughed coldly.

“Go easy? One, I never go easy once I’ve accepted payment. Two,

am I waiting for him to grow up and get his revenge if I go easy on him? Third, I want his blade."

Any one of these three reasons were enough.

Finally, both sides agreed that the boss killer would take up watch here to prevent Jiang Chen from escaping.

Long Juxue didn't actually suspect that the boss killer wouldn't keep his word. She was well aware that this person was selfish. As long as he didn't lose interest in Jiang Chen's blade, he would definitely not leave.

Of course, there was no point in waiting for a long time. No one could make it past three days within the forbidden zone of the fourth level.

Their agreement was to wait for a month. That was enough.

"Long siblings, I hope that the payment of four times the usual rate will have already arrived when I leave. You must be aware of what I would do if it hasn't." The boss killer reminded faintly.

Long Yinye snorted coldly but was dragged away by Long Juxue as the two walked outside.

Chapter 86: Forbidden Zone, Spirit Level Beast

Jiang Chen stumbled and staggered, using all the remaining strength within his body to flee into the depths of the fourth level. At this moment, he no longer cared about the so-called forbidden zone, and no longer cared about the point of no return.

He could die, but definitely not in the hands of the Long siblings!

He could never accept the Long siblings displaying his head and going back to the capital to bluff and bluster in front of his father!

If he couldn't control his birth, then he would at least control how his death came about!

Therefore, Jiang Chen didn't tarry. His feet rushed forward with all their might. He didn't know how long he'd walked either. He only knew that his body felt increasingly heavy, his mind increasingly dull, his pace increasingly scattered, and his consciousness increasingly foggy.

He fell down. He fell down with a body of blood and dirt.

After who knew how long, a vague trace of light seemed to shoot into the endless darkness of Jiang Chen's consciousness.

He seemed to be awake, yet also seemed to be dreaming.

He dreamed that he seemed to have returned to his past life, returning to the glories of being the son of the Celestial Emperor, returning to the resignation of enduring millions of years of emptiness...

The dream landscape took another turn in the blink of an eye. He seemed to have returned to the capital and saw that large hordes of Soaring Dragon soldiers had rushed into the Jiang Han manor, hauling his father out all trussed up.

And then an executioner's sword used for beheading people sentenced to death, swung high, chopping down towards his father's head.

"No!" Jiang Chen felt a pain in his chest and abruptly opened his eyes.

"Awrk!"

A Goldwing Swordbird seemed to be startled and fluttered away with a flap of its wings, flying away from Jiang Chen's side.

Jiang Chen lowered his head and discovered that his clothes had already been slit open by the sharp edge of the Goldwing Swordbird's beak. It was a good thing that there was a layer of Skysilk Armor protecting his body.

Otherwise, that beak would have laid him open and

disemboweled him just now.

“Goldwing Swordbird?” Jiang Chen was incredibly enfeebled. Whenever he circulated true qi through his meridians, he felt like his meridians would split open and that his body would completely fall apart into pieces..

Jiang Chen coughed lightly a few times, spitting out some trace liquids from his lungs. He felt that his breathing had become slightly easier.

Fishing out a Heavenly Karma Pill, he was about to put it in his mouth when his hand suddenly halted.

His eyes almost goggled out of his head.

The hairs on his body all involuntarily stood up as he looked around.

A thick crowd of Swordbirds were standing on every surface possible in all directions!

On the walls, on the grotesque rocks, on the marsh, the shrubs, the dirt...

As long as there was a place to stand, it was packed with Swordbirds!

The saying of “tens of thousands” is used for describing something numerous, but how could the number of Swordbirds in front of his eyes be numbering in the tens of thousands?

Jiang Chen swept his gaze around and couldn’t see the end. He only saw a mass of Swordbirds with keenly honed and neat feathers, glowing spirit pearls on their foreheads, and sharp beaks comparable to blades and swords.

“Have… Have I arrived in the base camp of the Swordbirds?”

Originally, one or two Swordbirds would pose no threat whatsoever, but the scene at hand was basically an ocean of Swordbirds!

Even if he was unharmed and in good shape, and even if his strength were to increase tenfold, he would probably still only suffer the downfall of being ripped into meat scraps in this ocean of Swordbirds, not to mention how he was covered with serious wounds right now!

You could kill one or two.

You could also kill ten or a hundred.

You wouldn’t be able to kill thousands or tens of thousands, but you could run.

Except, Swordbirds met the eye in every direction. They were

present no matter where one walked or escaped. How would he escape? There wasn't even the room to escape!

Besides, some Silverwing Swordbirds were scattered amongst these Swordbirds, and there were even around ten Goldwing Swordbirds!

One Goldwing Swordbird had the fighting strength of a true qi master!

Jiang Chen laughed wryly, it looked like even if he didn't meet violent beasts within this fourth level, this incalculable ocean of Swordbirds would be able to drown him.

"What a pity, why didn't the Long siblings take the risk and chase after me in here?" Jiang Chen didn't even have any thoughts of escaping now. He only rued the fact that he couldn't perish together with the Long siblings.

He threw the Heavenly Karma Pill into his mouth, simply deciding not to think so much.

However, he felt that it was a bit odd. These Swordbirds were all eyeing him like prey, but why had none of them taken any action yet?

With his current battle strength, a normal Greenwing Sword would be able to slice and dice him inch by inch into meat scraps.

A Goldwing Swordbird circled past the top of Jiang Chen's head.

Another Goldwing Swordbird from the opposite direction left behind a golden colored shadow.

The golden-feathered Goldwing Swordbirds were comparable to the existence of true qi masters alright. Those perfect wings and perfect lines emanated a frightening aura. They were indeed in no way inferior to the human true qi masters.

