SOVEREIGN OF THE THREE REALMS

BOOK 14

Plow Days

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

Sovereign of the Three Realms

(三界独尊)

by

Plow Days

(犁天)

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!

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 1101: Bleakmoon Hall

Jiang Chen sighed quietly, but still hoped that his luck would hold up. “So the holy maiden’s brother is definitely not in the sect?”

“Of course, he was chased out of the sect when he was twelve. He wasn’t even allowed to stay in the Tilted Moon Region. No one knows where he went.”

“Do you mean that neither the Blue Moon holy maiden nor Holy Maiden Xu Meng know about this either?” Jiang Chen couldn’t help but ask.

“They would like to, but the Moon God Sect would never allow that knowledge to reach them. To be frank, no one even knows if he still lives to this day.”

It was blunt, but Jiang Chen knew it was the truth. He had never met his brother, so his father took precedence even though he was also concerned about his brother. After all, Jiang Chen had actually lived with his father. They shared a deep relationship with each other. He had never seen his mother, younger brother or younger sister before. Though there was still a bond of blood between them, it wasn’t as strong as the one he shared with his father.

This was about as much as he could glean from this person. He’d learned everything he needed to know. Jiang Chen pointed at the senior executive who’d answered him. “This guy isn’t bad, he can be allowed to live. You decide how he should prove himself.”

“There’s no better way to prove one’s allegiance than murder.” Liu Zhen laughed. The wandering cultivator’s gaze swept across the Heavensworn Four. “Take your pick from these four. You may leave immediately after you kill only one of them.”

The senior executive’s expression changed a little. It was one

thing to betray the Heavensfall Society, and it was another to kill one of the Heavensworn Four.

Liu Zhen didn't force him to make a decision. "I'm fine with it if you want to let this precious chance to live slip through your grasp."

The senior executive paled at the change in Liu Zhen's tone and cried out hastily. "Nonono, I'll do it, I'll do it!"

Beigong Ming was the first person to turn pale when he heard this. He was certain that this senior executive was going to kill him because they had argued with each other for the right to answer first earlier. Emperor Peerless smiled and poked at the air twice with his finger. It unlocked the restriction on the senior executive's body.

The senior executive was pale, but strong determination was etched on his face. Anyone could see that he was prepared to kill. Beigong Ming had thought at first these people wouldn't dare do so, because they should've done so a long time ago if they dared, but it was obvious that this was being too naive. Not only were these enemies utterly out of control, they were tactically breaking the Society up from inside. Judging from the expression on the senior executive's face, he was obviously planning to kill Beigong Ming to prove his allegiance.

"Wait!" Beigong Ming cried. "I'm willing to prove my allegiance too."

No one could stay calm in the face of death, and he was not an exception to the rule. He obviously didn't want to die just like this.

Liu Zhen chuckled. "Who else is willing to kill to live?"

"I am!"

"I am too!"

"And me!" The captives immediately declared their decision to betray their organization. It stunned the Heavensworn Four.

“Cowards!” The fourth brother of the Heavensworn Four cursed loudly.

“Aren’t you afraid of death?” Liu Zhen beamed at the fourth of the Heavensworn Four.

The man raised his chin. “Like hell I’m afraid of you! Touch me even once and the Moon God Sect will destroy you!”

Liu Zhen’s face darkened as he looked at Beigong Ming. “You wanted to prove yourself, didn’t you? Kill him then.”

Beigong Ming was troubled by this. The fourth Heavensworn Four was his sworn brother. Even if he had fallen out with his brother, he still found the idea of killing his brother difficult to accept.

“It looks like your sincerity only goes so far.” Liu Zhen said coldly, “It doesn’t matter. There are plenty of people who yearning for this opportunity instead.”

The wandering cultivator turned around. “All those who are willing to kill him, stand up now.”

About eight Society members instantly rose to their feet. They all looked eager to finish the task.

“That many? This is a dilemma. Who should I pick?” Liu Zhen pretended to be puzzled.

The wandering cultivator wanted to play, but Jiang Chen wasn’t in the mood to watch this ugly display any longer. “Wrap this up quickly.”

Liu Zhen nodded hurriedly and chose someone at random. “Alright, you do it.”

The chosen person nodded repeatedly and was about to walk over to do the dirty deed. It was at this moment Third Master Jing finally jogged over. “Wait, wait!”

Third Master Jing ran all the way to Jiang Chen with a fawning

expression on his face. “If I may say something, young master Shao. The Heavensworn Four may be despicable people, but their patrons are extremely powerful. They even have the aid of a great emperor at the Moon God Sect.”

“So what?” Jiang Chen’s face turned cold.

Third Master Jing responded enigmatically, “Young master Shao, I may be able to introduce you to someone if you wish to inquire about Holy Maiden Xu Meng and that guy sold off by the Society.”

“Hmm?” Jiang Chen raised his eyebrows and stared at him sternly.

Third Master Jing hastily explained. “It’s like this. Just now I heard that they’ve turned over that prisoner to a captain named Gu Xintang, and it so happened that he and I are acquainted with each other. So…”

Jiang Chen mulled this over before fixing his gaze on Third Master Jing. “Why are you defending them? You guys don’t look that close.”

Third Master Jing let out a long sigh. “If I had a choice, I wouldn’t defend them at all. However, these bastards notified the first division and I happened to be present. If I don’t help them during their plight, then I may not be able to maintain my position for long.”

Third Master Jing was being quite forthright and truly did have his reasons to help them.

“Bleakmoon Hall is about to show up very soon. If you kill them now, you’ll be clashing swords against the Hall and immediately become the public enemy of Moon God Sect. If that happens, it’ll definitely complicate your attempts to inquire for information…” The third master was definitely an eloquent person. He had hit the nail in the head with just a few lines.

Jiang Chen considered this for a moment before nodding. “They may live, but they must suffer.”

As he said this, Jiang Chen took out a bottle of pills and passed it to Liu Zhen. “This is my exclusive poison pill. Feed them one each and kill anyone who resists.” Jiang Chen ordered coldly.

Third Master Jing didn’t dare go directly against Jiang Chen’s orders, seeing how firm the latter’s attitude was. He simply shook his head with a rueful smile on his face.

“This pill has an incubation period of half a month, and you can still be saved in half a month’s time. If I hear nothing about that person during this half month, then you may consider yourself unlucky.”

Liu Zhen personally made sure that the Heavensworn Four and a few hard headed senior executives swallowed the pill before he returned to Jiang Chen. He didn’t do the same to the small fries who’d announced their intention to leave Heavensfall Society, and it appeared that Jiang Chen was of the same mind.

“Third Master Jing, I’ll give you face and allow them to live half a month longer. If I can find that prisoner in half a month, then everyone will have a happy ending.” Jiang Chen smiled calmly.

Of course, if he couldn’t find his father in half a month’s time, then their punishment was death. No one in this world could cure the poison he created.

Third Master Jing simpered repeatedly. He would be a fool to disagree with Jiang Chen after the young man had given him face, not to mention that their relationship wasn’t deep to begin with. As the saying went, it would be wise to avoid conversely deeply with an acquaintance.

“Third Master Jing, I’ve already shown you my sincerity. Now it’s your turn to show yours.” Jiang Chen cast a meaningful glance at him.

Third Master Jing clenched his teeth and promised. “Don’t worry, I will contact Captain Gu Xintang.”

While he was speaking, a disturbance broke out from outside. Someone from the first division immediately came in. “Third Master, Bleakmoon Hall is here.”

A trace of excitement passed through the Heavensworn Four’s eyes. Jiang Chen sneered and said nothing about Bleakmoon Hall’s arrival. It was clear that he didn’t think much about them. When Third Master Jing saw the unfriendly look on Jiang Chen’s face, he frantically interjected, “Please allow me to communicate with Bleakmoon Hall first before you decide whether to act against them, young master Shao.”

Bleakmoon Hall had been very concerned when they received the Heavensworn Four’s report. They immediately sent two enforcer teams with a captain each to the scene immediately.

Third Master Jing walked out with quick steps and noted a group of fully armed enforcers. He immediately recognized that the captains belonged to the Purple Moon faction.

“You’re finally here, captains.” Third Master Jing swiftly walked out to meet them.

The two captains stared at Jing Third before exchanging a glance with each other. One of them frowned slightly. “Jing Third? Why are you here?”

The third master smiled. “I dearly wish I was somewhere else, but it is not in my place to ignore the Heavensworn Four’s most urgent cry for help.”

“Hmph. How are they doing right now?” The purple-haired captain asked coldly and somewhat rudely. He didn’t seem to think highly of Third Master Jing.

“Oh nothing, they almost lost their lives, that’s all.” Third Master Jing said with a half smile on his face. “I had to waste a lot

of breath to keep them alive, but they're actually still in danger."

"What the hell is going on?" The purple-haired captain asked in an unfriendly tone. He was a little annoyed by the half-hearted explanation.

"Why don't you head in and see it for yourself, Captain Luo?" Third Master Jing's attitude turned cold immediately after he noted the captain's impoliteness.

"Enter." The purple-haired captain didn't care for Third Master Jing's opinion and ordered his men to enter immediately.

Jiang Chen stared at the Bleakmoon Hall enforcers coldly.

"You're finally here, Captain Luo. But why have you only brought two squads with you? Why hasn't the hallmaster of Bleakmoon Hall come himself?" The fourth Heavensworn Four looked a little excited and disappointed to see them. It was obvious that he was slightly disappointed by the size of their group.

Jiang Chen and the others simply maintained a careless half smile on their faces as they stared at the enforcers. It was obvious that they didn't think highly of these people. Setting aside the fact that there only two squads, they wouldn't be afraid even if a hallmaster did show up. Moon God Sect was a first rank sect, but they only had four great emperors. These four great emperors were old people who had lived for thousands and thousands of years, and they would never bother themselves with such trivial matters.

Chapter 1102: Youre Emperor Peerless?

The hallmaster of the Bleakmoon Hall was merely a half-step great emperor. There was nothing he could possibly do against a full-fledged great emperor. It was why many first rank sects were reluctant to offend wandering great emperors, even though they weren't afraid of direct battle. They were worried that these great emperors would sporadically harass or annoy them.

Even a first rank sect would have to eat a great loss unless their forefathers personally dealt with the problem, but these eminent figures often preferred not to partake in these matters unless there was a threat to the sect fortunes or the fate of the sect was hanging in the balance. They would never appear under normal circumstances because a spar between two great emperors was extremely taxing. Unless matters had reached a point of no return, no one would ever want to make this sacrifice.

The purple-haired captain, Captain Luo, seemed very dusty and travel-worn. He'd travelled across vast distances without any rest, only to find that Heavensfall Society was already in shambles. This put him in a rather bad mood. And to top it off, the fourth of the Heavensworn Four had adopted an interrogative air and seemed to be complaining about the hallmaster's absence and that the two squads he'd brought were insufficient.

"Ju Fourth, you like to talk big, huh. The hallmaster has a host of problems to deal with everyday! Is he your servant to come and go at your convenience?" Captain Luo was rather displeased. "What on earth are you playing at? What's all this?"

Ju Fourth was extremely depressed. "We've truly barked up the wrong tree. Captain Luo, you needn't bother venting your temper on us. Hurry on back to the sect and inform the hallmaster of this matter. It'd be best if a great emperor forefather was informed of this too..."

“Shut your mouth!” Captain Luo flew into a rage. “Why would a forefather partake in your petty matters?!”

Elder Luo was clearly no ordinary man if he could become a captain of the Bleakmoon Hall. He could immediately tell that the Heavensfall Society had provoked a formidable foe. Their enemy was clearly much stronger than the two squads he’d brought with him. His squads couldn’t even rival the Society in terms of fighting potential.

The Heavensworn Four was composed of high level emperors, of whom Cong Taiyan was the strongest, and these powerful figures were currently captives with no way to resist. Thus it was clear that their enemies were clearly no ordinary figures. Even the hallmaster of the Bleakmoon Hall wouldn’t be able to do anything to them, much less him.

“Fellow daoists, I apologize for being blunt, but are you the ones who did this to the Heavensfall Society?” Captain Luo asked without being too overbearing or meek.

Jiang Chen smiled blandly. “That is correct. Captain Luo, are you going to bring us to justice?”

Captain Luo smiled wryly in response to Jiang Chen’s subtle mockery. “The Bleakmoon Hall has always been impartial and just. Surely you can explain your reasoning and motive behind this?”

“There’s no need. These men clearly deserved death. The only reason I hadn’t exterminated them was because I wanted to give Third Master Jing some face. Since you’re from the Bleakmoon Hall, I shan’t give you any trouble. This conflict shall remain between us and them.” Jiang Chen didn’t want to have a complete fall out with the Bleakmoon Hall.

Captain Luo was dumbfounded. Just who exactly was this person? How could he afford to be so cocky in Tilted Moon Region’s territory? In this region, not many dared speak to the Bleakmoon Hall in such a condescending way. The young man was

clearly from a very formidable background, but he seemed to be at most an initial level emperor. Emperors were rare in this region, but they weren't all that far and few between.

Captain Luo swept a complicated gaze at Emperor Peerless and Madame Yun and was suddenly lost in thought. Third Master Jing approached him and advised bluntly. "Captain Luo, this genuinely is a private feud between them."

Captain Luo clearly didn't like Third Master Jing very much either and responded with a cold snort. "Jing Third, I don't need you to tell me what to do."

Third Master Jing forced a smile. "I've no interest in telling you what to do. I'm just explaining the situation. Feel free to enforce the law if you want to. Just don't blame me when you eat a great loss."

Captain Luo was rendered speechless. Another captain suddenly stepped forwards and raised his cupped fist at Jiang Chen. "Friend, all things should be done within reason. What exactly is the nature of your feud with the Heavensfall Society? As long as you're in our territory, we have the authority to question you!"

"Is that so?" Jiang Chen laughed mockingly. "Go ahead and enforce your authority then. We'll see who gets the last laugh in this matter.

"We go." Jiang Chen made a sweeping gesture and left. He clearly didn't want to waste any more of his breath on the two captains.

This action made the two captains absolutely livid. Should they stop him? They weren't confident that they could. Especially not when Emperor Peerless had flared some of his aura. Even the slightest great emperor aura was enough to make them tremble in their boots.

"Captain Luo, stop them! They've poisoned us! Who's going to give us the antidote if they leave?" Ju Fourth yelled loudly.

Captain Luo threw a cold and vicious glare at Ju Fourth. “Shut your mouth!”

He summoned his courage and appeared in front of Jiang Chen after a flash of his figure. The others naturally wouldn’t stand idly after their captain had made a move. They quickly charged forward and barricaded the entrance with a formation.

Jiang Chen laughed angrily as he sized Captain Luo up. “Captain, I’m not trying to scare you, but in terms of strength, your two squads are actually weaker than the Heavensfall Society. Do you honestly think you can stop us when not even Cong Taiyan could?”

Captain Luo was once again speechless. It was their duty to subdue these people, but this was clearly beyond their abilities. They should really refrain from such futile efforts.

Emperor Peerless suddenly approached the captain with a gentle smile on his face. He patted the captain on the shoulder. “Captain Luo, is it? Pass on a message to your sect master and tell him that Mo Wushuang sends his regards.”

Mo Wushuang?!

Captain Luo was dumbfounded when he heard the name. “E-esteemed elder... you’re Emperor Peerless?” He asked as his face slowly turned as red as a tomato.

The emperor smiled blandly. “That’d merely a title that the jianghu has given to me out of admiration. I’m just a wandering dandelion that has yet to take root.”

Wandering cultivators often described themselves as a floating dandelion. The emperor was being modest. Captain Luo naturally wouldn’t take his words seriously. Color drained from everyone’s faces when the emperor revealed his identity. The Heavensworn Four were utterly flabbergasted. They finally realized who they’d offended and how frighteningly scary he was. Their faces were ashen with regret as they sighed inwardly.

“Esteemed senior, this matter is definitely beyond what we juniors can handle. It’s also beyond the jurisdiction of the Bleakmoon Hall too. I’ll make sure to report this matter to our hallmaster so that he may relay your greeting to the sect master.” Captain Luo was very quick witted. He immediately expressed his apologies in a manner that was both appropriate and sensible when he noticed that things had turned south.

The Heavensworn Four were indeed backed by the Moon God Sect. The sect supported their tyrannical and despotic acts, but they had no qualms sacrificing them when push came to shove. It clearly wasn’t worth offending a wandering great emperor over them. The Four were as pale as a ghost when they heard Captain Luo’s humbling voice. They knew at that point that their fates were now set in stone. The sect was powerful, but they would never risk offending a long established great emperor for them.

After the Bleakmoon Hall’s departure, the Heavensworn Four started to beg and plead like a group of defeated fighting cocks. There was no longer any animosity in their eyes. It had long been replaced by complete submission. There was no reason to further antagonize an enemy that they could do nothing against.

“Senior Peerless, it’s our fault for being as ignorant as a pig! Please forgive us for offending you!” Beigong Ming was the first to get on his knees.

Cong Taiyan swallowed his pride as well. “Senior Peerless, I realize that I’m a huge scoundrel, but we didn’t offend you on purpose! We shouldn’t be blamed for what happened! If the Moon God Sect hadn’t set that rule, why would we send that man to them?”

“Senior, please show us some mercy and let us make amends!” Beigong Ming pleaded.

The fiasco from before had caused an enormous crack within the Heavensworn Four. However, they were too busy begging for their

lives to care about such trivial matters. From here on out, the Heavensworn Four and the Society would cease to exist. Closing shop for good was the best choice of action after offending a great emperor.

Emperor Peerless responded blandly. “Sir Shao has the last say in this matter. I’m merely his henchman.” The emperor was extremely straightforward. He didn’t feel the slightest shame for saying that he was a henchman. In fact, he was more than happy to serve Jiang Chen.

It was Jiang Chen who rescued him and his wife from the gates of hell after all. It was only right that he’d do his savior a favor.

“Sir Shao, I knew that you were no ordinary man! Please give us a chance! We’re one of the local heads in this place. If you give us a chance, we definitely make it up to you!” Beigong Min pleaded miserably.

Make amends? Make it up to me? Jiang Chen smiled coldly. Even a hundred deaths wouldn't be enough to make amends if his father was dead because of them.

Chapter 1103: Third Master Jings Wish to Befriend Jiang Chen

“The only thing you lot can do is to pray that that man is safe. If he’s safe and I happen to be in a good mood, then maybe I’ll let you live. Otherwise… you know the consequences.” Jiang Chen didn’t wish to waste more breath, so he left with a flourish of his sleeves. The others followed behind him. As for the remaining pathetic souls, no one cared if they lived or died.

Third Master Jing glanced at the Heavensworn Four while doing his best to suppress his mirth. Sighing fakely with regret, he too walked towards outside. His smile bloomed like a flower the second he stepped out of the door. Delight was the only thing he felt from the Heavensworn Four’s misery. Normally, the four were so arrogant that their noses were in the air. They never showed him any respect at all despite his position.

Third Master Jing might be an asshole, but he was also the vice head of the first division and an official representative of the Moon God Sect. What was the Heavensworn Four? Sure, they had a patron in the sect, but it was also impossible for an underworld faction to gain official recognition. These tyrants who didn’t even have official recognition strutted before him and had given him no face for the longest time, so of course Third Master Jing wasn’t happy with them.

Frankly, the Heavensworn Four should be thankful that he had the self-control not to set off a few fireworks in celebration of their misery. It was only natural that he would feel a comforting sense of schadenfreude. At the same time however, the third master was struck by a lingering sense of fear and thankfulness. After all, had he made a single mistake when Jiang Chen showed up, he might’ve ended like the Heavensworn Four. Death was not an impossibility either.

Luckily for him, he was a flexible man. He had submitted immediately when he judged the situation to be against him. He felt ashamed at the time to behave so in front of his subordinates, and the flushing of his cheeks didn't fade even after he returned to the division. But now, he couldn't help but thank his lucky stars for making a decision that turned out to be so impossibly wise. If he hadn't caved back then, he doubted that his fate would be much better than the Heavensworn Four's. A wise man submits to the circumstances. This was Third Master Jing's law of survival. After witnessing the Heavensworn Four's downfall, he thought even better of his own principle.

"Young master Shao, the Heavensworn Four is an underground faction and a cancer to Frostmoon City that I've wished to eliminate since a long time ago." Third Master Jing hurriedly caught up to Jiang Chen's group and beamed passionately at the young man. "However, they were too powerful at the time and they were supported by some powerful people. Your feat today is something that gladdens everyone's hearts, and I'm sure that countless people would make a memorial tablet for you if this news were to be made public."

His words might be honeyed with thick flattery, but some parts of it were definitely true. Heavensfall Society was without a doubt the biggest cancer in Frostmoon City. Third Master Jing might be an overbearing vice head, but it wasn't to the point where he would shrink from no crime. True, he was a bit arrogant, greedy and sometimes ruthless, but compared to the Heavensworn Four he was practically a good guy.

The Heavensfall Society was a faction that committed all sorts of evil. Again, the third master had no doubt that there was at least a number of people who hated him to the bone, but compared to Heavensfall Society it was like comparing an ant to an elephant. The Society was hated by everyone, and their name was literally the synonym for evil in Frostmoon City. The name

“Heavensworn” Four could shut up even crying babies in the night.

“Third Master Jing, I doubt there’s anyone here who’s happier than you to witness the fall of Heavensfall Society, am I right? No need to hold it in, you can laugh as much as you wish.” Jiang Chen smiled.

Third Master Jing laughed. “You are truly a humorous man, young master Shao. I admit that Heavensfall Society has been a thorn in my side for the longest time. After all, we are technically the face of our sect, so we cannot completely ignore the wicked deeds they commit. But if I were to seek them out and tell them to tone things down a little, they would show me, the vice head of the first division, a terrible attitude. Would you be able stomach this? So I’ll be honest with you, young master Shao. I’m quite happy right now.”

Jiang Chen nodded before asking suddenly, “You haven’t forgotten your promise, have you?”

Third Master Jing responded quickly, “I was just going to talk to you about this, young master Shao. I will be leaving you to inform Captain Gu Xintang about your request right away. If you have nothing else to do, please feel free to make yourself comfortable in the division building. I guarantee that Captain Gu will show up if he’s not held up with a mission right now.”

As it turned out, Third Master Jing was quite well acquainted with Gu Xintang. His invitation hadn’t gone out for more than four hours before the captain showed up at the division building. The third master didn’t know why his guests were so interested in Holy Maiden Xu Meng, but he knew very well what to ask and what not to ask.

After he had returned to the division that day, Third Master Jing had investigated Jiang Chen’s title. When the news of Pillfire City had reached his ears, he immediately made a connection between

Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless and the arena lords of the Bounty Arena. This made it easy for him to connect the dots between the two pairs.

Emperor Peerless' reputation need not be further elaborated upon. There was almost no one who hadn't heard about him. Perhaps not even the Moon God Sect was willing to offend such a powerful person. As for young master Shao, he had performed shockingly well in the Bounty Arena and had become the bounty king. There was even intelligence noting that young master Shao's background might be shockingly profound. Although Third Master Jing couldn't imagine how important young master Shao was, he was sure that the young master was no ordinary person considering that he frightened even the powers of Pillfire City. Honestly, there were no powers in the entire Upper Eight Regions or even the human domain that would inspire wariness in the Pillfire City. This meant that young master Shao might hail from an even more mysterious place.

Third Master Jing was a member of a first rank sect and his knowledge and experience was greater than most people. He'd sometimes heard rumors that there were more mysterious and unfathomable places in Divine Abyss Continent. He suspected that young master Shao came from one of those places. Otherwise, there was no explanation for how a man as young as he would claim all the limelight in an event like the Bounty Arena, surpassing even Emperor Peerless and Pill King Blue Phoenix in terms of fame.

Moreover, Emperor Peerless' current attitude towards young master Shao piqued his curiosity even more. That was why he spared no effort in currying favor with Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless.

"Brother Gu, you haven't set aside official business to come here, have you?" Third Master Jing might be a bastard, but he had always been good in the art of socializing. His greeting was both

affectionate and warm.

“I couldn’t possibly miss your invitation, can I? I’m not on duty today, so there’s no official business for me to handle.” Gu Xintang looked to be about thirty or forty years old. Of course, that was just appearance, his true age was most definitely greater than forty. After all, he was a captain in Bleakmoon Hall of Moon God Sect. He couldn’t possibly hold his post if he was that young.

“Hehe, I have a task I’ll like to entrust you with, brother. At the same time, I’ll like to introduce you to a few important people.”

“Oh? Which VIP have you invited today?” Gu Xintang looked a little overwhelmed. As a captain of Bleakmoon Hall, Gu Xintang was in fact at the same level as Third Master Jing, the vice head of the first division. However, Gu Xintang’s background, network and supporters were far inferior to Third Master Jing’s. That was why when the third master had invited him, Gu Xintang didn’t think much and just answered the summons.

There was a large hall and a banquet already laid out. Jiang Chen, Long Xiaoxuan, Emperor Peerless and Madame Yun were all present at the table. Liu Zhen had declined from attending the feast because he was feeling slightly self conscious. He wasn’t completely clueless. He knew very well that he would stand out like a sore thumb even if he sat in the most inconspicuous seat because of his status and strength, or rather lack thereof.

“Come, come! Allow me to make some brief introductions, in fact let me introduce them to you first, Brother Gu. This here is Emperor Peerless, the famous pillar of the wandering cultivator community!”

“Emperor Peerless?” Gu Xintang turned pale with shock. “A great emperor?”

Third Master Jing predicted that Gu Xintang would lose his composure slightly, and so he smiled and said, “That’s right, he is Senior Peerless. That aside, Senior Peerless doesn’t care much for

courtesies and is a very amiable man. Oh right, this here is his wife, Madame Yun."

It took a long time before Gu Xintang recovered from his daze and made a hasty bow. "The junior greets Senior Peerless and Madame Yun."

Emperor Peerless smiled calmly. "You are too kind. I am just a wandering cultivator, and I don't mind a lack of pleasantries."

"Brother Gu, this here is young master Shao and young master Long. They may look young, but they are both top rate geniuses. In the Upper Eight Regions, they are without a doubt the best geniuses you can find out there."

"They really are as young as you say. How impressive." Gu Xintang was shocked to find how profound Jiang Chen and Long Xiaoxuan's cultivation and bearing were despite their age.

"Brother Gu, you are a captain of Bleakmoon Hall at your prime age. Your future is just as boundless." Jiang Chen also sighed.

This wasn't undue flattery. Gu Xintang definitely deserved to be viewed as an important figure. Everyone introduced themselves to each other before Third Master Jing finally beckoned everyone to take a seat. After the drinks cycled through the table for a couple of rounds, Third Master Jing looked at Gu Xintang. "Brother Gu, I won't beat around the bush anymore. Today, I have a very serious question I'll like to ask you."

Gu Xintang looked slightly surprised. "Please speak, Third Master."

"Do you still remember when the Heavensfall Society escorted a man to the Moon God Sect? Were you in charge that day?"

Gu Xintang's forehead wrinkled when he heard this. "I remember. The man had been captured by Heavensfall Society for inquiring about a taboo. I am the one on duty and took charge of his custody that day."

“Where is he now?” Third Master Jing asked in a low tone.

Gu Xintang looked surprised. “Where? I don’t know. I ordered my subordinates to throw him into the Sable Cells of the sect.”

“What?” Third Master Jing’s complexion turned deathly pale. The Sable Cells were an exceedingly terrifying place…

Chapter 1104: A Ray of Hope

Gu Xintang was thoroughly confused. He didn't understand why Third Master Jing was so agitated. The third master was asking after something insignificant at best. An origin realm cultivator was hardly relevant in the grand scheme of things. Gu Xintang hadn't even dealt with the matter himself. Instead, it had been delegated to subordinates. As an enforcer of the Bleakmoon Hall, he hardly needed to personally take care of the likes of ants.

"Why're you asking all of a sudden, Third Master?" Gu Xintang couldn't resist shooting back.

The third master was a bit white in the face. He snuck a glance at Jiang Chen to gauge the latter's opinion. The young man furrowed his brow. "Captain Gu, what kind of place are the Sable Cells you speak of?"

"Where we keep our prisoners, of course," Gu Xintang replied without thinking.

"So it's possible for him to still be alive, after being tossed in there?" A ray of hope glimmered in Jiang Chen's eyes.

Third Master Jing tried to look as expressively as he could at the captain. Unfortunately, Gu seemed to be immune to his efforts, and spoke honestly once more. "A dozen people die in that place every day," he smiled apologetically. "Whether they live or die is up to them. Hardly anyone survives several months there. If they do manage to do that, then they'll be able to stay there as long as they want. It's a dog-eat-dog place, wild and barbaric."

Jiang Chen's expression darkened at that.

"Young master Shao, do you happen to be acquainted with him?" In the end, Gu Xintang was no fool. He could guess from Third Master Jing and Jiang Chen's faces that something was up. The captain bore no fault in this situation. He'd only gone about his

business as usual. Tossing the man into the dungeon instead of killing him outright was already a kind of mercy.

“Brother Gu, give it to me straight,” Third Master Jing sighed. “What’re the chances of him still being alive?”

“Quite low,” Gu Xintang replied truthfully.

“Can you go there right now and look for him? Consider it a heartfelt request. If this works out, I owe you big time.” Third Master Jing knew his way around social niceties. Seeing that Jiang Chen wasn’t in a position to ask what he dearly wanted to, he went straight for it instead.

Jiang Chen knew the third master was only putting on a show in a sense, but he nevertheless had to concede that he was being offered help. Regardless of how rude or despicable Third Master Jing had been in the past, he was currently being more than friendly. Jiang Chen didn’t have the stony heart necessary to retain his grudge.

Gu Xintang considered it a bit before nodding. “Third Master, that man touched upon the Moon God Sect’s taboo. He tried to gather information on Holy Maiden Xu Meng–something we expressly forbid, you understand. But since you’re asking me, I’ll do it for your sake. I’ll look into it right away. If he’s still alive, I’ll definitely bring him out.”

Gu Xintang wasn’t a slow man. He perceived situations well enough. If he refused right now, Third Master Jing would be most offended by the gesture. Not only the third master, but everyone else here as well. The others aside, he didn’t dare make an enemy out of Emperor Peerless. Once angered, a great emperor could annihilate him on the spot at the drop of a hat.

He was only a captain in the Bleakmoon Hall. It was dubious that the Moon God Sect would even attempt to avenge him. After all, they didn’t want to enter open hostilities with great emperors who were also wandering cultivators.

Third Master Jing hesitated a moment as a glint entered his eye. “Brother Gu,” he said, “there’s no one else here. I’m not going to try hiding anything from you. So, actually, can you bring Brother Shao and Senior Peerless with you?”

“Eh?” Gu Xintang blinked. Take outsiders into the Moon God Sect’s dungeons? That was something the sect expressly forbade. In that moment, he became somewhat suspicious of the group’s motives. Were they really here just for an origin realm cultivator? The dungeon didn’t have any other experts they’re interested in, did it? How could an origin realm cultivator be worth Emperor Peerless’s personal presence?

A long time elapsed in silence. Evidently, the contents of the request had shocked Gu Xintang severely. He wasn’t willing to agree without deliberation.

“Brother Gu, I’ve always respected your talent and ability,” Third Master Jing frowned. “Can you tell me why you’re still only a captain after all these years?”

Gu Xintang smiled wryly. “Third Master, I don’t have any foundation or backing in the sect. I’m happy enough to be a captain of my hall.”

“But you can do far more than that. What are you missing? Charisma or connections?” Third Master Jing’s tongue rang with the sound of silver. “If you want to be bold, now is the time. Here’s your big chance.”

Gu Xintang smiled wryly. He saw what the so-called ‘opportunity’ was. If he buttered up Emperor Peerless and made the emperor’s acquaintance, he served to profit greatly from the new connection. But it was easier said than done. There was the possibility of not finding the origin realm cultivator at all. And even if they did, Gu Xintang considered it much more likely for him to be dead than alive. Finding a corpse voided the favor. In fact, an undesirable conclusion was more likely to aggravate these

people. His intuition told him that upsetting these people–great emperor, young man, and the rest–would bear serious consequences. The fact that he was of the Moon God Sect was irrelevant.

Jiang Chen took a deep breath. “Captain Gu, I know that you did only what your job demanded of you. There was nothing unfair about your conduct, and we really appreciate that you didn’t kill the person we’re looking for on the spot. It doesn’t matter whether he’s still dead or alive, we’ll owe you a favor as long as you take us to the cells.”

Emperor Peerless nodded as well. “Just like Third Master Jing said, you need to display your own charisma and boldness.”

Gu Xintang was a capable man. However, because he lacked solid backing from his higher-ups, he was often too circumspect in critical situations, not having the resolution or boldness to act decisively. The decision before him now was very difficult. After lengthy internal debate, he finally grit his teeth.

“Alright, I’ll do what you ask. I’ll take you to the cells, but you need to disguise yourselves before we go. Outsiders are absolutely not allowed into the sect’s restricted areas. And another thing: I need some reassurance that you’re only looking for that one origin realm cultivator. I cannot in good conscience take you, otherwise.”

“Don’t worry. I swear on my inner demons that I am, indeed, only looking for the person we spoke about. I will not cause any trouble for you,” Jiang Chen stated.

Third Master Jing chimed in as well. “Brother Gu, Sir Shao and Senior Peerless are both honorable people. They stick to their promises. You might not have a lot of faith in lil ole me here, but you can trust them for sure.”

Gu Xintang sighed softly. “I trust them, and I trust you. But for something that’s as important as this, I must take particular care. There’ll be no end to the ensuing problems otherwise. If the other

captains find out, they'll censure me. The fire might even spread to you, Third Master."

"If anyone else finds out, I should think I'd be the most embarrassed of all," Emperor Peerless smiled faintly. If a great emperor cultivator couldn't take care of something so small, it would be intensely humiliating for him.

"There's no time to lose. Let us depart right away. Captain Gu, tell us how we should disguise ourselves." Jiang Chen didn't want any further delay. Unnecessary time spent here translated to more risk that his father would be exposed to.

Both Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless dressed up a little according to Gu Xintang's wishes. Their disguises as the captain's subordinates were quite convincing. The two that originally accompanied him were arranged to stay behind at Third Master Jing's place.

"Brother Long, we're leaving Madame Yun with you. Take good care of her if anything comes up." Jiang Chen instructed before leaving.

The dragon was a little dissatisfied. He wanted to participate in the ensuing activity quite badly, but Gu Xintang had only two spots. Jiang Chen's accompaniment was locked in. Though Long Xiaoxuan was confident, he wasn't arrogant enough to think he was superior to Emperor Peerless. Thus, he didn't complain despite his unhappiness.

The Moon God Sect's headquarters weren't in Frostmoon City proper, but were hidden in the wilderness. Any regular person who didn't have the coordinates wouldn't even be able to find the entrance.

As a member of the sect, Gu Xintang encountered no such issue. He passed by several checkpoints, Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless in tow, before entering the Moon God Sect's gates proper. Emperor Peerless suppressed all of his aura the entire way. The

great emperor appeared just like a regular cultivator. He didn't dare reveal the slightest hint of his great emperor realm cultivation. They were in the heart of the Moon God Sect's territory, and being noticed was sure to induce unneeded misunderstanding and furor. Trespassing was a sensitive subject for any sect.

The cells were located in a secluded corner of the sect's grounds. Gu Xintang was often sent here for guard duty. As the third-ranking captain of Bleakmoon Hall, he was obviously being sidelined intentionally. There was no other reason for someone of his strength and stature to do that job. After all, the work was hard and thankless.

Though it wasn't Gu's shift today, all of the guards knew who he was. His arrival, subordinates in tow, was far from surprising. Verifying the password was enough to get the trio past the outside defenses.

"That was the checkpoint on the outside. There's another one further in. They're a lot stricter there, and even I am asked questions if I come on a day off." Gu Xintang transmitted to Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless as a discreet request for their cooperation.

It wasn't long before they reached the inner area. The checkpoint up ahead appeared to have remarkably improved security. Numerous experts patrolled the place, and defense formations filled every corner of the entrance. It gave off a forbidding impression to onlookers.

"What brings you here, Captain Gu?" The captain on duty was stunned, surprised by his fellow captain's unexpected appearance. This captain was another marginalized character in the Bleakmoon Hall. His ability and position paled to even Gu Xintang's.

"Captain Qin, there was a prisoner that I dropped off here earlier. I remembered a few more things I needed to interrogate him for

just now, so I’m here to pick him up.” Gu Xintang voiced a white lie.

Chapter 1105: Sable Cells

Still dazed, the captain took a few moments to collect his thoughts. He rarely encountered situations such as this, but who was he to stop the other man? “Captain Gu,” he said, “There’s no reason for me to prevent you from picking up a prisoner for interrogation. But, since you’re not on duty right now, can you show me your identification token?”

Of course Gu Xintang had his own token. Taking it out, he handed it over. Captain Qin glanced at it for a few seconds before smiling. “May I be so bold as to ask you to verify it?”

An identification token had to be verified by one’s own consciousness. Each token was matched to a specific individual. An imposter who attempted to infiltrate the prison would fail here. Their consciousness would not be able to match someone else’s token.

“Captain Qin, aren’t we old comrades? Is there really a need for this?” Gu Xintang scowled.

“If our roles were exchanged, Captain Gu, I would volunteer my cooperation.” The other captain smiled wryly. “It’s just that, you know, it’s my shift, and I don’t want…”

“I’ve always treated you well, Captain Qin. And yet you lack the most basic of faith in me?” Gu Xintang was displeased.

“If it were you in the flesh, Captain Gu, of course you’d have my full faith. But… I’m worried about imposters, right?”

The Sable Cells were an important area, off-limits to most.

“You certainly have an overactive imagination,” Gu Xintang spat angrily. As he said this, he activated his consciousness to show that it did, indeed, match his identification token.

The verification process having passed, apology flickered across Captain Qin’s face. “Sorry about that, Captain Gu. Just following

due process.”

He looked towards Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless as he said this, clearly looking for their identification tokens as well.

“Captain Qin, are you intentionally trying to make things difficult for me? Is it not enough that I verified, and now my subordinates need to do it as well?” Gu Xintang’s expression looked even worse now.

The intense irritation in Gu Xintang’s voice sent ripples across Captain Qin’s heart. He looked back at his fellow captain and let out a long sigh. “If you put it like that, Captain Gu, then never mind. Go on in.”