Their degree of wildness and fierceness even slightly surpassed true qi masters.

Numerous Goldwing Swords flew over Jiang Chen's head, circling.

Jiang Chen only felt baffled. These Goldwing Swordbirds continuously spiraled overhead, as if dancing in the sky. Although Jiang Chen could feel their hostility, he could also clearly feel that they were suppressing their intent to kill.

"What are these Goldwing Swordbirds hesitating for?" Jiang Chen was perplexed. This kind of situation was the most unbearable. It was like feeling the emotions of someone sentenced to death and tied up on the execution ground, waiting for the executioner's blade.

Except, this blade continuously failed to materialize. It was enough to cause someone to mentally break down.

“You demons in bird form, hurry up if you’re going to do something. What do you intend by continuously flying over this young lord’s head?”

“Hey, can you be more hygienic when you go potty? You almost splashed this young lord’s pants.”

Jiang Chen was seriously at a loss. He cursed for a while and saw that although the Goldwing Swordbirds couldn’t resist putting on a show of force or provoking him, they had no intention of doing anything to him. He became too lazy to pay attention to them.

At this moment, the medicinal effects of the Heavenly Karma Pill had slowly seeped into the meridians and started repairing his injuries.

“Whatever. Since they’re not making a move, I have a chance to heal from my injuries.”

One had to say, the Heavenly Karma Pill truly deserved its name, as it was divine in its effects. As long as the practitioner hadn’t died, any internal injuries could be healed completely from any time within a day to three days.

Of course, with Jiang Chen’s body constitution and the tenacity of his meridians, as soon as the Heavenly Karma Pill started taking effect, his rate of recovery would be faster than ordinary practitioners.

After all, the tenacity and strength of his meridians had been tempered by unique methods. It could be said that they had been tempered hundreds, no, thousands of times, and there were no others like them.

"Awrk!"

A Goldwing Swordbird circling over Jiang Chen's head suddenly let out a long call. All the other Goldwing Swordbirds started calling out in unison as well.

The Silverwing Swordbirds followed the call afterwards, with the countless Greenwing Swordbirds also joining in as well. In that moment, the calls of birds screaming concentrated into a sharp ocean of sound. It was as if a tidal wave was washing over the scene as the rock walls and grotesque rocks on all sides fell over, breaking and collapsing here and there.

"This..." Jiang Chen's face changed, knowing that something had happened. Even with his training of "Boulder's Heart", he too felt a bafflingly sense of palpitation in that moment.

It wasn't because of this ocean of sound, nor was it because of the deep impact from all the presences.

It was because a vague, indistinct aura was becoming clearer in the darkness, radiating from a distance to where they were.

“What’s going on? Is a huge and strong monster appearing?” Jiang Chen only felt that his heartbeat was uncontrollably speeding up. Even the suppression effect of “Boulder’s Heart” was unable to control this sense of shock and fear.

Thud thud!

Thud thud thud thud!

Sounds like drum beats vibrated Jiang Chen’s ear drums.

An incredible scene happened next. All the Swordbirds were as if a highly trained army, lining up neatly and facing the west as a whole, expanding their wings like two blades stuck sideways.

At this moment, one row, two rows, endless rows of Swordbirds all made the same movement, forming a square matrix!

This scene was awe inspiring and was a scene not to forget for the rest of Jiang Chen’s life!

Suddenly, Jiang Chen saw two lights like lanterns abruptly appear in the darkness to the west.

An extremely strong sense of presence threaded throughout the flocks of birds and rushed forward afterwards.

This was a strength that had never been felt before, an aura that

even true qi masters paled far in comparison to. Even tens, hundreds of true qi masters combined together would be unable to create such an aura!

“Spirit level violent beast?” Jiang Chen suddenly remembered something!

He was immediately enlightened. How were those two lights lanterns? Those were the beast’s eyes!

It was the king of this territory, the dictator of this territory!

Jiang Chen suddenly understood everything, and now understood why these Goldwing Swordbirds had had aggressively fierce postures but still didn’t do anything to him.

It wasn’t that they didn’t want to, but that they were afraid to!

Because, even Goldwing Swordbirds would lower their arrogant heads and humble themselves like slaves in front of this immensely strong violent beast.

This was the posture of submitting their allegiance to this beast!

Continuously increasing his “Boulder’s Heart” until he had raised it to the maximum, Jiang Chen strived his best to restrain his nervousness and fear.

He wasn't afraid of death, but didn't want to die in too ugly of an manner and be looked down upon by these alien races.

He could finally see clearly that it was a huge beast that was long and thick in stature. Its head was exceedingly like a dragon, but its body lacked the scales of a dragon.

It had legs, but not dragon claws.

The ground would tremble correspondingly with every step it took.

Thud. Thud thud!

This rhythm, this presence, all vibrated so that Jiang Chen's internal organs were in abnormal discomfort!

The aura of this beast made Jiang Chen's breath quicken. If it wasn't for the fact that he was the reincarnation of the son of the Celestial Emperor, he likely would have long ago been crushed by this aura.

"A human?!" This large beast had finally stopped and even imitated human language!

Jiang Chen was still someone who had seen great occasions after all, and he immediately resumed his normal countenance after holding up beneath this wave of aura. He was about to open his mouth when a thought struck him. He curled his tongue and

actually started speaking in the ancient language of the beasts, “Big fella, are you the king of the Boundless Catacombs?”

“Mm?” The eyes that were like lanterns of the large beast couldn’t help but blink. It almost doubted itself, as if its ears had misheard. This human could speak the language of the beasts?

And, the highly noble ancient language of the beasts at that?

“I asked you, are you the king of the Boundless Catacombs?” Jiang Chen asked again in the language of the beasts.

“You know the language of the beasts?” The spirit level beast asked in surprise.

“I know a lot, but you still haven’t answered my question.” Jiang Chen continued in the ancient language of the beasts.

“Interesting, how interesting! To think that there are still humans who understand the ancient language of the beasts!” How would this spirit level beast know that in the millions of years in Jiang Chen’s past life, they had been long drawn out and boring. He was widely read on all matters, and there were none that he didn’t understand if it was interesting.

“King?” The spirit level beast shook its head. “I’m just the lord in charge of the most outer fringes of this fourth level. I’m not even one of the great lords of the fourth level. King? Heh heh. I don’t even have the right to know!”

“Not even the right to know?” Jiang Chen was shocked.

“Indeed! However, how come you, a human, know the ancient language of the beasts?” This spirit level beast also knew a bit of the ancient language, but it wasn’t proficient at it, so it was incredibly curious.

Chapter 87: An Unexpected Transaction

“That’s my secret.” Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

“Secret?” The spirit level beast smiled. “You, a mere human, dare talk to me about secrets while in my territory?”

“Indeed, a secret. I hadn’t planned on leaving here alive anyways. You don’t even need to do anything, those Swordbirds are more than enough to take care of me.” Jiang Chen was utterly shameless.

“Haha, you’re an interesting human indeed. Previously, none of the humans that entered my territory have left it alive, unless I couldn’t beat them. However, you, I don’t plan on killing you.”

“Because I know the ancient language of the beasts?” Jiang Chen asked in a low voice.

“No.” The spirit level beast shook its head. “Because, since you’ve entered my territory, there’s been a certain type of power hidden inside of you, a frightening power. Although I can no longer feel it, I am certain that a terrifying power sleeps within you.”

“Oh?” Jiang Chen was also completely befuddled by the beast’s words.

It was a sure thing to say that he was full of the teaching of the apostles and held a thorough knowledge of scientific and

theoretical affairs, but how would he even begin to explain the fact that apparently a terrifying power was concealed within him?

"No need to speculate. You haven't even entered the spirit dao yet, and have yet to open your spirit ocean. You will absolutely be unable to capture the presence of this power."

Only when one entered the spirit dao and cleaved through the spirit ocean could one begin to train in spirit qi.

Out of the four accompanying abilities for "Moonshatter Flying Daggers", one of them, the "Psychic's Head" was only able to be trained after entering the spirit dao.

"This is to say, that you're afraid of my power?"

"Heh heh, afraid?" The spirit level beast smiled. "Just as you've said, these Swordbirds are more than enough to annihilate you tens of thousands of times over. What would I be afraid of you for?"

"Since you're not afraid, and I've trespassed on your territory, what reason do you have to let me go?"

"Human, do not seek to provoke me. I have been here for who knows how many millions of years. Do you think I will easily be provoked by a human? It's just that I've sensed a type of a mysterious power within you. This power seems to have surpassed the laws of this plane of existence. This power is precisely what my

peers have anticipated in their sleep of tens of thousands of years. This is a kind of hope!”

“Hope?” Jiang Chen was even more confused.

“Yes, hope. The hope to depart from this place!” An ancient sense of bleakness, one that had seen the many shifting scenes of life, flowed out from the spirit level beast’s eyes.

“Depart from here? You’re kidding. With your power, isn’t it an easy matter to leave?”

“That’s why I say you’re only an ordinary person right now. You haven’t even trained your spirit power, how would you be able to observe the net from which there is no escape in these Boundless Catacombs?”

“These Boundless Catacombs were created by the divine abilities of a person with great prestige from another plane. They contain an incredibly frightening, forbidden, taboo formation. Those below spirit dao can enter and leave freely, whereas our bodies have been imprinted with a seal that corresponds with the formation. We will trigger the formation as soon as we leave, activating the fires of heaven and earth and dying where we stand.”

“This is to say, that the outside world can enter and exit these boundless catacombs, but those of you inside cannot leave?”

“That’s not entirely true. Those below spirit dao, such as these Swordbirds, can still enter and leave.” The spirit level beast sighed lightly, a bit of loneliness apparent in its eyes.

Jiang Chen also remained silent. He could perceive a sort of desolate bleakness from the beast’s eyes, stemming from endless years of being imprisoned. This was just like how the millions of years in Jiang Chen’s past life were also empty, lonely, and resigned!

“Human, I have spent the vast majority of my time here in slumber because I don’t wish to awaken. Awakening expends both my spirit power and energy. Unless a reckless and brazen alien race blunders in and disturbs us, we prefer to sleep most of the time, as we cannot train in these Boundless Catacombs. Do you know why those who venture in here basically cannot return?”

“Yes, because they’ve disturbed you and wasted your spirit power and energy.” Jiang Chen could understand.

“You’re very smart. Therefore, you’re the only human I don’t wish to kill because I wish to make a transaction with you.”

“Transaction?” Jiang Chen was startled.

“Yes.” This spirit level beast sighed lightly. “I know I’m being a bit senseless, but I truly vaguely felt a trace of a power that didn’t belong to this plane during that moment. Perhaps, some sort of incredible miracle will happen to you in the future? Just treat it as one of my idle dreams. Perhaps it was only a misconception. But,

even if it was a misconception, I still don't want to let this opportunity pass..."

One had to say, the spirit level beast had had the tendency to ramble on because he had been caged for far too long.

"Let's get to the point." Jiang Chen had to remind him.

"Mm. This transaction is simple. I can let you go, and even swear allegiance to you, as long as you swear an oath that when you have the ability to release the seal from within my body in the future, you will come save me from this place. You must know that it's really too depressing staying inside this hellhole. I'd rather be your slave outside than while through endless days in here in agony."

"Just this simple?" Jiang Chen felt it was a bit unbelievable.