The rules mandated that everyone who entered needed to have their identity confirmed. But Gu Xintang was a close acquaintance, and he’d passed the check himself. If there was no issue with the leader, how could there be with his subordinates? Captain Qin did not want to offend Gu Xintang any further than he already did. He was happy to offer the relatively casual favor in order to placate the other man.

Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless were impassive. When Captain Qin had shown intent to examine them, they'd both been prepared to subdue the man on the spot. Thankfully, the captain ended up giving Gu Xintang a bit of courtesy after all. He hadn't stuck wholly to the rules. Still, it had been a pretty close call.

Jiang Chen instantly felt that he'd entered an entirely different world when he entered the Sable Cells. This was a dark realm, filled with filth and fetid air. A nauseating scent assaulted the trio's nostrils. It wasn't the scent of feces alone. Putrescence, stench, and the stink of sweat mixed together to form a vomit-inducing potpourri of smells.

"This is how the Cells are," Gu Xintang coughed apologetically. "Please forgive the atmosphere."

Jiang Chen shook his head. "Let's start looking."

The Cells were very spacious. No individual cell was walled off, and any inmate was free to move within the space. The Moon God Sect had intentionally designed it to be so. In this way, the prisoners could deplete their own numbers via mutual bloodshed. The area was little different from a dimly-lit slum. The malice of human nature was on full display here, each and every moment.

As soon as Jiang Chen entered the Cells, he fully opened up his consciousness. God's Eye in tandem with Evil Golden Eye imparted to him a piercing vision that spread to every corner of the space. With utmost care and caution, he began the search process. There was corpse and bone as far as the eye could see. Ripped off limbs and jagged appendages sprawled everywhere, and dried blood caked the earth with a sullen brown.

If Jiang Chen didn't have anything on his mind, the sight would’ve affected him very little. Almost every sect had their own dungeons. Such areas were reserved for their most heinous prisoners and captives, in order to leave them to their own devices. Only the greatest among them ended up surviving. In fact, many sects went on to extend offers of invitation to said survivors. Of course, it was largely an invitation of convenience. They were given opportunities to redeem themselves and use their abilities to benefit the sect.

Those who were put into dungeons of this kind typically found the offers rather attractive. Their dark enclosures might not have taken away their lives, but it certainly took away their leisure and freedom. Existence down here was boring and stale. Therefore, those who were interested in regaining their freedom usually accepted the invitations. Of course, the basic premise was firstly survival in such a harsh environment. Having a life to experience future freedom was a basic prerequisite to receiving that opportunity further down the line.

Gu Xintang was mildly discomfited. He felt somewhat anxious.

He'd been the one who'd ordered that man sent to these Cells, after all. Would the two in front of him really absolve him if that cultivator were found dead? Countless misgivings filled his heart. Deep down, he hoped for a miracle that the man was still be alive.

The food supply within the Sable Cells was sparse and limited. Furthermore, there were no resources for cultivation here. Cannibalism was a daily occurrence. Cultivators' consumption of their fellows wasn't merely to sate their hungers. Because of the lack of cultivation resources, they were forced to absorb others' internal energies and bloodlines in an effort to increase their own. It was a cruel fact of life that nevertheless took place with alarming regularity. In that sense, the Sable Cells was also like a small criminal town. There were new arrivals and mysterious disappearances every day.

"How many people are there in the Sable Cells?" Jiang Chen frowned.

"About fifty to a hundred thousand," Gu Xintang hurriedly replied. "Lower than fifty at its lowest, but usually above."

Most dungeon areas did not even serve the primary function of holding prisoners. Rather, they existed to cultivate heartless murderers. In the spirit beast kingdom, many spirit beasts kept their young together in mutual competition until only one survived. The one that did was always exceptionally fierce because of the bloody experience. Adversity and carnage were excellent honing steels, after all. The Sable Cells applied a similar principle.

An origin realm cultivator wasn't paid much attention here. In the Cells, they were the lowest on the literal food chain. Those who had the right of being locked up in the Sable Cells rarely acquired it without some other kind of distinction. Thus, several of Gu Xintang's attempts at asking the locals drew up only blanks and confusion. None of them remembered anyone matching the description.

Additionally, Jiang Chen knew that his father Jiang Feng would never have used his real name here. That made gathering information beyond difficult. But it wasn't in his character to give up. He wanted to find his father, dead or alive. Even if Jiang Feng was the former, Jiang Chen still wanted the corpse.

The Sable Cells were enormous, so they proceeded at a deliberate pace. Whatever new groups of people appeared in their sights were sure to be interrogated, but no clues arose. Jiang Chen's glowering expression disquieted Gu Xintang. He didn't know what he could do to wash his hands of the affair. His only choice was to grimly carry on forward with the expedition.

None of the prisoners in the Sable Cells were the quiet type. At the sight of Gu Xintang, they began to raise a fuss. "Captain Gu, you're not on duty today, are you? What luxurious mindset brings you by? Looking for a place of your own, eh?"

Evidently, the captain was very well known here. His strict demeanor drew the ire of many inmates. There were a few that wanted to suck up to him as well, however. They wanted a chance to advance themselves and perhaps get out.

"Captain Gu, are you looking for helpers? What about me?"

"Take me with you, captain. I promise that no matter what your orders are, I'll carry them out to the fullest. You'll find no problems with my work, no sir!" Their faces were the very epitome of flattery.

Gu Xintang beckoned to them. "I have something to ask you about. Whoever can answer, come forward. If you have useful info, I'll think about giving you a chance."

"What thing? Tell us about it, Captain Gu."

"I'm the nosiest of the bunch here. I guarantee you'll be happy to have asked me."

Gu Xintang kept his expression stoic. "Don't start bragging now.

Don’t try to lie to me. If you do either, I can ensure that you won’t live past tonight... much less get the chance at freedom you so desperately want.”

“No lies, no lies! How could anyone tell a lie to you, Captain Gu!”

“That’s right. This is already an amazing favor from Captain Gu. Lying! No way!”

Gu Xintang glanced at Jiang Chen before speaking further. “A few months ago, there was an origin realm cultivator who came here to the Sable Cells. Does anyone remember?”

“A few months ago? Origin realm cultivator?”

“Is there anything else, Captain Gu? This is too little to go off of. There have been at least a couple hundred to a thousand of those, so how could we know which one you mean?”

“Yeah, give us more. Even a few tidbits more would help. Appearance, name, nickname... whatever. If there’s a name, there’s a way.”

Gu Xintang thought about it for a moment. “This person was delivered to us by the Heavensfall Society. My subordinates brought him here.”

“What did he come here for?”

Gu Xintang was a little embarrassed, but answered nevertheless. “He asked about the Blue Moon’s secrets, specifically about Holy Maiden Xu Meng...”

Before he finished, one of the inmates uttered a surprised “Eh?”

The prisoner in question wasn’t particularly imposing, but he had a shrewd look in his eyes. Jiang Chen locked onto him immediately. He stepped forward, asking in a low voice. “Do you have any clues?”

His breathing hitched as he asked this. Clearly, any information about his father at this point was of paramount importance!

Chapter 1106: Whereabouts of Father Jiang Feng

The man pondered for a moment. “Now that you mention it, I do have an impression of him. He doesn’t seem to be in our zone.”

Gu Xintang was overjoyed. “Think harder and tell us everything you know. Remember, don’t lie.”

“You’ll be rewarded generously if you lead us to him.” Jiang Chen nodded.

The man noticed the hostile glares being cast at him and instantly knew that there would be enormous repercussions if he said any more. Plenty were willing to do anything for a chance to get out of the Sable Cells. And now, a glimmer of hope was within reach. If envious glances could kill, he’d be dead at least a dozen times by now. He’d also be dead within an hour if he remained here any longer.

The fighter mused deeply and glanced at Gu Xintang. “Captain Gu, I need you to make me a promise.”

“What is it?” Gu Xintang was unhappy that the man was trying to haggle.

“If the information I provide is useful, promise me that you’ll grant my freedom even if the person you seek isn’t found. If my information is useless, you still have to transfer me to another zone.” The man knew that he’d angered the masses here. Even if he couldn’t leave the Sable Cells, he would at least require a zone transfer.

Tens of thousands of prisoners were held in the cells. Its population was that of a city. Naturally, the place was segregated into multiple zones. There was a different ruler in each of the zones. The Sable Cells was said to be a lawless place, but everyone abided by a set of rules that no outsider would ever know about. If

it truly were a place without rules, the occupants would all be dead within a month. It was impossible for tens of thousands to coexist in a place like this.

The fact that the population maintained in the tens of thousands meant that there was actually an ecosystem down here. New prisoners were constantly coming in to replace the dead. This cycle was essential for the Sable Cells' existence.

Gu Xintang glanced at Jiang Chen and nodded without hesitation. "I can give you what you ask, provided that your information is useful."

The shrewd man was elated. "Deal! Follow me. Let's talk elsewhere."

Jiang Chen exchanged glances with Gu Xintang. They nodded and followed the man to a slightly more secluded corner to talk. "Captain Gu, I've heard about the man which you seek."

"Oh? Where is he?" Gu Xintang was paying undivided attention.

"I cannot tell you where he is for now." The shrewd man was quite sharp. "I need you to make me a promise."

"Didn't I do that earlier?" Gu Xintang frowned.

"Nonono. A verbal promise is useless. What am I to do if you break your promise?" The shrewd man had survived in this prison for a very long time. He wasn't the kind to trust others easily.

"What do you want us to do then?" Gu Xintang was very annoyed by his haggling.

"Very simple. Just solemnly swear to the heavens and earth that you'll fulfill your end of the deal if my information is useful. I guarantee that you'll be very satisfied with what I can offer. Moreover, the information that I have is very obscure. Not many know about it in this zone."

Jiang Chen activated his God's Eyes and stared at the shrewd

man as though he was trying to peer into the very depths of the man's soul. The cultivator quivered when he met Jiang Chen's gaze, but he peered back without any fear. He was scared, but he was equally as determined. He made it obvious that he'd not keel under pressure.

Gu Xintang nodded after thinking about it for a moment. "Fine. I shall do as you say. If your information is genuinely useful to us, I swear to the heavens that I shall grant you freedom. However, if your information is useless, I'll make sure that you'll rot in this prison for the rest of your life!"

The shrewd man smiled when he heard Gu Xintang's vow. "Rest assured. I'll commit suicide if it really is useless. The man that you seek is a very unimpressive earth origin cultivator that also seems to be incredibly infatuated with someone. Ever since he's arrived, all he's done is mumble 'Meng'er... Meng'er...' all day long. Everyone believed that he wouldn't even last three days, but..." The man suddenly stopped.

"But what?" A light flared in Jiang Chen's as he stared at the man anxiously.

"It really does seem very odd now that I think about it. When that man arrived, he immediately caught the attention of a few bosses here." The man chuckled. "Actually, many have seen the man you're looking for. However, nobody paid close attention to him except for me. He kept mumbling 'Meng'er... Meng'er...' all day long. The guards who brought him here said something about how merciful they were for not killing him on the spot for trying to uncover the sect's secrets..."

Opportunities were for those prepared. There had been many witnesses, but few paid close attention to the details. Everyone was only concerned with their own survival in the Sable Cells. Nobody would ever pay attention to such trifling matters, especially when the person in question was merely an origin realm cultivator. Nobody was interested in an origin realm cultivator's gossip. Of

course, that wouldn't be the case if he was an emperor. Everyone would surely pay attention then.

An origin realm cultivator was simply too insignificant. Almost nobody cared or asked about him. The only reason the shrewd man knew so much was because he was a very meticulous person. He paid extra attention to this matter when he heard that it was related to a certain 'holy maiden'. He was finally able to put his attention to detail to good use.

Jiang Chen was incredibly moved. The shrewd man clearly knew what he was talking about as he'd included many details that couldn't be fabricated. He reached into his sleeves and took out ten Heroic Sage Pills. These were very beneficial to one's cultivation in the sage realm. It replenished one's energy and was a great source of internal energy. Its effects wasn't as overwhelming as the Sage Smile Pill and didn't offer an unconditional breakthrough in the sage realm, but it was more useful in the long term. The Sage Smile Pill allowed for an unconditional breakthrough, but it could only be used once. The Heroic Sage Pill however, could be used throughout the entire sage realm.

"Stop trying to haggle and tell me where he is right now. All you need to do is tell me where he is and these pills will be yours." Jiang Chen was very generous.

It had been years since the shrewd man last saw cultivation resources. He gulped audibly upon seeing those shiny new pills. A gleam appeared in his eyes. "T-these... these are Heroic Sage Pills? Upper rank ones at that too?"

"You have an eye for quality goods." Jiang Chen replied blandly.

"They're all mine if I tell you where he is?" The shrewd man gulped audibly for the second time. Greed was written all over his face. He was a voracious wolf that had just discovered prey.

Gu Xintang gave the man a kick in the butt. "Stop talking nonsense and just tell us where he is!"

The man finally realized the nuances within the situation and began to see Jiang Chen in a new light. He'd originally thought that Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless were Gu Xintang's subordinates, but he suddenly noticed how respectful Gu Xintang was towards them. They were clearly not subordinates. However, being the shrewd person that he was, he definitely wouldn't say that out loud. He very much preferred to keep his head attached to his neck. He nodded without any more delay. "I made some inquiries on his whereabouts soon after that. If I'm not mistaken, he should be in the Ten Ultimates."

Gu Xintang was aghast. "What did you just say?!"

The shrewd man nodded reassuringly. "That man is definitely in the Ten Ultimates. If he's still alive that is."

Gu Xintang flashed a complicated look at him. "Are you sure you're not dreaming?"

"Captain Gu, why would I lie when my freedom is at stake? It might sound unbelievable, but it's completely true," the man replied resolutely.

"What kind of place is the Ten Ultimates?" Jiang Chen asked Gu Xintang.

Gu Xintang smiled wryly. "The Ten Ultimates is the scariest and also highest rank zone in the Sable Cells. The residents there are the strongest of all. Only ten are allowed to live in that zone at any given time. This is a silent rule which everyone acknowledges. If one wishes to enter the Ten Ultimates, one must challenge the powerful experts there. Thus, it's an extremely frightening place to be in. Most captains wouldn't even dare approach that zone. Only the hallmaster of the Bleakmoon Hall can come and go as he wish."

There were multiple powerful experts in each of the Sable Cells zones. They were subdued and imprisoned in the Sable Cells for a multitude of reasons. Even though they'd lost their freedom, they

were still more than capable of holding their own in the Cells and had climbed to the very top of the local food chain. In fact, they were all frighteningly powerful talents that could climb to the top of any food chain. In other words, they were all very ambitious and ruthless characters.

“Are the prisoners in that zone the strongest in this prison?” Jiang Chen asked.

“Definitely. The Sable Cells are a very primitive place where wits can never overcome brawn. One’s cultivation level speaks the loudest here. Every single prisoner living in the Ten Ultimates is a high level emperor. In fact, the weakest among them is actually an eighth level emperor.” Gu Xintang sighed gently. He genuinely feared the Ten Ultimates.

The Sable Cells was a very hostile place that brought out every drop of potential from within the occupants. An eighth level emperor in these cells might not be any weaker than a ninth level emperor in the outside world. There was no place to hide or find solace in a place like this. Everyday was a new struggle. To survive, one had to squeeze every drop of potential from oneself and display one’s power and ferocity at every given moment.

Emperor Peerless finally broke the silence. “Who cares what zone he’s in. Let’s go and have a look. Time is of the essence.”

Jiang Chen nodded. “Let’s go.”

Gu Xintang grit his teeth and nodded reluctantly. Their informant immediately turned pale. “W-wait! Are... are you really certain that you want to enter to the Ten Ultimates?”

Chapter 1107: The Ten Ultimates

The shrewd man was obviously very afraid of the zone. Even with Gu Xintang around, he didn't think well of their intention to visit the Ten Ultimates at all. Who wasn't aware in the Sable Cells that the Ten Ultimates was a place not even Bleakmoon Hall's captains dared enter carelessly. Even on the occasion they had to go in, they would be on full alert the entire time.

Every fiend imprisoned in the Ten Ultimates was heartless and crazy. A mere captain had no right to put on airs in that place. If they offended these monsters, they might well be slaughtered on the spot. There were definitely such a precedence, and many times in the past as well. The captains wouldn't be so wary of this place otherwise. Those imprisoned in the Ten Ultimates weren't someone that a mere captain could intimidate. To put it bluntly, the captains were the ones who had to watch themselves and discard all airs, or else dire consequences befall them.

So how did the shrewd man dare enter the Ten Ultimates? He didn't even have the guts to approach the area, especially since he was the one who'd raised it in the first place. If the experts in the Ten Ultimates learned that he was the one who'd revealed their secret, he wouldn't survive their wrath even if he had ten lives.

"I'm not going, Captain Gu." The shrewd man blurted when he thought up to this point.

Gu Xintang frowned. "Sure, do as you wish. If your intel is incorrect though, you better be prepared to stay in Sable Cells for the rest of your life."

The shrewd man shook his head. "My intel is absolute correct. It's what I concluded after gathering information from many places, so there's absolutely no way it could be wrong."

Jiang Chen tossed the ten Heroic Sage Pill to the shrewd man before asking in a low tone, "If the Ten Ultimates is as scary as you

say, then why would their cultivators be so interested in an origin realm cultivator? What on earth are they planning by bringing him into the zone? Is it a good thing or a bad thing?"

The shrewd man smiled wryly. "Do you think anything good can happen in this place? I dare not say that everyone in the Sable Cells is an irredeemable criminal, but no one who gets into the Ten Ultimates has a shred of mercy left in their hearts."

"What on earth are they planning?" Jiang Chen frowned.

"I'm not sure about the details, but I heard that the experts of the Ten Ultimates noticed the origin realm cultivator's bloodline to be pretty uncommon. There was something interesting about his bloodline that drew their attention. Right now, they're stuck at discussing about how to split the goods among themselves, but if I have to guess they're probably fattening that cultivator so they can devour his bloodline power later. He's only at origin realm after all. Things will probably change when he reaches sage realm or emperor realm."

"And how long will that take? There are no cultivation resources in the Sable Cells at all." Gu Xintang frowned.

"It's true that there are no cultivation resources in the Sable Cells, but that doesn't mean they can't acquire them. To put it bluntly, the experts of the Ten Ultimates are far higher in the status quo than a captain like you. Do you really think that people like them would be completely helpless? Who know, they may even be in cahoots with a senior executive in Moon God Sect."

Of course these people were imprisoned for a reason, but that didn't mean their original contacts were all gone. No one in the Ten Ultimates was an easy picking.

Jiang Chen should've been absolutely furious to hear this, but not only was he not angry at all, his nerves even relaxed a little. It didn't matter what the people inside the Ten Ultimates were planning as long as his father was safe for the moment. That was

all he needed to hear. As for their plans, they were irrelevant. After all, what did he have to be afraid of with Old Brother Mo by his side?

That being said, Jiang Chen was curious about something. He knew that his father's bloodline was nothing special at all. Jiang Feng was his blood-related father, so he knew exactly how much potential his father had.

The only way to explain this was that his father must have consumed the Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill and successfully unlocked a bloodline that could cultivate all five elements. This bloodline was so rare that it might not even be possible to find someone like this in a hundred million cultivators. The pill itself was just a foundation-type pill used to establish one's foundation when breaking through to the spirit realm. It was completely useless to an emperor realm cultivator.

Jiang Chen wasn't willing to speculate beyond this. All was well in the world as long as his father was still alive.

"Captain Gu, we're entering the Ten Ultimates. You may stay behind after you lead us to the entrance." Jiang Chen didn't want to drag the captain into this mess.

But Gu Xintang shook his head. "I'm going with you. My conscience won't be clean if I let the two of you enter that place alone."

The shrewd man looked anxious when he saw that Gu Xintang was adamant. "Captain Gu, who's going to fulfill your promise if something happens to you in the Ten Ultimates?"

Gu Xintang cursed angrily, "What nonsense are you spouting!? There's no need to be in a rush. I'll keep my promise. Do you think everyone in the world is as cowardly as you are?"

The man fell silent. It was true that the cultivators of the Ten Ultimates were ferocious, but Gu Xintang was a representative of

the Moon God Sect. He would probably be safe as long as he didn't go overboard.

Still, the man couldn't help but wipe away a bit of cold sweat on their behalf. Snatching food from the tiger's mouth? It was a feat possible only for the greatest heavyweights of the sect. Otherwise, not even the hallmaster of Bleakmoon Hall might necessarily be able to take someone from the Ten Ultimates. In the end, the man still decided not to follow them.

Gu Xintang led Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless towards the Ten Ultimates. The man shook his head with worry as he stared at the departing group's backs. He wasn't worried for their life, but that no one would fulfill Gu Xintang's promise if he died. Still, he'd gotten ten Heroic Sage Pills. It wasn't a completely fruitless endeavor. Even if he couldn't leave this place immediately, these ten Heroic Sage Pills were enough for him to increase a cultivation level.

"Gu Xintang is normally very rigid in his thinking, so what pushed him to act so recklessly this time? Who are those two? What are their backgrounds?" The shrewd man was extremely curious about their identities. He also clucked his tongue in wonder as he wrapped his hands around the ten Heroic Sage Pills. "Haha, I would've asked for more if I knew they were this generous. Speaking of which, those two looked utterly fearless for some reason. Can they really be a big shot or something?"

The man was both gossipy and smart. The more he thought of Gu Xintang's reactions, the more he thought that the two strangers were extremely powerful and of important background. There was no way Gu Xintang would be so resolute in his decision to accompany them into the Ten Ultimates otherwise.

"I hope they'll come back successful. My freedom depends on you all now." The shrewd man yearned for freedom.

The Ten Ultimates was deeper inside the Sable Cells. It was also

superior to the other parts of the Cells. The amount of wandering prisoners obviously decreased after they arrived at the Ten Ultimates. The environment of this place was absolutely incomparable to the other areas of the Sable Cells. Even more ridiculous was the fact that there were prisoners who cleaned and tidied the place up nicely. Although the Ten Ultimates still looked a little sparse, it was shocking to find a place like this in the Sable Cells.

“Tsk tsk, these ‘VIPs’ sure know how to enjoy life even in prison. A different person might’ve thought they’re here for a vacation.” Jiang Chen commented with a bit of mockery in his tone.

Gu Xintang smiled wryly. Even he thought that the Ten Ultimates looked a little too nice. A prisoner in the Sable Cells should at least looked like a prisoner, shouldn’t they? He wasn’t in the position to comment about this though.

Just as they were approaching the Ten Ultimates, a group of people suddenly walked out from the buildings on the left and right. They were all staring at Gu Xintang unkindly.

A one-eyed man asked coldly, “Captain Gu? Are you the one on duty today?”

This one-eyed man was obviously not one of the Ten Ultimates. He was more of a watchdog. If he was one of the experts, then Gu Xintang might’ve considered showing him a bit of courtesy. But he was just a gatekeeper, so the captain was quite displeased with his attitude.

Gu Xintang responded calmly, “One-Eyed Zhao, since when did you have the right to ask if I’m on duty today?”

The gatekeeper obviously had one eye left, but Gu Xintang had purposely called him a blind man. A trace of cruelty flashed across the gatekeeper’s remaining eye before he quickly concealed it.

“I can’t care less about your business, but I must warn you’ll be

crossing a line if you come any further. There are places you can't enter just because you feel like it." A tinge of warning and threat colored the one-eyed man's tone.

"Bullshit! This is the Sable Cells, and I'm the captain who oversees the Sable Cells. There is nowhere in this place that I cannot go. Who the hell do you think you are to question my right, One-Eyed Zhao?" Gu Xintang didn't care to be polite at all. He wasn't a person who would suffer a threat from a gatekeeper no matter how good-tempered he was.

"Tsk tsk, you sure are awe-inspiring today, Captain Gu. Sure, feel free to ignore my kind-hearted warning like the ignorant fool you are. None of us will try to stop you. Come on, show us that you have the balls to walk right on through." The one-eyed man ridiculed him merrily and actually waved away all of his men. He ignored Gu Xintang and his group entirely.

There was no reason for the captain to back down at this point, so he let out a cold snort. "Pretentious bastard. Come on, let us continue forwards."

Jiang Chen nodded. He had taken note of Gu Xintang's performance.

Emperor Peerless also gave Gu Xintang a smile and patted him on the shoulder as a show of encouragement. "Don't worry, we'll hold up even the sky for you if it collapses."

The great emperor's words was like a surge of invisible energy that boosted his spirits massively. Gu Xintang immediately felt as steady as having eaten a tranquilizer. He strode forwards and led Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless into the depths of the Ten Ultimates.

It was obvious to the denizens of the Ten Ultimates that someone had intruded on their playground. This was a very, very rare occurrence, as even Bleakmoon Hall's men had to report to them and obtain their permission before they were allowed to enter.

Had someone seriously just entered without permission today? Were they looking down on the Ten Ultimates? The experts of the zone might fight against each other often, but they were quite united in their desires to protect their own territory. They called out to each other and emerged from their hidey holes, completely surrounding Gu Xintang and Jiang Chen.

Chapter 1108: One Hit K.O.

“Gu Xintang, you stubborn fool. I warned you a long time ago, didn’t I? How dare a mere captain look down on the mighty Ten Ultimates? Do you think that this is a place like anywhere else where you can come and go anytime you want?” The one-eyed man crawled out of his corner again to scold Gu Xintang self-righteously. None of the ten great experts were speaking, but the one-eyed man had spoken up first. This showed that he must be one who held foremost authority beneath the ten great experts. He was likely a butler of some kind.

Gu Xintang cupped his hands together and spoke evenly. “Everyone, I am here to perform an official investigation today, so please bear with me.”

The captain’s words were fair, but he still sounded a bit uncertain. It was understandable, considering he was facing a bunch of ruthless monsters. Another captain might have turned pale and stuttered in fright already.

“Shut it!” An old man with hair as white as cranes’ feathers, but a face as young as a child’s scolded Gu Xintang as his expression darkened. “Who the hell do you think you are? Did the hallmaster neglect to teach you the rules? How dare an insignificant captain like you intrude upon our sanctuary? Do you think so little of the Ten Ultimates? Do you want me to teach you the meaning of the word ‘death’?”

Gu Xintang’s face turned pale and his mouth dry. He forced his own mouth open and tried to say something, but Jiang Chen walked forwards and stopped the captain. “Leave things to us.”

Gu Xintang could only nod in response and mutter, “Stay calm. Let’s see if we can negotiate this peacefully first.”

That being said, the captain himself wasn’t confident that a peaceful negotiation could be carried out in this place. To begin

with, the Ten Ultimates wouldn't be the Ten Ultimates if such a thing was possible. So what if logic was on their side? The experts here worshipped strength only. Those who were strong become the voice of reason, and those who were weak were only served the fruits of 'reason'.

"Old Brother Mo, would you like to be the one to teach them the rules they speak of? I'll go search for our man." Jiang Chen winked at Emperor Peerless.

The great emperor smiled calmly. "No problem. Be careful though. There are no easy pickings around here."

Jiang Chen nodded. Of course, it hadn't escaped his attention that the weakest cultivator here was at least eighth level emperor realm, and the strongest cultivator in this place was almost half-step great emperor. That being said, he wasn't a fledgling who'd just embarked on the journey of martial dao anymore. He likely couldn't fight a half-step great emperor head on, but when it came to speed? He was fast enough that he dared challenge Emperor Peerless himself, much less these people! Nodding slightly, he activated his arts and transformed into a bolt lightning, cutting through the air. The Kunpeng Meteoric Escape enabled him to vanish instantly in mid-air like a meteor.

"You're courting death!" The surrounding crowd cursed.

The elder with white hair and a childish face waved them down. "Calm down, no need to get worked up. It's just a rat we can squash any time we want. Situ Ling, Wu Xutao, go catch that rat. The rest of you, stay here."

The old man obviously held absolute authority in the Ten Ultimates. His cultivation, experience and knowledge exceeded everyone present as well. He was the closest expert to reach half-step great emperor, and right now he was staring at Emperor Peerless with evident realization that the great emperor was their real enemy today.

He has to be the reason why this ragtag group dared intrude into the Ten Ultimates. Although the old man couldn't see through Emperor Peerless' cultivation, his instincts were telling him that this man would be a very difficult opponent.

Emperor Peerless smiled calmly as he glanced at the old man with white hair and a childish face. He said leisurely, "He Fenghui, Ole He. I thought you'd died a long time ago. I didn't realize that you were imprisoned inside the Ten Ultimates. This is truly surprising. Did you offend Moon God Sect somehow? If not, why would someone like you be imprisoned in such a place?"

The old man's name was He Fenghui. He was a famous cultivator in the wandering cultivator community. Although his strength was incomparable to Emperor Peerless', he was on par with the two Geng brothers Emperor Peerless called friends. The old man occupied a high status in the wandering cultivator community, even if he fell short of being the best.

"You... you know my name? You can't possibly be a nobody. Why have you disguised yourself as a small Bleakmoon Hall guard?" He Fenghui's reply was full of wariness.

"Hmph, that's none of your concern. I will ask you only one question, are you going to fight? Or are you going to stay there like a well-behaved boy?"

The threat made everyone in the Ten Ultimates grow furious.

"Who the hell do you think you are to act like this in the Ten Ultimates?!"

"Old Brother He, this guy's so full of himself. Let's teach him a lesson already!"

He Fenghui looked undecided. He had a feeling that this man was no easy picking, and he personally didn't want to raise a hand against this man until he learned of his opponent's true strength. However, it was also true that they would be shamed if they

allowed this man to act like this without retaliation.

“There’s no need for hesitation, Ole He. I’m giving you all one chance to beat me. All of you, come at me together.” Emperor Peerless cut an impressive figure with this calm response, his hands folded behind his back.

“What?”

“This arrogant bastard!”

“Brothers, let’s cut him to pieces together and ask questions later!” The cultivators of the Ten Ultimates were all ferocious fugitives. They were usually the ones who held the power and looked down on others, not the other way around. Therefore, when they saw how cocky Emperor Peerless was and wanting them to all go at him together, their inner savagery immediately came to the fore.

He Fenghui himself narrowed his eyes slightly. It was obvious that Emperor Peerless’ words had enraged him greatly as well.

“I don’t care who you are, but you’re not getting away with that taunt in the Ten Ultimates. Brothers, since he wants us to attack him at once, there is no need to be courteous. Do it!” The moment He Fenghui waved his hand, eight figures pounced on Emperor Peerless with surprising rapport.

Emperor Peerless didn’t look worried at all by their charge. After gently pushing Gu Xintang out of the circle of battle, he activated his great emperor domain and instantly transformed the radius of thirty meters around him into his own world. The powerful great emperor domain immediately transmuted into a zone of both offense and defense.

The eight figures who charged forward immediately felt like they had run into an invisible wall and were forced to slow down. Speed and strength were both absolutely necessary in a battle between experts. When they noticed that theirs were completely countered,

they realized that they'd run into a deadly opponent.

Inside his own domain, Emperor Peerless was free to do whatever he wanted. He quickly reached his maximum speed. He pointed with his finger repeatedly as he moved. These high level emperors might look fierce and intimidating, but they were like lambs to the slaughter the moment they entered the emperor's domain. Their speed was completely suppressed and their strength fell below ten percent of their usual.

However, Emperor Peerless' speed was completely unaffected. The only thing the eight noted was a blur before their eyes and a sudden coldness pricking against the center of their forehead. Their hearts pounded. We're so dead!

He Fenghui, the only cultivator present whose strength far surpassed his peers, forcefully twisted his body and barely broke free of the domain's restraint when he noticed the situation had taken an unfavorable turn. Then, he flew backwards like his life depended on it.

Emperor Peerless was faster than him though. Like a giant roc, he instantly caught up to He Fenghui despite setting out later. The great emperor pointed. "What's the rush, Ole He?"

He Fenghui instantly fell from the air like he'd been electrocuted by the gesture. He landed beside his fallen companions.

Thump thump thump! The eight cultivators who attacked Emperor Peerless were taken out in practically a single move. The lackeys of the Ten Ultimates were so terrified by these turn of events that their legs trembled like leaves. They'd fawned on the experts of the Ten Ultimates and gained a sizable amount of authority as a result. They were able to strut around with authority normally because they had the Ten Ultimates on their side.

However, the man before them had completely upended their notions. The near invincible Ten Ultimates had actually failed to

last more than a single move… What a frightening opponent!

Gu Xintang was just as stunned when he witnessed the heart pounding scene from outside the ring. It was obvious he hadn't anticipated that the battle would end in such a simple manner. Every expert in the Ten Ultimates were diabolical criminals and masters of their generation. However, they were as weak and flimsy as a piece of paper before Emperor Peerless.

Gu Xintang couldn't even begin to describe his feelings. Is this a great emperor? Is this a peak expert's strength? Is this the gap between emperors and great emperors?

The captain seldom felt his blood thrum in his veins, but he did feel it today. In fact, he felt like his blood was boiling! He hadn't participated in the battle, but he almost felt like he was the one who'd taken them all out in a single move.

Emperor Peerless wasn't planning on taking lives and didn't overdo things. As the experts groaned and scrambled back to their feet, they looked as dispirited as a defeated cock. All traces of ferocity and resistance had vanished from their faces.

Yes, they had submitted to Emperor Peerless. It was hard not to when he had taken them all out in a single move. He Fenghui gloomily made his way to Emperor Peerless before bowing respectfully. "I wasn't aware that a great emperor has graced us with his presence. The fault lies in my ignorance. Please forgive us, senior."

"We were blind and foolish to have offended you, senior. Thank you very much for showing us mercy."

"Thank you very much for not killing us." These people might be diabolical and fearless, but they weren't nearly stupid enough to not realize that the great emperor had shown them mercy. If Emperor Peerless had wanted to kill them, that one exchange was enough time for him to kill them more than ten times over.

It was true that upper rank emperor realm was an impressive cultivation level that enabled them to call themselves kings and lords inside the Sable Cells. However, this strength was only built on the common sense that their opponents were either at the same level or lower. In the end, an emperor realm cultivator was a joke before a great emperor. The gap between the two was like heaven and earth.

Even the weakest great emperor could easily crush an emperor. This difference in power wasn’t something most could overcome, unless the emperor happened to possess an unnaturally powerful artifact that could reduce the odds. However, it was obviously impossible for these death row criminals to be in possession of such an artifact.

Chapter 1109: Father and Son Meet With No Recognition

Emperor Peerless completely understood their mindset as he was also a wandering cultivator. Fists spoke the loudest when dealing with their kind. Neither empathy, camaraderie, logic, or gratitude would work on them. They were a bunch of stinking rocks. Words would never penetrate their thick skulls. The best way to get their cooperation was to beat them into submission or win them over with bribes. It was futile to try anything else.

Emperor Peerless naturally wouldn't bribe them. Force was his method of choice.

"Old He, what exactly are the rules that you speak of? I'm so very curious," he asked blandly.

He Fenghui smiled ruefully as he begged for forgiveness. "Esteemed senior, please stop making fun of this junior. How could there be rules in a place like this? Strength is king! Anything you say will be taken as law here!"

Emperor Peerless pointed at Gu Xintang. "Captain Gu is my friend. He came all the way here, yet you wish to teach him manners? You wanted to teach him the meaning of death?"

"My sincerest apologies! How could we have known that Captain Gu was backed by such a large patron? We are very sorry! Truly!" He Fenghui replied in a self-deprecating way. "Esteemed senior, we assure you that Captain Gu will be our esteemed guest from now on! This will not happen again!"

Gu Xintang was extremely invigorated. He could finally hold his head high. The fear within the eyes of these villainous inmates gave him a sense of jubilation and gratification. So this is what it feels like to have someone behind my back. He sighed deeply

The one-eyed man walked up to Gu Xintang with a dejected

manner. “Captain Gu, you are absolutely correct. Old Zhao is truly blind. Feel free to hit me or yell at me if it pleases you. I only ask for your magnanimity and forgiveness.”

Gu Xintang snorted. “One-Eyed Zhao, seeing that you are so sincere, I shall forgive you just this once. How dare you raise your voice at me just because you have the Ten Ultimates behind you? You’re just swaggering around with borrowed influence, understood?”

“Y-yes. I apologize for overstepping my boundaries! I deserve to be scolded for being too overzealous in my guard dog duties! A lesson learned is a lesson earned!” One-Eyed Zhao bowed submissively and resorted to flattery. He was glad that Gu Xintang had chosen to scold him. He would’ve been even more worried if the captain hadn’t scolded or beaten him, because it meant that the captain had harbored a grudge. If that happened, there was an enormous possibility that he might suddenly disappear in the Sable Cells one day.

Gu Xintang couldn’t kill any of the Ten Ultimates, but the same couldn’t be said for One-Eyed Zhao. Nobody expected the captain to have a great emperor as a friend. He was clearly pretending to be a pig to eat a tiger!

“Esteemed senior, may I ask what brought you to the Ten Colossal Zone? Is there anything I can assist you with?” He Fenghui asked courteously.

“I’m looking for someone,” the emperor replied blandly. However, he suddenly turned hostile again when he thought about Jiang Chen. “Old He, you’d better call back your two companions right now. If something happens to my friend, I’ll slaughter each and every one of you, down to the last chicken and dog in this place.”

Color drained from He Fenghui’s face. He could tell that the emperor wasn’t joking. He immediately gave orders to his men.

“Quick! Go get Situ Ling and Wu Xutao! Stop them from making a grave mistake!”

Just when his men were about to leave, Situ Ling and Wu Xutao returned in a foul mood. Situ Ling yelled for reinforcements as he ran. “Give us two more men! That brat is too slippery! He uses a very strange art that makes it impossible to catch him! No, we need at least four to subdue him! Strangely enough, he seems to be looking for someone…”

The tense atmosphere made him suspect that something was up. “Oi! What are you waiting for? Are you guys deaf or are you mute?” he complained.

“If we don’t stop that kid soon, he’s going to overturn the entire zone!” Wu Xutao immediately added. When they got closer, the atmosphere became even more bizarre.

“Hey! Why are you…” Halfway through his sentence, Situ Ling finally noticed the unusual expressions on the crowd’s face. It almost seemed like they were… showing respect to the enemy?

What in the world was going on?

They weren’t complete idiots. Their hearts tightened upon taking notice of the unusual scene.

He Fenghui smiled wryly. “Situ, Old Wu, come make your greetings to the esteemed great emperor.”

Esteemed great emperor? The two were utterly dumbfounded. Their mouths struggled to form proper words. When they finally regained composure, they snuck a glance at Emperor Peerless.