"Just this simple." The spirit level beast nodded, with an extremely sincere look flowing through his eyes.

It looked like loneliness and emptiness were truly enough to destroy everything, including strong spirits beasts such as this one!

"An oath of heaven's law is very effective, you must think carefully." The spirit level beast didn't forget to remind him.

Jiang Chen smiled. He was the reincarnation of the son of the Celestial Emperor. He was all too aware of the power of an oath under heaven's law. Even the Celestial Emperor himself would not

dare violate an oath under heaven's law.

The spirit level beast stared unblinkingly at Jiang Chen, obviously a bit anxious for the favor and worried that it would lose it, desperately afraid that Jiang Chen would reject.

Jiang Chen rubbed his stomach and smiled lazily. "If you can find something for me to eat, then we can agree on this matter."

"Really?" The eyes of the spirit level beast sparkled.

"I can swear, but I can't guarantee the time period. Because I currently have no idea nor knowledge of the formation and seals."

"That's not a problem, we've already stayed here countless of years, staying further would be a simple repeat."

"Alright, I, Jiang Chen, swear in the name of heaven's law, that if I one day should be equipped with the power to break the seal, I will be sure to... right, what's your name?"

"I'm called Mang Qi!" The spirit level beast hastily added.

"I will be sure to save Mang Qi from this place. If I violate this oath, then heaven's law shall smite me." Jiang Chen swore the oath with a serious genuity.

"Alright, it looks like you're different from the other humans. I

can feel your sincerity. Since you haven't been perfunctory to me, I, Mang Qi, also swear that if you can save me from this place, I will treat you as my master for the rest of my life and listen to all of your commands! If I violate this oath, then heaven's law shall smite me."

One human and one beast conducted this odd transaction in these circumstances.

At this moment, Jiang Chen's stomach started rumbling at this inappropriate timing.

Goldwing Swordbirds very quickly delivered food, a strand of jade green fruit.

"Eat. Only this is of a somewhat higher quality within the caves. The meat is all more disgusting, I think you wouldn't be able to stomach it."

Jiang Chen got straight to the point and started munching on the fruit. The fruit was crisp, juicy, and melted in his mouth. A faint wisp of warmth could be felt after swallowing it. It was warm and toasty, giving off an indescribable feeling of comfort.

"Eh? What kind of fruit is this?" Jiang Chen felt a wave of hot air arise from his dantian when he got to the third fruit. It then flowed to the various meridians, as nurturing as the spring rains, making Jiang Chen feel peace of mind and happy of heart.

“This is the Rare Jade Fruit, the spirit fruit that grows in the area I slumber in. An ordinary practitioner can increase his level of training by one level with no strings attached when partaking of a single fruit.”

“Then I’ve eaten three in a row, doesn’t that mean…”

“Haha you think too much. The effects of eating a hundred are the same as eating just one. Eating too much will actually lead to adverse side effects, so I’ve only prepared six for you.”

“Ah? Why didn’t you say so earlier? Then I’m not eating any more, what a shameful waste!” It was as if Jiang Chen had received a priceless treasure as he stored the Rare Jade Fruits into his sack.

This was a rare and precious fruit. Although this would merely be wares by the side of the road for Jiang Chen in his previous life, the times of now were not those of previous days.

This natural spirit fruit was now a luxury item to Jiang Chen.

Mang Qi yawned hugely and smiled, “Looks like I need to give you some space. You must be preparing to break through?”

The Rare Jade Fruit would unconditionally increase one level of training. This wasn’t mere talk.

The spirit power held by this fruit immediately caused the levels of spirit power within Jiang Chen’s body to be abundantly

plentiful, miraculously healing all the injuries he had previously sustained.

Three days later...

Mang Qi once again appeared and had a friendly smile on its face. “Congratulations, looks like you have indeed broken through. Mm? Such a young true qi master?”

Jiang Chen slowly opened his eyes, neatly organizing each current of true qi within his body and storing them back into his dantian.

Everything appeared quite incredible.

He had broken through to nine meridians true qi after entering the Boundless Catacombs. Who would’ve thought that after drastic changes, he would find the chance to breakthrough in these circumstances that led to certain death!

And, this time’s breakthrough sent him directly to the ranks of true qi masters!

Ten meridians true qi, true qi master!

True qi masters were the elite apex of existence in the entire Eastern Kingdom!

Except, Jiang Chen was not overly happy. He nodded with a faint expression, “I’ve underestimated the spirit power of this Rare Jade Fruit!”

“Quite normal, but I don’t seem to see any of the joy that normally follows a breakthrough? Oh right, I haven’t seemed to ask your name up until now?”

“Jiang Chen.”

“Jiang Chen… Jiang Chen.” Mang Qi repeated this to itself a few times, as if wanting to deeply imprint this name into his mental consciousness.

“Oh right, Mang Qi, how many days has it been since I’ve entered the fourth level?” Jiang Chen suddenly asked.

“You’ve spent two or three days in a coma since entering, add to that the three days taken for breaking through, should be around six or seven days? It hasn’t exceeded seven days.”

“Hasn’t exceeded seven days?” Jiang Chen was delighted. He had been worried that he had been in a coma for too long and missed the one month deadline of the mission.

Various events had happened when he was hunting the Greenwing Swordbirds previously, and he’d then been delayed quite a few days when he’d encountered the pursuit from the Hidden Hand. Altogether, he had spent roughly seventeen or

eighteen days.

Add to that the six or seven days in here, only twenty four or twenty five days should have passed out of a month.

“You have urgent business?” For unknown reasons, Mang Qi suddenly didn’t want this human to leave.

“Incredibly urgent. It has to do with my father and the survival of my family!” Jiang Chen wasn’t being an alarmist. Once the Long family got the upper hand and the Jiang family lost power, it was sure to be a horrifying suppression and slaughter!

Chapter 88: Swallowing The Killer Xue Sha

Jiang Chen was also a bit moved when he saw the slight disappointment in Mang Qi's eyes. He knew that if he just dusted himself off and left like this, it wouldn't be kind at all.

"I think I can tarry a bit more, at most two days more. During these two days, we can chat about your seal and the matters regarding this formation." Jiang Chen said.

Mang Qi smiled. "Mm. Jiang Chen, I can finally be certain that you're a reliable human. However, I know nothing of the seal within my body, and have been unable to find any information. But this formation... I've only heard of the lord of the fourth level vaguely speak of it before. I think it's called 'The Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement' something or another!"

"The Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement?"

Jiang Chen's brow creased faintly, as the memory banks of his past life opened once again. He had studied formations in his past life, and he had definitely heard of this "Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement" before. But the memories within his mind hadn't been fully unlocked yet, so he couldn't quite get any leads during this moment.

But how would Mang Qi know Jiang Chen's secrets?

"Jiang Chen, you don't need to bother yourself in order to ponder this matter right now. You don't even need to turn this

over in your mind within the next hundred or five hundred years, unless your training is enough to stand at the apex of this world.” Mang Qi sighed lightly.

Jiang Chen actually already knew all of what Mang Qi just said.

“Jiang Chen, take this item.” Mang Qi fished out a hard object that was like jade, but not jade.

“What’s this?”

“Something from my body. To be more precise, it’s one of my teeth.”

Although it was a tooth, its radiance was the same as jade, and it looked quite simple and unsophisticated. It almost looked like it could be one the bones of a god or demon as ancient, strange patterns were on it.

“Don’t think random thoughts, this isn’t a weapon and it can’t defend you. It’s only use is that my mark on it represents me.”

Mang Qi chuckled. “If you ever need help from me, infuse it with your true qi and I’ll receive your message.”

“So what if I need you? Aren’t you stuck within the Boundless Catacombs?”

“I can’t leave, but my troops can.” Mang Qi smiled. “You try imagining millions upon tens of millions underneath the leadership of the Goldwing Swordbirds. Just who would be able to withstand their might within these common kingdoms?”

Jiang Chen trembled from his shock.

His scalp became numb at the thought of this scene. Once these Greenwing Swordbirds, who numbered enough that they could blot out the sky and cover the earth, left the Boundless Catacombs, it would undoubtedly lead to everlasting disaster.

It was entirely possible that the other neighboring sixteen countries would be embroiled as well, not to mention just the Eastern Kingdom!

This Mang Qi was quite the marvelous character! He’d offered such a large gift obviously to tie Jiang Chen, along with his gains and losses, together.

This was precisely an indication of goodwill, cozying up to him, and playing on emotions.

“Mang Qi, I accept your gift.” Jiang Chen didn’t put on airs. He really did have need of such a great gift at the moment.

“Heh heh, this item also has another function. If I think of you, I only need to move my mental strength, and this item will send energy to your body, alerting you.”

“I’ll have to come see you then, right?” Jiang Chen smiled.

“Heh heh, I won’t come looking for you without rhyme or reason, only as a last resort. Of this you can be assured of.” Mang Qi’s old face reddened as he promised.

After reaching an agreement with Mang Qi, Jiang Chen brought up his intention to leave. Although there were still five or six days left, one thing still weighed on Jiang Chen’s mind.

The killers from Hidden Hand that day had disguised themselves as Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue. Jiang Chen was worried about these two best friends, and he wanted to go scout out the situation.

He wanted to see them if they were alive, and their corpses if they were dead.

“Jiang Chen, that fellow who wants to kill you is still waiting outside the fourth level.” Mang Qi reminded.

“Is that so? They’re all there? I was afraid they’d left.” Jiang Chen’s tone was sinisterly cold.

“I’m afraid you’ll be disappointed. Two of them have already left, while the last one is standing guard there. It seems like he won’t rest unless he’s dead.”

“Long Yinye and Long Juxue have left?” Jiang Chen understood how matters stood after thinking briefly. They wouldn’t linger too long, not with the mission period being one month.

This meant that the person who hadn’t left was the boss killer from the Hidden Hand.

“How about this, Jiang Chen. I’ve decided to send a division of Swordbirds out. They’ll listen to your commands. One division contains ten Goldwing Swordbirds, one hundred Silverwing Swordbirds, and ten thousand Greenwing Swordbirds. If that’s not enough, you can use that thing to contact me at any time.”

Mang Qi viewed Jiang Chen as a treasure now, and didn’t wish for any accidents to befall him. Besides, within his territory, he naturally had the obligation to ensure Jiang Chen’s safety.

Mang Qi’s presence expanded as he gave orders in the beast language. Ten Goldwing Swordbirds flew docilely to Jiang Chen.

“Jiang Chen, be at ease, they will absolutely obey your orders.” Mang Qi promised. “I can’t leave the fourth level, so let my people teach that fellow a lesson.”

Jiang Chen didn’t decline or observe the formalities. He simply left with the division of Swordbirds.

On the boundary between the third and fourth level, the killer boss Xue Sha had already been standing guard for six or seven

days.

“The odds are likely stacked against this Jiang Chen, if he doesn’t come out soon.” Xue Sha was also hesitating. “Should I go in and take a look or not? What if his injuries flared up and he died in the outermost fringes of the fourth level? If it’s only a few kilometers, I should be fine if I enter and leave, right?”

Xue Sha comforted himself in this way, but still couldn’t find the courage to actually take the first step into the fourth level.

After all, the legends were simply too frightening. None of the practitioners who’d ever entered the fourth level had ever made it out again.