“Esteemed great emperor?” They were certain that this was no mistake when they saw how respectful He Fenghui and the others were. These vicious men would never be so courteous if otherwise.

“Greetings, esteemed great emperor.” Situ Ling and Wu Xufeng greeted awkwardly.

“How’s my friend?” Emperor Peerless asked blandly.

“Haii… we couldn’t even catch up to him. Your friend is just too quick. We were completely stumped.” Situ Ling smiled wryly.

“Both of us joined strength and still failed to stop him. Esteemed senior, is he your disciple? His speed is extraordinary!” Wu Xutao complimented unreservedly.

The emperor smiled. “How could I possibly have the right to teach him? Stop talking nonsense. He has a master that’s much stronger than me!”

Stronger than me? What exactly did that mean? An expert stronger than a great emperor? Was that even possible? These men were content with being king in the Ten Ultimates. As time went on, it was only natural that they’d become a little ignorant.

Was there really a realm beyond great emperor? What could it be? The legendary empyrean realm? Were there really empyrean experts in the Divine Abyss Continent? At their cultivation level, there was no way they could confirm if the empyrean realm was real.

“Esteemed senior, you said that his master is even stronger than you? Is his master an empyrean cultivator?” He Fenghui sucked in a breath of cold air and asked cautiously.

“Mm. Maybe even beyond that.” Emperor Peerless sighed softly. “That’s enough. My turn to ask questions. The origin realm cultivator, you didn’t do anything to him, right?”

“What origin realm cultivator?” This was a perplexing question.

“Stop pretending. I’m talking about the one which all of you are fighting over.” The emperor’s face darkened.

“Y-you… do you mean the origin realm cultivator that was sent here by the Heavensfall Society?” He Fenghui was flabbergasted.

“Why? Have you already…” The emperor flashed a sinister look.

His voice was cold and forbidding as killing intent gleamed in his eyes.

“Nonono. We are still... fattening him up. However, he doesn’t seem to appreciate our kindness. We’ve given him food and cultivation resources, but he doesn’t seem to want any. He probably wants to rebel until the very end.” He Fenghui replied apologetically.

“Bullshit! How dare you decorate your malicious actions as kindness?” Emperor Peerless flew into rage. “You were going to fatten him up for slaughter! You better pray hard that he’s still alive. Otherwise, not even the entire Moon God Sect will be able to save you!”

The crowd was ashen with regret. He Fenghui breathed a sigh of relief. “It's fortunate that he’s still alive. His body is currently a little frail, but he still breathes. Esteemed Senior, could it be that... he's somehow connected to the empyrean expert too?”

“Why else would he catch your eye?” Emperor Peerless snapped.

He Fenghui wore a wry expression as his heart beat furiously. It had been an extremely close call. If anything happened to that man, not even ten lives would be enough.

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Jiang Chen was on his knees inside one of the cells in Ten Ultimates. His father was lying on the floor in front of him. He was in a very weakened state and barely had any breath left. Jiang Chen’s heart tightened, making tears rain from his eyes when he saw how haggard his father was. They’d been separated for almost ten years. His once vigorous and able-bodied father had gone through so much torment that he was now on death’s doorstep.

He felt a sudden urge to slaughter everyone in the area, but quickly regained his calm. First, he transferred some energy into his father to help restore his father’s qi. After that, he fed his

father a pill to restore vitality.

Jiang Feng slowly regained consciousness. He opened his eyes slowly, only to be greeted by an unfamiliar face.

“Where is this place? Who are you?” His voice was rough and hoarse. A thought suddenly struck him and he immediately pushed Jiang Chen away. “You vicious and evil bastards! Are you still trying to fatten me up for slaughter? I’d sooner die than let that happen!”

Jiang Chen sobbed even harder upon seeing his father’s reaction. “Father, it’s been ten years. It’s this unfilial son’s fault for not coming to get you sooner!”

Jiang Feng shook with complete disbelief. “W-who are you?”

“Father, it was you who left me a letter, telling me that you’ve gone on a journey in search of mother. You told me not to follow you to the Upper Eight Regions, and that you’d kill yourself if I did. Have you forgotten all of this?”

Jiang Feng began to shake involuntarily. His chapped lips trembled nonstop. One could easily tell how agitated he was. His consciousness hadn’t fully recovered yet, but he knew that those specific details had only shared only between him and his son. The face in front of him was completely foreign, but the voice, manner of speech, and details, clearly pointed towards the fact that it was his son! This was clearly no imposter!

“Chen’er, is it really you? Am I dreaming?” Jiang Feng was in a very feeble state, but he couldn’t help but want to get up and get a closer look at Jiang Chen.

“Father, you’re not dreaming! I’ve come a very long way and went through every painstaking lead to finally locate you through your friend, Liu Zhen. The fates have bound us together. Nobody could’ve stopped us from reuniting!” Jiang Chen was also very agitated. He was elated to finally see his father again!

Chapter 1110: Rescuing Jiang Feng

Jiang Chen had despaired at first when he learned that his father had been sent to the Moon God Sect by the Heavensfall Society and then thrown into the Sable Cells. But hope had dawned in the end. Not only had he found his father in the Sable Cells, but his father was still alive, albeit extremely weakened. As long as his father was still alive, Jiang Chen would be able to restore Jiang Feng to his vigor of yesteryear.

He slowly transferred some energy into his father's body to strengthen his father's physique and vital functions. Thanks to Jiang Chen's treatment from both inside and out, Jiang Feng slightly recovered two hours later. His vitals had stabilized, even though he was still very weak.

"Chen'er... is it just me, or is your cultivation... quite impressive?" Jiang Feng was slightly surprised. Naturally, he could sense the tremendous power concealed inside Jiang Chen's body.

"Father, let's chat after we get out of here. Back then, you told me not to come to the Upper Eight Regions to find you before I improved my cultivation level. Although I was very worried for your safety, I didn't dare go against your will. Instead, I cultivated hard so that I could reunite with you as soon as possible."

Jiang Feng smiled brightly. "Good, good. I'm proud of you, my son!"

"Come, let's get out of here." Jiang Chen carried his father on his back. His speed was barely impacted by the fact that he was carrying a man roughly fifty kilograms. He planned on avoiding the two pursuers who were chasing after him at first, but soon discovered that the path was completely clear. He only saw the two pursuers with awkward expressions on their faces and even afraid to meet his eyes after he emerged. Jiang Chen was a smart man. He

immediately knew that Emperor Peerless had used his martial prowess to “talk to” them.

These cultivators didn’t impress Jiang Chen favorably in the least. They were one of the major reasons who’d made his father this way. Still, the discovery that his father was still alive had dispelled most of his fury.

When the experts of the Ten Ultimates noticed that Jiang Feng was on Jiang Chen’s back and seemingly recovering, they all let out a long sigh of relief. They’d fretted immensely just now that Jiang Feng was either dead or couldn’t be saved. It was highly unlikely they would survive if either one of those cases were true, so they all felt like they’d just narrowly escaped a brush with death.

“How is he, brother?” Emperor Peerless walked forward with concern.

“Thank heavens that he can be saved.” Jiang Chen swept a cold glance at the experts of the Ten Ultimates. “I’m aware that the Sable Cells has its own laws of survival, so I won’t pursue this anymore. Don’t expect me to feel any gratitude towards you lot though. I’m going to take him with me. Does anyone have an opinion to share?”

Everyone knew that this young man was young and weaker than they were, but no one dared to rebuke him. They shook their heads in response.

“Young master Shao, please forgive us for being blind and foolish. You are a great, magnanimous man. Please don’t hold this over our heads.” He Fengui spoke seriously. No one thought that he was an embarrassment for speaking so submissively.

“Yeah, young master Shao. If we knew how great your friend is, we would never have plotted anything in the first place.”

“Ai, it’s all the Moon God Sect’s fault. I can’t believe they just

randomly throw people into the Sable Cells without checking their background! What a lawless sect!”

Jiang Chen didn’t like to hear such irresponsible words. He didn’t plan to interact with any of them either. He nodded indifferently. “I’m taking a prisoner with me. What will happen if a Moon God Sect member finds out and asks about him?”

“How many die in the Sable Cells every day?” He Fenghui chuckled. “No one cares if a person suddenly goes missing here. You don’t have to worry at all, young master Shao. No one will ever ask about him.”

“What if someone decides to tattle behind our backs?” Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

He Fenghui swept a ferocious glance across his surroundings. “Who dares be a tattletale?”

“Hell no, who in their right minds would do such a thing? That’s suicide! Plus, almost no one important comes to a place like the Sable Cells. We might not even have the opportunity to do so even if we wanted to.”

“Yeah, yeah! Anyone who snitches will die a horrific death!”

Emperor Peerless smiled leisurely. “You don’t need to worry, brother. Ole He is a smart man. He should know that I can visit the Sable Cells a second time if I want to, so he won’t do such a foolish thing unless he’s made up his mind to become my enemy…”

Emperor Peerless stopped there, but no one missed his underlying meaning. It wasn’t a threat, but it was more intimidating than any verbal threats that exists.

“We wouldn’t dare, not at all…”

“Don’t worry, senior. Our lips are sealed.” The cultivators thumped their chests with assurance. It was obvious that they were extremely wary of Emperor Peerless’ strength and Jiang Chen’s mysterious background. They might be imprisoned in the

Sable Cells for now, but it didn't mean that they were going to rot here for the rest of their lives. Even if this was as far as they went, it was still incredibly unwise to earn the grudge of a great emperor.

Since Captain Gu was around and Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless dressed as Bleakmoon Hall disciples, no one thought them bringing a prisoner out was off. Their short journey out of the Ten Ultimates was smooth and without incident. When they returned to the outskirts of the Sable Cells, they discovered the shrewd man waiting for them at a corner. His eyeballs nearly popped out of their sockets when he saw that they had actually brought someone out of the Ten Ultimates.

How… how is this possible? Not only did the group look perfectly unharmed, they were even allowed to leave with their target! Just what kind of madmen had Gu Xintang brought to the Sable Cells? Surprise aside, this was good news to the shrewd man. He hurriedly walked forwards. "Congratulations, Captain Gu. I didn't think that you would actually succeed."

Gu Xintang nodded. "You've been here all this time?"

The shrewd man smiled ruefully. "I wanted to leave but, where could I go? It'd be suicide to go back to my previous area." After he said this, the shrewd man smiled awkwardly. "So, Captain Gu, it seems that you've succeeded in your endeavor… can you fulfill your promise then?"

Gu Xintang waved his hands. "Come, we will leave together. Are there any belongings do you wish to pack?"

The man was overjoyed to hear this. He quickly waved off Gu Xintang's question. "There's no need, it's just a bunch of trash. I can do without them."

Pack his belongings? Was that a joke? He had nothing of value to pack. Even he had anything, he would be a fool to go back and get them. He had snatched the other prisoners' windfall and earned the opportunity to escape while they continued to suffer. He had

no doubt in his mind that he had become a public enemy. Plus, the Sable Cells was about an unlucky a place as could be, so he had no intentions of bringing anything out with him, even if it was valuable. What kind of ill luck would cling to things you took out of here? He wanted to escape from this forsaken place as soon as possible.When they returned to the main entrance, the captain on duty, Captain Qin, frowned when he saw the two prisoners following Gu Xintang. “Why are there two people behind you, Captain Gu?”

Gu Xintang waved his hands. “They hold some vital clues for an investigation. Help me, Captain QIn, and I’ll return the favor if you run into any trouble in the future.”

Captain Qin wasn’t a fool. After hearing these words, he stopped asking questions, nodded and waved his hands with a yell. “Stand down!”

When they exited the main entrance, Gu Xintang asked, “Senior, young master Shao, are you planning to take your friend back to Frostmoon City for treatment or...?”

Emperor Peerless didn’t have an opinion in this matter. He left the decision in Jiang Chen’s hands. However, Jiang Chen remarked, “Brother Gu, is it possible to settle in somewhere nearby for now?”

Gu Xintang answered quickly, “Let us go to my residence then. We won’t encounter any problems there.”

Now that he’d helped Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless, his next logical action was of course to solidify his connection with the duo. Meanwhile the shrewd man looked a little awkward. He was certain he wouldn’t be able to leave the sect’s domain without someone to help him.

“You’ll come with us too.” Jiang Chen glanced at the shrewd man. “Oh right, what’s your name?”

The shrewd man answered quickly. “My surname is Chu, full name Chu Nan.”

“If you leave now you’ll never be able to walk out of the Moon God Sect’s gates. Why don’t you come with us.” Jiang Chen’s tone made it clear that it wasn’t a question, but an order.

“Of course, that’s exactly what I was hoping for. It would be my honor.” Chu Nan wasn’t lying. Even he had come to the realization by now that these two were extraordinary. How could they be normal if they were capable of bringing a prisoner out of the Ten Ultimates? The opportunity to mingle with these people must be the product of the good karma he cultivated during his past life.

Gu Xintang was at best middle-level management in the Moon God Sect. Therefore, his residence was located slightly farther away from the heart of the sect. Still, it was overall a quiet place suitable for cultivation. His status also earned him a relatively spacious abode. Since Gu Xintang was still single, he lived alone and led a carefree life. It also meant that Jiang Chen’s group didn’t crowd his residence in the slightest.

Emperor Peerless looked around for a bit before smiling, “Little Gu, you are a captain of Bleakmoon Hall, aren’t you? So why are you still single? Why haven’t you found a loving partner who suits you?”

Gu Xintang smiled. “A suitable lover is easy to find, but a marriage after my heart… is not so easy.”

The captain’s smile looked a little rueful. It was obvious he had a sad story that he didn’t wish to speak of.

“Just leave it up to fate. When it is time, you may find yourself love bound before you know it.” Emperor Peerless was renowned for his tale of love. His love story with Madame Yun was famous even among the wandering cultivator community.

After settling his father down to rest, Jiang Chen walked out of

the room. “Brother Gu, I may be imposing on you for some time to come. Do you mind?”

“It is no problem at all. I couldn’t invite honorable guests like the senior and young master Shao in the norm, so why on earth would I find you imposing? Please, do as you wish.” It wasn’t false courtesy. Gu Xintang was very happy for Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless to stay in his residence since it was a good opportunity for him to get closer to them.

“Also, please inform Third Master Jing to treat my companions well,” Jiang Chen added. Long Xiaoxuan and Madame Yun were still at the first division. He naturally couldn’t neglect them.

“Don’t worry, I’ll for arrange things accordingly.” Gu Xintang gave his word.

Chapter 1111: A Deep Love Between Father and Son

Staying temporarily within Gu Xintang's reisdence, Jiang Chen took meticulous care of his father every day. Under his attentive ministrations, Jiang Feng's wounds healed very quickly. He was mostly healed after roughly four days. Physically and psychologically, he was no different from most other cultivators.

During this entire time, Jiang Chen kept completely silent. He told the older man nothing of their current circumstances. Jiang Feng cooperated by reciprocating that silence, asking no questions whatsoever. He knew that his son urgently wanted to treat his injuries.

The silence lasted until the day of Jiang Feng's recovery. On that day, he let out a soft sigh. "Chen'er, I didn't expect us to reunite here, of all places. Why did they take me to the Moon God Sect? Why did they just toss me into the Sable Cells? I only went to the Heavensfall Society to gather some information. Is there something different about the Tilted Moon Region?" Jiang Feng was still utterly lost as to the reasons for having been put through this entire experience.

He'd drifted about the Upper Eight Regions for numerous years, making contacts through an entire gamut of channels. Though he had often been deceived, this kind of ordeal was new to him. Simple information-gathering had led to him being mired in unexpected trouble.

Jiang Chen tossed his father a complicated look. "Father, perhaps you still have the wool over your eyes. You don't know that you came too close to the truth for comfort."

"What do you mean?" Jiang Feng's face froze.

"What you've been seeking for all these years... is with the Moon

God Sect. You stumbled upon their secrets. What better reason could they toss you into the Sable Cells for?”

Jiang Feng’s expression changed drastically as he jumped out of his chair. “Chen’er, what did you just say? What I’ve been looking for... is with the Moon God Sect? Your mother, is she really from here?”

Jiang Chen nodded. “Indeed.”

Jiang Feng was in literal shock. He was in a great disarray, punctuated by outbreaks of foolish giggles, incomprehensible mutters, and stoic stares. He recovered himself a little only after a long while. “Chen'er, are you sure that your mother is at the Moon God Sect still?” He grabbed his son’s hand. “How did you find out?”

Jiang Chen cut straight to the chase. “When I was at Veluriyam Capital, I heard a certain piece of news. Several decades ago, a holy maiden from the Moon God Sect was lost to the mundane world. This inspired me to come to the Tilted Moon Region in search of more information. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that you’d come as well, nor that you wouldn’t know mother was with the Moon God Sect!”

“This must be the will of heaven! Chen'er, heaven itself wants our family to get back together. Who can refuse the decree of the divine?” Jiang Feng’s lips trembled and he was greatly excited. He badly wanted to grow a pair of wings and set out right this moment to find his wife again.

Jiang Chen, on the other hand, looked more conflicted. “Father, that’s only part of it.” He let out a long sigh.

“Oh? What else is there? Is your mother... not doing well?” Jiang Feng’s voice trailed off, shaking. He was most worried not about not being able to find his wife again, but rather finding her in unhappiness. Or worse, that she’d forgotten about him altogether.

“I don’t think… ‘not doing well’ is the right way to put it, but I can’t say that she’s amazingly well either. Perhaps she pines for you every day, father, just like you do her. But she has no control over her own fate, and can’t leave the Moon God Sect.”

“Why?” Jiang Feng was incensed. “The people at the Moon God Sect are a bunch of bullies. If your mother isn’t willing to stay, why are they stopping her from leaving? Don’t they know that you can’t force a horse to drink water? Don’t they understand that she doesn’t care about being some holy maiden?”

Jiang Chen hastily tried to calm his passionate father down. “Dad, take a deep breath and relax. Mother isn’t their holy maiden at the moment.”

“Oh? How do you know? If she’s not, all the better. There should be much less resistance for our family reunion, then.” Jiang Feng was visibly pleased.

Jiang Chen knew that it was his father’s dream to see that happen. However, what he didn’t know was that their family didn’t quite include the number of people that he’d expect.

Technically, they were now a family of five.

The complexity of Jiang Chen’s expression did not escape his father. Jiang Feng’s voice cracked. “Chen'er, are you keeping something important from me? Is… your mother…”

“No, no. She’s with the Moon God Sect, and not as their holy maiden. But, er, there’s someone else who is, who makes it very hard for mother to leave them.”

“Why should that person matter to her?” Jiang Feng shook his head.

“Not just to her, but to us as well. Because… the current holy maiden of the Blues is your daughter and my sister. And mother, well, she was originally supposed to be the holy maiden for the Blue Moon faction…”

“What? What’d you just say? Your sister? My daughter?” Jiang Feng’s eyes widened. What he’d just heard was absolutely astounding. Without a doubt, this information was simply too incredible. Jiang Chen had experienced similar emotions when he’d first heard about it as well, so this was nothing unexpected. Jiang Feng positively reeled with confusion.

“How can you have a sister?! How would your mother have married someone else and have children with him? You’re lying, this is all fake, Chen'er, it must be!” He sounded like a raving madman.

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. “Father, I didn’t say anything like that. Her child is also yours, but no one knew about it back when you first separated. There’s another thing, actually. Mother gave birth to fraternal twins, one boy and one girl.”

This revelation hit Jiang Feng on the head like a hefty club. He saw stars in front of his eyes. Should he be feeling happy? Bewildered? He was still for a long while before coming to his senses. Excitement flared in his eyes. “Chen'er, is everything you’ve said true?”

“You can trust it completely. I’ve verified these secrets with many people. The Moon God Sect prefers to keep them hidden, but even secrets have keepers.”

“Good, great, amazing!” Suddenly, Jiang Feng began to cackle loudly. The skin around his eyes became reddened, and tears pooled at their corners. Though men were usually stoic and unyielding, there were certain soft subjects that could bring them to tears.

Jiang Feng had gone through a great deal. He had planned for and anticipated the worst. Hearing that his wife was still alive cheered him up quite a bit. Not only that, but she’d also given him a pair of children. Two pieces of wonderful news! In that moment, he felt that every trial and tribulation had been worth it.

“So you’re saying, Chen'er, that we’re not a family of three anymore? Instead, we’re a family of five?! What excellent news. Let’s go find your mother immediately!” Jiang Feng was being very impulsive.

“Easy, father,” Jiang Chen cautioned hastily. “Mother is the previous holy maiden of the Blue Moon faction, and younger sister is the current. They surely have a formidable amount of protection around them. If we just go looking for them willy-nilly, then we won’t be able to see them at all. Worse, we’ll have given away our goal, lowering our chances to be reunited with them.”

Having seen a fair bit himself, Jiang Chen knew well the barriers for relationships between those of different social classes. His father was just some origin realm cultivator. The Moon God Sect cared little for individuals of that caliber. The Blues, for one, was less than willing for their two generations of holy maidens to have any connections with such a man. Thus, recklessly heading in could only result in closing off future paths towards his mother and sister. That was a much graver matter than just not being able to see them for the time being. To achieve a proper family reunion, they needed to wait for the right time and approach.

Jiang Feng had made the rash suggestion based on his emotions alone. Cooling off was enough for him to agree with his son. Going now would result only in the opposite of what they wanted.

“What do you think, Chen'er? My head is a little messed up. I’d rather listen to your ideas,” Jiang Feng declared decisively.

“We need to be in this for the long haul. Father, I promise that no matter how much resistance, I’ll see this through and get you and mother back together. I’ll make our family whole again. And I’ll find my younger brother...” Jiang Chen hadn’t wanted to add the last part, but he decided that it was too important to omit.

“Find your younger brother? What do you mean?” Jiang Feng’s tone darkened. Jiang Chen let out a soft sigh. He laid out what’d

happened.

Jiang Feng adopted an ugly look at the situation. “Is the Moon God Sect this cold-blooded?”

“They are. As is any first rank sect. Don’t worry, father. The heavens are watching over our entire family. Even if my little brother has been exiled from the Tilted Moon Region, I’m sure he’s safe and sound elsewhere. It’s very possible that these troubles are only trials on his road to greatness.” Jiang Chen could only try to comfort his father this way.

Jiang Feng nodded. “You’re right. Back in Jiang Han province, you wallowed in ignorance under my protecting eye. After you went to the capital, you suddenly wisened up. And look how well you’ve turned out, now! You know, I’ve been hearing about your exploits at the Precious Tree Sect, then the Regal Pill Palace, and then your grudge with Eternal Celestial Capital… a first rank sect even has a bounty on your head, eh? Is all of this true?”

As a wanderer, Jiang Feng had been privy to a reasonable amount of information from the jianghu while on the road. The size of the bounty on Jiang Chen’s head had alerted the entire world to his existence. He’d thought that it was merely someone with the same name at first, but a cursory examination revealed that the Jiang Chen on Eternal Celestial Capital’s hit-list was his son!

This had scared him into a cold fright. He had to start hiding his name and identity because of it. It wasn’t that he was scared of being captured by the Eternal Celestial Capital, but that he was worried that he would be used to blackmail his son. Thankfully, Jiang Feng was so insignificant that few people even noticed him. He managed to avoid the most unfavorable outcomes.

He hadn’t heard any more news of Jiang Chen, after that. He thought constantly of his son, but the presence of the bounty from Eternal Celestial Capital remained an assuring sight. As long as the bounty was still there, his son was safe. Truthfully, Jiang Feng

sometimes felt proud of his son. A first rank sect hadn’t managed to touch his son after how many years? He didn’t know where his son had ended up, but he’d maintained a strong faith that his son was alright!

Chapter 1112: An Excited Jiang Feng

One had to say, Jiang Feng's intuition was quite strong.

"Chen'er, I've let you down. I wasn't there to support you in your time of need for so many years." Jiang Feng blamed himself. "I really feel that I've let you down. I've let your younger brother down too..."

Jiang Chen was gripped with emotion. "Father, you took care of me for many years already. You even waited until I could stand on my own before you came out to look for mother. I should be the one apologizing."

"What are you saying? What a childish thing to say. You have nothing to apologize for. Do you think I could've escaped the Sable Cells if not for you? Do you think I would've learned about your mother's whereabouts without you? Chen'er, if I had to choose the two things I take pride in the most in my life, it would be knowing your mother and raising a good son like you."

At this point, Jiang Feng had completely forgotten about his former identity as a duke in the Eastern Kingdom. It was only after he left the Eastern Kingdom and the sixteen kingdoms alliance did he learn about the vastness of the world and his own insignificance. He finally understood why those people had worn that expression when they took away his wife.

They had the right to be proud. Compared to them, the Eastern Kingdom was lesser than even frogs at the bottom of a well.

"What happened with the chase from the Eternal Celestial Capital, Chen'er? How did you manage to avoid them?"

The conversation would drag on for a very long time if he were to go into every detail, so Jiang Chen gave his father a quick summary. "It's true that they pursued me, but they didn't give me too much trouble. Thanks to a series of coincidences, I eventually

entered Veluriyam Capital."

"So you did end up at the Capital? I heard that the Eternal Celestial Capital blocked the way to Veluriyam Capital to prevent you from entering that region."

"They did. If young master Wei of Veluriyam Capital hadn't lent me his aid, I wouldn't have been able to enter Veluriyam Capital."

"Good, good. The heavens help the worthy, like you said earlier. Where did you go after? You've changed a lot after these years. I almost didn't recognize you." Jiang Feng was very excited. After all, it was every father's ambition and greatest happiness to see their son grow into success, a dragon amongst men.

"I've barely left Veluriyam Capital since I arrived there. For the past couple of years, I've built my own force, made my own connections and even built an important identity in Veluriyam Capital. I'm also known as Zhen Shi, or Pill King Zhen."

Jiang Feng's heart skipped a beat as disbelief shone from his eyes. "What did you say, Chen'er? Pill King Zhen? The one who defeated Pill King Ji Lang of Pillfire City?"

Jiang Chen smiled ruefully. "So you've heard about that too, father?"

"Who hasn't? Everyone in the Upper Eight Regions is talking about this. Chen'er, are you really that Pill King Zhen?"

Jiang Chen smiled and didn't deny it. "Yes, that's me. I used an alias because I didn't want to expose myself too soon and affect the grand plan to rebuild the Regal Pill Palace. I didn't want to drag Veluriyam Capital into my troubles either."

Jiang Feng sucked in a deep breath. The shocking news made him felt a little dizzy, and he had to repeat the gesture multiple times before he finally managed to rein in his emotions. As his spirits surged, he threw a punch at Jiang Chen's shoulder.

"Good boy! I never thought my son could be this impressive until

today, my good man! Pill King Zhen, is it? Hahaha, the famous Pill King Zhen is actually my son! If only I can see the faces of those Moon God Sect people when they learn about this! Speaking of which, I've also heard that you've been chosen as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain by Emperor Peafowl!"

Jiang Feng might have travelled to many places to inquire about his wife's whereabouts, but that didn't mean he didn't pay attention to world news. Jiang Chen being chosen as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain had happened many years ago. It had spread to every corner of the human domain, especially since he'd gone into the Veluriyam Pagoda right after the fact.

The years he spent inside Veluriyam Pagoda were more than enough time for the news to spread to all corners of human territory. At the time, Jiang Feng had simply treated it as gossip. Not even in his dreams had he ever imagined that Pill King Zhen was his son!

Jiang Chen didn't deny this either. He nodded. "That's true. But, the amount of responsibility I have to shoulder is proportional to the greatness of this status."

"What's a young man to fear about shouldering responsibilities? I hear that Emperor Peafowl is the number one great emperor of Veluriyam Capital and the representative of their unparalleled status. This means that Veluriyam Capital will fall under your rule eventually, right? Hehehehe. If that's the case then, what's a mere Moon God Sect?!" Jiang Feng's tone brimmed with pride. What father wouldn't be happy to hear such feats from their own son? How would he not hold his head high with pride?

All these years, his heart had ached every time he recalled his wife's background and the disdainful looks of the bastards who took her away. That feeling of being looked down on like an ant had been a constant torment to his soul. He knew that it was a gap that could almost never be surmounted. Jiang Feng admitted to it. That was why his only hope was that his wife hadn't discarded her

love towards him.

However, equality in status was the basis of every marriage since the ancient times. If his wife really was the descendant of a top faction, could they really have a happy ending even if he found her in the end? If Jiang Feng were to be frank with himself, he think highly of his chances. However, all of his worries and depression were dispelled when he learned of his son's current status. None of this was a problem any longer.

As he'd mentioned earlier, what was a Moon God Sect when his son ruled over Veluriyam Capital itself? One Veluriyam Capital was at least worth two first rank sects, and the Moon God Sect was at most one first rank sect. They were completely incomparable to Veluriyam Capital.

As the saying went, a father rides on his son's success. Now that Jiang Feng's son was the future ruler of Veluriyam Capital, who in the Moon God Sect would dare stop him from reuniting with his wife? Who dared keep the father and mother of Veluriyam Capital's ruler apart? Jiang Feng's blood boiled with passion when his thoughts traveled to this point.

He finally understood why his son was so calm all this time. He finally understood why he didn't think their family's reunion was a big issue, and why he'd dared make that bold promise. His son wasn't running his mouth, but actually had the power to make their dreams a reality! Jiang Feng felt much better after knowing all this. If one of his sons wasn't still missing, he might have laughed like a madman there and then.

"Oh right, Chen'er. I noticed that the experts of the Ten Ultimates seemed terribly afraid of you when you were there. Those are some of the fiercest and most dangerous criminals in the Sable Cells, so why were they afraid of a half-step emperor realm cultivator?" Jiang Feng suddenly recalled the situation when they escaped the Sable Cells and voiced his doubts to Jiang Chen.

“Heh heh, they’re only a little bit wary of me. Old Brother Mo is the main reason why they were as meek as they were. Old Brother Mo is a great emperor and the one of the top cultivators in the wandering cultivator community: Emperor Peerless.”

“Ah? Emperor Peerless?” Jiang Feng’s mouth fell open. Of course he had heard of the great Emperor Peerless! How could he not know when he was a wandering cultivator himself? He’d just never imagined that his son would be powerful enough to invite a great man like Emperor Peerless to rescue him, not to mention that the great emperor looked like he didn’t mind listening to Jiang Chen’s orders.

“Chen’er, I heard that Emperor Peerless is a loner of sorts, so how did you…” Jiang Feng sounded a little doubtful.

“Father, Old Brother Mo and I got along well the moment we meet each other. We admire each other very much and so have a close friendship. His troubles are my troubles, and I’m sure that Old Brother Mo will treat my troubles with equal seriousness.” Jiang Chen didn’t see anything wrong with their current friendship. A different person might think that Jiang Chen was the one benefitting because Emperor Peerless was a great emperor, but Jiang Chen himself didn’t think this was the case at all.

In fact, neither did Emperor Peerless think so either. Disregarding that Jiang Chen had saved him and Madame Yun from a deadly poison, the lad had even cured his wife of her illness and released them from a lifetime of pain and suffering. Even if the emperor excluded these from the equation, he was still certain that it was only a matter of time before Jiang Chen’s pill dao and martial dao talents exceeded his. This was even before accounting for the mysterious expert behind the young man’s back. These were all thing Mo Wushuang couldn’t compete with Jiang Chen in the slightest.

Of course, Emperor Peerless hadn’t thought that much about things. He’d simply thought that Jiang Chen was a worthy person

to be friends with the moment Jiang Chen had gifted him the Pinecrane Pill.

Jiang Chen relaxed a little when he heard his son's reassurances. He felt very proud that his son was able to call a great emperor his brother. It proved just how excellent his son was. Had Jiang Chen been another young man, he might not even dare to breath loudly in the presence of a great emperor, much less becoming brothers with one. If one had neither the ability nor the backing, a great emperor wouldn't bother to even acknowledge a person's presence.

Father and son chatted idly with each other for a moment before Jiang Feng asked about his younger brother, Jiang Tong and nephew, Jiang Yu. Jiang Chen told him everything that had happened in the sixteen kingdoms alliance.

When Jiang Chen had returned to Skylaurel Kingdom, he learned that Jiang Tong and Jiang Yu had long since vanished from public eyes alongside the Precious Tree Sect. They hadn't been attacked by Eternal Celestial Capital. Jiang Feng felt even better when he heard this his brother and nephew were fine. However, he wasn't much interested when Jiang Chen talked about Jiang Han province and the Jiang family. He had given up on those people a long time ago.

Jiang Chen could sense that his father's horizon and psyche had changed entirely after spending so much time away from the sixteen kingdoms alliance. Naturally, it was a gratifying change. A while later, Jiang Chen took his father to Emperor Peerless so the latter could express his gratitude.

Emperor Peerless had a rough idea of Jiang Feng's identity by now and didn't put on airs before the man. "Brother Jiang Feng, I'm calling you my brother, but I'm also calling your son my brother. Wouldn't you say that the seniority between us has gone completely out of whack?" He cracked a joke and chuckled.

Jiang Feng also laughed. “There is nothing wrong if we keep it separate. Normally, we both should address you as our senior, but my son would be troubled since you address each other on equal terms. Therefore, if you may forgive my impertinence, I would like to address you as Old Brother Mo too.”

Emperor Peerless laughed loudly. “As it should be, as it should be! Congratulations for raising a good son, my man. Oh, how blind and foolish the Moon God Sect must be!”

Chapter 1113: A New Problem

Emperor Peerless was clearly calling the Moon God Sect blind for not noticing Jiang Chen's potential, but the latter didn't say anything and laughed inwardly to himself. It wasn't really the Moon God Sect's fault. His bloodline had genuinely been very mediocre when he was young. If he really was a genius, the sect would've taken him away long before. There was no chance he'd be left behind in the Eastern Kingdom.

Jiang Chen smiled awkwardly and changed the topic. "Old Brother Mo, I believe you have a rough understanding of my family issues by now. There's yet another stumbling block before me. The Moon God Sect has been keeping very close tabs on my mother and sister. We must come up with a plan so that our family can reunite."

Emperor Peerless laughed. "You have two choices. You can barge your way in or have an open, frank discussion with them."

Barging in clearly wasn't the smartest idea. There was no way Jiang Chen would even consider it. He wouldn't mind it if he was the only concerned party, but that wasn't the case. He couldn't afford to take such drastic measures when his parent's happiness was at stake. Moreover, barging his way into a first rank sect was easier said than done. Even if he somehow succeeded, who could guarantee that he'd successfully leave with his mother and sister? This option wasn't even worth considering. Having a discussion with them was a prickly matter as well. How was he supposed to tackle the subject?

Reveal his identity as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain? That would expose everything! That clearly wasn't going to work. He couldn't afford to reveal his true identity. First of all, setting aside that he might not be able to stabilize the uproar in Veluriyam Capital once his identity was revealed, the Ninesuns Sky Sect and the Eternal Celestial Capital would surely band

together and launch an assault on him. His sway as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain would dwindle as a result as well.

He wasn't powerful enough to ignore those repercussions yet. Revealing his identity would cause more problems than it would solve. He was merely the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain and not the true leader of Veluriyam Capital. Moreover, the power struggle between the great emperors of the capital had yet to be resolved.

"Little brother, your identity should be enough to get you a meeting with them," the emperor advised.

Jiang Feng shook his head before Jiang Chen could reply. "Chen'er can't do that. If his identity is exposed, it will implicate not only Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but also the Regal Pill Palace. I can't allow Chen'er to sacrifice his future over something like this. At most, I'll just wait a few more years. I've already waited decades for this moment. A few more years wouldn't hurt."

He desperately wanted to see his wife and reunite his family, but he understood how complicated the situation was. Maybe it wasn't time for them to reunite just yet. He was just relieved to finally locate his wife. A few more years of waiting was acceptable. After all, that time frame wasn't even that long in the cultivation world.

Jiang Feng's injuries were almost fully healed after a few day's rest in Gu Xintang's residence. And so, Jiang Chen decided to return to Frostmoon City to make some long term plans. He also asked Gu Xintang if he'd ever get the chance to meet the Blue Moon's holy maidens. Unfortunately, not even the hallmaster of Bleakmoon Hall would be able to meet a holy maiden, let alone a mere guard captain like him.

Holy maidens were potential sectmasters. They were very isolated from the outside world and shrouded in mystery. Other than the sectmaster who personally instructed them, not even their parents were allowed to see them often. Holy maidens with

high potential would go through long periods of observation until the next sectmaster was singled out.

The Moon God Sect had four sectmasters in a rising hierarchy as there was four factions within the sect. The Purples, Blues, Indigos, and Reds formed a council where each faction had their own representative. Of course, the council wasn't entirely harmonious either. Regardless, holy maidens were far beyond the reach of the common people. Only those with insurmountable power within the sect could have an audience with them, except when the holy maiden voluntarily showed herself.

Holy maidens were extremely mysterious in this sect. They were very different from the true disciples of other sects because they were women. Upon entering the cultivation world, they'd cause a huge commotion throughout region. In the Upper Eight Regions, many sought glory by courting the Moon God Sect holy maidens. Technically, the holy maidens had sworn to never marry, but sometimes there were exceptions. Those who lost the running to become sectmaster were allowed to marry. Of course, the requirements for such arrangements were incredibly high. The average Wang, Chen, and Lin could only dream about marrying a holy maiden.

Even those who lost in the running had extremely high standards. First of all, their partners must have a similar background of affluence and power, and they had to be equipped with talent and good looks. Most important of all, they had to remain faithful unto death. Infidelity was regarded as treason against the sect.

The Moon God Sect was the only matriarchal sect in the Upper Eight Regions. Marriage was seen as a sacred matter and was thus subject to many inflexible and rigid rules. Jiang Chen's mother, Xu Meng, was a good example. She had been left behind in the secular world during infancy, so the matter should've come to a rest with that. However, the sect wouldn't allow it. When they received

news that one of their holy maidens had been desecrated, they viewed it as an immense humiliation. They'd rather kidnap or kill her than to allow her to commit further debauchery in the secular world. For the sake of pointless vanity, they were willing to separate a pair of lovebirds and destroy their family.

Jiang Chen asked Third Master Jing the same questions in Frostmoon City. The latter smiled wryly and shook his head. "Brother Shao, if you need help with anything else, I'll help you in a heartbeat. But if you wish to see a holy maiden... I'm afraid it's beyond my abilities. Neither I, Captain Gu, or the hallmaster of Blackmoon Hall can help you with that. Even the forefather of House Jing, who's a sect elder, would have to ask for permission from the holy maiden before they can meet."