Even if it was a few kilometers, and not penetrating deeply, Xue Sha was unable to guarantee that he would be able to emerge unscatched.

But the temptation from Jiang Chen’s blade was an itch in his heart that was impossible to scratch! He knew quite clearly that if he could obtain that blade, then he, Xue sha, would absolutely be invincible amongst those below spirit dao practitioners. He’d be able to rampage without abandon in these common kingdoms!

This temptation was difficult to withstand.

To enter or not to enter?

“That damned Jiang Chen. If you hadn’t entered the fourth level, that precious blade would definitely be in my hands.” Xue Sha grew an itch in his heart whenever he thought of the blade.

He also regretted not killing Jiang Chen with the fastest speed possible. If he’d killed Jiang Chen in the third level, how would the matters of today have occurred?

But, he also had to admit that Jiang Chen’s strength exceeded his expectations. If it wasn’t for the attacks from Long Yinye and Long Juxue’s spirit weapons drawing his attention, then his chances of killing Jiang Chen alone would’ve been even lower.

“Ai, when did such an abnormality appear in the Eastern Kingdom?” Xue Sha cursed in his heart. “Oh right, this Jiang Chen is from the Jiang Han dukedom. The Duke of Jiang Han is only a duke of the second rank. How could he cultivate such a genius as this? Unless... is there some sort of secret within the Jiang Han household? Huh! If I can’t get that blade, I must go to the capital of the Eastern Kingdom when I leave, and seize that Duke of Jiang Han. I’ll get something out of him at least.”

Xue Sha’s ears moved when his thoughts traveled down this path, and his nose sniffed faintly he subconsciously raised the bow in his hands.

He almost couldn’t believe it because he sensed a faint presence. This presence was the hidden scent that he had left on Jiang Chen’s body previously!

“Jiang Chen?” Xue Sha asked this with some disbelief.

“It’s me.” Jiang Chen’s voice sounded remotely from the darkness.

“It’s really you?” Xue Sha was agitated. “You’re not dead? Very good! Jiang Chen, we can have a chat. I can not kill you and let you leave. The condition for that, is that you leave your blade behind.”

“Do you think I would believe your bullshit?” Jiang Chen burst out laughing.

“You have no other choice but to believe me. Otherwise, you can just try going inside again, No one has emerged from the fourth level alive! You mustn’t have entered in too far, and were only on the outskirts, right?” Xue Sha asked.

“Was that what I did? Why don’t you come inside and find out?” Jiang Chen sneered.

Xue Sha laughed a sinister, cold laugh. “I have no need to enter, I only need to stand guard here. You’ll be unable to leave then. Will you leave after handing over the precious blade, or die in the forbidden zone of the fourth level?”

“I must choose one?” Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

“You must choose one!”

“Very good! I choose that you stay, and I leave!” Jiang Chen muttered a few things in his mouth as soon as he finished speaking.

“What did you say?” Xue Sha was dumbfounded.

Suddenly, Xue Sha’s breathing halted because he saw all sorts of Swordbirds surge out from all corners and all directions — like an overflow of locusts.

Blotting out the sky and covering up the earth, everywhere to be found beneath the heavens!

The thickly dotted Swordbirds were so concentrated that one didn’t even have room to lift their feet.

Countless Swordbirds rushed out without fear of death. Their violently sharp beaks and feathered wings were as sharp as knives as they cut through the air, cut through the rock walls — cut through anything and everything.

Xue Sha’s face changed, as his eleven meridians true qi continuously raged outwards, attempting to withstand them for a moment.

However, in such narrow quarters, and under the condition of being surrounded, the area in which he could deploy it truly wasn’t much.

The power of an eleven true meridians true qi master was powerful indeed. Swordbird after Swordbird was shot by the true qi and fell in a meaty mass of blood rain.

However, he could kill ten or a hundred Swordbirds this way, but he was still limited by what he could do in the end.

One division of Swordbirds had tens of thousands of birds. Including the Swordbirds on the outskirts, nearly twenty thousand Swordbirds had surged out this time. They had filled the space within five kilometers.

A golden shadow suddenly streaked towards Xue Sha.

Following that was another golden shadow, and another...

Ten golden shadows in a row started attacking Xue Sha with the intimidating aura of thunder and creeping rubble.

The Goldwing Swordbirds had finally made their move.

Each Goldwing Swordbird was the equivalent of a true qi master. Ten true qi masters plus countless numbers of regular practitioners that were unafraid of death.

This confirmed one saying – “random fists will beat the master to death!”

No matter how strong you were, you'd be unable to face the tactic of a sea of humans if you didn't have overwhelming power.

This wasn't the tactic of a sea of humans, but a sea of birds.

Pfft!

Golden colored wings cut across Xue Sha's arms, hands, back, and thighs...

Another round of attacks came.

Xue Sha wailed like the ghosts crying and wolves howling, "Jiang Chen, save me! We'll escape together!"

One had to say, people would always verbalize some utterly ridiculous, very naive words when they were in desperate circumstances.

Jiang Chen smiled remotely, "Xue Sha, I will leave shortly, but I'm not escaping. Have you woken up to the realization yet that the Goldwing Swordbirds seem to really like your flesh and blood?"

Xue Sha cried out and sobbed, and then his voice grew smaller and smaller until it disappeared.

After a short while, only a skeleton, a pile of random strands of

hair, many scraps of cloth, and a randomly scattered precious bow and quiver of arrows were left.

Even a mighty eleven meridians true qi master would only be able to make slightly bigger waves when compared to and surrounded by the tactic of a sea of Swordbirds.

Chapter 89: Fatty Xuan's Bizarre Encounter

Jiang Chen kicked the bones aside and took the precious bow and quiver of arrows.