It was only then that Jiang Chen realized how difficult it would be to get an audience with the holy maidens of the Sect. Conventional ways were no longer an option. He'd have to blaze a much more unorthodox path.

"Third Master Jing, if getting an audience with a holy maiden is so difficult, what about the former holy maiden, Xu Meng? That should be easier, right?" Jiang Chen tried again.

"Aii it would definitely be easier if it were any other former holy maidens. Unfortunately, Holy Maiden Xu Meng is under heavy surveillance. The sect doesn't allow her to come into contact with the outside world. Moreover, she doesn't want to see any of the members of the sect due to her deep hatred for them. The sect has ruined her life and separated her family. Her son is also missing and nobody even knows if he's still alive..." Third Master Jing didn't withhold any information and told Jiang Chen everything he knew.

Getting an audience with a former holy maiden wasn't any easier than a current one. Jiang Chen was running out of options. Did he really have no other choice but to meet with them? Was it even possible to have an effective talk with such a rigid and inflexible

sect?

The Tilted Moon Region had good relations with Pillfire City due to their close proximity. There was no guarantee that they might show a young lord of Veluriyam Capital face either. He tried tackling the matter from multiple angles, but there just wasn't any other way.

"Maybe I should just barge into the Blue Moons and kidnap your mother?" Emperor Peerless suggested.

"That wouldn't be appropriate." Jiang Chen immediately shook his head. "First of all, it's too risky. Going in is relatively safe when you're alone, but the same can't be said when you have to escape with another person. Secondly, it makes things difficult for my little sister. It'll be even harder for us to meet in the future. Lastly, this will also affect Third Master Jing and Gu Xintang."

The third master was somewhat touched by those words. He'd been genuinely worried when Emperor Peerless had voiced his suggestion. He was deeply impressed that Sir Shao hadn't forgotten about him even in a situation like this! He might be a scoundrel, but he wasn't the kind of person that couldn't tell chalk from cheese.

Since the group couldn't think of an appropriate course of action yet, they had no choice but to wait for an opportunity. In the meantime, Jiang Chen transferred energy to his father everyday to reshape his body and bloodline. He didn't hesitate to use his treasure trove of useful items on his father. After all, the man was only in his fifties. That was still young in the cultivation world. As long as his foundation was solid, it was completely normal for him to catch up to the other experts at his age.

When Palace Head Dan Chi had broken through the sage realm at a hundred years old, he was considered a peerless talent in Myriad Domain. Jiang Feng was already an earth origin cultivator. With Jiang Chen's help, he shouldn't have any problem breaking

through the sage realm within three to five years. There was no shortcut in attaining the emperor realm, but Jiang Chen had plenty of resources, pills, spirit stones, and equipment.

He also had in possession the true dragon, golden cicada, and astral white tiger bloodline. His father could choose to whichever one to refine and instantly become a peerless talent in the entire Divine Abyss Continent. Jiang Chen was relieved that he'd refined the Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill for his father back then. It was just a tiny pill, but it was enough to set up a solid foundation for Jiang Feng. Otherwise, there was no way Jiang Feng could reach the earth origin realm within a decade. This was already a very astonishing cultivation speed and no doubt that it was thanks to the Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill.

"Haha, Chen'er, it's normally the father who paves the road and sets up a training plan for his son. But in our family, the father is the one who gets to enjoy such fortune instead." Jiang Feng sighed deeply. Everything had changed ever since his son reentered into his world. His bleak and dull life was now full of light and color.

Liu Zhen envied the father and son for reuniting, while Jiang Chen didn't forget to repay Liu Zhen for not forsaking his father. The young lord imparted a lot of fortune to Liu Zhen. A lot of them were opportunities that Liu Zhen wouldn't have even dreamed about. This excited him greatly. Meeting Jiang Feng was the turning point in his life. Liu Zhen had never asked to be compensated for his dedication, but he'd received it nonetheless.

Chapter 1114: New Troubles

Liu Zhen was floored when he learned of Jiang Chen's true identity. The young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain was the highest status that existed in the Upper Eight Regions! It was an unimaginable height to a small wandering cultivator like him. But now, living proof of that height was standing right in front of him!

Naturally, Liu Zhen was overwhelmed by emotion and excitement. He knew that this was a turning point, his one and only chance to turn around his miserable life. If he successfully seized this opportunity, he would be able to rewrite his life into something completely new and even take full revenge against those who had shamed him in the past.

……

On this day, Third Master Jing hurriedly sought out Jiang Chen. "Sir Shao, are you free right now?"

"What is it?" Jiang Chen knew that something had happened from his hasty expression.

"Something's happened to Captain Gu…" Third Master Jing sounded a bit depressed. "He's been beaten up in Frostmoon City."

"Captain Gu is a member of the Moon God Sect and a captain of Bleakmoon Hall, isn't he?" Jiang Chen looked startled. "Isn't that breaking sect laws? Has the sect taken action against the offender?"

Third Master Jing smiled wryly as he sighed. "The thing is, the culprit belongs to the Moon God Sect as well."

"Where is he now? How badly is he wounded? Come, let's go to him." Jiang Chen wasn't an ungrateful sort. Gu Xintang had done a lot of work to save Jiang Chen's father. Although it was inconvenient for him to interfere with Moon God Sect's internal matters, he couldn't sit by and do nothing now that Third Master

Jing had come to him for help.

“Should we ask Emperor Peerless to join us too?” Third Master Jing reminded.

Jiang Chen knew that Third Master Jing had actually been looking for Emperor Peerless and not him. This was a fight after all. If a captain in Bleakmoon Hall couldn’t beat his opponent, there was no reason for Third Master Jing to believe that Jiang Chen could do the unexpected. On the surface, his combat ability appeared even less than Third Master Jing and Gu Xintang.

Jiang Chen nodded and went to inform Emperor Peerless. The great emperor frowned. “Who attacked him? Little Gu is an honest man. Why would anyone bully someone like him?”

Third Master Jing smiled ruefully. “Well, in our city, honest men are the easiest to bully.”

The third master himself looked shamefaced when he said this. After all, he had bullied so many honest men in the past that he cultivated an ill reputation. If Jiang Chen hadn’t taken him down a peg, he might have continued his villainous ways. Recently however, the third master was acting a lot less like the scoundrel he used to be and seemed like he wished to turn over a new leaf.

Emperor Peerless was very unhappy, to say the least. He’d already mentioned admiring Gu Xintang back at the Ten Ultimates. Granted, that had been the Sable Cells and not Frostmoon City. No one in Frostmoon City knew that Gu Xintang was a man who’d earned the great emperor’s appreciation. This still greatly displeased the great emperor. He angrily had the third master lead the way.

Third Master Jing and Gu Xintang shared a firm bond of friendship with each other. Faction wise, they were both Blue Moon members. The one who’d beat up Gu Xintang this time belonged to the Purple Moons, so the fight wasn’t just a matter of personal grudge, but of orthodoxy as well.

Purple Moon and Blue Moon were the two most popular factions in Moon God Sect at the moment. Purple Moon had the greatest foundation while Blue Moon had produced the strongest holy maiden in the sect's history, Holy Maiden Qingxuan. Both factions constantly butted heads because of this.

Surprisingly, the location of the beatdown was in a bustling area in Frostmoon City. Gu Xintang was currently surrounded by a group of men while his were sprawled all over the ground. His attackers were obviously Bleakmoon Hall enforcers as well, but their attire was slightly different from his. Patently, they belonged to another squad.

Among them, a man with an aquiline nose was ordering his men to attack Gu Xintang while he stood with folded arms. Gu Xintang was visibly hurt, but he hadn't surrendered to his enemy and was fighting with all his might. The man with an aquiline nose was surnamed Sun and he was yelling viciously, "Gu Xintang, I warned you a long time ago to stay away from Ah Li! Have you checked yourself in a pool of pee, you worthless fool? How do you think you're in any way worthy of Ah Li?!"

Gu Xintang couldn't spare the energy to answer the taunt because he was being attacked on all fronts. However, it was obvious from his look of grief and indignation that he held a deep hatred of this man.

"Brothers, beat him as hard as you can! He'll think that I'm a pushover if he isn't taught a lesson." The man with an aquiline nose was also a Bleakmoon Hall captain. He was slightly higher than Gu Xintang in the ranks, and had great backing and a wide personal network in Moon God Sect.

The advantages he possessed made him extremely arrogant and willful. The Ah Li mentioned was Gu Xintang's partner. They loved each other and had even been preparing to formally commit each other as dao partners. However, Sun had appeared out of nowhere one day, taken one look at Ah Li, and unceremoniously

tried to take her from Gu Xintang.

Although Ah Li didn't like Sun at all, she found it difficult to do anything when he shamelessly dogged her steps every day. She had no choice but to hide from him, but Gu Xintang didn't have the same luxury. They were both captains of Bleakmoon Hall and had to see each other everyday. This resulted in Sun verbally attacking Gu Xintang every chance he had.

The two rivals had run into each other today, and Sun decided that the opportunity was ripe for a beating. They weren't within sect territory, so this didn't count as infighting. Even if it did count, he could easily use his connections and scrub his crimes clean. It was the advantage of being a widely connected and very underhanded man.Sun had obviously planned on giving Gu Xintang a thorough beating from the start because the men he'd brought were all extremely powerful fighters. Caught off guard, Gu Xintang wasn't a match for Sun's devious schemes at all. Captain Gu's original plans were to eat lunch and drink with Third Master Jing. When the third master saw what was happening to his friend, he immediately escaped to bring back reinforcements.

Sun was aware that Third Master Jing was Gu Xintang's best friend. However, he couldn't attack Third Master Jing as he could the latter. Third Master Jing was the vice head of the first division. Things would not be nearly as simple if he beat up Third Master Jing in Frostmoon City because the man had considerable backing himself. He might not wield as much power as Sun did in the Moon God Sect, but that didn't mean he couldn't stir the pot if he really wished to. This was why Sun didn't stop Third Master Jing from leaving. He'd simply laughed at the vice head and called him chicken in leaving his brother behind to suffer. He also took the opportunity to taunt Gu Xintang that his friends were all trash and cowards.

While Sun was hooting at Gu Xintang, one of his subordinates suddenly walked over and reported in a low voice, "Captain Gu,

Third Master Jing has returned."

"He's nothing." Sun smiled disdainfully in response. "Don't tell me he's planning to take revenge? I let him go earlier is because he's the vice head of the first division. If he's stupid enough to get back into the fight, then beat him up as well!"

"I think he brought some people with him..."

Sun sneered. "So what? Who can he bring from that mere first division of his? Here in Moon God Sect, he'll have to bring the holy maiden herself to stop me. Otherwise, all other small fries are just..."

"Are just what?" A cold voice cut through the air powerfully. It forcefully slammed into Sun's chest like an invisible sword. Sun paled and felt a burst of pain and upheaval in his chest. In the next moment, he spat out a mouthful of blood. The technique that transformed voice into thunder had, of course, been executed by Emperor Peerless.

The emperor walked into the fray without even stopping. With incredible ease like a tiger in a flock of lambs, he grabbed the cultivators surrounding Gu Xintang and threw them away like rag dolls. The enforcers were scared witless and weren't able to resist at all.

Gu Xintang immediately relaxed when he saw Emperor Peerless, but his wounds made him wobble about and look deathly pale. He clutched his wounds and leaned powerlessly against a wall. The captain flashed a ghastly smile. "Thank you for helping me, senior."

Emperor Peerless waved his hands in response before striding straight towards Sun. "What's your name?"

Sun was greatly surprised to see the reinforcements Third Master Jing had brought were able to throw his men around like rag dolls. How on earth had he managed to get someone as strong as this?

Sun hadn't brought many men with him, but they were all seventh level emperor realm that were as strong or stronger than Gu Xintang. However, none of them had been able to put up even a bit of resistance before this stranger at all. This made the color drain from his face. He was slightly stronger than Gu Xintang, but that was all. If his companions couldn't withstand a single blow from the stranger, then there was no reason that he would be able to even if he hadn't endured that vocal blow from earlier.

"My... my name is Sun Yuan. I'm a descendant of the Sun Family of the Moon God Sect. My aunt is the previous generation's holy maiden, and my cousin is one of this generation's holy maiden. As for me, I'm..."

Emperor Peerless immediately slapped him across the face before with a sneer. "You what? Do you think you can escape punishment by blabbing all this?"

Sun Yuan was stupefied and frightened by Emperor Peerless' boldness as he clutched his face. He never imagined that the stranger would dare to slap him after he reeled off his background!

"How... how dare you slap me? Do you know who I am?!" Sun Yuan cried out. This was obviously the first time he'd taken a loss like this.

Emperor Peerless responded indifferently, "If you can beat up others, why can't I beat you up?"

"I... Gu Xintang is nothing compared to me! He doesn't even deserve to pick up my shoes!" Su Yuan yelled hysterically.

"In my eyes, you are the one who don't deserve to hold his shoes. How much do you think you're worth without your family and without those relatives of yours?" Emperor Peerless was a wandering cultivator, so what he couldn't stand the most were arrogant, out-of-control fops who did whatever they wanted just because they were backed by their families. Ordinarily speaking, he might have chosen to stay out of all this. But he had indeed

taken a liking to Gu Xintang; at the very least, he was very satisfied with the captain's performance back in the Sable Cells. Naturally, it was only right to return the favor and back up the captain.

Chapter 1115: A Great Emperors Backing

Walking over as well, Jiang Chen looked at Sun Yuan coolly. Generally speaking, he didn't approve of useless dandies like him. The world was full of people like this. Sun Yuan was simply of a slightly higher level than most of those fops.

"So, you're Sun Yuan, hmm? I don't know how strong your aunts and uncles and whatever the rest of your family are, but I've seen more than my fair share of dandies like you. If you beat up someone today, you should be prepared to be beaten up by someone else tomorrow. It's all well and good when you bully someone, but you're crying foul when we put you in your place?" The sarcasm hung heavy on his face.

Having gotten his breath back, Gu Xintang strode to take his place beside Jiang Chen.

"Sun Yuan," he glared at his fellow captain. "Ah Li and I love each other. No matter how shameful you plan on being, we will always be of one mind. If you want to be an obstacle to our relationship, then I'll fight you to the death, regardless of the cost!"

"Good!" Emperor Peerless laughed, applauding loudly. "This is the kind of statement I approve of. Sun Yuan, mark my words! My little friend Gu's problems are also mine. If you think your family is so great, then call up all your relatives. Why don't you see for yourself how easy I am to deal with, or not?"

The emperor's words commanded a great deal of authority. Jiang Chen clapped as well. "As expected of a worthy senior. Little Gu, you should thank Senior Peerless right now."

Gu Xintang felt immensely grateful. He rushed up hurriedly. "Thank you very much, Senior Peerless."

Senior Peerless? Sun Yuan blinked. Who was that? Was there a

‘Senior Peerless’ in Frostmoon City? Did the Moon God Sect have someone like that? …no, right?

It was at this time that one of the smarter folks in the crowd remembered something important. His face changed color, and he rushed to Sun Yuan’s side, murmuring a few words in the latter’s ear. Sun Yuan’s face colored as well when he heard the details. He gave Emperor Peerless a conflicted look. He knew now who the old man before him was.

Mo Wushuang, Emperor Peerless! One of the most influential characters among wandering cultivators. The discovery was extremely embarrassing for him. Should he press on? Back off? Throw down a few harsh words? But he’d be in a lot of trouble if he couldn’t take back a hard attitude. Angering this titan of the wandering cultivation world meant that he could possibly be swatted to death.

Sure his was a prominent family, but he wasn’t really all that important in the family’s grand scheme of things. They might feel pity at his death, but it was doubtful that they would attempt to avenge him with all resources at their disposal. After all, he was only one of the backup talents of middling proficiency in the Sun family. There was a reasonable gap between him and the top geniuses. It was unrealistic to ask his family to feud with a great emperor realm cultivator on his behalf.

But was he going to turn tail and flee? Where would his dignity be then? How would he live it down once he returned to Bleakmoon Hall? If Gu Xintang gained the upper hand… if Gu Xintang’s guests delivered such a withering blow… how would he fight with him for Ah Li then? Sun Yuan sank into a period of brief conflict.

Emperor Peerless ignored the youngster. “Little Gu,” he turned to his acquaintance. “I asked whether you had a dao partner, back at your place. You answered me that it’s easy to find the right person, but hard to have a marriage after your heart. Is this crook

the obstacle to that?”

Gu Xintang nodded. “He’s completely unreasonable. Ah Li and I made private vows to each other long ago. Our commitment holds true unto death. Sun is a player and has ruined the innocence of countless maidens. How honest can he really be?”

A man like Sun Yuan never stuck with a single girl. He wanted to seize Gu Xintang’s woman solely because Ah Li’s appearance caught his fancy. The raw lust and possessiveness on display was absolutely despicable.

Emperor Peerless nodded back. “I see. Well then, I shall host your wedding. Hold it right here in Frostmoon City and pick a good day for you. I’d like to see if there’s someone fool enough to try to ruin your marriage.”

It was better to demolish ten temples than a single marriage; such went a piece of ancient conventional wisdom. Breaking the relationships of others was typically seen as something negative, almost criminal.

Sun Yuan’s eyes burned with hatred. He knew that Emperor Peerless was giving him a public beating, but he didn’t dare resist a bit.

“You over there, Sun something-or-other. Mark my words. If you or anyone wreck Little Gu and Ah Li’s relationship, I’ll make sure they don’t even have a full corpse left..” The emperor’s gaze was bottomless, his tone frigid. Sun Yuan was shaken to the core. He glared viciously at Gu Xintang, who scowled back without fear.

Emperor Peerless’s backing allowed Gu Xintang to face Sun Yuan without worry. Before now, he had never backed off from the other man, even without outside help. It was even more unlikely that he would do so given the emperor’s assurance.

“Well? Scram!” Emperor Peerless growled.

Sun Yuan was about to utter a snappy retort or three, but his

lackies permitted him no such opportunity. They lugged and dragged him away in a scramble.

“Young master Sun, don’t be too rash!”

“Young master Sun, give Senior Peerless some respect.”

“Yes, young master Sun. We can make other plans after we go back. Making trouble here will only end in our own suffering.” The people who spoke up were clever enough. They knew that falling out with a great emperor was likely to lead to swift and immediate death. Even a delayed death would be a luxury then.

Sun Yuan’s anger didn’t make him mentally disabled. He understood as well as his cronies that he had no right to challenge a great emperor. Thus, he could only take the easy way out and stormed out. The youth’s lack of popularity in Frostmoon City showed. The bystanders boo’ed in their wake. Clearly, they also intensely disliked those who tried to budge into others’ relationships.

Gu Xintang was the picture of gratefulness. “Senior Peerless, I… as your junior, I do not know how I can thank you. When Ah Li and I officially get married, we will surely invite you to the banquet and toast you more than a few times.”

“Hahaha, I’d be happy to oblige when that happy day comes. Don’t worry, Little Gu. Even if your sect head is the one opposed to it, I’d still champion the cause on your behalf. The Sun family is nothing to worry about. They’re not exactly above the Moon God Sect’s rules, are they?”

Gu Xintang nodded. Emperor Peerless’ promise shored up his confidence.

“Go back and make preparations. Pick a good day, and the sooner the better. I will personally preside over your wedding and bear witness for you.”

This was amazing news for Gu Xintang. Thanking Emperor

Peerless, Jiang Chen, and Third Master Jing, he left immediately after with his subordinates. He wanted to tell Ah Li as quickly as possible about the change in their situation.

Just as the captain had said, he and Ah Li bore mutual affection for one another to the point of inseparable closeness. She was overjoyed at the announcement and excitedly asked for all the details. She cried tears of happiness as she listened to Gu's retelling of today's events over and over again.

"Xintang, we have to thank Senior Peerless properly. Rather than picking the perfect time, why not let decide upon things here and now? Let's have our ceremony in three days. That's enough time for us to prepare. We're cultivators and don't need pomp and circumstance for our wedding. It's just something symbolic, you know? It's just to tell the world that I am yours from this day forward!"

His partner's considerate words moved Gu Xintang greatly. His resolve to protect Ah Li for the rest of his life strengthened because of it. The date of the ceremony was thus decided. Word went out very quickly of it. Both Gu Xintang and Ah Li were only middle management within the Moon God Sect, so their ceremony made few waves. The captain had only average connections, and his circle of friends was not particularly large. Ah Li had a reasonable amount of relational prestige within the Sect, but wasn't particularly prominent.

Ah Li's family had originally felt uncertain towards Gu Xintang. Their opinion was that although Gu was an excellent young man, he lacked the foundations and backing within the Moon God Sect that would assist with future advancement. Though Sun Yuan was a bit of a scoundrel, he had considerable support from his family, and so his future within the Sect was comparatively brighter. This all changed when Ah Li brought back news of the recent changes, particularly those regarding Emperor Peerless. All opposition from her family disappeared overnight.

They all sang a different tune: Gu Xintang was the perfect match for her. No one said another word about his lack of backing. With a great emperor backing him up, how could anyone complain otherwise?

Sure, the great emperor didn't belong to the Moon God Sect, but how many great emperors did the Sect have? Given their extremely low numbers, could they afford to disrespect Emperor Peerless? Changing her family's mind made everything else much easier.

Third Master Jing's family hadn't cared much about his relationship with Gu Xintang prior either. Since learning about Emperor Peerless' support of Gu, they suddenly summoned the third master for a good lecture on maintaining the relationship he already had with the captain.

From these two turnarounds, it was evident that even though Emperor Peerless was a wandering cultivator, he still had remarkable influence. He could affect the Moon God Sect's various factions, despite not being one of their great emperors. Because of this, Gu Xintang and Ah Li's ceremony had significantly more attendees than expected. The guests who'd come to offer their congratulations were only passing acquaintances, making the captain feel it both strange and remarkable.

Emperor Peerless clearly hadn't made his offer in a spur-of-the-moment decision. Rather, he did so because he saw the genuine affection between Gu Xintang and Ah Li. He saw something of his past self and Madame Yun in this couple. When he had courted Madame Yun many years ago, the faction she'd belonged to didn't think much of him either. Emperor Pillzenith's interference in their relationship, moreover, was a spitting image of Sun Yuan's actions. Thus, the emperor cared much more about Gu Xintang's marriage than he let on. He felt empathy with one of his kind.

Because of this, Gu Xintang and Ah Li's ceremony was greatly livened up. Several of the Moon God Sect's elders showed up to

further boost the occasion. Naturally, Captain Gu wasn't the person who commanded their respect; they had come because of Emperor Peerless.

Chapter 1116: The Thorny Problem of the Moon God Sect

The grand ceremony ended on a high note amidst great hustle and bustle. Gu Xintang and Ah Li were in absolute bliss. Emperor Peerless and Madame Yun announced during the event that they were taking Gu Xintang as their foster son. Jiang Chen was a bit surprised by the sudden announcement as the emperor had said nothing beforehand.

Jiang Chen knew that the emperor must've seen a shadow of his past self with Gu Xintang. It was why this matter had resonated with him greatly. Announcing Gu Xintang as his foster son might seem like a simple affair, but it actually served as a strong warning for everyone. Any attempt to separate the lovebirds would be a direct slap to the emperor's face.

Although Gu Xintang had been relatively unknown before this, he instantly became the hot topic of the Moon God Sect. Even those who weren't particularly fond of him before had changed their opinions. Fate worked in mysterious ways. Simply knowing the correct person was enough to bring an enormous change in one's life.

Before this incident, Gu Xintang lacked upward momentum within the sect. Ah Li's family hadn't been too fond of him because of it. However, everything changed once he became the emperor's foster son. Everyone had to take into account that his foster father was Emperor Peerless. Not even the Moon God Sect could possibly disregard someone with that kind of background. Other than the sectmaster, nobody would ever dare to bully him. One's position rises with one's background. There was no better example of this than Gu Xintang.

Meanwhile, the emperor fielded numerous callers after the ceremony. Various Moon God Sect elders swarmed towards him

with invitations him to all kinds of events and dinners. The first to issue an invite was Third Master Jing's clan. The clan elder was completely astounded when he learned that Third Master Jing and Emperor Peerless had once been enemies and were now friends. He gave the third master a stern talking to and ordered him to invite the emperor and Sir Shao over for a banquet no matter what. Everybody wanted to win over the wandering great emperor, and he didn't reject any of these invites.

Jiang Chen didn't like participating in these sorts of events, but for the sake of gathering more information about his mother, he reluctantly joined too. After a few busy days of socializing, Third Master Jing suddenly approached Jiang Chen in secret.

"Sir Shao, you are the same Sir Shao who participated in Pillfire City's Bounty Arena, yes?" Third Master Jing asked carefully.

"That's me, why do you ask?" Jiang Chen was caught by surprise.

"I'm only trying to confirm something. I heard that you resolved a sovereign pill dao mission that had remained unsolved for over eight hundred years?" The third master was being very enigmatic.

"Yes." Jiang Chen didn't deny things.

The third master nodded and mused deeply. "Sir Shao, one of my family's forefathers just mentioned that the Moon God Sect has sent many invitations to pill kings of Pillfire City lately. It seems like they've encountered some kind of difficulty. The senior executives have even begun employing their connections to search for peerless pill dao experts."

Jiang Chen's interest was piqued. "Why are they searching for pill dao experts?"

Third Master Jing shook his head. "I have no idea. From what I've learned, this matter is of extreme importance. Even the three sectmasters are in great distress. They've issued a non-negotiable

command that a pill king who can solve the problem must be found within three months."

Jiang Chen pondered for a moment. "Who did they invite?"

"The best pill kings we have in the Tilted Moon Region are from the Moon God Sect. Clearly, they were unable to solve the problem or the sect wouldn't have called for outside help. I hear that they've cordially invited various pill kings from Pillfire City like Pill King Ji Lang, Pill King Blue Phoenix, Pill King Ancient Moon, and Pill King Horizon..."

These were very famous quasi-pill emperors from Pillfire City. Jiang Chen recognized a few of those names. Pill King Ji Lang was one of his old rivals. He'd thoroughly humiliated the pill king back at Saint Peafowl Mountain and built his reputation entirely on the basis of the blow he'd dealt to Pill King Ji Lang. There was no way the name would be unfamiliar to him.

Pill King Blue Phoenix was someone he'd grown acquainted with at the Bounty Arena. The pill king had a rotten temper, but he was also someone with principles and shunned all evil influences. He was a bit more conservative than most, but he was a morally righteous pill dao expert. Jiang Chen also knew about Pill King Ancient Moon and Pill King Horizon, but they weren't acquainted. He simply knew them through their fame as half-step pill emperors.

"Did they only invite pill kings from Pillfire City?" Jiang Chen asked.

"There are a few more cities in close proximity, but the pill kings from Pillfire City are a lot more reliable. The pill kings from the other regions aren't exactly better than those from the Tilted Moon Region." Third Master Jing recounted things accurately.

Pillfire City's field of influence was too wide-ranging. The upper, middle, and lower regions around the city no longer possessed any extraordinary pill dao talents because the truly talented had all

been recruited by the city. It was pointless to invite pill kings from other regions when the pill kings from Pillfire City were present. Nobody could possibly be better than the city's elites.

"That isn't exactly true. Pillfire City has a high pill dao standard, but that doesn't mean they're capable of everything. Why didn't they seek help from further regions?"

Third Master Jing sighed. "Everybody trusts Pillfire City in these surroundings. Their web of influence is simply too large. By the way, Sir Shao, are you perhaps interested?"

Jiang Chen gave the suggestion some thought. "What kind of opportunity is there? Will I get an audience with a holy maiden?"

Third Master Jing smiled wryly. He didn't expect Jiang Chen to be so persistent when it came to the holy maiden. "I'm not certain what opportunities there'll be, but since the sectmaster takes this matter very seriously, there's a chance that the holy maiden might be involved."

Jiang Chen nodded. "Then I shall offer my assistance."

The third master was elated. "Wonderful! No problem shall remain unsolved with Sir Shao's help! Every senior executive in the sect has the right to recommend one person. My patriarch is a sect elder and possesses an empty recommendation spot. So, he wanted see if you're interested."

Under normal circumstances, Jiang Chen wouldn't even bat an eye at the opportunity. But since the Moon God Sect was taking the issue very seriously, he had no choice but to show interest. He couldn't let a chance to infiltrate the sect slip by. Things would turn for the better if he could somehow connect with his sister. He was only worried that he wouldn't get the chance to see or pass a message to her.

……

The sacred ground of the Blue Moons.

The morning breeze chased away a lingering moon in the sky. It was the hour of breaking down, one in which coolness still lingered in the air. A woman dressed in gray sat in front of a table with a slightly melancholic expression. She was holding a scauper in her right hand and a one foot tall wood carving in her left. The carving was made from Goldmoon Maple, an extremely precious wood.

She’d carved the image of a young and handsome man into the wood. If Jiang Feng was present, he’d immediately realize that it was an image of him in his twenties. The woman meticulously guided every stroke of the scauper. Her eyes brimmed with love and tenderness when she concentrated on the carving. It rather seemed like she was helping her lover put on clothes instead.

Her fingers were long and slender, and her complexion was as fair as polished jade. She wore an extremely plain jade bangle on her wrist that actually looked slightly cheap. But it only accentuated the jade-like qualities of her skin. Her gray attire wasn’t a good match for her beauty, but even the most mismatched clothes couldn’t hide her elegance and gracefulness. Unchallengeable grace just seemed to radiate naturally from her.

Identical wood carvings with the same face, size, expressions and detail could be seen all over her room. There was also two smaller wood carvings among them. One of them was a carving of a youth, while the other was a carving of a child still in his diapers. She'd poured her heart and soul into these carvings.

As the sun rose, various forms of life began to awaken from their slumber. Creak! A wooden door was pushed open to fill the wooden house with a ray of morning light and warm the woman’s face.

“Ah?!” The woman was mildly startled and accidentally cut her left hand with the scauper. Blood immediately poured from her wound. The person who pushed the door open was a girl with remarkable resemblance to the woman. The girl’s features were

less graceful, which accentuated her childish looks.

“Mother, what’s wrong? Did you cut your hand?” The girl was very concerned. When she saw her mother’s bleeding hand, she immediately looked for a medicinal box to treat the wounds. After the wound was handled appropriately, the girl knelt before her mother and began shaking her mother’s legs affectionately. “Mother, you’ve not slept for a night again!” Her sweet tones held a few hints of blame. “Xuan’er is really worried about you when you’re like this!”

“Aii... silly child. Mother is fine. Don’t about me. Go, quickly. Your master is waiting for today’s training.” The woman in grey sighed gently. A smile could only be seen on her face when her daughter was around.

“Mother, this is too unfair! You always coop yourself up in this hut to carve his figure! Xuan’er knows that you can’t forget about father, but... you should take care of your body so that you can one day reunite!” The girl was worried and anxious, almost on the verge of tears. It pained her greatly to see her mother tormenting herself this way.

Chapter 1117: Two Generations of Holy Maidens

If Jiang Feng was present, he would've been so emotional that he might not have been able to speak. This woman was none other than the beloved wife he had missed day and night for almost thirty years, the previous Blue Moon holy maiden, Xu Meng.

Almost thirty years had put plenty of distance between them couple, but it never managed to pull Xu Meng's thoughts away from the Eastern Kingdom. She missed her distant husband and the child who'd lost his mother since infancy, Jiang Chen, nearly every minute and every hour.

Xu Meng wore a distressed smile as she murmured seemingly to herself. "Xuan'er, I'm just so incredibly biased. One of your brothers lost me when he was just a baby, and your twin brother was chased out of the sect and abandoned to survive on his own when he was just twelve years old. I don't even know where he is. I'm only able to stay by your side now. Don't you think I'm biased?"

The girl she was speaking to was the new Blue Moon holy maiden, Xu Qingxuan. The girl was respectfully addressed as Holy Maiden Qingxuan, and she was the most talented and outstanding holy maiden of this generation.

Xu Qingxuan felt as if knives were slashing across her heart. She knew that her mother's longing for her family had slowly transformed into an internal demon that no one could dispel unless her mother and father could meet again one day. Although she occasionally felt curious about the father she'd never met, the entire faction, from her martial dao master to her etiquette teachers and even her servants, worked hard to brainwash her. They told her that her father was of filthy, lowly blood. They told her that the sect had saved them, mother and daughter, from his

tainted world and helped them cut ties with her lowly father, preventing them from succumbing to his world.

The brainwashing wasn't completely ineffective. Sometimes, she would wonder if her father really as bad as they said. But if he is, why isn't mother able to forget him despite so many years? And so, her father was a body of contradiction in her head. On one hand, he was the embodiment of all the faults her people described, and on the other, he was what her mother described him as. Sometimes, she felt it would be nice if she could meet her father for real. All her doubts would be solved this way.

As for her brother...

Xu Qingxuan had no idea what her brother at the Eastern Kingdom was like. She only thought that the place he lived in was so lowly that it could almost be forgotten. Her twin brother was fifteen minutes older than she was. Though they were both born in the Moon God Sect, the number of times she was able to see him were far and few in between.

Ever since her bloodline had been tested, she'd been protected like a princess. Ever since her twin brother's test took place, he was thrown away like trash. Their fates had completely branched off since, and Xu Qingxuan slowly forgot about her twin brother over time. After all, her twin brother had been forced to leave them at a very young age. As they'd never met each other since, her impression of her twin brother was extremely blurry.

But Xu Qingxuan knew that her mother had never ceased viewing her twin brother as a son. To her mother, there was nothing more cruel than watching her own flesh and blood being isolated, chased out of the Moon God Sect, out of the city and not being able to do anything about it.

Xu Meng had tried to escape the Moon God Sect to seek out her husband and her son multiple times, but the sect never allowed her to take a step out of their sight. She'd managed to exit the main

doors a few times, but after several failed attempts, she was restricted to the point where she wasn't even able to walk out of Blue Moon territory. She was watched very heavily by the faction because of her escape attempts, and was now viewed as the shame of the faction instead of a former holy maiden. In their eyes, a Moon God Sect holy maiden who couldn't forget a man of lowly blood was a corrupt holy maiden and sacrilege to the sect. If she wasn't the mother of Xu Qingxuan, she might've been executed already. To the Blues, Xu Meng had lost all value the moment she gave birth to Xu Qingxuan. She was no longer needed in the line of inheritance. Currently, her only remaining identity was the birth mother of Holy Maiden Qingxuan. If it wasn't for this identity, she wouldn't be allowed to reside in Blue Moon territory at all.

But no matter how much the outside world disliked, scorned and disparaged Xu Meng, Xu Qingxuan never grew distant or felt disdain for her own mother. Although she had been brainwashed countless times since she was born and had been told by many that her mother was impure and the shame of the sect, the young girl had inherited her mother's natural kindness and purity. The brainwashing failed to subvert her nature. Mother and daughter was connected by blood, and the love between them surpassed all slander.

Xu Qingxuan's heart ached when she saw how sad her mother was and she tried for consolation. "Wait just a bit longer, mother. When Xuan'er becomes the sectmaster of the Moon God Sect, no one in Blue Moon will be able to confine you or put you on house arrest any longer. Xuan'er will be able to take you anywhere you want to... Xuan'er is happy as long mother is happy."

Xu Meng smiled. She was very glad to see that her daughter had grown up to become a sensible person. Although her daughter underwent brainwashing every day, she hadn't lost her nature. It was a very commendable thing. She saw herself in her daughter when she noted how well-behaved her daughter was and Qingxuan

she hadn't lost her kindness despite her environment.

When she caressed her daughter's cheeks and stared at her face, Xu Meng could almost recall the happy days she'd spent with Jiang Feng shortly after their marriage. Back then, Xu Meng had been just as young as her daughter, the difference being that there were more hints of a noble, heroic air in her daughter's bearing.

"Xuan'er, you should leave now. Your master will grow anxious if you don't hurry," Xu Meng said lovingly as she stroked her daughter's beautiful hair gently. She sighed softly. "Please don't be jealous of your father or your two older brothers. I miss them, but that doesn't mean I don't love you as much. All of you are my heart, and it feels that it'd rip in two if I lost any one of you."

Xu Qingxuan nodded understandingly. "Mother, Xuan'er knows of your love for father. The others may not understand it, but I really do. Mother's background isn't something you chose, but your love for father is something you chose. They kept saying that you are the shame of the sect, but if it wasn't for them you would never have wandered into the secular world in the first place, would you? They are the ones who had caused all this sadness!"

Xu Qingxuan wasn't devoid of sense. She was very much on her mother's side in this regard.

"My good daughter, I'm so glad you understand. I would able to die with peace given your understanding. That being said, please don't ever disdain your father. If it wasn't for him, you wouldn't exist. No matter what happens, he is your one and only birth father. This is something that cannot change no matter how much they scorn or look down on him. Despite his humble birth, your father is a man amongst men. He was willing to give up everything to fight for the woman he loves. If you ever meet a man like this in the future, you must grab hold of him and cherish him greatly. You musn't forget that even the strongest man in the world might not be willing to lay his life down on the line for a woman he loves. A man's background and strength may not be his own choices, but

his courage and attitude are. Xuan'er, you're still very young. You will understand my words one day." Xu Meng's statements were slightly radical. She was talking to the Moon God Sect's holy maiden, and the holy maiden was absolutely forbidden from falling in love of her own accord. Only the holy maidens confirmed not to become sectmaster were allowed to love and marry.

Holy Maiden Qingxuan's tender cheeks turned pink. "Mother, you can't let master hear this or she'll be angry with you again."

Xu Meng smiled faintly. "I'm just teaching my own daughter a lesson. What does she have to be angry about? Alright, Xuan'er, you should hurry off. She'll really be angry if you're any later" Xu Meng pushed her daughter's shoulder gently.

Xu Qingxuan sighed quietly. "Mother, just let me stay by your side for a little while longer. Master has been pretty busy as of late because something's gone wrong with the sect's tree of inheritance lately. Everyone in the sect is working hard to solve this, but a solution hasn't been found just yet."

Xu Meng cared nothing for the problem just mentioned. In fact, she didn't want to listen to anything related to the Moon God Sect. The only thing she was interested in was news regarding the sixteen kingdoms alliance and the Eastern Kingdom. However, there were almost no one in the entire Tilted Moon Region who'd ever heard of the Eastern Kingdom. As for the sixteen kingdoms alliance, who in their right minds would visit such a small place far from civilization?

Xu Qingxuan herself knew that her mother wasn't interested in such things, so she giggled. "Mother, do you think I should beg master to take you down the mountains for a breath of fresh air?"

Xu Meng shook her head. "No, it's alright. Your master's going to scold you again if you do that, and I have no intentions of letting my daughter be scolded. If you really are concerned for my well being, just remember to visit Myriad Domain when you're sent

into the world for training and visit the Eastern Kingdom of the sixteen kingdoms alliance. Specifically, you should inquire about the Jiang Han province."

Xu Qingxuan's face was a little strange when she heard this. Truthfully, she had inquired about the Jiang Han province through other channels, but what she'd learned shocked her greatly.

The Jiang Han province still existed to this day, but it didn't belong to the Jiangs any more. Everyone in the Jiang family was either dead or had left, and the Jiang bloodline had terminated a long time ago. But dare she tell her mother about this?

The only thing sustaining her mother through the years was her towards the Jiang Han province. If she learned that her husband and oldest son was possible be dead already, she might actually crumble on the spot. Xu Qingxuan knew that a person's flame of life was soon to extinguish the moment they'd lost all will to live.

Chapter 1118: Moon God Precious Tree

How could Xu Qingxuan possibly tell her mother this development? She didn't want to lose her mother. For Qingxuan, her mother was the dearest person in the world. She was closer to her mother than her master. In her heart of hearts, she firmly believed that mother wasn't at all like how the Blues described her to be. Personality and character were embodied in one's words and actions.

The Blue Moon faction's members denounced mother every single day, but she never said a bad word about them in return. Though mother was very unsatisfied with the Moon God Sect and thought that they had destroyed her life, she had never uttered a single profanity against them. How could a mother like that be as awful as they described?

As mother and daughter chatted, the voice of another woman came from outside. "Holy Maiden Qingxuan, the second sectmaster noticed that you haven't come yet. She told me to come fetch you."

Xu Qingxuan made a silly face then kissed her mother on the cheek. "Mother," she laughed, "I'm giving you a kiss in father's place. I hope that you'll have a nice day today! I'm off to see how master is doing."

The girl walked out, closing the door of the wooden cottage behind her. "Senior sister Xie," she inquired of the woman who'd spoken a moment earlier. "Why has master summoned me so early today?"

"Yeah, it's a bit off, isn't it? I hear it's because a certain Pill King Ji Lang has arrived from Pillfire City. Master is interested in meeting him. Right! She called for you because she wants you to meet him as well."

"I'm not interested in meeting a man." Xu Qingxuan pouted.

“Hehe, Pill King Ji Lang isn’t just any man. He’s Emperor Pillzenith’s personally cultivated disciple and heir! People call him the ‘Invincible Pill Legend’. Many of our sectmasters show him a lot of respect! Actually, according to rumors... Pill King Ji Lang once said that if he were ever to look for a dao partner, he would definitely come to the Moon God Sect for one of our holy maidens.” The senior sister Xie’s tone was tinged with infatuation.

Xu Qingxuan was completely disinterested. “Why do I care? My goal is to become the next sectmaster. I’m not interested in some smelly man. ‘Invincible Pill Legend’, hmph! Wasn’t he beaten by a Pill King Zhen from Veluriyam Capital a few years back? Am I remembering incorrectly?”

“Ha, I didn’t say that you should marry him! The second sectmaster couldn’t to let you go anyways. Never mind that, Qingxuan! Hurry and go. She’ll scold you again if you’re late.”

The second sectmaster was second in rank within the Moon God Sect and one of the Blue Moon forefathers. Once upon a time, she had been the one to discover Xu Meng, but her failure to keep the girl safe was also the reason why the latter had been lost to the mundane world. Despite this, she hadn’t taken responsibility for the mistake. Instead, she considered it Xu Meng’s fault for polluting the Moon God Sect’s treasured bloodline with a mortal man’s blood. To this end, she attempted to brainwash Xu Qingxuan by teaching all of the Blues that Xu Meng had brought shame to the Moon God Sect. This transferred to Xu Qingxuan herself as well: the second sectmaster lambasted her mother every day in the girl’s presence, and drilled it into her head that she needed to do well to atone for the crimes of her mother.

The propaganda didn’t succeed in turning Xu Qingxuan against Xu Meng, but it left a shadow in the young girl’s mind. Xu Qingxuan felt that if she did not become the best holy maiden the sect had ever seen, then her mother would bear eternal shame and guilt.

The Moon God Sect had a certain Moon God Precious Tree that had been passed down for countless generations, over tens of thousands of years. Legend had it that it was originally a species growing in the Jewelled Celestial Palace that'd managed to take root here on the Divine Abyss Continent, growing into a precious tree over time.

The Moon God Precious Tree was also a totem of the sect, one of the paramount symbols of its superiority. It was a miraculous specimen. Purple in spring, indigo in summer, blue in autumn, and red in winter. Its shades clearly demarcated the changing of seasons. In this way, the tree could almost be used to tell the seasons. It was superbly accurate. The four colorful factions of the Moon God Sect also originated from the tree's prismatic behavior.

Unfortunately, it had begun to display bad symptoms as of late. The colors were as brilliant and clear as usual, but the leaves were wilting day by day. The Moon God Precious Tree's foliage was usually extremely lush and vibrant. However, it was slowly losing its vigor everyday. Already, it had fewer than half of the leaves than it did at its prime. This fact made the entire sect rather fearful. After all, the Precious Tree had been passed down as the sect's symbol for countless years. When the totem developed a less-than-symbolic problem, an irrational fear was struck into the hearts of every sect member, from the sectmasters to the lowest disciple.

Reacting like that was completely natural. The seriousness of the problem, once understood, compelled them to find a collection of pill masters and spirit botanists to diagnose the tree. Each of the experts had their own version of the reason for it. Their explanations differed from each other's every time. When a solution was asked of them, the most that any of them could do was stammer. No one had a clear-cut answer.

The Moon God Sect understood then that these people were completely unreliable. That was when they'd begun to find help in

the outside world. During this period, their cry for help reached Pillfire City. For their part, the city was the very image of sympathy. A number of pill emperor-level pill kings came to the Moon God Sect to give their own versions of the diagnosis for the Moon God Precious Tree. This time, Pill King Blue Phoenix, Pill King Ancient Moon, Pill King Void had answered the call. Any of them were half step pill emperors. That these people were gathered in a joint diagnosis really showed how much the Moon God Sect valued the tree.

Following closely behind her master, Xu Qingxuan was a little curious about the fact that so many pill kings had come from afar. She hoped that these people would be able to treat the Moon God Precious Tree, but didn't have much interest in the pill kings themselves.

In her eyes, pill kings were all old, wizened men with plenty of white hair and long beards. These people matched her expectations exactly.

Pill King Ji Lang was the exception. He looked reasonably young, broad-shouldered and quite tall. His posture and bearing distinguished him from the crowd. However, Xu Qingxuan found the man's appearance to be oddly repulsive. She didn't know why, but her subconscious gave her that impulse. It was an inexplicable feeling. Each time her eyes brushed over the seemingly-polite smile on Pill King Ji Lang's face, she felt a shudder of disgust run down her spine.

Still, as a prominent member of the Moon God Sect, she was one of the hosts. She had to maintain a degree of basic civility and polity towards visiting guests. She refrained from responding to his icebreakers or shows of courtship, and exhibited only what was essential for greeting.

For his part, Pill King Ji Lang was positively charmed by the young girl's demeanor. He tried to find opportunities every so often to strike up a conversation with her, and win her over with a

display of his dazzling expertise. Unfortunately, Xu Qingxuan failed to offer him any such windows.

It was at this time that someone suggested the group to go look at the Moon God Precious Tree. This new topic fired the pill king up. He knew that the entire Moon God Sect was heavily invested in the matter of the Precious Tree. If he could use his talents to find the reason for the tree's disease, he would definitely be able to make a strong impression in front of the pretty girl.

He knew also that the best holy maidens from the Sect were not married off. But there were always exceptions to every rule. He, Pill King Ji Lang, was the future lord of Pillfire City! A holy maiden that he took a special interest in might not be so far off after all. Given the Moon God Sect's position and strength, it was difficult for it to refuse the demands of a giant the likes of Pillfire City.

Pillfire was very close to being one of the strongest factions of the Upper Eight Regions, and in fact, the entire human domain. The Moon God Sect, on the other hand, was a little behind the middle of the pack for first rank sects. A single Pillfire City could match three Moon God Sects. A difference like that meant that the former had the absolute advantage in any struggles of power. Thus, though Pill King Ji Lang had an itch in his heart, he was in no hurry at all to act on it, nor was he discomposed.

The pill king was a very clever man. He didn't hastily begin his examination once in front of the tree, but rather sat down cross-legged a little away from it. Once at rest, he settled into a period of meditation. This was but a ruse: his real intent was for the others to go first. When the others failed and he came forward, his competence would be further heightened through the comparison.

Even if there were results from the joint diagnosis, his personal ability would hardly be shown off in a group effort. Pill King Ji Lang didn't want those old coots to ride his coattails. The older pill kings–Blue Phoenix, for example–weren't nearly as petty as Pill King Ji Lang. They were thinking nothing of the sort. The Moon

God Sect's courtesy blew away all thoughts of holding back. They began to look for symptoms immediately. Furthermore, pill kings of their caliber had an odd, but common, line of thought. The more complicated the subject or problem, the more curious they were about it.

A full two hours passed by. The pill kings went over the tree again and again, forming and demolishing a score of hypotheses, but ultimately came up fruitless.

"Dear sectmasters, we apologize for our lack of skill. We have tested for every variety of problem that can occur to spirit plants and precious trees, but none of them matches the issue here," Pill King Blue Phoenix sighed. "Looks like our incompetence has let you down."

"Don't be so humble, pill kings." The main sectmaster of the Moon God Sect smiled faintly. "At least you've eliminated them as possibilities. That a worthwhile work in its own right."

The process of elimination was also a functional method to diagnose problems with.

"Pill King Ji Lang hasn't made his move yet, no?" To the side, the second sectmaster also smiled. "He looks like he's preparing for something. Perhaps meditation will assist in sharpening his judgment? A kind of emotional preparation, maybe?"

Pill King Blue Phoenix pressed his lips together, but stayed silent. Internally, he began to swear. What 'emotional preparation' was there? It's all a facade! The pill king understood Pill King Ji Lang reasonably well. He knew that the man enjoyed pomp and circumstance. It was much more likely that the other pill king thought a communal diagnosis would be devaluing to him. His current actions were a veneer, presented only to show how special he was.

At this time, Pill King Ji Lang's eyes opened. "My fellow pill kings," he pretended to be confused. "Have you finished your

diagnosis? What're the results like, if I may ask?"

Several of the other pill kings from Pillfire City were greatly upset by the words. What was Ji Lang playing at? Enough with the charade. Fakery made one a lightning rod for divine justice! They didn't believe that the pill king had missed a word of the conversation.

Pill King Ji Lang smiled slightly, then nodded. "If that's so, then I'll put my humble abilities to the test. The Moon God Precious Tree is supposed to be an ancient heirloom, and is surely more than several dozen thousand years advanced in age. Compared to human cultivators, they're the achievers of a truer kind of eternal life."

The pill king was quite adept at making pleasant word salads.

Chapter 1119: Utterly Shameful

Pill King Ji Lang had spent so long setting the scene for himself for this one moment. Everyone, including Pill King Blue Phoenix, was staring at him. These veteran pill kings wanted to see how Pill King Ji Lang would treat the Moon God Precious Tree too. Truthfully, they were all on the same skill level as the pill king, but unlike them, Pill King Ji Lang was young and Emperor Pillzenith's chosen successor. That was why he put on airs and acted arrogantly.

If he could treat the Moon God Precious Tree, they'd swallow their complaints and let his shortcomings slide by. But if he couldn't treat the Moon God Precious Tree, then they would have words about his attitude.

As time ticked on, Pill King Ji Lang's expression grew more and more serious. He'd been full of confidence and certainty at first, but soon discovered that he was unable to diagnose the condition that plagued the Moon God Precious Tree despite scouring through a lifetime of knowledge. He slowly panicked.

He'd wasted a great amount of effort to promote himself as he'd thought this was his opportunity to enhance his reputation and win the heart of the pretty girl who'd caught his eye. If he really failed to treat the Moon God Precious Tree, then everything he did earlier would be nothing but a joke. He might turn into a laughingstock.

Sweat began to pour down Pill King Ji Lang's back. He forced himself to inspect the Moon God Precious Tree again from the beginning, but the result was the same as before.

Two hours passed. Three hours passed. The three sectmasters of Moon God Sect had put great expectations on Pill King Ji Lang. As time went on, however, their expressions grew more and more severe as disappointment flashed through their faces.

Although they didn't go so far as to label Pill King Ji Lang as a show-off with no true skill, their opinion of him had dipped severely. Everyone said that Pill King Ji Lang is an amazing pill king, but truthfully? This is all he can manage. He's not so different from others.

The worst part of it all was the ridiculous self promotion he'd done earlier to prepare the 'climax' of the show. The start had been impressive, but the end was like constipation. Nothing had come out. The feeling of being raised into the air before being dropped to the ground was very, very depressing to say the least.

When four hours passed, everyone's patience had dried up completely. If Pill King Ji Lang wasn't a representative of Pillfire City, the Moon God Sect members present would have already declared an end to this farce. After all, no one wanted to see Pill King Ji Lang humiliate himself any further.

Finally, the pill king let out a cough but maintained a self-important look on his face. He declared leisurely, "Dear sectmasters, I wasn't able to discover the root cause of the Moon God Precious Tree's sickness despite using everything I've learned. However, I did discover some suspicious clues. The problem though is that I cannot deduce anything from these clues in such a short time, so I'll have to return to Pillfire City to look up a few references and confirm my thoughts. I am sure that I will come up with an answer to your problems one day."

His words sounded mighty impressive, but anyone who mulled over his words carefully would discover that they were empty words that might as well have been left unsaid.

For starters, there was nothing concrete in his statements such as the use of words like "clues" and "suspicious". His so-called deduction and looking up references could only be performed after he returned to Pillfire City. Even his promised "answer" had an indefinite deadline. "One day"? The day he found an answer might not come even after Moon God Precious Tree had lost all of its

leaves.

Still, the sectmasters of Moon God Sect maintained a polite tone out of consideration for Pillfire City's face. "In that case, we wish for you to bring us good news as soon as possible, Pill King Ji Lang."

"Of course, of course. Ji Lang will do his absolute best to find out the root cause of the Moon God Precious Tree's sickness." Pill King Ji Lang expressed.

However, Pill King Blue Phoenix couldn't stop himself from saying, "Pill King Ji Lang, please forgive my curiosity. What exactly are the suspicious clues you've found? Why don't we exchange our knowledge and pool our wisdom since we're all here? Brainstorming sessions can often generate unexpected ideas."

Pill King Blue Phoenix's attack was a bit harsh. This irritated Pill King Ji Lang because this question took away his chance to walk away without looking bad, and he wasn't sure if Blue Phoenix had done it on purpose or not. What he'd said earlier was nothing more but a way to excuse himself from this embarrassing scene without losing face. But Pill King Blue Phoenix had pulled the carpet out from underneath him.

"Hehe, this involves much technical knowledge that'll take a long time to explain. If you have the time to, feel free to discuss with me in Pillfire City." Now that was a little too shameless. Luckily for him, Pill King Blue Phoenix didn't pursue the matter any further. He simply smiled and remained silence.

The senior sectmaster of Moon God Sect sighed. "To think that the Moon God Precious Tree would be so difficult to treat that all pill kings present are stumped by it! If that is so, then is there anyone in this world who is capable of treating it? Ai. If you have anyone on your minds, please don't hesitate to recommend them, honorable pill kings."

Her question was wasted on Pill King Ji Lang because he thought

that no one in the world was better than himself. Therefore, he would never recommend another pill king for a job.

“I guess the only one left to invite is Emperor Pillzenith himself.” Pill King Ancient Moon mused. “However, the great emperor has been cultivating in seclusion for many years. I doubt it’ll be easy to request his presence.”

“Perhaps it’s all a matter of fate. Maybe we aren’t meant to treat the Moon God Precious Tree?” Pill King Void was apparently a fatalist.

Pill King Blue Phoenix thought for a moment before he suddenly sighed softly. “If I must make a recommendation, there is one such person on my mind. However…”

“However?” the senior sectmaster asked with sudden interest. Unless she was mistaken, it sounded like the person the pill king wished to recommend was very impressive.

“No, it’s nothing. It’s just that he is the first person that came to my mind when it comes to solving this seemingly impossible conundrum.”

“Is that so? Are you referring to a certain pill emperor you know, brother?” Pill King Ancient Moon sounded curious as well.

Pill King Blue Phoenix shook his head. “No, he’s not a pill emperor, but I’m sure you’ve all heard of him before. Not long ago, Pillfire City held the Bounty Arena at a once-in-a-millennium level. I know one of the arena lords, and his skills impressed me to no end. He was able to solve a bounty that no one was able to solve for eight hundred years with ease…”

“Oh? Is that true?” The sect heads of Moon God Sect sat high up on the totem pole, so they seldom paid attention to secular matters.

Pill King Ancient Moon also remembered. “I’ve heard of this. He is an extremely young genius who goes by the surname Shao. Shao

Yuan. Am I right?”

Pill King Blue Phoenix nodded. “Unfortunately, he has gone elsewhere already. I’ve not heard of him after the shocking display of skill at Pillfire City.”

Pill King Ji Lang couldn’t help but interrupt. “Don’t you think you value him a little too highly, Pill King Blue Phoenix? Shao Yan was able to stand out was because many powerful pill kings in Pillfire City didn’t participate in the Bounty Arena. If they did, he wouldn’t have had the chance to show himself off.”

Naturally, Pill King Ji Lang was displeased to hear Pill King Blue Phoenix recommending an outsider to the Moon God Sect. Ji Lang was publicly hailed as the number one pill king in Pillfire City and second only to a pill emperor, so he thought of Pill King Blue Phoenix’s praise of an outsider as a slap to his face and an attempt to undermine his reputation. Pill King Blue Phoenix didn’t retort and smiled calmly instead. “I’m just bringing this up as requested. The Moon God Sect can decide if their own accord whether or not to accept my recommendation.”

Seeing that the pill kings of Pillfire City weren’t acting that amiable with each other, the senior sectmaster knew that it was time to cut the consultation short. She smiled. “Thank you very much for your help today, everyone. Please join us at the Moon God Palace and we can continue our discussions there.”

Pill King Blue Phoenix clasped his hands together. “I’m ashamed that I wasn’t able to find anything that could help, so please allow me to turn down this invitation, senior sectmaster.”

“We shall be taking our leave as well.” Pill King Ancient Moon and Pill King Void felt the same way. Moon God Sect had invited them over with great respect, but they weren’t able to help in the end. None of them were shameless enough to continue to impose on their hosts.

However, Pill King Ji Lang smiled. “Then I shall trouble Moon

God Sect for a little longer."

He had a thick skin and an ulterior motive for staying. He wanted to get closer to Xu Qingxuan. The pill king had been thoroughly bewitched today. There were a couple of other holy maidens who had attended the gathering, but for some reason he lusted for Xu Qingxuan, the holy maiden who'd showed up the latest. What was even more striking was that Xu Qingxuan was the only one most disgusted by his actions.

Pill King Ji Lang actually spent another half day in Moon God Sect. However, he realized there wouldn't be much of an opportunity for him as he didn't see any chances to progress. And yet, he wasn't disappointed. There hadn't been a woman who'd managed to escape his clutches yet, and that wasn't going to change even if the other party was a holy maiden of the Moon God Sect.

He made up his mind to visit the Moon God Sect and conquer Holy Maiden Qingxuan the moment he discovered the root cause of the Moon God Precious Tree's sickness. Still, dreams and reality were two different things. He had to admit that a problem he couldn't solve on-site was only going to become even more impossible after he returned to Pillfire City. As time dragged on and interest waned, he would only grow less eager to ponder this problem.

After sending Pill King Ji Lang off, the three sectmasters and the holy maidens gathered together, feeling downcast. It was obvious that the departure of Pillfire City's pill kings had left their hopes in tatters once more. If even these top rate pill kings could do nothing to cure the Moon God Precious Tree, they really couldn't think of anyone else who could deliver them from the encroaching despair.

The senior sectmaster sighed quietly. "Speak your mind, everyone. Does anyone have an idea to share? Does anyone have an amazing pill king in mind? It doesn't matter who they are, we can no longer afford to be choosy. We must do everything we can to try

cure the Moon God Precious Tree."

The third sectmaster mused, "I feel that Pill King Ji Lang made a frivolous statement. I believe Pill King Blue Phoenix's suggestion is worth consideration."

"But he only gave us a name. Even he doesn't know where this Pill King Shao Yuan has gone to. Our sincerity is useless when we can't even find the man in the first place."

Suddenly, Xu Qingxuan spoke up. "Wasn't Pill King Ji Lang beaten by a genius from Veluriyam Capital. Maybe we should switch up our mindset and consider pill kings from other factions?"

Chapter 1120: Jiang Chens Recommendation

Xu Qingxuan had truly given them a new perspective on things. The crowd recalled the story of how Pill King Ji Lang had lost to Pill King Zhen of Veluriyam Capital all those years ago. It was a story that took the entire Upper Eight Regions by the storm. Pillfire City had killed many people in order to stifle the rumors, but to no avail.

In the end, the city refused to acknowledge the loss and claimed that Veluriyam Capital had cheated by researching the Longevity Pill beforehand, while Pill King Ji Lang had little to no time for preparation and thus failed the incredibly easy task due to lack of enthusiasm. This statement of theirs was utterly unconvincing, but it was enough to stifle heated discussions. Eventually, people began to forget about Pill King Ji Lang's humiliating loss.

Pill King Zhen? Veluriyam Capital was genuinely a great distance away from Tilted Moon Region. If they sought the Capital's help, it'd be a great form of disrespect to Pillfire City. After all, their borders was right next to each other. Pillfire would definitely take offense if they hired help from that far away. Being neighbors with the city wasn't always a good thing. The sectmasters exchanged glances without saying anything.

The second sectmaster smiled wryly. "Qingxuan, your suggestion isn't bad, but it doesn't suit our situation very well if you take everything into account. It's basically a slap to Pillfire City's face."

"Why must we consider the city's face? What's wrong with hiring someone else if the city is incompetent? It's not as though we sought Veluriyam Capital for help first!" Xu Qingxuan had made a good argument.

"What do you all think?" the second sectmaster asked ruefully.

The senior sectmaster sighed. "We might consider asking Pill King Zhen of Veluriyam Capital for help, but only as a last resort.

Before that, we should consider Pill King Blue Phoenix's suggestion and find the genius Shao Yuan."

"Yes. If he's really as great as the pill king says he is, maybe a miracle will happen?"

The sectmasters quickly came to a unanimous decision. They'd seek Pill King Shao Yuan's help first, just as Pill King Blue Phoenix had suggested. They wholeheartedly believed that Pill King Shao Yuan would show up if the reward was high enough, even if his whereabouts were currently unknown.

An announcement was made while they were in the middle of their discussion. "Esteemed sectmasters, Elder Jing asks for an audience."

"Elder Jing?" The senior sectmaster was a little taken aback. "What's he doing here?"

"He wishes to recommend a pill king."

Elder Jing? An image of Elder Jing flashed across the three sectmasters' minds. Indeed, there was an Elder Jing among the elders of the sect. However, he didn't particularly stand out among the jury of elders. He wasn't exactly the cream of the crop. That was why they were a little taken aback when Elder Jing wanted to recommend someone. However, they needed all the help they could get. If they denied him of his audience, who'd ever recommend a pill king again?

"Send him in," the senior sectmaster ordered.

Elder Jing was the Jing forefather and held a seat in the Moon God Sect's council of elders. However he didn't get to see the sectmasters very often.

"Jing Tianbo pays his respects to the three sectmasters and the holy maidens."

The holy maidens were second only to the sectmasters. Their authority was just above the elders, but it was mostly just a

symbolic gesture as they held no true power for the time being.

“Elder Jing, you may rise. We heard that you’re recommending a pill king?” The senior sectmaster wasn’t exactly enthusiastic, but there wasn’t any hostility in her voice.

Jing Tianbo nodded. “Yes. This subordinate is here for that reason.”

“Oh? The pill king you’re nominating. Where is he from?” She followed up warmly.

“This subordinate doesn’t know.”

How dare you recommend someone without knowing his background first? The senior sectmaster was starting to feel annoyed. “What rank pill king is he then?”

Jing Tianbo found himself in an increasingly awkward situation. He didn’t actually know what rank the person in question was. He suddenly found himself incapable of answering.

“Then you should at least know what school of pill dao he’s from, right?” The sectmaster was on the verge of kicking him out.

Jing Tianbo smiled wryly. “I heard that his origin is extremely mysterious. This subordinate hasn’t made the proper inquiries. However…”

“Elder Jing! You are too rash!” The second sectmaster suddenly yelled as she could no longer hold back her anger. “If you’re going to recommend someone, you should at least research his background first! How dare you recommend someone you don’t even know a thing about!? Do you even know what you’re doing?”

Jing Tianbo was terrified. Cold sweat immediately poured from his forehead. “This subordinate realizes his mistake. But…”

“That’s enough! I’ve heard enough from you. Elder Jing, you may take your leave. The sect is in urgent need of a pill dao expert, but not every Wang, Chen, or Lin has the right to enter our sect

and point fingers!”

Color drained from Jing Tianbo’s face. The entire incident was leaving a bitter taste in his mouth, but he didn’t dare to go against the sectmaster’s orders. He flashed a wry smile and bowed deeply. “This subordinate has overstepped his boundaries, I ask for your forgiveness. Aii…”

Jing Tianbo didn’t have enough authority to speak. Otherwise, he could’ve added a few more words. Unfortunately, he didn’t have the courage to do so. He was genuinely intimidated by the wrath of the three sectmasters.

However, Xu Qingxuan suddenly spoke up. “Elder Jing, the pill king that you’re recommending, what is his surname? You should at least know that much, right?”

Jing Tianbo quickly answered. “He goes by the surname of Shao! Maybe the sectmasters have heard of him too? A captain from the Bleakmoon Hall was recently declared as Emperor Peerless’ foster son, right? Sir Shao has accompanied the emperor throughout his stay in our region. A few months ago, they’ve even attended the Bounty Arena in Pillfire City together and raised an enormous commotion there!” Jing Tianbo didn’t dare to linger once he was done and immediately backed towards the exit.

“Wait!” The senior sectmaster yelled excitedly. The other two sectmasters were also brimming with excitement.

“Elder Jing, did you just mention that he goes by the surname of Shao? Is his full name Shao Yuan?” The senior sectmaster asked agitatedly.

“That is correct. Senior sectmaster, you know of Sir Shao Yuan too?” Jing Tianbo was a little taken aback. He didn’t expect the sectmasters to care about such mundane affairs. And it was true, the sectmasters genuinely knew nothing about this pill king. The only reason they even knew of his name was because they’d just come to a decision to seek his help.

Pill King Blue Phoenix had strongly recommended Pill King Shao Yuan. He held Sir Shao in such high regard that Sir Shao seemed like the only person he revered in the pill dao world. No ordinary person could possibly gain so much respect from a proud and acclaimed pill king like Blue Phoenix. The sectmasters of Moon God Sect couldn't help but have a paramount of respect for Shao Yuan. Initially, they were worried they'd fail to locate the enigmatic pill king, but unexpectedly, he was right on their doorstep! Finding him hadn't taken the slightest effort!

"Elder Jing, you've done us a great service. Quick, go get Pill King Shao Yuan!"

"Please hurry. Tell him that we're willing to give him any reward for his services! As long as he finds out what's wrong with the Moon God Precious Tree, he can ask for any amount of spirit stones from us."

Jing Tianbo breathed a sigh of relief and laughed inwardly at himself. If he'd known earlier that this would happen, he should've just mentioned Sir Shao's full name. It would've saved him an earful.

The sectmasters exchanged glances once Elder Jing had left. The second sectmaster was still a little skeptical. "Isn't this too much of a coincidence? I can't help but suspect that something is amiss."

"I concur. However, Emperor Peerless has been in Frostmoon City for quite some time. Since Sir Shao and the emperor are well acquainted, it isn't that suspicious to see them together."

"Who cares if it's a coincidence or not? Our main concern is his ability to cure our Precious Tree! Does anything else really matter if he can solve our problem?" The senior sectmaster ended the argument. The crowd nodded in agreement.

"Senior sectmaster, how should we welcome him? Should we show him as much hospitality as Pill King Ji Lang, or would that too excessive?"

“Mm, that’s true. His fame is nothing when compared to Pill King Ji Lang’s.”

The senior sectmaster’s face darkened. “Who cares if he’s famous or not at a time like this? Pill King Ji Lang is famous, yes. But what has he done for us?”

“Jing Tianbo has already left. He’ll surely inform Sir Shao of our predicament. Sir Shao might hold it against us if he realizes that we’re showing him less hospitality than the other pill kings. This might end up working against our favor.”

The discussion on hospitality was from henceforth put to rest. If the guest didn’t put forth his best simply because he wasn’t shown enough hospitality, all their efforts would go down the drain.

Jing Tianbo quickly brought the news to the first division. Jiang Chen was thrilled. He turned around to face Jiang Feng.

“This is our chance! Father, I’ll make sure hand over your token to little sister. We can only hope that she’ll hand it over to mother.”

Jiang Feng nodded resolutely. “She will. We share the same righteousness in our blood because she’s my daughter. Of that I have no doubt.”

Jiang Chen nodded. He hoped that it’d be the case. He was worried that his sister might’ve lost her innocence after being constantly brainwashed by the sect. Could she possibly remain kind, gentle, and magnamious as how his father described his mother?

Jiang Chen brought along his father’s token and left with Jing Tianbo without hesitation. He didn’t bring a single person with him. Not even Emperor Peerless. The more people there was, the bigger the chance that something could go wrong.

They soon arrived at the entrance of the Moon God Sect. It was his second time here, but he was in a completely different mood

this time. He was determined to deliver the message to his mother so that his parents could reunite. The desire to do so burned fiercely inside of him. It was the his responsibility as their son and his greatest wish.

Chapter 1121: Jiang Chen Sets Off

Inside the Moon God Palace, the three sectmasters and six holy maidens were all gathered. Jing Tianbo had returned to the palace with Jiang Chen.

“Honored sectmasters, I have brought Sir Shao with me. Sir Shao, please make your greetings to the honored sectmasters,” Jin Tianbo indicated.

Jiang Chen smiled and walked forward. He cupped his hands together in a salute and bowed slightly. “Wandering cultivator Shao Yuan greets the sectmasters and holy maidens of the Moon God Sect.”

Jiang Chen had enough perception to note that the younger-looking girls were the new holy maidens of the Moon God Sect. A sweeping glance later, his eyes was captured firmly by the girl at the center. Although her features didn’t share too much resemblance with his father, Jiang Chen was certain that she was his sister because of her temperament. His heart moved by the revelation, a trace of gentleness flashing through his eyes.

The young girl he was looking at was none other than Xu Qingxuan. Her first impression of Jiang Chen was much better than her first impression of Pill King Ji Lang. For starters, the young man didn’t hold himself in a pretentious or honeyed way. His actions and words were open and straightforward. Although his sweeping gaze was a little brazen, and his eyes seemed to have paused on her a longer than usual, Xu Qingxuan didn’t sense any indecency or ugliness from him. In fact, she even noticed a glimmer of gentleness flashing through his eyes.

This was a bit of a surprise. The average man would either pretend to be calm, eager to show off, affect remoteness, act pretentiously, or even stare at her boldly with open lust. However, all she felt from this young man was a kind of gentleness that felt

as warm as the sunlight. For some reason, she was reminded of the gentleness her mother displayed when affectionately caressing her cheek.

“You look very young, Sir Shao.” The senior sectmaster examined Jiang Chen critically for a moment before asking with a smile, “If rumors don’t deceive, I heard that you made quite a name for yourself during the Bounty Arena event at Pillfire City?”

“Not really, I just got lucky, that’s all. The only reason I stood out is because the seniors relinquished their stage to a junior.”

“Good. You are neither servile nor overbearing, and you do not allow success to go to your head. I can be sure that you’re no normal person from these qualities alone, Sir Shao.”

“You praise me too much, sectmaster.”

After exchanging pleasantries and some tentative questions over tea, the senior sectmaster finally broached the main topic. “I have heard that Sir Shao is a genius in pill dao, and Pill King Blue Phoenix thinks quite highly of you. We invited you today, Sir Shao, in hopes that you can help us see if something is afflicting our Moon God Precious Tree. For the past few years, the Moon God Precious Tree has lost a lot of leaves and looked like it was aging for some unknown reason.”

Jiang Chen put down his cup of tea. “Seeing is believing. Please allow me to see the Moon God Precious Tree first before I give you an answer.”

The sect admired his pragmatic attitude. The senior sectmaster personally led the way to the location of the Moon God Precious Tree. Surprisingly, the Moon God Precious Tree was shorter than the Precious Tree Sect’s Precious Tree of Rosy Dawn. On the other hand, the Moon God Precious Tree was noticeably more valuable than the latter, be it in terms of quality or rank.

Unplanned praise gushed out as Jiang Chen looked upon it. “The

Moon God Precious Tree is great tree of pure yin without parallel! It's no wonder that the sect's inheritance has been passed down for so long. It's all thanks to this tree."

After the compliments, Jiang Chen set to work and circled the tree a couple of times, making a general inspection. Pill King Blue Phoenix and the others had done the same before, but none of the sectmasters stopped Jiang Chen. They simply stood off to the side and observed the pill king's actions closely in silence.

Jiang Chen's knowledge was much richer than the other pill kings, and the things he looked out for was just as many. However, he didn't find any problems with the tree despite all of his inspections. There was nothing wrong with the air, soil, fengshui or surrounding environment. This meant that he could almost exclude all external factors.

Jiang Chen then inspected the tree for internal factors. Although the Moon God Precious Tree looked to be in slight decline, he couldn't find any signs from its growth rings and trunk that the tree was approaching the end of its lifespan. It was obviously still in the prime of life. This meant that he could exclude all internal factors with certainty. So the Moon God Precious Tree wasn't even close to reaching the end of its life. If it wasn't internal, then it must be external. But he had already eliminated most external factors from the equation.

This is strange. Jiang Chen frowned at the Moon God Precious Tree and sank into a daze. He couldn't discover any external or internal factors that might've affected the tree negatively. He even wondered if someone had damaged the tree on purpose, but again he couldn't find any such signs on its surface. A closer inspection didn't yield any other clues.

For a time, Jiang Chen was stumped by the problem in front of him. Most problems were obvious to him at first glance due to the sheer wealth of knowledge he possessed, so this was the first time he couldn't immediately identify a problem. The Moon God

Precious Tree's problem must be very well hidden. Sighing softly, he stepped away from the tree and stopped in front of the Moon God Sect crowd.

"How is it?" the senior sectmaster asked anxiously.

Jiang Chen thought for a moment before replying, "Maybe you'll think that this is an excuse to cover up my incompetence, senior sectmaster, but I can tell you with certainty that the Moon God Precious Tree itself doesn't show any signs of aging or deterioration. It is still in the prime of life, so to speak. I've excluded most external from the equation, so I must admit that I'm a little stumped right now."

Although he hadn't located any external or internal causes, the Moon God Precious Tree was indeed losing leaves and weakening. It was a fact that Jiang Chen couldn't ignore.

"But..."

Jiang Chen waved his hands. "I know, the Moon God Precious Tree is losing leaves and weakening somehow. There must be something that is causing this. However, the cause of its deterioration is well concealed and not a regular reason. Therefore, I'll like to request for a prolonged stay and observe the tree for while longer. Is that acceptable, senior sectmaster?"

The senior sectmaster pondered for a moment. Whatever her reservations might be, Sir Shao did seem more reliable than that Pill King Ji Lang. At the very least, everything he had said was clear cut and honest. He didn't throw out confusing and specious statements that prevented them from understanding what he was expressing.Nodding, the senior sectmaster responded, "In that case, we shall impose on you for a little while longer, Sir Shao. The Moon God Precious Tree is our totem treasure. If you are able to resolve our dilemma, we are willing to pay almost any price you ask for."

Jiang Chen waved his hands. "We can talk about my reward

later. If you don't mind, you may depart and tend to your tasks. You only need to leave one or two behind."

The senior sectmaster pondered again before agreeing. "Alright. Ah Yuan, please stay here and keep Sir Shao company."

Ah Yuan was a holy maiden raised by the senior sectmaster herself.

"But master, I still have a lot of homework to do. Can't you find someone else instead?" Ah Yuan was a little reluctant. Shao Yuan might have a bit of a genteel bearing, but he was also rather plain and unattractive.

Jiang Chen had disguised himself before coming here. He hadn't put on an exceptionally opulent outfit, nor had he disguised himself to look like a handsome and elegant young man. Admittedly, he looked unattractive to girls, particularly young girls. However, he didn't mind this rejection at all. He simply stared at the Moon God Precious Tree as if he hadn't heard Ah Yuan's rejection.

"I'll stay." Someone volunteered suddenly. When the crowd turned to look at the volunteer, they were surprised to find that it was Holy Maiden Qingxuan, the disciple of the second sectmaster, and the most talented and outstanding holy maiden to date in the sect.

The crowd was slightly taken aback. What was Qingxuan trying to do? She had looked down on someone like Pill King Ji Lang, but now was volunteering to stay behind with this strange male? What on earth was she playing at?

"Qingxuan, stop fooling around." The second sectmaster had always intensely disliked men. This was especially true when the men in question were trying to approach her favorite pupil.

Xu Qingxuan was the disciple she treasured the most. How would she possibly allow the girl spend time alone with a man? However,

her disciple proved unusually stubborn this time.

“Please let me stay behind, master. Your disciple promises that she’ll be a good girl and not give you trouble, okay? I just want to know if this guy is putting on an act or not.”

Everyone knew of Xu Qingxuan’s temper. She might be naive, but one couldn’t deny that she had a certain cleverness. Some called her devious, but they couldn’t deny that she had an innocence within her. Some called her antisocial, but she could leave a deep impression when she spoke.

“Come then, Number Two. If Qingxuan wishes to stay, then just let her be. What, do you lack that much confidence in your favorite pupil?” The senior sectmaster said with a half smile on her face.