"And I'd been thinking of how to find a precious bow for Xue Tong. This Xue Sha was a man bearing gifts." Jiang Chen was someone who could tell good from the bad. He knew that this bow was uncommon.

After finishing Xue Sha off, Jiang Chen didn't linger and walked outside.

At the same time, he communicated with the division of Swordbirds in the beast language, having them search for Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue from the first to the third level.

Apart from the Goldwing Swordbirds, who could just barely understand Jiang Chen's words, the other Swordbirds could only be reached through the commands of the Goldwing Swordbirds.

Jiang Chen didn't idly sit around, he too started searching in every corner.

"Fatty Xuan, nothing better have happened to you." Jiang Chen knew that Fatty Xuan and company had actually suffered from undeserved misfortunes. If it wasn't for the others wanting to make a move against him, they would have never targeted Fatty Xuan and the others.

There were still five or six days left until the end of the allotted time for the mission. Jiang Chen was in no hurry to leave.

The number of heirs left in the Boundless Catacombs in the last couple of days had noticeably decreased. In addition, traces of combat could be seen all over the Catacombs. One could also see that this time's trials were very bloody and that the fights between the various heirs had been quite serious.

"These are the sins of the Long family. These heirs have most likely all suffered from undeserved calamities." Jiang Chen sighed lightly.

The traces of the Long siblings manipulating this time's contest were very evident. Looking at the corpses, some of them were close to the Long family, while some weren't close to the Long family.

It must have been the seizures and fights between the two camps.

It looks like the rate of loss during this time's competition would exceed at least thirty percent.

For the kingdom, this was truly a higher rate of loss. One had to know that the rate of loss in previous examinations and trials wouldn't exceed ten percent.

Anything over ten percent would count as heavy losses.

“Internal friction, this is likely the bad consequences from the result of internal friction? The Duke of Soaring Dragon is using these methods to build his power. Even if he replaces the royal family and controls the entire kingdom, the kingdom’s vitality would be greatly sapped. Besides, how will these dukes voluntarily submit to him?”

Jiang Chen shook his head. At the end of the day, he actually didn’t have the slightest interest in the power scrambles of common royalty and nobles. However, the flow of the greater picture had brought him to stand on the side opposite to the Duke of Soaring Dragon.

The fact that the Duke of Soaring Dragon had hired killers this time had also thoroughly enraged Jiang Chen.

“Duke of Soaring Dragon, I, Jiang Chen, will one day make your Long family clan disappear from the domain of the Eastern Kingdom!”

Jiang Chen had been truly angered this time.

He made no progress on the first day. He neither found Fatty Xuan nor located Hubing Yue!

Under these circumstances, no news was actually the best news.

Having not found them meant that the they might still be alive!

The next day, the heirs that were left in the Boundless Catacombs had basically all withdrawn. Jiang Chen still didn't find any clues.

"Can it be that they haven't died and they have already left?"

Jiang Chen wasn't willing to give up. He decided to search for another day. If he still found nothing on the third day, then he would leave the Boundless Catacombs.

There were still two or three days left, there was still enough time to make it back!

It was on the third day that a Goldwing Swordbird found a trace of a clue. There was the breath of a living person in one of the random patches of bog on the second level.

Jiang Chen immediately rushed over and discovered that there truly was a live person in the bog. A great part of his body had been sucked in by the bog, but this person was tightly gripping a branch, unable to climb up or retreat. He had sunk into a coma, but his hands were still curled around the branch in a death grasp.

"Fatty Xuan?" Jiang Chen was stunned when he saw this person's face clearly.

He hastily ordered the Goldwing Swordbirds to save him.

Fatty Xuan was quickly hauled to safety, he was incredibly weak and feeble. Jiang Chen fed a medicine pill to him and massaged

him for a bit.

Fatty Xuan awoke leisurely, his lips white. “Brother Chen, am... am I not dead?”

“Damn fatty, I really thought you died. Have you seen Xiaoyue?” Jiang Chen asked.

“No... I haven’t seen him. I was freaking unlucky. I sank into this bog on the third day of entering this place. I called out day and night, but no one heard me!” Fatty Xuan complained.

This patch of bog was exceedingly isolated, it was pretty impressive that Fatty Xuan had made it to this forsaken place.

Jiang Chen was also secretly rejoicing, good thing you sank into this bog. Otherwise, your way would be fraught with grim possibilities.

“Ai. Brother Chen, I’ve taken a tumble this time. I haven’t collected a single green spirit pearl. Damn it to hell, even this bog bullies fatties? I’m just a bit heavier is all. My qinggong is not too shabby, why did I sink in?” Fatty Xuan self deprecated.

Jiang Chen was speechless and he flicked a glance at Fatty Xuan. He smiled, “You’re not entirely empty handed. Look at your body fat, most of it has gone.”

Fatty Xuan was flabbergasted and looked down. His originally

skin tight clothes were flapping emptily, like stolen clothes.

The waist that had been thicker than a pail was pretty much on the level of an ordinary person's.

After almost one month of not eating or not drinking, if it wasn't for the fat on his body, he probably would've long since starved to death.

"Brother Chen, I... I dieted successfully?" Fatty Xuan leapt up as his eyes sparkled. "Haha, I really dieted successfully? This is to say that when I pick up chicks in the future, none of them will complain that I lean so heavily on her that she can't breath?"

Jiang Chen was completely speechless. Fatty wasn't just in an ordinary good mood. He'd only used one sentence to talk about failing the exam, and in fact, he had started thinking about picking up chicks.

It was a good thing that Jiang Chen had collected enough green spirit pearls from the bodies of the dead heirs on his way back.

Even after adding together the amount required by his mission and Fatty Xuan's mission, there was still more than enough left.

After resting in the catacombs for a half day, Fatty Xuan slowly recovered some of his vigor. He immediately became curious, "Brother Chen, what's happened? How come all these Swordbirds listen to you?"

“Fatty, we’re brothers, so don’t ask about these matters. The more you know, the worse off you’ll be.” Jiang Chen knew that Fatty Xuan was destined to not have any particular martial dao achievements in his life. It was better that he didn’t know of these matters.

“Alright, no matter what, you’re still my most admired Brother Chen.” Fatty Xuan didn’t ask further. “Brother, how many days has it been?”

“27 or 28 days?”

“Is it 27 or 28 days?” Fatty Xuan was depressed. “If it was 27 days, then the army would still be outside the mountain valley. If it’s 28 days, then the army will have left and we’ll have to go back alone. If we don’t have fast horses, how will we make it in time?”

“Don’t worry about this, right now I’m worried about Xiaoyue.” Jiang Chen sighed.

“Xiaoyue is eight meridians true qi. What could possibly happen to him?” Fatty Xuan asked carelessly.

Jiang Chen spread out his hands but didn’t say anything.

If Hubing Yue died, whatever the reason, Jiang Chen would be sure to make the Long family pay a price, a price that was hundreds and thousands of times more than his death!

After resting another night, roughly sixty to seventy percent of Fatty Xuan's injuries had recovered. After the two walked around in the Boundless Catacombs for a few hours, they finally walked out of the Catacombs!

It was blue skies and a bright sun outside, the trees making a pleasant shade.

Fatty Xuan tilted his head up to the sky and breathed in, yelling out loudly. "Is anyone alive? It's great to be alive! The air of the outside world is damn good to breath in!"

Walking out of the mountain valleys and coming to the place where the army had been originally camped, it was a scene of disorder. Everyone had long since left.

"We're truly late after all?" Fatty Xuan was a bit shamefaced. "Brother Chen, I seemed to have dragged you down again."

"Stop your nonsense." Jiang Chen looked around the area. "Judging from these tracks, they should have only left a day ago. This means we have two days to make it back."

"Then what are we waiting for, let's set out immediately!" Fatty Xuan said hurriedly.

"No rush." Jiang Chen smiled faintly and murmured some words in the beast language. The ten Goldwing Swordbirds immediately

left the shrubbery and flew over.

“I want to go back to the capital and need to borrow your wings.” Jiang Chen instructed.

He arranged for six Goldwing Swordbirds to take turns carrying the two of them. The other four were in charge of leading the Swordbird army.

Jiang Chen naturally wouldn’t take the Swordbird army to the capital. He settled them deep in the mountains several kilometers from the outskirts of the capital.

A distance of several kilometers was the work of five minutes with the Swordbird’s speed.

With this flying army, Jiang Chen felt a lot more reassured in his heart.

Within the capital, a great furor had also been raised these days.

The rate of loss for this time’s trials had reached thirty percent. Out of a hundred heirs, only seventy to eighty had emerged.

And out of these seventy to eighty, almost half of them bore injuries.

The rumors of the heirs of Soaring Dragon manipulating the

competition spread throughout the capital, shocking the entire Eastern Kingdom!

If it was said that the conflict between the Duke of Soaring Dragon and the royal family had been conducted in secret before, then manipulating the competition was almost a public provocation of royal authority.

Although there was nothing in the rules of the Hidden Dragon Trials that mentioned manipulating the competition, the moves of the heirs of Soaring Dragon, that of “those who adhere to me ascend and those who defy me die”, were a blatant pressure of forcing other dukes under their banner.

This was forming a clique to pursue their own selfish interests!

A duke had started forming his gang publicly. This was the precursor to rebellion!

Of course, this was only one sort of public opinion in the capital.

There was another rumor exactly opposite this version. It said that Jiang Chen from the Jiang Han dukedom was the one manipulating the competition.

This saying made Jiang Chen out to be the person behind the scenes manipulating the competition. The reason for the internal strife within the heirs was pushed onto Jiang Chen.

In addition, this rumor also mentioned an exceedingly sensitive intelligence, that Jiang Chen had attempted to ambush the Long siblings and usurp the rank of first duke from the Duke of Soaring Dragon!

The two versions represented the two contending powers within the capital!

Although the first version was obviously more persuasive and closer to the truth, but out of the 108 dukes in the capital, over half had already silently admitted to Soaring Dragon's strength now.

Therefore, although this version was closer to the truth, it was slowly oppressed.

As for the second version, because of the disappearance of the person in question, Jiang Chen, it snowballed. This also represented that, on a certain level, the scales were slowly tipping towards Duke Long in the conflict between the royal family and Soaring Dragon.

Although Jiang Feng could stabilize the situation in the internals of the Jiang Han household, he was powerless to halt the rumors in the outside world with his influence.

After all, Jiang Feng's foundations were shallow. He didn't have one tenth of the Duke of Soaring Dragon's power within the capital.

Another way of saying it was that once the royal family was withdrawn as a backer, Jiang Feng would become utterly isolated with no mass support. The entire Jiang Han household was like a lone canoe in the wild seas, facing the violent impacts from the Duke of Soaring Dragon and his accomplices alone.

The situation in the capital became more and more delicate.

Within the Soaring Dragon household, Long Zhaofeng was full of high spirits. The thorn in his side, Jiang Chen, had finally been removed at last. Although the Long siblings had been unable to see Jiang Chen's death with their own eyes before leaving the catacombs, Duke Long was quite at ease. Jiang Chen had barged into the fourth level, the openly acknowledged forbidden zone. Once he entered, he would be dead without a doubt!

Therefore, in Duke Long's eyes, Jiang Chen was undoubtedly already a dead man.