The second sectmaster couldn’t say anything against that. She shot Xu Qingxuan a glare. “Remember your promise and don’t cause trouble. Otherwise, I’m not promising you anything else in the future, you hear?”

“Don’t worry.” Xu Qingxuan chuckled.

Everyone eventually vacated the premises. Although the second sectmaster looked a little reluctant, she ultimately remembered her place and didn’t stay behind to supervise the two of them.

Jiang Chen sat cross-legged under the Moon God Precious Tree and stared fixedly at it.

“Alright, stop pretending already. Now speak, why have you asked me to stay behind? You’re pretty bold, aren’t you? It takes courage to send me a private message right before my master. Aren’t you afraid that she’ll give you a good beating?” Xu Qingxuan snorted cutely.

Jiang Chen smiled calmly. “Xu Qingxuan, your mother’s name is Xu Meng, isn’t it?”

“You… don’t bring up my mother!” Xu Qingxuan frowned slightly. “I’m warning you. Even if all of the Blues humiliate her,

an outsider like you doesn't have the right to do the same!"

Jiang Chen shook his head. He waved casually and dropped a storage ring in front of Xu Qingxuan. "There's something inside this storage ring. If you truly wish your mother well, then make sure to give it to her."

"What... what do you mean?" Xu Qingxuan was completely befuddled.

But Jiang Chen had already changed the subject. "Let's talk about the Moon God Precious Tree. How do you normally take care of the tree? What kind of people are the caretakers?"

"There's someone who tends to the Moon God Precious Tree every day. The caretakers are always the same people. That being said, one of the disciples who tended the tree passed away a few years ago, so a new disciple was sent to tend the tree."

"Hmm?" Jiang Chen frowned a little when he heard this. He seemed to have caught a clue.

Chapter 1122: A Deeply Confused Holy Maiden Qingxuan

Men were quite attractive when deep in thought. Surprisingly, Xu Qingxuan kept her mouth shut while Jiang Chen was contemplating deeply. All she did was stare at Jiang Chen while contemplating something.

First impressions were sometimes very important. The holy maiden couldn't help but feel that Pill King Ji Lang was too boastful and excessively vain no matter how she looked at him. The image of him being first under the heavens rubbed her entirely the wrong way. Meanwhile, Shao Yuan didn't use any flowery speech or wear flamboyant clothing. He didn't even flatter her in any form or manner either. Because of that, Xu Qingxuan noticed that he was truly engrossed with the Moon God Precious Tree instead of anything else.

She'd initially had her doubts about Shao Yuan, especially since he'd told her to remain through a mental message. She was completely on her guard. If he made any unwanted advances at her, she'd immediately resort to violence. However, things went completely against her expectations. He did hand something over to her, but it was meant for her mother. This unexpected outcome piqued her interest.

While she was completely engrossed with her own thoughts, Jiang Chen suddenly nodded and approached her. "Gather the caretakers of the Moon God Precious Tree. All of them. Leave no one behind."

Xu Qingxuan was upset that she was being ordered around by Jiang Chen. She was a holy maiden! Her authority was second only to the sectmasters. She was always the one who gave orders and not the other way around. A change flickered through her expression. She was about to fly into a rage, but she quickly

noticed that he wasn't looking at her at all as he was completely engrossed with the tree. She swallowed her grievances and reluctantly left to do Jiang Chen's bidding.

The servants immediately carried out the holy maiden's orders. It didn't take long before all of the caretakers were summoned. When the sectmasters heard that Jiang Chen had asked to see the caretakers, they returned for a look. They were worried that Jiang Chen would push the blame onto these disciples.

According to various tests done by the other pill kings, there were no signs of tampering with the tree. If Pill King Shao Yuan pushed the blame to these innocent caretakers, it'd be incredibly unsightly. The sectmasters would never allow that to happen. It might cause the disciples to grow suspicious of each other, resulting in internal conflict within the sect.

Jiang Chen was a little taken aback when he noticed the sectmasters' return. However, he kept his calm and made no intentional glances at Xu Qingxuan. However, he couldn't help but have an inkling of worry that his sister might hand over the storage ring to her master. Fortunately, Xu Qingxuan did no such thing. She walked up to the sectmasters and acted as though nothing had happened between them.

"It was Sir Shao who gave me the order to assemble the caretakers."

The second sectmaster frowned. "What does he want?"

She wasn't worried that Jiang Chen had done something to her beloved disciple because it hadn't been long since they left. Even if he was up to something, there wasn't enough time for him to try any monkey business. She wasn't happy about the series of events, but she didn't pursue Xu Qingxuan about this matter.

Xu Qingxuan shook her head innocently. "He didn't tell me. Since he's the pill king and not me, I had no choice but to follow his orders."

The senior sectmaster approached Jiang Chen and spoke in a roundabout way. “Sir Shao, I guarantee that there’s no problem with the disciples who are charged with the care of our tree. Many pill kings have inspected our tree and ruled out foul play.”

Jiang Chen nodded without saying anything.

The caretakers had grave expressions on their faces. They were incredibly worried and anxious. Their conscience was clear, but they couldn’t help but worry because they were now suspects. The Moon God Precious Tree was simply too important to the sect. Nobody could afford to be careless. Therefore, they were all filled with grievances at Jiang Chen. He was clearly trying to create a problem out of thin air.

Jiang Chen swept his gaze across the caretakers. There were twelve in total. They worked in two shifts, one in the morning and one at night. The caretakers didn’t dare to say a word when his gaze swept past them. However, their eyes communicated their resentment perfectly.

Jiang Chen stopped abruptly when he set his gaze upon one of the caretakers. His expression immediately softened. “There’s the problem,” he clapped.

“What?” The senior sectmaster was taken aback.

The others stared at Jiang Chen nervously. They didn’t believe him at all.

“Holy Maiden Qingxuan, you mentioned that one of the caretakers had to be replaced years ago due to an unfortunate incident. She was replaced by this big sister over there, right?” Jiang Chen pointed at a particular caretaker.

Xu Qingxuan stared at the caretaker, completely dumbfounded. “How did you know?” She had mentioned that one of the caretakers had been replaced, but she hadn’t mentioned who!

The senior sectmaster was completely astounded. “Sir Shao, how

did you know?”

The caretaker was incredibly nervous and so full of dread that she immediately broke into tears. “S-sectmaster! T-this disciple is innocent! I swear to the heavens that I’ve not done anything to harm our sect’s precious tree! Wuuu!!”

The second sectmaster glared at Jiang Chen angrily. “Sir Shao, haven’t I told you that none of our caretakers are possibly at fault? Many pill kings have already concluded that there are no signs of foul play with our precious tree. Please stop trying to raise false alarms.”

Jiang Chen shrugged with a wry smile. “When did I ever say that she harmed your tree? Didn’t you arrive at that conclusion yourself?”

The second sectmaster was still fuming with anger but the caretaker had stopped crying. She glared at Jiang Chen resentfully. If you don’t think that I’ve harmed the tree, why point me out!?

Jiang Chen smiled awkwardly. “Ah, yes. What is your name?”

“Xu Shan.” The caretaking replied angrily.

Jiang Chen nodded and turned to face the senior sectmaster. “Senior sectmaster, I must congratulate the Moon God Sect. You have a very unique genius among your disciples.”

“What do you mean?” The senior sectmaster was baffled.

“Also, I’ve found the source of the problem.” Jiang Chen grinned.

The crowd was now completely mystified. What exactly did he mean?

Xu Qingxuan couldn't put up with this any longer. “Hey! Can you stop speaking in vague terms? Stop trying to play us for a fool like Pill King Ji Lang! Don’t make us look down on you!”

The senior sectmaster immediately reprimanded her. “Qingxuan,

is this how you're supposed to speak to a honored guest?"

Xu Qingxuan snorted and glared at Jiang Chen meanly. Jiang Chen was relieved to see how straightforward his little sister was. It meant that she'd retained some of her natural kindness and wasn't completely brainwashed by the sect yet. He didn't retort and turned to face the senior sectmaster. "It's very simple. The problem still lies with Big Sister Xu Shan. However, she didn't do it on purpose. In fact, she's the victim."

"Oh? Please explain," the senior sect master replied with humility.

The crowd collected themselves and listened earnestly. Xu Shan had also stopped crying and stared at Jiang Chen anxiously. She wanted to hear what he had to say. After all, he'd mentioned that she was an innocent victim.

Jiang Chen didn't leave his listeners hanging. "There's a bloodline called the Reverse Yin Yang Bloodline. Most women have bloodlines that are yin in nature, but there are also a few that have yang dominated. However, there's also a very special bloodline that allows one to freely switch between yin and yang blood. This is the Reverse Yin Yang Bloodline. I believe that Big Sister Xu Shan is in possession of this unique bloodline. Unfortunately, her blood could also be incorrectly identified as a mixed, useless bloodline, leading to a conclusion that she doesn't have much potential in martial dao. It's the reason why she was chosen as the caretaker of the Moon God Precious Tree, right? After all, it doesn't take much technique to take good care of the tree."

The sectmasters didn't have much of an impression of Xu Shan. After all, who would possibly pay attention to such an insignificant character? Taking care of the tree was a menial job. It may seem like an important task, but it was often delegated to high born sect members with low talent.

Others reacted rather blandly, but Xu Shan was completely

dumbfounded. Sir Shao's words were like he'd investigated her. Her clan had determined that she possessed a useless bloodline, which devalued her status within the clan greatly. If it wasn't for her clan's influence, she would never have been given the task of a caretaker.

Xu Shan was completely overcome by her emotions. Sir Shao was saying that she was in possession of a unique bloodline instead of a useless one! Her mind was in shambles. She was excited, yet also worried that that Sir Shao had made a mistake. She didn't want to get her hopes up for nothing. Meanwhile, the crowd was in a stupefied daze.

The senior sectmaster sucked in a deep breath after some moments had passed. "Sir Shao, how confident are you with your theory?"

"It isn't a theory. I'm merely stating the facts." Jiang Chen replied blandly.

Theory? Are you kidding me? I've already gone through all the theories and found nothing wrong. Why even bother with theories? He'd quickly got his certain answer when he laid eyes on Xu Shan.

The culprit was definitely Xu Shan's bloodline!

The crowd remained a little unconvinced despite Jiang Chen's confidence in the matter. Were things really as simple as that? Even though they remained somewhat unconvinced, they couldn't help but admit that no pill king before him had offered a theory from this angle!

Chapter 1123: Shocking the Entire Sect

Though Sir Shao Yuan's words erred on the side of the preposterous, he did open up an entirely new angle of attack.This was an approach that had never been tried before. The suspicions about him began to loosen. Could this young man possibly be speaking the truth? His confidence made it difficult to imagine he was just making it up. Unlike Pill King Ji Lang, he had spoken with surety.

The senior sectmaster took in a deep breath. "Sir Shao, if it is really as you say... how should we fix the problem?"

Jiang Chen waved a hand. "There's nothing to fix. The effects so far have been superficial at best and no lasting damage has been done. But... Big Sister Xu Shan won't be able to take care of the Moon God Precious Tree any more." He turned to the girl in question. "Your Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline should be well taken care of. Get a set of martial methods and principles tailored to you, and your future accomplishments will be limitless."

He looked back at the Moon God Sect's senior sectmaster. "That's at least part of the reason I was congratulating you, sectmaster. With this Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline in your Moon God Sect, you're sure to witness the birth of a new great personage sooner or later."

These words were like a clap of thunder, exploding within close vicinity of the audience. If it really was as Jiang Chen said, then Xu Shan's talent had been wasted for a long time. The senior sectmaster felt her ears ring. Too much information too quickly had that kind of effect, and she could scarcely take it all in. Had it really taken so little to find the reason for the Precious Tree's problem? And they'd received a martial dao genius on top of that? What kind of bloodline was the Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline? Despite her breadth of experience, she had never heard of such a thing. Was it really as wondrous as the young man was saying?

Xu Qingxuan had never heard of it, either. Probably none of the sectmasters have. But it was simply inconvenient for them to say that outright. She didn't care about that, though. She had few concerns to consider.

"Sir Shao, you've certainly been the most reasonable one so far, but... why does your theory sound like something out of a myth? What is the Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline? Can you tell me?"

It was impolite for Xu Qingxuan to ask this of him, given that Jiang Chen was a guest. However, her personality had naïve innocence woven into it. Any listeners would only hear the cute temperament of a little girl, taking nothing serious from the gesture.

Jiang Chen had a rather good impression of his little sister. Since she asked, he was ready to show off a bit. He knew that the better his performance was, the more likely that Xu Qingxuan might bring his storage ring to mother. It was an important outcome to ensure. Sinking into thought for a moment, he turned back to Xu Shan, his tone deliberate. "Big Sister Xu Shan, you're still very young, yes? Thirty at most, I'd wager."

It was normal for girls to find talk of their age embarrassing at any time. In the world of martial dao, thirty was equivalent to a child in normal terms. A very early stage of life. Even so, Xu Shan still visibly reddened. Her voice was as small as an ant's. "I'm twenty-eight this year."

"Hmm, twenty-eight. Good, you haven't missed the best time to cultivate yet. It would be a great shame if you were over sixty instead... both for you, and your bloodline." Jiang Chen carried on. "When you cultivated during your childhood, it must have been very difficult to gather spirit energy. Scattered energy was only one symptom, though. Oscillating between a hot dantian and an icy one must've been another. It had no pattern whatsoever, right?"

Xu Shan's eyes lit up. "Yes, yes, you know everything about it! What... what problem do I have?"

"The Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline is liable to cause such chaos if you don't have a good grasp of its characteristics. You need a set of cultivation methods tailored to you. If you go about it the normal way, you won't even get a fifth of the results of other people. In other words, even though you're one of the Moon God Sect's best talents, you've been reaping very little returns from your work. I'm not wrong about that, am I?"

Xu Shan began to cry once more. She'd experienced a great deal of abuse because of her cultivation. Remembering back on it saddened her. Being laughed at by one's peers, being abandoned by one's family, being sidelined by everyone in general... this kind of mass rejection was hard for anyone to deal with, much less a girl.

Nobody had cared about her feelings these past few years. Nobody had cared about her suffering. And yet, a total stranger had been the one to speak these caring words to her. And a prominent pill king, at that! Her past anguish was brought to the forefront again. It was very cruel to be presented with such awful outcomes despite her prime talent.

Xu Shan had been aiming resentment at Jiang Chen at first. She thought that he was putting on an act in order to push the blame onto her, that she was going to be made a scapegoat. She felt ashamed to have thought that, now. She had been wrong about this Sir Shao, her mindset too narrow. From beginning to end, the young pill king had shown zero antagonism towards her. Quite the opposite, he actively proved her innocence. If this had occurred in private, Xu Shan would've had no qualms about kneeling down in gratitude to him.

Each and every cultivator dreamed of becoming a genius one day, regardless of gender. Xu Shan's had been crushed before it could bloom. How painful it must have been! The silence from the audience following the revelation was palpable. The senior

sectmaster sighed softly. Her mouth moved as if to say something, but she swallowed those unformed words.

The second sectmaster, on the other hand, seemed dissatisfied still. “Your version of things is untested. Do you have any proof?”

Jiang Chen bore no goodwill towards the second sectmaster, who was also Xu Qingxuan’s master. This woman was indubitably a Blue Moon forefather, and the person responsible for shattering his father and mother’s marriage. It was more than likely that she had also ordered his mother’s house arrest and his little brother’s exile as of late. On what basis could he have a good impression of her?

Still, he had no desire to engage in open warfare with her. “As a pill master,” he smiled faintly, “My job is to speak the truth. Whether you accept it or not is another matter. I had no intention of receiving any reward from you from the start. If one day I am proven correct, then do try to remember that Elder Jing Tianbo tried to help once upon a time. If not for his sake, I wouldn’t be here.”

His speech was a little pretentious, but he couldn’t exactly reveal his true intentions here. It was better to be circumspect and indirect. The jig was up if they found out that he was here for his mother. He didn’t want to waste all the effort he’d put in so far. Failure was not an option. Jiang Chen had no fear of antagonizing these people here. The only thing he was scared of was his parents’ inability to reunite once more. To him, it was a weighty matter of filial piety.

The senior sectmaster stopped the second sectmaster with a look. She stepped forward in inquiry. “Sir Shao, your explanation is very reasonable indeed. There’s just one question I’d like to ask: why does the Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline conflict with the Moon God Precious Tree? How should someone with the bloodline go about their cultivation?”

These were honest questions.

“No matter whether it’s leaning towards yin or yang reverse, the bloodline is intensely potent either way. Naturally, it does far more damage to the tree during yang reverse. The Moon God Precious Tree is a spirit plant characterized by extreme yin. The pure yang energy from the yang reverse process intrinsically inhibits it. You people know that already to a degree, yes? You’ve never sent male disciples to care for this tree, correct?”

The senior sectmaster looked thoughtful. Her expression shifted from confusion to convincement.

“As expected, Sir Shao, you’re a man of many talents and experiences. I’d wager that only you could’ve found the cause for our problem. We hereby thank you for your assistance. If you’d like any reward, feel free to let us know. We have both spirit stones and spirit herbs aplenty, and no sum is too great for your taking.”

Jiang Chen knew the promise was mostly only lip service. The sect wasn’t likely to comply with any outrageous demands. But he wasn’t here for a reward in the first place. “Never mind,” he waved a hand dismissively. “I’ve said before that material rewards are not my reason for coming here. I’m just glad that you believe me enough to trust me, senior sectmaster.”

“Hmm, alright. And the matter of the Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline, if I may be so bold?” the senior sectmaster added.

Jiang Chen nodded. “I’ll do a write up in a bit. Big Sister Xu Shan will understand as soon as she sees it. The Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline only looks chaotic, but there will be no problems whatsoever if she just follows the directions. When she grasps its principles, she’ll catch up to everyone else in no time–or pass them, really. Perhaps the Moon God Sect will gain another holy maiden in five years’ time.”

“Is that really possible?” The senior sectmaster was amazed. There were high standards for becoming a holy maiden, both

talent and bloodline wise.

Jiang Chen laughed heartily. “If you don’t believe me, then why not entrust Big Sister Xu Shan to me? I’ll provide her with a splendid future. I daresay you’ll regret it down the line, though!”

The girl in question let out a soft chirp, her face immediately reddening at those words. She clutched at the hems of her clothes, made anxious by the suggestion.

The senior sectmaster smiled. She could take an obvious joke. If this Sir Shao hadn’t described the Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline in such exaggerated terms, she would’ve had no problem handing Xu Shan over to him. But now, regardless of his claims’ truthfulness, she wasn’t willing to part with a potential holy maiden genius. Thinking this, of the sectmaster tossed Xu Shan a meaningful glance. What she saw unsettled her. Both Xu Shan’s expression and body language communicated embarrassment, but also a subdued, impulsive willingness to leave. That wasn’t a good sign.

This was not the time to call her out on it, though. From Xu Shan’s perspective, she’d just been rescued from the brink of uselessness and turned into a treasure. Anyone would feel overwhelming gratefulness in her situation. The sectmaster could also see that Sir Shao’s joke wasn’t exactly a call for ownership. Instead, it was an offer to help her cultivation, a chance at a brilliant future in martial dao.

To the side, Xu Qingxuan looked dumbfounded. She looked back and forth between Jiang Chen and Xu Shan. Suddenly, she became inexplicably unhappy. Not because of Xu Shan’s Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline, but rather Jiang Chen’s joke. The noble impression that he’d finally managed to erect in her heart showed signs of crumbling.

Girls’ hearts were eclectic things. Upon discovery of a man’s uniqueness, a girl tended to overanalyze each little action and statement that they made, imagining infinite possibilities. In other

words, an overactive imagination. Not that Xu Qingxuan's heart was moved, per se. The displeasure arose almost entirely out of her feminine instinct.

Chapter 1124: The Kiss Had Nothing to Do With Love

The senior sectmaster personally attended to Jiang Chen, and the latter stayed at Moon God Palace for another an hour. After refreshing himself with tea and snacks, Jiang Chen wrote down the appropriate cultivation method. His knowledge from his previous life was useful in this situation. He'd seen at least three with the Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline in his millions of years. In essence, the key to cultivating the Yin Yang Reverse Bloodline was timing. The cultivator would cultivate the arts of absolute yin at certain times and absolute yang at others.

When the arts of absolute yin and absolute yang was cultivated to the point where they began to fuse with each other, the bloodline would then start displaying its terrifying potential. It was to the extent where even someone with a top rate bloodline like Xu Qingxuan might not necessarily be able to surpass her.

After Jiang Chen passed what he wrote onto Xu Shan, he reminded her, "Big Sister Xu Shan, the Yin Yang Reverse bloodline is somewhat difficult to identify, but it is not as complicated to cultivate as you may think. You won't encounter any problems now that you possess the proper cultivation method and awareness of your bloodline. As long as you follow these instructions and cultivate hard for the next five years, your bloodline will fuse together and generate enough potential to makes the entire world envious. Remember, you don't need to feel self conscious. On the contrary, you should feel proud of yourself because you possess one of the greatest bloodlines there is in the entire world."

For a genius suppressed for a long time like Xu Shan, the rebuilding of one's confidence was of paramount important. If she lacked conviction, she might not be able to soar to the top as he told her she would. Cultivation was not an easy thing. And now,

Xu Shan's mind was a complete blank because excitement had taken over both her heart and body. She could only nod repeatedly in acknowledgement of Jiang Chen's words.

Jiang Chen knew that Xu Shan might not be able to remember anything he said because she was overly emotional right now. So, he turned around to face the senior sectmaster. "Senior sectmaster, her martial dao talent is perfectly fine. However, your aid is necessary to rebuild her confidence."

The senior sectmaster looked thoughtful. She was growing more and more impressed by this young man. His outstanding ability and self-conduct were clear for all to see. There were very few in the martial dao world who would do so much for a person they just met. Xu Shan wasn't an ugly woman, but her features were at best above average out of all of the female disciples. There was no reason Jiang Chen would set aside the prettier holy maidens of Moon God Sect and flatter Xu Shan alone if that was his intention.

This meant that Sir Shao was purely working from an angle of morality. He had absolutely no intentions of flattering Xu Shan and winning her favor, not to mention that she was neither exceedingly beautiful nor important enough to warrant some attention.

After finishing his cup of tea, Jiang Chen rose to bid his goodbye. The senior sectmaster personally saw him out, and Xu Shan insisted on walking with him a bit longer after they reached the entrance. The senior sectmaster was a little worried about Xu Shan, but she wasn't completely ignorant of the ways of the world. Sighing softly, she gave permission to Xu Shan to do as she pleased and left with her attendants first, leaving Xu Shan alone to send off Sir Shao.

Jiang Chen smiled when he saw the determination on Xu Shan's face. "Sister Xu Shan, you don't have to see me out. Just remember what I said and be confident in yourself. Your bloodline is one of the best bloodlines there are in the entire world."

Xu Shan nodded with reddened cheeks. Jiang Chen casually waved her goodbye and just about to step outside. Suddenly, Xu Shan broke into a small run and planted her soft, red lips against Jiang Chen's cheeks. Then, she drew back like a frightened rabbit and ran away embarrassedly before Jiang Chen could do anything.

Jiang Chen was a bit taken aback. He never imagined that Xu Shan would show him her gratitude in such a bold manner.

"Sir Shao, Xu Shan will never forget about the kindness you showed me today. In the future, you only need to say the word and I'll do my best to repay the favor I owe you today even at the cost of my life."

Jiang Chen relaxed when he heard Xu Shan's determined voice. It at least proved that she wasn't lacking in confidence, and that a long period of oppression had only served to ignite her ambition and her will to turn the tables. Her fighting will wasn't lost, and Jiang Chen was sure that she could become a new holy maiden in three to five years if she maintained this outlook.

……

Meanwhile, Xu Qingxuan was feeling a little down. That shouldn't have been the case, in fact she should've been happy since the Moon God Precious Tree was finally free from its ailments. But still, she couldn't help but feel a bit annoyed when she thought about that guy.

He's probably the only man who's never tried to curry favor with me from the moment he set foot in the sect. Normally Xu Qingxuan disliked having people fawning over her, but Pill King Shao Yuan was an exceeding outstanding person, so the complete lack of special attention had disappointed her a little. It wasn't that she was attracted to him, it was just in her nature as a girl to enjoy the attention of others.

I'm an outstanding person, right? He should've at least treated me with a bit of courtesy, right? But Jiang Chen had ordered her

around like a servant girl from the start. After all was said and done, he'd left without even bidding goodbye. Hmph, that self-important guy. Who knows, maybe he was planning to enter the Moon God Sect from the beginning. Xu Qingxuan recalled the storage ring Jiang Chen asked her to pass on to her mother.

Suddenly, a strong surge of curiosity made her itch to check the storage ring and uncover its mysteries. Still, she wasn't a girl who lacked principles. Her curiosity gripped her, but she didn't check the storage ring without permission.

Xu Qingxuan returned to her home gloomily and discovered the door of her mother's wooden house was closed.

"Mother, Xuan'er has returned." Xu Qingxuan greeted her mother dispiritedly before pushing through the door.

Holy Maiden Xu Meng was leaning against the window and staring at the beautiful scenery outside. Suddenly, she sighed. "Xuan'er, the magpies have been playing in the trees for a whole day. Has something happened?"

Xu Qingxuan was startled. Her mother's words was obviously not directed at anyone in particular, but... she did have some news with her. She lightly clenched the storage ring in her hand and hesitated. She didn't know if she should pass it to her mother.

"Xuan'er, I see that you're not looking so jewel. Is the Moon God Precious Tree still sick? You don't have to worry about it. You're just a young girl, and there are always things to worry about. Leave it to the sectmasters to worry about the tree."

Xu Qingxuan was a little angry when the tree was mentioned. "Mother, let's not talk about the tree, okay? We've found the root cause of its sickness."

"Oh? Then why are you still looking so depressed?" Holy Maiden Xu Meng didn't ask about the tree. She had zero interest in the Moon God Sect right now. The only thing she cared for was her

daughter's feelings.

"Ai, it's all because of..." Xu Qingxuan was about to speak Shao Yuan's name, but in the end she stopped herself from doing so.

"What is it? Did someone make you unhappy?"

"Yeah, that guy was pretty terrible." Xu Qingxuan muttered. She didn't really have a problem with Jiang Chen. It was just a nagging discomfort. For some reason, she couldn't get over the fact that he had treated Xu Shan with great courtesy, but not her, the foremost holy maiden of the Moon God Sect.

Truthfully, Xu Qingxuan wasn't unaware of Jiang Chen's attention. However, the attention she felt from him wasn't the admiration between a man and a woman, but a casualness that only existed between two people who were very familiar with each other. Generally speaking, this familiarity only existed between family members. No pretenses, no courtesies, and no affectations.

"What guy?" Holy Maiden Xu Meng smiled. "Strange. I thought your Moon God Sect normally forbade men from entering the core area, don't they?"

"Ai, I didn't know you're so gossipy, mother. We were inviting people to take a look at the Moon God Precious Tree, remember? That guy, well, it turns out he actually has some skill."

"Who on earth are you talking about..." Xu Meng said with a half smile on her face. She had no qualms with her daughter exploring the depths of love at all. After all, her daughter was over twenty years old already. In fact, she didn't even want her daughter to become a holy maiden in the first place. In Xu Meng's opinion, there were almost no normal people in the entire Moon God Sect. Nearly all of them were stone-hearted cultivators who had traded away their humanity for cultivation.

"Come on, tell me. Is he that Pill King... someone from Pillfire City? I think I heard his name being mentioned this morning."

“No, not him.” Xu Qingxuan didn’t feel an ounce of goodwill towards Pill King Ji Lang. “That guy’s just a self-centered braggart with no real knowledge.”

“Oh? Then who is it that you’re talking about?” Holy Maiden Xu Meng didn’t look like she would stop until she got the truth out of Xu Qingxuan.

“Mother… just don’t ask. He’s more interested in you than he is in me, you know.”

Holy Maiden Xu Meng’s face changed abruptly. “Xuan’er, how can you make such a distasteful joke to your own mother?”

“I’m not joking. I think that guy has a screw loose in his head. At first he told me to stay behind, and I thought he was going to confess to me or something like those other terrible men, but… he asked me if I’m Xu Meng’s daughter before giving me a storage ring. He told me to give it to you.”

“What did you say?” Xu Meng immediately grew agitated. “Where is the ring? Quickly, show it to me. What else did he tell you?”

“He didn’t say anything else. He simply told me to give you the ring if I truly care. Hmph, as if I need him to tell me that.” Xu Qingxuan pouted. Complaints aside, she didn’t dilly dally. She passed the storage ring to her mother.

When her mother accepted the ring and checked its contents, a shudder coursed through her entire body. A look of wild joy abruptly colored her features. She took out the item from the ring, which turned out to be a single earring. Holy Maiden Xu Meng’s hands and lips shook uncontrollably as she clutched the earring. It was obvious that her emotions were completely out of control.

“Mother, what… what’s wrong?” Xu Qingxuan was frightened by her change.

“It’s him… it’s him… Xuan’er, this is your father bringing me a

message! This... this earring is what I used to wear back at Jiang Han Province. When Moon God Sect took me away, the earring was lost in the scuffle. This is it, there's not mistake. Xuan'er, your father... your father has finally come to find me!" Xu Meng sounded incoherent. She was on the verge of a complete emotional breakdown.

Chapter 1125: Holy Maiden Xu Meng Crazed With Joy

Xu Qingxuan walked over to her mother and wanted to take a closer look at the earring. However, Xu Meng held it firmly in her hand and kept staring at it as though it was her sole source of happiness and the most precious thing in the world.

“Mother, can’t you let me take a small peek at it?” Xu Qingxuan’s curiosity was piqued. It took some time before Xu Meng could finally loosen her grip and place the earring gently into Xu Qingxuan’s hands. Her mother was treating it as the most fragile thing in the world.

Xu Qingxuan was also assailed by emotions. She understood that the earring represented the love and yearning between her parents. It was the symbol of hope. She didn’t dare to be careless when she was given the earring. It didn’t seem to be anything special, just a semi-precious accessory from the secular world. A true cultivator would never bother wearing such a thing.

“Xuan’er, this earring is definitely real. Who told you to you give this to me? W-what did he look like? He could very well be your father!” Xu Meng could no longer keep her composure.

“Ah mother, that man is very young. He isn’t even thirty years old yet. A fellow disciple called Xu Shan is twenty-eight years old, yet he called her big sister. This means that he isn’t even twenty-eight yet. How could he possibly be father?” Xu Qingxuan didn’t want to pour cold water on her mother, but she felt obligated to tell the truth.

Xu Meng wasn’t disheartened. “Even if he isn’t your father, he’s definitely your father’s friend. Otherwise, how can you explain this earring? Why would he especially bring it to me?”

She’d made a rather good point.

Xu Qingxuan sighed gently. “Mother, there are some things which I’ve yet to tell you. A few days ago, I sent someone to investigate the Eastern Kingdom. The Jiang Han territory continues to exist, but it doesn’t go by the surname of Jiang anymore. The duke of Jiang Han and Jiang Chen are longer there. The investigator said that they must’ve perished when the Eternal Celestial Capital attacked the Myriad Domain.”

“No! Impossible! This earring doesn’t lie!” Xu Meng remained resolute. “Your father is fine and so is your brother!”

“Mother, why don’t you check if there’s anything else in the storage ring?” Xu Qingxuan didn’t try to argue with her mother. There was little meaning in trying to disprove her mother’s staunch beliefs. Xu Meng suddenly recalled that there was something else in the ring. She took a glance and noticed a small note inside. Hardly able to contain herself, she immediately opened it.

Thirty years apart, thirty years of longing. Now I dwell in Frostmoon City, for I long to see you again. Only two sentences were written on the paper. There was no inscription, name, or anything to help identify the sender. However, Xu Meng immediately slumped to the ground and cried her heart out after reading it.

“Xuan’er, it really is your father! It’s his handwriting and his manner of speech! Xuan’er, I need to descend the mountain! I need to go to Frostmoon City!” She’d lost all strength from her limbs due to the great waves of emotion, but her voice remained incredibly resolute and unwavering.

Xu Qingxuan noted that there was no endearing words or pledge of eternal love within the two sentences. However, it contained all the pain and longing from their thirty years of separation. This was a great love that didn’t require grandiose gestures or flowery words.

Xu Qingxuan was deeply moved. If it really was her father's handwriting, then the love between her parents must be greater than anything else. They'd gone against all odds just so they could once again protect and care for each other. Not even time and space could separate them.

Jiang Feng's short message had been written after much deliberation. He'd previously written a letter filled with tens of thousands of words, but he realized that thirty years of longing couldn't be properly expressed with ink and paper. He quickly came to realize that words were superficial. He didn't know what his wife was thinking right now, but he was certain that her feelings hadn't changed.

If so, what was the point of writing so many words? After a lot of back and forth, he decided to write just two sentences. If their hearts were truly aligned, his wife would understand the depth within the two lines of words and come to meet him. If they were fated not to meet, she could keep it as a momento. Knowing about each other's safety was a million times better than knowing nothing about the other at all.

Xu Meng grabbed her daughter's hands tightly. "Xuan'er, didn't you say that you'll take mother down the mountain for some fresh air this morning? Well, mother has changed her mind. I want to go. Now!"

Xu Qingxuan understood that her mother had good reason to be excited, so she quickly spoke words of comfort. "Mother, since things are already at this point, I'll find a way to make it happen. However, we must remain vigilant and take things one step at a time. First of all, we need to consider if this is a trap or some kind of cruel joke. It's unlikely, but we need to be mentally prepared. Secondly, we must also take father's safety into consideration. If the sectmasters finds out that father has contacted us, the consequences would be unimaginable. Thirdly, we must also consider how we can let both of you reunite. I'll make sure to make

it happen even if I'll be punished for it."

"No! I cannot be so selfish! Both your father and I would never let you take punishment for our sake. We'll wait. One day, you'll become a sectmaster and you can then decide our fates."

Xu Qingxuan shook her head. "It'll take many centuries and millenniums before that happens. The sectmasters are still young, so it'll be many years before they retire. Neither of you have attained emperor realm either... I'm afraid time is not on your side..."

Xu Meng had abstained from cultivation. She had the talents of a holy maiden, but because of neglect in her martial dao, she hadn't even attained origin realm yet. As for Jiang Feng...

Xu Qingxuan hadn't met him yet, but the Eastern Kingdom was a place with limited martial dao aptitude. Even if he had a breakthrough, he was likely an origin cultivator at the very most. She couldn't help but worry about this problem. Her parents didn't have a lifespan as long as hers due to their limited cultivation level. They couldn't afford to wait for too long.

Deeply touched by the love her parents had for each other, she began to make bold elopement plans for them. She was determined to fulfill her mother's wish even if she'd be punished for it. She understood that her mother was going to reach the very limit of exhaustion one day. Her everyday life was filled with sadness and misery. Waking up everyday was a challenge in itself.

"Mother, don't worry. I'll make the arrangements. We'll leave by day break tomorrow." Her mind was set. She'd carry out her plan.

"Xuan'er, you must plan carefully. You mustn't get yourself entangled in my matters. The Moon God Sect doesn't contain even a shred of compassion. Once you're of no value to them, they have no qualms throwing you away like trash. Mother has experienced it firsthand," Xu Meng suddenly said. It was the first time she'd ever badmouthed the sect and served as a reminder for her

daughter.

“Mother, don’t worry… I know what I’m doing.”

“Xuan’er, even if we take a trip down the mountain, how are we supposed to find your father in a city as big as Frostmoon City?” Xu Meng was at a loss.

“Mother, I know where they are. The messenger Shao Yuan and Emperor Peerless are both currently staying at the sect’s first division at Frostmoon City. Father must be there too.”

The second sectmaster had extremely high expectations for Xu Qingxuan. Because of that, she’d begun to control and scrutinize her disciple’s every move. Xu Qingxuan found this very difficult to get used to. The second sectmaster was incredibly strict because she didn’t want her disciple to walk down the same path as the mother. When Xu Qingxuan asked for permission to take her mother down the mountains, her master turned her down without a second thought or consideration.

“Qingxuan, you need to think this through. Ill fate is as persistent as red dust. Let your mother’s misfortune serve as a bitter lesson for you!” The second sectmaster warned sternly.

Xu Qingxuan respected her master greatly and rarely went against her master’s orders. However, today was one of those rare days. She glared at her master fiercely. “Honored master, can you really blame my mother for her actions? She was merely an infant when she left the Moon God Sect! How could she have known? What happened after that was a continuation of fate!” She felt that it was time speak a word on her mother’s behalf.

The second sectmaster stared at Xu Qingxuan in utter disbelief. She never imagined that her obedient disciple would actually talk back at her! Xu Qingxuan hadn’t said anything wrong, but to the second sectmaster, it was an act of defiance and disrespect.

“Qingxuan, have you finally learned to disrespect your master?”

Her voice was harsh and cold.

Xu Qingxuan held her head high, exposing her snowy white neck. “Honored master, I’ve had enough! Everyone has been criticizing my mother ever since the day I could speak! They clearly know that it wasn’t her fault, yet they continue to blame, belittle, and mock! Has nobody once thought that she was actually innocent? Even if she was at fault, at the end of the day, she’s still my mother! Moreover, hasn’t she given a holy maiden to the sect as a replacement already? She has repaid her debts to the sect and then some!” Xu Qingxuan yelled at the top of of her lungs, venting her frustrations and anger that had accumulated over the years.

The second sectmaster was completely dumbfounded by her disciple’s sudden outburst. Xu Qingxuan’s words had thawed some of the compassion that she’d long sealed in ice. Indeed, had Xu Meng truly sinned?

Was it really appropriate to blame everything on her? Even if she’d truly sinned, hadn’t her sins been washed away when she gave her daughter, an even more impressive holy maiden, to the sect? The second sectmaster was suddenly at a loss for words. She understood her disciple very well. Xu Qingxuan would definitely rebel if pushed too far.

The second sectmaster let out a long sigh. “You may make a trip down the mountain with your mother. But remember, you must be back within three days and you mustn’t leave the confines of Frostmoon City. Otherwise… you’ll be punished according to sect rules.”

Chapter 1126: On the Verge of Coming Out

Xu Qingxuan's first and only time getting angry at her master had achieved rather unexpected results. For once, her master had acquiesced. She was surprised, to be sure, but also a little contrite.

"I'm sorry, master. I lost control of my emotions just now." As a fundamentally kind-hearted girl, she decided to apologize after the fact.

The second sectmaster looked bleak. Xu Qingxuan's tirade had seemingly struck a chord. "You can go, Qingxuan."

Xu Qingxuan's heart was filled with uncertainty by her master's display. Not daring to say anything further, she merely nodded and walked out. When she mentioned the incident to her mother, Xu Meng was just as startled as her daughter. She did not believe that the Blue Moon forefather could suddenly have had a change of heart. It was virtually impossible to appeal to her conscience. It's more likely that she was worried about Qingxuan's potential rebelliousness. Xu Meng was deeply prejudiced against the Moon God Sect. This was especially true for the forefather of the Blues, the second sectmaster.

It was scarcely dawn the next day when Xu Meng began to hurriedly put her baggage together. Aware exactly how anxious her mother was, Xu Qingxuan did not delay a single moment. She woke up just as early as her mother had, and led the way down the mountain after a very brief wash-up.

The gatekeeping disciples all showed mild surprise at the supposedly grounded Holy Maiden Xu Meng's departure, but with Holy Maiden Qingxuan as her guide, who dared stop her? The journey out of the Moon God Sect's mountainous domain was surprisingly smooth.

Elsewhere, within the sect's sacred grounds...

The forefather of the Blue Moon faction occupied in a lofty position, looking into the direction that Xu Qingxuan had departed in. Her expression was stoic and impenetrable. It was hard to tell what she was really thinking.

“Forefather, you could’ve stopped them from leaving if you’re not happy about it. I think that Xu Meng is a bad influence on Holy Maiden Qingxuan. In my opinion, we should permanently separate the two. Why let them see each other?” An old woman stood behind the forefather of the Blues, her voice as discordant as a broken cymbal.

Though the forefather of the Blues was named such, she still appeared rather youthful. Despite her age, she’d retained much of her charm. The Blue Moon forefather sighed softly at the old woman’s words. “Sure, it’s easy enough to physically separate them. But it’s much more difficult to cut off their connection in Qingxuan’s heart. We’ve tried to brainwash her for so many years, yet she is still closest to her mother. It’s something in her blood, and nothing that a crude barrier will do.”

“I’m simply worried that that witch Xu Meng will lead Qingxuan down the wrong path too,” the old woman muttered. “Qingxuan is such an innocent girl. For her to be exposed to the karmic ties of the world… it is not good for her cultivation, not good at all.”

“Hmph. Qingxuan’s own fortunes will decide for her. If she really lacks even the littlest bit of mental fortitude, that means she wasn’t the best holy maiden candidate after all.” The forefather’s words became chilly. She was transparently disgusted with the possibility. Once probability became certainty, she would toss Xu Qingxuan aside without hesitation. There were other holy maidens to pay attention to. The forefather was at the peak of her power and had plenty of time to find a different successor.

“Shall I keep watch and follow them?” The old woman volunteered.

“No need. Unless I go personally, there won’t be any results from it.” The Blue Moon forefather shook her head, visibly disdaining the suggestion.

The old woman sighed again. “I really do hope that Qingxuan understands what’s good for her. She better avoid any self-degradation.”

“Granny Ku, don’t prattle on about Xu Meng in front of Qingxuan any more. Qingxuan, she… she’s becoming more and more rebellious. Honestly, about Xu Meng, about the past… strictly speaking, Xu Meng wasn’t entirely at fault. It was the capriciousness of fate.”

This was a rare impartial remark.

“Don’t blame yourself, forefather,” the old woman beseeched promptly. “Even if it was fate, that just means Xu Meng has a bad destiny. It was a result of evils she committed in her past life. So, it doesn’t matter. It’s still her fault. If she sincerely admits her mistakes and wholeheartedly listens to your arrangements to atone, then she could’ve become one of the Blues’ best assistants to our very own Qingxuan. What a shame that she’s given up on herself and wallows in filth. She doesn’t think about how to change. How wrong she is!”

The granny had resorted to sophistry. To her, the reasoning of the Blue Moon faction was truth incarnate. That Xu Meng missed her husband and was unwilling to compromise with the Moon God Sect was an original sin.

This was an awfully shameless form of logic and very high-handed. After all, Xu Meng had been lost since childhood. Her life and growth had nothing to do with the Moon God Sect. What sense of commonality and identity could she feel towards it?

Quite the opposite in fact: the appearance of the sect had completely destroyed her life, turning it flatly upside-down. Her freedom was taken away, her marriage and family shattered. Xu

Meng was the biggest victim in all this. And yet, the Moon God Sect had made her daughter their holy maiden. They were reaping the fruits of Xu Meng's labor.

Xu Meng couldn't remember how many days she'd not departed the Sacred Blue Moon Mountain. The sight of the cityscape before her was somewhat surreal. She hung tightly onto Xu Qingxuan's arm. "Xuan'er, am I dreaming?"

"Look, mother. There's so many people on this street. Some are crying, some are laughing, some are shouting, and some are hawking their wares. Doesn't seem like a dream to me. This is real, right. We're already at Frostmoon City." Xu Qingxuan was a little tense. Her parents' reunion had been a dream of hers since time immemorial, so she couldn't help her anxiety when the time actually came. She wanted to know what her father looked like. However, she was also worried that this was all a deception. She could take it psychologically, but could her mother do the same?

I hope this is real, I really do... mother is such a kind person. The heavens wouldn't toy with her any more than it already has, no way. Xu Qingxuan tried to convince herself.

Before long, Xu Qingxuan and her mother arrived at the gates of the first division. Holy Maiden Qingxuan's descent upon Frostmoon City was a piece of tremendous news. Countless cultivators were mobilized by it from every direction, vying for a closer look. Everyone wanted to know what the so-called foremost holy maiden of the Moon God Sect looked like. How awe-inspiring was her presence, really?

The density of curiosity caused the streets near the first division to become increasingly crowded.

"Wow, it's an immortal beauty in the flesh!"

"Huh? How come there are two of them? And they look so alike, too."

“They look like sisters! Even a single one is exceedingly rare, much less a pair.”

“That’s their foremost holy maiden, alright. I have no words to describe her with!”

The holy maidens of the Moon God Sect paid great attention to the nurture of their disposition and temperament. When their appearance was added to the mix, the ensemble was positively breathtaking. In the eyes of earthly cultivators, a holy maiden of the Moon God Sect was an otherworldly immortal. The Moon God Sect actively encouraged this kind of perception in order to maintain its veneer of mystery and grandeur.

Xu Qingxuan’s unannounced appearance within Frostmoon City heated up the atmosphere. Every observer present thought it was worth their while. As expected, the holy maiden’s manner, posture, and demeanor were perfect beyond criticism. A wave of people suddenly rushed out from the first division’s gates. At their head was Third Master Jing, who paused momentarily upon seeing Xu Qingxuan.

The third master was the vice head of the first division, but he had only seen the holy maiden once before, in passing. It was the first time he had the chance to take a good look at her. For a moment, he lost his composure.

“Thank you for gracing us with your presence, Holy Maiden Qingxuan. I do apologize for my lack of decorum.” Apologizing profusely for his lack of manners, Third Master Jing ushered Xu Meng and Xu Qingxuan inside. There was a wave of disappointed sighing in the street as the young holy maiden exited their vicinity, the crowd’s eyes clearly yet unsated.

Xu Qingxuan didn’t feel much about the third master’s niceties. She cut straight to the chase. “Is Pill King Shao Yuan here or not?”

“Ah, yes, he is.” Third Master Jing quickly nodded. Coincidentally, a person came into view at the end of a hallway

ahead. It was Jiang Chen.

The young man himself was greeted with a welcome sight. Xu Qingxuan had in tow a woman who looked exactly like her. The only differences were an increase in both maturity and tenderness. His heart shook. Mother?

Still, he kept both his wits and composure. It wasn't the right time for them to reveal to each other their identities. There was too much of a crowd.

"Holy Maiden Qingxuan, I've waited for you awhile."

Xu Qingxuan petted her mother's back very softly, a gesture meant to calm her down. Xu Meng retained her poise, knowing the inconvenience that stemmed from the excessive onlookers. She pushed down the emotions that were welling up within her, and strode in arm-in-arm with her daughter. The strength in her feet waned with each step, and she found it more and more difficult to move. Emotional exertion, rather than physical weakness, sent her into temporary shock.

Jiang Chen was assured all the more by this display that she was indeed his biological mother. He felt both anguish and relief. His mother was evidently just as excited as he was. Like his father, she could hardly contain herself. The span of three decades was not nearly enough to break the bonds of love. Love was an overwhelmingly potent force, the unrelenting drive behind their looming reunification.

Third Master Jing was astute enough to wave and shout in dismissal. "All of you can go now."

The first division's personnel dispersed immediately. The third master looked back at Jiang Chen fawningly. "Brother Shao, I'll take my leave now. Just let me know if you need me."

Jiang Chen didn't oppose Third Master Jing's self-expulsion. There was no need for any outsiders in their vicinity.

After no one remained in their general surroundings, Xu Qingxuan tossed Jiang Chen a slightly resentful glare. “You’re the messenger, right? Can you tell us who sent you now?”

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. “Come with me.”

Xu Meng couldn’t wait any more. “Brother Shao,” she asked frantically, “do you… do you know my husband? Are you acquainted with my dear Feng?”

“Er, please.” Jiang Chen hastily interrupted. “Really, please don’t call me ‘brother Shao’.”

“What?” Xu Qingxuan was instantly displeased. “You’re not happy with an honorific like that? Do you know how much of an unseen advantage you have over me because of it? It’s an entire generation’s worth, you know?”

“I would, ah…” Jiang Chen laughed helplessly. “Really prefer not to at all, if I can.”

The bravest man in the world wouldn’t let their mother call them ‘brother’. That was too much chaos for any man to handle.

Chapter 1127: Reunited

Xu Qingxuan's lip curled, but she didn't give him a reply. She supported her mother as they walked towards the back garden. "Mother, you absolutely must stay calm, alright? No matter what happens, please remember that your daughter is right by your side."

Xu Meng nodded repeatedly while saying, "I know, I know." However, she literally couldn't be more nervous than she was right now.

They quickly arrived at the entrance to the garden. A person suddenly ran out from behind a nearby flower rack and screeched to a halt, staring at Xu Meng and Xu Meng only. They felt as if the entire world had come to a standstill as they stared into each other's eyes. It had been thirty years. It had been an eternity.

Xu Meng's tears fell like raindrops as she whispered, "My dearest Feng."

"Meng'er!" Jiang Feng shed manly tears, and he rushed forwards to hold Xu Meng in a tight embrace. He was afraid that a sudden breeze would suddenly rip away the scene in front of his eyes like a dream.

They had been separated for thirty years and were reunited thirty years later. The outpour of emotions was something no language in the world could possibly describe. The only way they knew to express it to the utmost was to hug each other as tightly as they could.

"My dearest Feng, Meng'er isn't dreaming, is she? Meng'er definitely isn't dreaming, is she?" Xu Meng whispered quietly and shakily.

"It is not a dream, Meng'er. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting for so long. The heavens have taken pity on us and reunited our

family once more. This is fate, Meng'er. This can be nothing else but fate." Jiang Feng's voice was just as shaky and emotional as Xu Meng's.

Xu Qingxuan's eyes turned a little wet. Her body trembled a little with emotion. The human heart was made of flesh, so how could she not be overjoyed to see her father and mother reuniting with each other once more? She had never seen her mother as happy as she was today since young. It was as if her entire body was smiling and reverberating with happiness. It was a kind of happiness that Xu Qingxuan had never seen until now.

Xu Qingxuan wiped the tears from her eyes for a second before abruptly recalling that Jiang Chen was right beside her. She hurriedly tamped down her feelings and shot a slightly chastising glance at him. However, she noticed that his eyes were red as well. "Hey, don't you think you should be... somewhere else? This is a private matter, you know. Also, what on earth are you crying about?"

Xu Qingxuan was confused by Jiang Chen's reactions. I'm crying because my parents have reunited with one another, but why are you, a messenger, crying? Don't you think you're a little too absorbed in the drama?

Jiang Chen was greatly amused by Xu Qingxuan's reaction. "Is there a rule that says that your parents can't be my parents?"

At first, Xu Qingxuan didn't understand his meaning. What? My parents are your parents? Are you taking advantage of me, boy?

She thought so was because the parents of one's spouse counted as the other spouse's parents as well. However, when she saw that Jiang Chen was completely serious and not looking like he was taking advantage of her in the slightest, her mind abruptly turned blank. There was a buzz inside her head, but she was unable to decipher its meaning immediately.

"Oh Holy Maiden Qingxuan, foremost holy maiden of Moon God

Sect. Do you think I'm worthy enough to be your older brother?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

"What? You..." The answer cut through the fog in Xu Qingxuan's head like lightning.

My brother? Shao Yuan is... my... brother? Xu Qingxuan turned to look at her father, then back at Jiang Chen. For a time, she was completely speechless.

By now Jiang Feng and Xu Meng had managed to rein in their emotions a little. Their father happily led their mother by the hand towards them. "Meng'er, today is truly the happiest I've ever been in the past thirty years, for we are not the only ones who have reunited with one another. Chen'er, come quickly and pay your respects to your mother!"

Jiang Chen dared not dilly dally as he smiled at Xu Meng, strode towards her and knelt on the floor, kowtowing. "Your child, Jiang Chen, greets you, mother."

Xu Meng's emotions skyrocketed yet again as her eyes turned red. "Jiang Chen? You're... you're Chen'er?"

She flung herself at Jiang Chen and hugged him. She pulled him to her bosom and rained kisses on him. For an instant, Xu Meng felt as if she had travelled back in time nearly thirty years ago. At the time, Chen'er was but a breastfeeding baby and knew only baby talk. It was as if time had rolled back to nearly thirty years ago.

"Oh, Chen'er, my poor child. I have done so much wrong to you and your father. Come, Chen'er, let me see you." Xu Meng shed tears while holding Jiang Chen's head.

This was obviously not the time to care about his disguises, so Jiang Chen pulled off his mask and revealed his true face. It was obvious that he resembled both his father and his mother, excluding the parts of his figure that had developed from his

growth. He had sharp, straight eyebrows that framed bright eyes, a sharply defined face, and a bearing that bespoke of something extraordinary. He was starting to look like a man who surpassed the greatest young geniuses in the Upper Eight Regions in every way.

Xu Qingxuan was completely stunned as she stared at the face that shared a bit of resemblance to hers. Is he really my older brother? Is he really Jiang Chen? I didn't realize my brother is this handsome and graceful! His cultivation is nothing like the small place they call the Eastern Kingdoms at all... Her thoughts were in disarray.

Xu Meng smiled through her tears and nodded repeatedly, "Good boy, good boy. You share your father's features, but you are even more handsome than he is."

Jiang Feng chuckled foolishly. "But of course! He is my son, isn't he? Meng'er, you may not know this, but our son is not inferior to... to... he's not inferior in the slightest..."

The man looked at Xu Qingxuan with eyes filled with fatherly love. Xu Meng finally realized something and beckoned her daughter to come closer. "Xuan'er, what are you waiting for? Come and pay your respects to your father!"

Xu Qingxuan wasn't heartless. Looking embarrassed, she walked closer towards them before kneeling. "Father, I've been jealous of you for the longest time, you know? Mother misses you every day. But it's all worth it to see how happy she is today."

"Haha, good, good! It didn't occur even in my dreams that I, Jiang Feng, would have such an amazing son and daughter. Meng'er, everything we've endured until now is worth it. Chen'er, you are your sister's elder brother. You better take good care of her from here on out, you hear?" Jiang Feng said.

Jiang Chen smiled slightly. "I don't know, father. My sister is the holy maiden, so maybe she is the one who should be taking care of

me.”

Xu Qingxuan snorted softly. “You’re a smooth talker, I see. You want me to call you my brother? Well, don’t say I didn’t give you a chance. Beat me at something and I’ll do that without qualms.”

He smiled. “Of course. But how should we compete?”

“Don’t you even think about pill battles. Let’s compete in martial dao!” Xu Qingxuan knew that there was no way she could beat her stinky brother in pill dao.

Xu Meng put on a straight face and chided. “Xuan’er, stop it. How can you talk to your brother like this?”

Xu Qingxuan giggled. “Oh mother, it’s only been minutes since you’ve seen your son and you’re playing favorites already! Hmph, I don’t care. He must beat me first if he wants me to call him brother. Otherwise, I’ll add the word ‘stinky’ and call him ‘stinky brother’ every time we see each other!”

Xu Meng looked a bit embarrassed as she looked at Jiang Feng. “My dearest Feng, I’m sorry. I think I spoiled Xuan’er too much. She’s not a bad person, but she can be pretty sharp tongued sometimes.”

Jiang Feng laughed loudly. “She’s a girl, isn’t she? It won’t do if she doesn’t have a bit of a temper. Chen’er, you better work hard to earn your status, you hear? It won’t be easy to be Qingxuan’s brother.”

Xu Meng rolled her eyes at Jiang Feng. “What kind of father are you? Stop sowing discord between our children!”

Jiang Feng couldn’t stop smiling. “I’m just kidding, Chen’er. You have nothing to be worried about at all. Sure, Xuan’er is a holy maiden, but Chen’er is no small fry himself. Do you know that Chen’er has a second identity? He’s Pill King Zhen, also known as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Veluriyam Capital.”

“What?” This time Xu Qingxuan was completely stunned. “What

did you just say, father?”

Jiang Feng rubbed his own nose. “Well Chen’er, please explain things to your sister, will you?” He threw the responsibility to his son.

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. “It’s a long story, and I still need to keep this identity a secret. I had to do something in Pillfire City earlier, and Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City are sworn enemies. That’s why I disguised myself as Shao Yuan now.”“Are you really Pill King Zhen?” Xu Meng cocked her head and stared at Jiang Chen. “Did my stinky brother really beat that Pill King Ji Lang?”

“Your one and only,” Jiang Chen joked. He didn’t put on airs. He briefly explained his experiences, with a white lie that the reason he possessed his extraordinary talents today were all thanks to his non-existent “teacher”.

A story made up of half-truths and half-lies was generally more interesting than the truth itself. Xu Qingxuan was quickly absorbed in Jiang Chen’s legendary tale.

“Brother, you mentioned that a mysterious old man had taught you your martial dao and pill dao, right? Did he come from Myriad Abyss Island? Does Myriad Abyss Island really exist in this world?”

“It does. It definitely exists.” This was one thing Jiang Chen could ascertain because Huang’er herself came from Myriad Abyss Island.

A hint of fascination passed through Xu Qingxuan’s clear eyes. “It would be worth all the hardships of cultivation if I can visit that mysterious place one day.”

Jiang Chen smiled. “Don’t worry, you’ll definitely be able to go there one day.”

“Really? Did you teacher promise to bring you there, brother?” The light of expectation appeared in Xu Qingxuan’s pupils.

“We don’t need his help. We can go there ourselves when our

strength reaches a certain level. There are no place in the world that's inaccessible if you have enough strength."

Before Xu Qingxuan knew it, she was starting to address Jiang Chen willingly as her brother.

Xu Meng was very gratified to see how excellent her son had turned out. She looked at her daughter. "Xuan'er, from today onwards, you are to remember that your surname is Jiang. The name I gave you at your birth, is Jiang Xuan."

However, Jiang Feng remarked, "Names are unimportant, we are. There is no need to be hasty, Meng'er. Xuan'er is still a holy maiden of Moon God Sect, and it isn't something we can change immediately."

Jiang Chen agreed with his father's sentiment. "Mother, for now sister's name is among the lower priority. Incidentally, would you happen to know where our younger brother is?"

Xu Meng's eyes brimmed with infinite sadness once more. It was one of the wounds she suffered during her miserable life, and one that wasn't healed just yet.

Chapter 1128: Homeward

Xu Qingxuan quickly interjected when she saw her mother's heartbroken figure. "Stop asking mother about our younger brother. When the sect expelled him, mother was under house arrest and didn't get to see him off. She wasn't allowed to have any form of contact with him at all..."

Therefore, nobody had any leads on his whereabouts.

"Meng'er, could the Moon God Sect have... expelled him from their territory and sent someone to secretly..." Jiang Feng suddenly added.

Xu Meng immediately shook her head. "The sect is definitely capable of such acts if there are no possible repercussions, but they didn't resort to such measures because of Xuan'er. They didn't want her to hold a grudge against them. That loss would outweigh the gain. It's also why I was never harmed even though they slandered me and put me under house arrest for so many years."

"I see. That's good to hear." Jiang Feng bore great hatred for the Moon God Sect, but it wasn't appropriate for him to spew hatred against the sect as his daughter was a holy maiden.

"As long as my younger brother is alive, we'll find him one day. I assure you." Jiang Chen said convincingly. He was extremely resolute. His family of five would one day be complete without a single missing member.

The family spent the rest of the day in great harmony after their reunion. Xu Meng was worried at first that her daughter might kick up a fuss or do something out of character, but that didn't happen. Her daughter was very sensible. They stayed indoors for three whole days to enjoy this hard-earned familial bliss. They didn't even take a single step out of the first division.

"Mother, I promised master that I would leave for only three

days. Will you be... going with father to Veluriyam Capital?" Xu Qingxuan knew that she'd have to ask this sooner or later.

Xu Meng was hesitant. If it were up to her, she'd definitely choose to always follow her husband instead of staying in a forsaken place like the Moon God Sect. But what of her daughter if she left like this? She loved her daughter just as much as she loved her husband and son.

Jiang Feng smiled as he held Xu Meng's hand. "Meng'er, Jiang Chen and I have already discussed this. We will return to the Capital first, while you and Xuan'er return to the sect."

Xu Meng was taken aback. She thought that her husband would insist on taking her away.

"Father, you should take mother with you. The sect will not punish me too harshly. A little bit of punishment is nothing for my parents' sake." Xu Qingxuan was determined.

"If we take mother with us right now, that would be eloping. It'd be dishonorable to mother and puts you in a difficult situation. Father doesn't want to elope with mother like a good-for-nothing. One day, father and I will come to the sect and openly ask for her. Nobody will be able to or dare hinder us then!" Jiang Chen was even more steadfast. His voice was filled with sway and dominance.

Jiang Feng nodded. "Meng'er, this is a promise from Chen'er and I. The day will not be too far away. We have to protect your reputation and prevent Xuan'er from getting dragged in. We must do this in an upright and honorable manner so that we may come together openly as a family again."

Xu Meng didn't want to be separated from her husband again, but she was sensible enough to understand that if she insisted on leaving with her husband, it would negatively affect her daughter and cause an enormous mess in the grander scheme of things. It wasn't time to show their cards yet. Jiang Chen still couldn't

afford to reveal his identity as there was no guarantee that the Moon God Sect would yield just a young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Once his identity was exposed, Pillfire City would absolutely try to hunt him down madly during his journey back to the capital. Moreover, Pillfire City was the first place he'd have to pass through on his way back.

Xu Meng couldn't bear to be separated. Tears dotted her face as she bid farewell. In spite of that, she was in a much better mood this time compared to thirty years ago. After all, they were only parting today for the sake of a better tomorrow.

Jiang Chen was also a little depressed after he sent his mother and sister off. He'd made such a decision due to the lack of a better choice. As a son, he didn't want to see his parents apart from each other. But due to various complications, they had no choice but to bide their time for now. But he didn't intend to sit idly by and wait. He was going to pick up the pace and reunite his entire family within five years at the latest.

Emperor Peerless also knew about Jiang Chen's family situation. He offered words of comfort when he saw how depressed Jiang Chen was. "Little brother, I don't know how to console you, but if you need my help, all you need to do is ask. I'll invite every eminent wanderer in the cultivation world and we'll pressure the Moon God Sect together!"

The emperor's words lifted Jiang Chen's spirits. "Old Brother Mo, don't worry. A small matter like this doesn't need such drastic actions. This trip has left me with few regrets. I've found both my parents and now they know about each other's existence. I only have a small small regret left, but I'll soon find a way to fix it. Old Brother Mo, you must be getting anxious after so many years of waiting. Tomorrow, we shall journey back to Veluriyam Capital!"

Third Master Jing was depressed when he heard that they were

leaving. If possible, he'd rather have them stay permanently in Frostmoon City, but that wasn't realistic. He didn't know for certain who Jiang Chen was, but he had a few hunches. All he knew was that Brother Shao definitely had an extraordinary background. Otherwise, there was no way Emperor Peerless would willingly be the young man's henchman.

At the beginning, Jiang Chen's impression of Third Master Jing was so rotten that he'd almost killed the man. But as time went on, they slowly became friends.

"Old Third, I once considered you an enemy, but now I think we can say that we're friends. I'll spare you the common courtesies. Holy Maiden Qing Xuan will keep an eye on your matters from now on." Jiang Chen turned to face Captain Gu. "Captain Gu, you are now Emperor Peerless' foster son. Nobody in the Moon God Sect will give you trouble anymore. However, you should become more sociable and open, make more friends. It'll only benefit you."

Gu Xintang listened to Jiang Chen's advice intently and nodded with affirmation as he'd also realized that Sir Shao was the true leader of the group. Even his foster father followed his lead and acted according to his wishes.

"If you face any problems, seek out Holy Maiden Qing Xuan." Jiang Chen advised once again.

Third Master Jing and Gu Xintang had both contributed a lot to the family's reunion. Since they were both of the Blues, it was a given that they'd seek Holy Maiden Qingxuan's help. She'd also help them because of their involvement in her parent's matters. After that, Jiang Chen handed a single Pinecrane Pill to both of them.

"These pills are for you. Remember, you mustn't show it to anyone or you'll bring doom down upon yourselves. I won't tell you the name of the pill as neither of you need to use it for now. If you're still in the emperor realm after a few thousand years and

your lifespan is at its end, you may consume the pill and extend your lifespan by at least thousand more years."

A pill that extended an emperor cultivator's life by a thousand years? Complicated expressions crossed Gu Xintang and Third Master Jing's faces. Their breathing grew more rapid as well.

"You heard that right. Emperor realm, not sage realm. Remember, you have to keep it a secret, or else..." Jiang Chen patted their shoulders without finishing his sentence.

"Mm." Third Master Jing and Gu Xintang nodded. They'd realized the pill's value. There was a similar pill called the Longevity Pill for the sage realm. It'd taken the martial dao world by storm in recent years. However, nobody had ever heard of a similar pill for the emperor realm. This was truly an eye-opener. They never imagined that there'd be one for emperors too! It was a priceless pill that no amount of money could possibly buy.

"Don't look down on this pill. It isn't something that can be mass produced. It's completely different from the Longevity Pill. The raw ingredients for this pill are already worth a million times more than the Longevity Pill. It's also extremely difficult to obtain. There's only a few of these in the world."

Both now understood just how precious the pill was. To put in into simpler terms, it was a lifesaving pill. Jiang Chen didn't say anything else. He waved them goodbye and left immediately after.

Their group consisted of Emperor Peerless and his wife, Jiang Chen, his father, and also Liu Zhen. There was only five in the group, but the cultivation differences between them couldn't be any greater. Long Xiaoxuan couldn't be bothered to travel such long distances, so he hid himself on Jiang Chen's body and continued to loaf around. Their group had a very interesting lineup.

Liu Zhen was the weakest amongst them, but that didn't affect his status in the group. Jiang Chen was rather kind to him, while

Jiang Feng didn't neglect his brother just because he'd reunited with his son. He showed Liu Zhen a lot of care throughout the journey.

Liu Zhen was in a very complicated mood all along. He was excited but also deeply moved. If he hadn't insisted on saving Jiang Feng, his life would likely be vastly different right now. He'd have to spend the rest of life in self-blame and would never be acquainted with eminent figures like Emperor Peerless and Jiang Chen. He was completely overwhelmed.

They arrived in Pillfire City territory after leaving the Tilted Moon Region. Jiang Chen had no business in the city, so he led the group right across the territory. After a month, they arrived at the heartland of the Upper Eight Regions. They were right between Pillfire City and Veluriyam Capital.

"Old Brother Mo, this should be the Great Yu Upper Region where the Great Yu Skysword Sect is located, right? I accepted money from the sect, but I've yet to refine the pill they requested. Why don't we stop by their sect for a moment? It won't take more a week before we can depart again." Jiang Chen wasn't the sort to break his promises.

The emperor was in a light mood. His dao partner's injuries had been stabilized. The only issue that remained was the root of her injuries. He naturally wouldn't mind one or two small detours. He chuckled.

"We shall go wherever you want to go. The Skysword Sect is one of the most famous sects in the Upper Eight Regions. A short visit would be interesting."

……

Elder Lu of the Great Yu Skysword Sect was under a lot of stress lately. He'd already paid the bounty, yet the Ancient Reformation Pill was still nowhere to be seen. He was contemplating if he should request a refund from the Temple of Cleansing Fire and get

them to hunt down the scammer by name of Shao Yuan. However, Pill King Shao Yuan suddenly arrived at the Great Yu Skysword Sect on this day. The smoldering fire of anxiety within Elder Lu's heart was instantly extinguished upon news of his arrival.

Chapter 1129: Great Yu Skysword Sect

The Great Yu Skysword Sect was firmly top three amongst all first rank sects. It was singular in its pursuit of sword dao, and made mighty because of it. The entire sect acted with a uniform style of efficiency and sharpness. Jiang Chen was happier to deal with sects like these. They tended to lack plots and stratagems as there was little to worry about in terms of curveballs.

The ceremony that greeted his arrival was stately and grand. Understandably so, for the Ancient Reformation Pill was a burning need for them.

“Haha, I didn’t expect Brother Mo to have come with Sir Shao Yuan. We are truly honored to receive you both.” The person responsible for their reception was, surprisingly, the sect’s third sword emperor and great emperor, Han Qiansui. He was also the clan brother of the Great Yu Skysword Sect’s leading great emperor, Han Qianzhan.

Both Qianzhan and Qiansui were outstanding geniuses of the sphere, representatives of the pinnacle of sword dao prowess. They served as the sect’s pillars and cornerstones. And so, Emperor Peerless’s acquaintance with the man was completely understandable.

“Brother Qiansui.” He laughed. “it has been at least several centuries since our last meeting. How is your older brother, Qianzhan? Not coming out to receive an old friend is a little ill-mannered, no?”

His words revealed a familiarity with multiple leaders of the sect and his behavior was more casual because of it.

“My brother has entered sealed door cultivation for many years now.” Han Qiansui smiled in kind. “Unfortunately, only I am available to welcome you two this time.”

“Well, never mind.” Emperor Peerless waved a hand. “I was hoping for another chance to see his face. The sealing of his doors is an unforeseen damper on things. Shame, maybe next time.”

Han Qiansui nodded, then saluted Jiang Chen with a cupped fist. “I have long heard your name, Sir Shao. Our humble Skysword Sect has waited many moons for your eventual arrival.”

“It’s my fault,” Jiang Chen coughed apologetically. “My personal affairs regretfully held me up.”

Han Qiansui was a little surprised at the youth’s mildness. He’d expected a much more intolerable temper from the exceptionally young and adept genius. Why else would he have delayed his trip so? But it seemed that his guess missed the mark by a mile.

“Are the materials all ready?” Jiang Chen asked.

“Yes, absolutely.” Han Qiansui affirmed. “Do you need additional preparations, Sir Shao? Do you need to select an auspicious day, perhaps?”

“I’m just refining some pills, right?” Jiang Chen burst out in laughter. “No need to be so particular about everything. If the materials ready, then you can take me to them now.”

“Now?” Han Qiansui smiled wryly. “We’re in a bit of a rush, but we can easily spare a few bits of time here and there. It’s late in the day. Let us enjoy a refreshing evening and rest to conserve our strength. We can begin tomorrow.”

Jiang Chen was happy enough to listen to the arrangements of his hosts.

“Then let it be as you wish, Sect Head Qiansui.” There was little difference whether he began today or tomorrow. The Ancient Reformation Pill was a difficult one, but Jiang Chen was supremely confident in his own skill. Three days if he was lucky, five to seven if not.

During the welcome meal, Han Qiansui marveled at the fact that

Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless treated as Jiang Feng and Liu Zhen as equals, despite their differences in strength and position. He was clever enough, however, to avoid probing them on the subject or even pointing it out. He merely treated the entire party with equal politeness and no preferential treatment. Jiang Feng and Liu Zhen were given the same respect accorded to their companions.

Jiang Feng's emotions were a bit stirred up, but as he was ultimately benefiting from the ability of his son, he didn't consider it too closely. Liu Zhen, on the other hand, was almost brought to tears by the scene. He was being given the chance to publicly dine in the company of great emperors! He'd never imagined that he could one day sit together with experts of such caliber. They were even toasting to him. He was close to being hysterical. For this, his entire life had all been worth it.

The night passed merrily.

Waking up the next day, Jiang Chen was personally led into the pill room by Han Qiansui. Every kind of material was prepared for him, with plenty of each kind to spare.

"Sir Shao, do you need some other pill kings to help you out? Do you have any other special needs?"

"The bounty mission from before," Jiang Chen smiled, brushing past the question, "mentioned both the pill and the recipe. I'll get you the recipe in a bit."

Han Qiansui was overjoyed. "Very good, Sir Shao. You are a man of your word. Then, I'll wait outside for your good news."

Refining pills was Jiang Chen's original line of work and expertise. But even so, he didn't appreciate strangers' observation and participation. After all, many methods that he used during the process would only scare and alarm others. Therefore, it was better to avoid having any kind of an audience in the room during the refining phase.

The Ancient Reformation Pill was a pill with incredible effects. One could almost say magical. Its materials were prohibitively expensive. From this, the Skysword Sect's wealth and endowment was palpable. The pill had also existed since ancient times. Experts back then used them to reform their physical bodies when said bodies crumbled. It was a sort of miracle pill.

Jiang Chen examined each and every material carefully to make sure they were untampered and sound. Only after that did he began to heat up his cauldron.

……

Three days went by, resulting in the successful refinement of a cauldron of Ancient Reformation Pills. Jiang Chen received a little more than he'd expected with four pills being refined. He stashed three of them unceremoniously into his own bags and put the remaining pill into a pill bottle, then recovered his breath and stamina before leaving the room.

Han Qiansui had been waiting outside quite a while. Anticipation was written all over his face and a sliver of unease as well.

"How did you do, Sir Shao?" He gulped down a mouthful of saliva.

Jiang Chen casually tossed up the pill bottle in hand. "Congratulations, Sect Head Qiansui. I did just as I promised. Here is the Ancient Reformation Pill you wanted." He took out a corresponding pill recipe as well. "Here's the complete recipe. Please take it for safekeeping."

Han Qiansui was overjoyed. He snatched the bottle and recipe out of Jiang Chen's hands excitedly. "You perform miracles everywhere you go, Sir Shao. I've just received news about you from the Tilted Moon Region. Countless pill kings couldn't find the problem with the Moon God Sect's Precious Tree, but you solved it in the blink of an eye. You are a true master!"

It had been a month or two since Jiang Chen's diagnosis of that tree. It was unsurprising that news would've spread here by now.

"How is the Moon God Precious Tree doing, nowadays?" Jiang Chen asked, curious.

"I hear that it's been restored to its former vigor. Because of it, your fame is being spread far and wide across the Upper Eight Regions' northern reaches."

"Undeserved," Jiang Chen smiled. "I was just a bit luckier than the rest."

"No, no, no. It wasn't just luck. You are a pill dao legend for sure, Sir Shao. Nobody can deny that. It's widely held public opinion that you are definitely above a pill king. You could easily be crowned a pill emperor. Even the emperors who live secluded lives can't deny this."

Having the Ancient Reformation Pill finally in his hands thrilled Han Qiansui. His admiration for Jiang Chen was heartfelt. Anyone else who received such praise would be uncontrollably ecstatic, but Jiang Chen was mostly unaffected. 'Easily be crowned a pill emperor'? Pshaw. Sheer vanity and air.

Jiang Chen's true ability was much greater than that. He was one of the best at pill dao in the heavenly planes, how was he be a mere pill emperor? Pill emperors weren't worthy to be his pageboys in fetching firewood!

"Sect Head Qiansui, I'm glad to have done my part. I think it's time for me to depart."

"Sir Shao, you are in too much of a hurry," Han Qiansui urged. "You have done us a great favor, and we must be a proper host for you. Please, stay a few more days and let us entertain you. There's no need to be shy."

The Skysword Sect was direct in all their dealings. They found it disconcerting to be unable to repay their debts. Jiang Chen was a

bit embarrassed.

“Sect Head Qiansui, you’re making me all flustered. I mostly refined the pill for the bounty attached.”

“The bounty means nothing,” Han Qiansui shook his head. “The mission wouldn’t have been left untaken for eight hundred years otherwise. In the end, it’s your skill that’s carried the day. You’ve done much better than those fame-chasing pill emperors could ever do. In my opinion, you’re the best there is!”

“You speak too highly of me,” Jiang Chen roared with laughter.

Regardless of how he tried to refuse, Han Qiansui’s passion was unabated. Jiang Chen was asked again and again to stay for a few days. Helpless, he settled for agreeing to three more. Finally placated, Han Qiansui departed with joy on his face. Calling for a steward, he instructed the man to take good care of their guests.

The degree of hospitality that the Skysword Sect showed was indisputably great. The sect attached an enormous amount of importance to this batch of guests, the same that would be given to the heads of another first rank sect.

……

In a certain secret realm deep within the sacred grounds of the Skysword Sect, a sealed door disappeared without warning. Han Qiansui’s figure shot into the now-clear opening. His voice trembled when he reached the entrance of a specific abode. “Eldest brother, the heavens have taken pity on us. We finally have an Ancient Reformation Pill. It’s been eight hundred years, and now you can finally see daylight once more!”

“Hmm?” A somewhat hoarse sound responded from within. “Qiansui, has the person that Elder Lu told me about finally come?’

“Yes, yes. I persuaded him many times before he finally acquiesced to staying three more days. Eldest brother, we of the Skysword Sect have a top-notch martial dao heritage in the Upper

Eight Regions, but we're missing a real meister of pills. If we can get Sir Shao to stay with us, then our advancement will know no bounds!" Han Qiansui had spent so much effort on keeping Jiang Chen around a bit longer for a very utilitarian reason. He wanted to make Jiang Chen's acquaintance and ideally even recruit the pill king.

The hoarse voice from within the cavernous abode was the Skysword Sect's sect head, Han Qianzhan. He had explored a secret realm about a thousand years ago. During his time there, a demonic poison had unexpectedly infected his body. It caused his flesh to begin to rot, and no matter what suppressive method he used, he could not stop the poison's force.

As a great emperor, it was difficult for him to find a different body to take. That was why he'd announced his retirement into closed door cultivation, for which he should be undisturbed. He stayed like that for several centuries. Later on, Han Qiansui had then made a key discovery: the Ancient Reformation Pill, and its ability to reconstruct and reform bodies. That was why this Skysword Sect had looked for the pill at all costs.

This kind of closed door cultivation means that one either breaks through, or doesn't and dies behind closed doors.

Chapter 1130: The Great Yu Skysword Sects Hearty Invitation

Han Qianzhan rasped out again. “Qiansui, let me try out the Reformation Pill first.”

Qiansui sent the Reformation Pill behind the doors. “Big brother, I’ll wait for you outside. I heard that this Reformation Pill is of exquisite workmanship, so it should take effect immediately.”

Han Qianzhan responded with a grunt of acknowledgement. He was consuming the pill already.

As Han Qiansui waited for his older brother outside, every second felt like an eternity to him. They had gotten the Ancient Reformation Pill alright, so all that was left was to see how effective it was. If the pill was really effective, his older brother would be able to recover his strength. This meant that the situation in the sect could be completely stabilized. If they could persuade Sir Shao to join their sect after that, their sect would more than double in strength. Nothing could stop their rise then!

Time passed by slowly.

A loud, exuberant roar suddenly blasted out of the cave, which was followed by a carefree laugh.

“Hahaha, Qiansui, this Reformation Pill truly is as amazing as you say. The effects are immediate!” Han Qianzhan shot forth from the cave. His naked, reformed body was completely exposed beneath the sun, and he looked like a primitive barbarian because of it. His muscles rippled with explosive strength and his body looked like it’d been cast of iron. He presented an absolutely perfect sight.

“Big brother, your clothes.” Han Qiansui hurriedly tossed a set of clothes to his older brother.

“Give me a minute!” Han Qianzhan roared with laughter again.

He took leaping strides towards a lake and flung himself into the water.

“Let me wash away these years of bad luck first. Qiansui, you did very well this time! I’ll thank you well in the future.” Han Qianzhan brimmed with excitement. The past several hundred years had been the lowest point of his life. At his worst, he’d practically been a bag of bones barely held together by a sack of rotting skin. Anyone who saw him would’ve thought that he was a demon. However, that was all in the past now. Han Qianzhan had returned to the world!

……

“What? Sect Head Qianzhan wishes to hold a banquet for me?” Jiang Chen’s mind whirled with Han Qiansui’s message. He highly doubted that Han Qianzhan would exit his seclusion just to treat a pill king.

“That’s right. My elder brother is extremely impressed by your talents, Sir Shao. Please, you simply must attend.” Han Qiansui was very sincere.

Although Jiang Chen didn’t know why Han Qianzhan had suddenly exited his sealed door cultivation, he had no reason to turn down the invitation.

“If Sect Head Qianzhan so insists, then I will respectfully accept this invitation.” He nodded on the spot.

News of Han Qianzhan exiting his seclusion shocked the entire Skyword Sect. After all, no one had seen Sect Head Qianzhan for a very, very long time. Some of the disciples who’d joined the sect later didn’t even know what the sect head looked like. All they knew was that the Great Yu Skysword Sect had a great emperor called Sect Head Qianzhan, and he was indisputably the strongest sect head and great emperor to ever exist in sect history.

Emperor Peerless was a little surprised by this invitation as well.

Han Qiansui had just treated them, and now his elder brother wanted to do the same? Something else is in play here. Still, he knew that Skysword Sect wasn't a dishonest or ungrateful sect. So, he agreed to go as well.

Jiang Feng discussed this with Liu Zhen for a bit. In the end, they decided against attending the feast. They felt that their strength was too low, and they were certain to feel pressure if they came face to face with the senior executives, especially Sect Head Qian Zhan, of the Skysword Sect. Unlike last time, Han Qiansui wouldn't be the only person who was attending. It seemed that every senior executive in Skysword Sect would be present as well.

Madame Yun also turned down the invitation saying that she wasn't feeling well enough. In the end, Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless were the only ones who came to the feast.

When Jiang Chen finally saw the legendary sect head of Skysword Sect, a bit of surprise grew in him. It wasn't Han Qianzhan's cultivation that sparked this emotion, but the man's body. Emperor Peerless was unaware of the signs because he had never come into contact with the Ancient Reformation Pill, but Jiang Chen was the refiner of this pill. Han Qianzhan's body was extremely strong and had a prowling vitality to it. These were obvious signs of consuming the Ancient Reformation Pill. However, Jiang Chen didn't point this out. The sect must have their own reasons for keeping this a secret, so he had no intentions of exposing this and souring the atmosphere.

Han Qianzhan treated them passionately and generously during the feast. He called Emperor Peerless a brother and treated Jiang Chen with great courtesy. However, he didn't mention anything else except his thanks during the feast. Even when they were chatting about nothing in particular, he only recounted some interesting stories of the world. Naturally, the story they focused the most on was Jiang Chen's inhuman performance at the Moon God Sect.

“Do you know that you’re famous in the entire Upper Eight Regions, Sir Shao? One man is extremely angry because of this.” Han Qiansui suddenly chuckled.

“Who?” Jiang Chen was slightly taken aback.

“Pill King Ji Lang of Pillfire City, of course.” Han Qiansui sighed softly. “It’s rumored that you went to the Moon God Sect right after Pill King Ji Lang and the other pill kings departed. You weren’t separated by more than half a day. Pill King Ji Lang failed to find anything wrong with the tree, but you found the root of its sickness in no time at all. As a result, Pill King Ji Lang is deeply humiliated by your success. The cherry on top is that Pill King Blue Phoenix can’t stop singing your praises when he heard that you were the one who cured the Moon God Precious Tree.”

“I hear that Pill King Blue Phoenix is the one who recommended Sir Shao in the first place.” An esteemed elder smiled. “A person who is both talented and popular like you is hard to come by. Come, allow me to offer you a toast, Sir Shao!”

“You shower me with too much praise.” Jiang Chen smiled and drank the toast.

Han Qiansui sighed. “The fact that Pill King Blue Phoenix’s recommendation came out ahead only serves to humiliate Pill King Ji Lang further. That’s why the latter has a lot to complain about Pill King Blue Phoenix right now. I heard he’s declared that he will take out Pill King Blue Phoenix, and you all know how hot tempered Pill King Blue Phoenix is. I’m almost certain that great drama is right around the corner of Pillfire City.”

When Jiang Chen recalled Pill King Blue Phoenix, he couldn’t help but feel a bit concerned. “Pill King Blue Phoenix is a senior of virtue and prestige. Pill King Ji Lang couldn’t possibly attack him directly no matter how much hatred is there, right?”

“Ai, who knows? That being said, Pill King Blue Phoenix is a veteran representative of Pillfire City and sits very high up on the

totem pole. If Pill King Ji Lang really tries to harm him, he may very well provoke the ire of every other veteran pill king in Pillfire City. I doubt that even Emperor Pillzenith's successor can do as he wishes in this matter."

"Say, speaking of Pill King Ji Lang, don't you think he's a bit unlucky as of late? He is exceedingly talented and full of mettle, but for some reason this former 'invincible' legend has suffered two losses in a row for the past few years, although his second loss was purely accidental. Sir Shao just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time."

Truthfully, Jiang Chen fostered no goodwill towards Pill King Ji Lang. His only impression of the pill king was that of an overly arrogant person who was too fond of pretending.

"It doesn't matter. I'm just doing what I'm supposed to be doing. Pill King Ji Lang's feelings are none of my concern." Jiang Chen raised his cup. "Let's talk about something else, shall we? Let's drink some more!"

"Yeah, let's drink!" The feast only ended when everyone had enjoyed it to their heart's content.

"Please stay behind for a little longer, Sir Shao. My older brother would like to discuss something with you in private." Han Qiansui whispered to Jiang Chen at the end.

"Sir Shao, I have some amazing tea leaves at my place." The sect head walked over with a smile. "Would you like to taste them? It should neutralize the wine in our bellies a bit."

Jiang Chen agreed immediately because he knew that Han Qianzhan must have something to say to him. "In that case, allow me to impose on you both a little longer. How about you, Old Brother Mo?"

"I'm coming too. Brother Qianzhan, am I invited too?" Emperor Peerless chuckled.

“Of course you are! In fact, I would be offended if you didn’t ask.” Han Qianzhan laughed heartily.

Inside a private room, Han Qianzhan raised his cup after tea was served.

“Sir Shao, I’ve never been a person to beat around the bush, so allow me to thank you for your Ancient Reformation Pill. Without it, I would still be stuck in a dark and lightless residence and afraid to show anyone my face.”

“Hmm?” Jiang Chen was startled. He didn’t think that Han Qianzhan would reveal this of his own accord.

“It is a long story. Back then, I…” Han Qianzhan summarized his close call all those years ago. Traces of lingering fear flitted through his face when he talked about the demonic poison that plagued him before.

Jiang Chen hurriedly walked forwards and put a hand to Han Qianzhan’s hand, feeling his pulse. Jiang Chen nodded a while later. “Thankfully, the demonic poison was flushed out completely after your body was constructed. Congratulations, Sect Head Qianzhan.”

Han Qianzhan clasped his hands together in thanks. “It’s all thanks to your miraculous pill, Sir Shao. You saved my life.”

“You praise me too highly, Sect Head Qianzhan,” Jiang Chen responded hurriedly.

However, Emperor Peerless interrupted with a smile. “There’s no need to be humble, brother. Brother Qianzhan is not a person who speaks carelessly. When he does, it’s truth that comes from the bottom of his heart. I would’ve died too if you hadn’t saved me. We owe you one, and it’s nothing we feel ashamed about.”

“Oh? Were you saved by Brother Shao as well, Brother Mo?” Han Qianzhan looked slightly surprised. At his side, Han Qiansui shared the same feeling. They realized that this must be the reason why

Emperor Peerless always followed Sir Shao's words.

Emperor Peerless briefly relayed when he and Madame Yun had been schemed against by a friend.

"Sir Shao is truly amazing. We are right to call you a miracle worker!" The Han brothers praised after the story.

Emperor Peerless waved his hands. "Brother Qianzhan, surely you haven't treated us to a feast and invited us here for a simple expression of thanks, have you? Let us be frank with each other. There are no outsiders here."

Han Qianzhan laughed in response. "You are just as forthright as you are before, Brother Mo! In that case, I won't beat around the bush any longer. I am extremely impressed by Sir Shao's pill dao talents, and I wish to invite Sir Shao to join the Skysword Sect. Would you like to create something big with us, Sir Shao?"

Both Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless were stunned by this. An invitation to join Skysword Sect. My word... Both men smiled wryly in response.

"Brother Qianzhan, you are a forthright person, so I'll be forthright with you as well. Unfortunately, there is no way my brother will, or can, join the Skysword Sect." Emperor Peerless responded directly.

"Could we ask why?" Both Han brothers were a little disappointed.

"I should tell you the reason myself, sect heads." Jiang Chen sighed with helpless smile. "I'm deeply grateful for your invitation, but my real name isn't Shao Yuan. I'm Pill King Zhen of Veluriyam Capital and the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. So, you can imagine how Emperor Peafowl would react if I were to join you."

Chapter 1131: A Guest Pill King

The Han brothers were dumbfounded by the sudden revelation. They'd never have dreamed that Sir Shao Yuan was actually Veluriyam's Pill King Zhen! Wry smiles and glances were exchanged with each other. Han Qianzhan was a very carefree person. He was disappointed by the sudden turn of events, but quickly accepted the reality of things.

"Oh well. I must say that I'm extremely jealous of Emperor Peafowl for finding such an excellent heir. Veluriyam Capital's fortunes are still as strong as ever! " Han Qianzhan exclaimed with eny.

Han Qiansui nodded in agreement. "Pill King Zhen, this means that you've defeated Pill King Ji Lang twice in a row! It'll be most entertaining if news of this gets out! His undefeated legend will be thoroughly ripped into shreds!"

]Jiang Chen smiled and made no comment.

"Pill King Zhen, why does a famous and well-celebrated person like you conceal your true identity? It's a good opportunity to make an even better name for yourself!" Han Qianzhan couldn't help but ask.

"Everybody knows that Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City are rivals. If the city finds out that I'm the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, I'm afraid they'll won't let me set foot out of their city ever again." Jiang Chen answered in a self-deprecating manner.

Odd expressions flashed across the brothers' faces. Jiang Chen smiled wryly. "Surely you don't think I'd traveled all the way to Pillfire City just to take them down a notch?"

"Isn't that the case?" Han Qianzhan answered ruefully.

Emperor Peerless laughed. "It truly isn't! I can attest to that!"

The group immediately burst into hearty laughter.

“It’s a pity that the Skysword Sect has missed the opportunity to recruit you, Pill King Zhen.” Han Qianzhan breathed out a long sigh.

“Regrettably, my little brother can’t join the Skysword Sect, but that doesn’t mean we can’t partner with each other. Isn’t there such a thing as a guest pill king? Surely a sect as grand and distinguished as yours can afford to have him as a guest pill king?” Emperor Peerless said while smiling.

The Han brothers exchanged glances that were brimming with excitement. Emperor Peerless had made a good point! They’d failed to recruit him, but they could just offer him a spot as a guest pill king! The entire Upper Eight Regions placed his abilities on par with pill emperors at the moment, so one could only imagine how frightening the young pill emperor would become in the future.

They had a feeling that Pillfire City’s overwhelming dominance in the Upper Eight Region’s pill dao might soon be challenged. And in fact, change was already happening, Pillfire City was merely unaware of it. After Pill King Zhen took over the Upper Eight Region’s pill dao by the storm, who could possibly stop him then? Pillfire City? Impossible! Even their most vaunted Pill King Ji Lang had lost to Pill King Zhen twice. Was Emperor Pillzenith supposed to go up against him?

Emperor Pillzenith had a very strong foundation in pill dao, but in terms of raw talent, he likely was on par with Pill King Ji Lang. What Emperor Pillzenith was famous for was equal strength in both martial dao and pill dao, but he likely wasn’t a match for Pill King Zhen in terms of raw pill dao.

The Reformation Pill, Longevity Pill…

These impossibly complicated pills were child’s play to Pill King Zhen. His frightening foundation in pill dao wasn’t something that Pillfire City could possibly hope to measure up to.

The Han Brothers couldn't help but wonder where had Pill King Zhen obtained his pill dao heritage. Shao Yuan had first appeared with rumors of Myriad Abyss Island swirling around him. Not many believed that gossip back then. But if he wasn't from the legendary island, where in the human domain could he have possibly obtained such a powerful pill dao heritage?

Regardless of his origin, a future pill dao master like him was definitely worth associating with.

Through Han Qianzhan's incredible foresight and reasoning, he foresaw that Jiang Chen was going to turn everything upside down in the pill dao world. He sucked in a deep breath and looked at Jiang Chen passionately. "Pill King Zhen, no, maybe we should address you as Pill Emperor Zhen instead? What do you think of Brother Mo's suggestion. Pill Emperor Zhen?"

Jiang Chen threw a meaningful glance at the Han brothers and pondered deeply. "If I disagree, I'd be letting both of you down. However, I have a condition as well."

"Please, do speak your mind."

Jiang Chen nodded and spoke slowly. "I need a favor from Sect head Qianzhan. One day, when I need the sect head to return the favor, he would need to do so unconditionally."

A favor? Under normal circumstances, Han Qianzhan wouldn't even consider accepting such a vague condition. But this time, he immediately accepted the condition after a moment's consideration. "Fair enough, it's a deal!"

"Sect Head Qianzhan, aren't you curious what I might ask from you?"

"Haha! Your reputation precedes you! No one has ever accused you of any immoral or unscrupulous atrocities. Because of that, I'm inclined to trust you."

Jiang Chen nodded. "Sect Head Qianzhan, rest assured. I won't

use this favor to do anything unethical. However, there are some matters in which I might need an eminent figure like you to show up to bolster my side. Of course, we might offend some people, but I'll make it up you."

"Haha! As long as we're not doing anything atrocious, why should we fear offending a few people? As cultivators, when do we not give offense! We're bound to offend someone when we go about our business in this world!" Han Qianzhan burst into laughter.

"It's so happily settled then." Han Qiansui nodded. "Pill Emperor Zhen, please feel free to ask for any remuneration for your troubles."

Jiang Chen smiled. "Let's talk specifics then. I won't ask for remuneration when I'm not offering my services. I'm sure that your sect won't require my help for common issues. If you have pill dao questions that you cannot solve, I'll ask for as little remuneration as possible, unless it has to do with a business transaction."

Han Qianzhan clapped. "Deal! Your straightforwardness is truly a breath of fresh air!"

"Actually, the Ancient Reformation Pill is a rather good business opportunity!" Han Qiansui suddenly remarked. "There are many in need of a body reforming pill."

The Reformation Pill was indeed a business opportunity, but Jiang Chen smiled with disagreement. "The Reformation Pill is indeed an exceptionally rare pill, but its manufacturing cost is too high, refining process too long, and skill requirement too arduous. The market returns will not be high because not many will actually be able to afford it."

Han Qiansui seemed to agree after thinking about it more. The Reformation Pill was genuinely a good product, but it wasn't suitable for mass production due to the various reasons

mentioned. The common pill king wouldn't be able to manufacture it, let alone the majority of pill masters.

With the partnership discussion concluded, the Han brothers and Jiang Chen's group had swiftly grown closer to each other. They now had many common topics to talk about.

Jiang Chen and the rest ended up staying at the Skysword Sect for a total of five more days instead of three. The Han brothers earnestly tried keeping them for more, but they couldn't delay their journey any longer. In forming a partnership with the Skysword Sect, Jiang Chen had gained a very important ally in the human domain.

"Pill Emperor Zhen, we wish to send a group of pill kings to Sacred Peafowl Mountain to study pill dao under you. We will offer 100 million saint spirit stones as remuneration per month. What do you think?"

It was a business proposal that the Han brothers had come up with after many nights of discussion. They wanted to send a group of pill kings to learn from Jiang Chen no matter what. Even if the pill kings wouldn't learn much, gaining some insight and experience would be more than enough.

Jiang Chen smiled. "You're more than welcome to do so. However, I have very limited time, so I'll only conduct three to five lectures a month."

"Haha! As long as your lectures comprise of condensed knowledge, we'll be fine even if you only hold it once a month! We ask for quality, not quantity!"

When they concluded their discussions, Jiang Chen and the rest finally departed from the Skysword Sect. The young man had gained a lot from this visit. He'd become friends with a great sect and obtained three Reformation Pills.

The Great Yu Upper Region was extremely vast and it took them

two days to clear the area.

Jiang Feng noticed that Liu Zhen had sunk in a very odd mood ever since they left the Great Yu Upper Region.

“Brother, you’ve been in a peculiar mood for the past two days. Have you encountered some problems in your cultivation?” Jiang Feng was concerned.

Liu Zhen sighed softly and shook his head. “Brother, this is the Horizontal Mountain Mid Region. My ancestral home is located in one of the bigger countries here…”

Jiang Feng and Liu Zhen knew each other’s backgrounds, and the former immediately realized that Liu Zhen was recalling matters of home.

“Little brother, I thought you no longer have family in your ancestral home?” He quietly asked.

“My parents and siblings are gone, but I once had a wife…” Liu Zhen’s grimace could just barely pass for a smile.

“Didn’t you say that she’s gone too?” Jiang Feng was curious.

“No.” Liu Zhen’s face began to twitch. “Brother, I’ve lied to you about this. She… she scorned my low status back in the day and ran off with somebody else.”

Jiang Feng frowned. “How could she?!”

Liu Zhen suddenly hugged Jiang Feng and bawled his eyes out. “Brother! I want to go home and take a look. Don’t worry, I don’t intend nor do I want revenge. I just want some closure and to find the answer to a question.”

Jiang Feng patted Liu Zhen on the shoulder. “Give me a moment. I’ll tell Chen’er.”

Jiang Chen glanced at Emperor Peerless after hearing Jiang Feng’s words.

“It’s right along the way. If Liu Zhen needs to go home, we

should accompany him. It's the least we can do." The emperor shrugged.

Since the emperor had already given consent, Jiang Chen naturally wouldn't say no. Liu Zhen's eyes were bloodshot. Jiang Chen knew that the man had recalled some painful memories. Since Liu Zhen had contributed greatly in the search for Jiang Feng, Jiang Chen naturally wouldn't sit by idly and just watch.

"Liu Zhen, lead the way. We'll help you if you want to take revenge for the grievances you've suffered." This was one of Jiang Chen's principles.

"It has been so many years. I've long forgotten about things. However, there's something I must confirm or I'll die with everlasting regret," Liu Zhen hastily responded.

Chapter 1132: Liu Zhens Grievances

Liu Zhen's ancestral home was located in the Horizontal Mountain Mid Region's Vermilion Tang Empire. He hailed from one of the empire's middling families. After disaster struck, his parents passed away one after another. As their only child, Liu Zhen was left with a tidy inheritance.

His ensuing days within the empire's capital, the Scarlet Tang City, was relatively comfortable because of this. An ample estate and a childhood girlfriend made for a cozy life.

Alas, such days were not to last. A young man from a family ten times better than his, with wealth a hundred times his, suddenly appeared in Liu Zhen's life one day. His woman walked away without hesitation, despite her pregnancy at the time. She took all he had with her and pawned off everything he owned. Not a single copper had been left for him.

Liu Zhen was essentially left destitute overnight. His home, his fields, and all his businesses became others' property over the span of twenty-four hours. Driven to the edge of madness, Liu Zhen sought out the woman in a frenzy. But after finding the right place with quite some difficulty, he was beat senseless and tossed aside. If not for the sheer number of onlookers, he probably would've been outright killed.

The suffering he experienced pushed Liu Zhen away from this place into voluntary exile. He began to travel the world, becoming a wandering cultivator who lived on a knife's edge. His martial dao gift was rather average. In the Vermilion Tang Empire, people like him could be found in droves. Without any earthly possessions, he lacked the cultivation resources to proceed at a reasonable pace.

It had been many years since then, but his level within the origin realm almost hadn't risen at all. When he'd first made Jiang Feng's acquaintance, Liu Zhen had been considerably stronger than his

sworn brother. But now, he was left behind in the dust. Jiang Feng was sixth level origin realm, bordering on seventh. Liu Zhen was still back on the third level.

For his part, Liu Zhen wasn't particularly jealous of Jiang Feng. He envied a bit that his sworn brother had a good son, sure. But more than that, he was mostly thankful that he'd been able to make the other man's acquaintance. It was quickly becoming evident that his son could be the catalyst of a change in Liu's life.

Liu Zhen had thought that his pain was in the process of being slowly washed away. But the closer he got to his homeland, the more searing his psychological scar became. Time hadn't healed his pain at all. It had only buried it deep within his heart. The proximity of home caused his memories to burst forth like a flood, utterly smashing his dam of feigned strength.

He realized that he could let go of everything else except this bit of agonizing history. He had to find out the truth no matter what. Not the truth about why she'd left him, but whether the child inside of her had been his or the other man's?

The Vermilion Tang Empire occupied similar status in the Horizontal Mountain Mid Region as the Great Scarlet Empire did within the Great Scarlet Mid Region. They were both the administrative cores of their region. In this city, Liu Zhen's family qualified as a middling one at most. He had very little to do with power. When pitched against a family or faction ten or a hundred times greater, his experiences were understandable.

It was a cruel, cruel world.

Since his departure from Scarlet Tang City, Liu Zhen had not set foot in his hometown for almost thirty years. Any dream that the city appeared in inevitably turned into a bad one. For an entire empire, thirty years passed in the blink of an eye. But for Liu Zhen, they signified countless sleepless nights filled with waking nightmares.

“Hold your head high, Liu Zhen. Remember, you’re not the same man as you were before. Your sworn brother is the father of Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s young lord!” Emperor Peerless commanded. He was exceptionally keen whenever it came to emotional matters. Helping Gu Xintang and Ah Li out, for example. Hearing about Liu Zhen’s past bereavement was no different. The emperor was incensed while Madame Yun looked incredulous. Jiang Chen’s reaction was obviously similar.

Scarlet Tang City was a passably bustling place. In the eyes of Jiang Chen and company, though, its busyness could not compare to many other places that their well-traveled feet had trodden in.

Liu Zhen looked increasingly conflicted after they entered the city, hence Emperor Peerless’s incessant reminders for him to buck up. Deep down, he had some reservations about returning here. There was lingering resentment and fearfulness, albeit both well-hidden, about the son of a rich and powerful family stealing his woman. Even when he was newly armed with a prominent backer, he could not shake off the timidity in his bones. He was only able to adjust himself mentally after several admonishments from the emperor.

After about an hour, Liu Zhen and the rest came to a house’s doorsteps. “This is my ancestral home,” he commented sadly. “Someone else owns it now. My ancestors would shudder to see the sight of it, I’m sure.”

He had been cluelessly deceived by that woman, all those years ago and rendered destitute overnight through surrogate sale of his possessions. This was already a depressing outcome. That he’d received no sympathy at the time was salt on the wound. Many had said that it was his blindness that was responsible for his fate. They gossiped that he’d picked the wrong kind of girl.

Others had chalked it up to failures of character. After all, what kind of useless man could lose everything his ancestors had like that? There was taunting and mockery, and all sorts of hearsay and

slander. Very few people commiserated with him, or if they did, they didn't dare show it.

The man responsible for ruining Liu Zhen was a noble scion of one of the Scarlet Tang City's best families and a real local despot. Who would spare any meaningless compassion for someone as penniless as Liu Zhen? Standing in front of his home of yesteryear, Liu Zhen began to weep.

"Is that all you're good for?" Emperor Peerless muttered discontentedly. "I regret coming with you now. If you used to live here, just buy it for five or ten times its former price. Hello. You're worth a billion saint spirit stones now."

Liu Zhen blinked. That's right! He was now fabulously rich, at least comparatively speaking. The dandy who'd taken his girl away certainly didn't have this much money, and possibly not even his family did.

The Vermilion Tang Empire had its fair share of wealthy families, but it was only an empire within a middle region. The young noble back then was prominent in Scarlet Tang City, but not when the entire empire was put into perspective.

Put another way, more than a billion saint spirit stones was the equivalent of more than ten billion origin spirit stones. It was a princely sum, and not even the likes of a fourth rank sect could come up with it in a hurry. In the Vermilion Tang Empire, the only factions that could were second and third rank sects, a few of the leading families, and the imperial bloodline. Not many others who could easily take out so much money came to mind.

"Old Brother Mo is right, Liu Zhen," Jiang Chen encouraged. "You are a rich man, and you need to use your wealth like a club. Is a problem that you can solve with money really a problem at all? What's there to cry about?"

The emperor and his young friend's advice filled Liu Zhen with renewed confidence. Jiang Feng declined to offer his own, instead

knocking on the door straight away. The door creaked open. Two house guards came out, glancing sidelong at him. “Who’re you looking for?”

“Summon the master of your house,” Jiang Feng said coolly.

“Who are you?” The guards of big families tended to be quite haughty. They were unwilling to listen to Jiang Chen’s brusque request.

Chuckling, Jiang Chen stepped up to the pair of stone lions at the door. “Did these belong to your family?” He asked Liu Zhen.

The wandering cultivator shook his head. “Not mine. Probably put here by the person who bought the house.”

“Okay then.” Jiang Chen laughed.

He gave one of the statues a light pat. Despite its unique materials, the stone lion crumbled to dust instantly like a pile of sand.

“Summon the master of the house,” he continued, equally coolly.

The house guard’s face immediately paled. He fled desperately back inside. Not long after, a series of loud footsteps were heard from within. A group of fierce-looking guards swarmed out under the leadership of their master. The master of the house was a sky origin realm cultivator from the looks of it.

“Who’s brave enough to trespass on private properly in broad daylight, hmm? You know you’re in Scarlet Tang City, yes?” The man had a well-developed throat.

Smirking, Jiang Chen stepped forward once more. “You’re the master of the house?”

“So what if I am? I’d like to know who you are. Were you the one that broke the stone lion beside my door?”

“How much did you buy this house for?” Jiang Chen said, his voice impassive as ever.

“What’s it to you? I’d really like to know where you come from, breaking my stone lion like that, aren’t you scared…” The man cut off mid-sentence. Jiang Chen had casually smashed the other lion to smithereens as well when he was speaking.

“Last chance. How much did you buy this house for?” Jiang Chen’s voice was colder now.

The homeowner paled just as his guard had. Crushing an entire lion with a single pat… what incredible strength!

He knew better than anyone that the stone lions hadn’t been made of just any kind of stone. Sculpted with special materials, they had been designed to bring him good fortune. Even a sage realm cultivator would have a hard time if they wanted to break that stone with their bare hands. Rendering it unto dust directly… was probably beyond even sky sage realm. Why… when and why had a fiend like this come to Scarlet Tang City without warning?

Seeing the temperature of Jiang Chen’s expression fall lower and lower, the homeowner shivered in concern. “It c-cost m-me… six million saint spirit stones. My l-life savings.”

Grinning, Jiang Chen snapped his fingers at Liu Zhen.

Noticing, the wandering cultivator walked up himself, handing the homeowner twenty million saint spirit stones. “I’m giving you this much to get out of here. Now. Scram.”

“What?” The homeowner was stunned. He narrowed his eyes at Liu Zhen in apparent recognition. “You… you’re the last person who lived here, right? What was your name again? Liu… Liu Zhen, is that you? You dare come back, boy?!”

He regretted his words as soon as they were out of his mouth. ‘Boy’? ‘Dare come back’? Wasn’t he paying attention? With the backers he’s got now, of course Liu Zhen dared come back. What remarkable backers they were to be able to shatter a stone lion with a single pat!

Chapter 1133: Money Makes the World Go Round

“Take the money, put down the deed, pack your stuff, and get out of my sight!” Liu Zhen narrowed his eyes murderously. He was slowly growing more comfortable with this new role. He was rich and protected by a powerful patron. There was no reason for him to feel afraid whatsoever.

The owner of this house was trembling with fear and dread. “Please wait for a moment, please wait for a moment. I will pack my stuff and scram with my family right away!” He hurriedly bowed and scraped before Liu Zhen.

The owner of this house was smart. He understood] that Liu Zhen had returned for revenge. The wandering cultivator himself might not be all that scary, but the backup he’d brought was. Their mere presence alone was a telltale sign that they were absolutely beyond his ability to provoke. If he refused to relent despite the twenty million on the table, there was a high chance that this advantageous transaction would quickly devolve into a robbery. After all, he hadn’t exactly bought Liu Zhen’s house fair and square back then.

Smart people usually worked very quickly and efficiently. In less than an hour, the now former owner of this house had packed all his belongings, called a dozen or so carriages to cart away the furniture he’d bought after moving into the house, and readied to leave with his family.

Liu Zhen tossed the bag of twenty million saint spirit stones straight at the owner and declared like someone with too much money on his hands. “You may count them.”

“There’s no need, there’s no need.” The former owner of the house was just about to stuff the bag into his shirt when an old memory suddenly struck his mind. He hastily counted out five

million saint spirit stones and returned the money respectfully.

“Brother Liu Zhen, I threw away some of the original furniture inside your house. Please accept this five million saint spirit stones as repayment. It’s all my fault, please forgive me.”

Liu Zhen naturally hadn’t expected that the former owner of the house to keep his stuff after he moved in. He snorted. “Do I look like I care about this small sum of money?”

The former owner of the house trembled as his scalp tingled with fear. Make no mistake, Liu Zhen had become so rich that five million was nothing to him now. The man stood there paralyzed because it didn’t feel right to withdraw the money or return it to Liu Zhen.

“What’s wrong? Are you planning to stay for lunch?” Liu Zhen snorted coldly.

The implied meaning behind Liu Zhen’s words gave the former owner of the house direction, and the latter quickly smiled apologetically. “I’ll be leaving right away, right away. Please excuse us, Brother Liu Zhen.”

Twenty million saint spirit stones was three times the original purchase price he’d doled out. He’d lived there for free for thirty years, so it was a worthy bargain no matter how he looked at it. With twenty million in hand, he could easily buy a better house in Scarlet Tang City.

The road was filled with large and small carts and luggage, and the amount of activity and noise of moving house was quite obvious. The surrounding neighbors came out for a look because of this.

“Hey, Zhang Dalang! Why are there so many carriages in front of your house so early in the morning? Are you moving?”

“I thought you said yesterday that you were going to celebrate your first grandson’s one month birthday in a few days? Why have

you suddenly decided to move?”

“Come on, Zhang Dalang, talk to us. Why are you being so silent? We’ve been neighbors for so many years, but now you’re leaving without even telling us? Are you afraid that we’ll borrow money from you or something?” These people were long time inhabitants and neighbors Liu Zhen was familiar with most of them.

Zhang Dalang, now the former owner of Liu Zhen’s house, wore an awkward look on his face. “I’m leaving, I’m leaving. It seems that the Zhangs don’t have the fortune to live here for long.”

“What on earth are you talking about? If you don’t have the fortune to, then what about Liu Zhen?”

“Zhang Dalang, I think you’re overthinking this. Liu Zhen failed to keep his fortunes because he was good-for-nothing, but you’re not him. I say you should stay!” These people were all using Liu Zhen for their comparison.

However, there were a few in the crowd who had sharp eyes. They immediately clapped a hand over the speakers’ mouths and jabbed their fingers at Liu Zhen. Those badmouthing Liu Zhen saw the man himself sneering from the entrance of the house and flicking disdainful looks out of the corner of his eyes.

That’s right, he was dismissing them with side glances! His gaze was frivolously ridiculing and mocking. He seemed to be gazing down upon fools from a lofty position.

“Liu Zhen?”

“Am I seeing right? Is it really Liu Zhen? Why have you come back? Are you the one who chased out Zhang Dalang?”

“That can’t be right. How can you possibly scare Zhang Dalang away with that meager cultivation of yours?”

Zhang Dalang’s expression changed greatly when he heard this. “Everyone, you have no idea what you’re talking about. Brother Liu Zhen has paid me a large sum of money to buy back his

ancestral home and your assumptions are completely outlandish. You guys shouldn't judge a person by their old reputation! Brother Liu Zhen now is a rich man."

Zhang Dalang raised a cupped fist salute to Liu Zhen. "Brother Liu Zhen, I'll be leaving now. The fengshui here is quite good, and it has remained so through the thirty years I lived here. I am sure that it'll only get better now that it has returned to your hands."

The former owner hastily jumped into a carriage and ordered the group to leave.

This scene stunned the onlooking neighbors completely. They might have suspected that this was an elaborate ploy if they hadn't witnessed it with their own eyes. Zhang Dalang was a sky origin realm cultivator. Maybe a sky origin cultivator wasn't all that impressive in the Scarlet Tang City, but it meant he wielded great power in this neighborhood.

Liu Zhen was a poor and weak man. What could he possibly do? He got rich? He's a rich man now? If he was that capable in the first place, he wouldn't be robbed of his woman and swindled out of his property in the first place!

Liu Zhen folded his arms across his chest and sneered. "What's wrong? Keep talking. I'm very interested to hear just how many complaints you lot have in store for me. Maybe some of you have even gotten a little more creative since then."

His neighbors all looked a bit embarrassed. However, an elderly man who was slightly older than the rest of the neighbors spoke up. "Liu Zhen, I watched you grow up since you were young, so I have a word of advice. Stay away from Scarlet Tang City. You may not know this, but the Liu family has become even richer than it was before. The eldest son of the Liu family is the assistant minister of the Ministry of War now. Even if you did make some money for yourself, why have you returned here instead of enjoying a better life elsewhere?"

“Yeah, do you think you can raise your head high and make your ancestors proud just by buying back your ancestral home? Do you think you can take revenge against the Liu family now? You think too much of yourself, man.”

The Liu family was the family who stole Liu Zhen’s woman, but it was the youngest son who’d done that. Ever since the Liu family had successfully landed one of their own in court, their power had grown tremendously over time. Today, they were considered one of the first ranking factions in Scarlet Tang City. It wasn’t a foremost faction and it wasn’t one of the best, but it was still among the top sixty factions in Scarlet Tang City.

Liu Zhen’s old family couldn’t even be ranked among the top six thousand, much less top sixty. It was this gap that had sealed Liu Zhen’s fate back in the day.

Not all of the neighbors had spoken up maliciously. However, even the kindest sentiments they offered held tones of wanting to watch a good show. Naturally, Liu Zhen was aware that none of these people were fundamentally good. The only reason they spoke up was to lessen the embarrassment they felt.

“To think I remained in your minds even though I’d left for thirty years. The Liu family? The assistant minister of the Ministry of War? Is that really as impressive as you say?” The wandering cultivator smiled calmly.

The old man’s face changed greatly. “Liu Zhen, you better watch your mouth. The power wielded by the Liu family now is nothing the rest of us can compare to.”

“Compare?” Liu Zhen laughed loudly. “Why on earth would I compare myself to them? What right do they possibly have to compare themselves to me?”

There was a commotion after Liu Zhen had made his declaration. His neighbors were all shaking their heads repeatedly.

“Madness, Liu Zhen has gone madness!”

“Maybe he has. He got lucky and thought he could mount a counterattack against the Liu family now, only to discover that the gap between him and his enemies has only widened with time. The reality of things was simply too much for him to bear.”

“Well, he has no one but himself to blame. He could’ve kept earning his money outside of Scarlet Tang City and enjoy a better life. What on earth possessed him to return here and humiliate himself further?”

“Yeah, the Liu family is destined to be a hurdle he can never overcome.”

“Alright, time to go home, everyone. It doesn’t look like this guy is going to back down until he’s been smacked by reality. Or maybe it was his plan to go down in flames all along?” All kinds of comments were made in response to Liu Zhen’s remark. Some people kept their voices down so Liu Zhen couldn’t hear them, but some didn’t even pretend to be polite.

Liu Zhen simply laughed calmly before he took out a bag containing ten million saint spirit stones. “I’m holding ten million saint spirit stones in my hand right now, and I plan to use eight million to buy furniture. The remaining two million are labor fees. Those who are willing to work for me, please raise your hands.”

Ten million? For a time, the neighbors thought that their ears had fooled them. They all looked at Liu Zhen with doubtful eyes.

Jiang Chen smiled widely at Liu Zhen’s antics. The wandering cultivator was starting to act more and more like a wealthy upstart. When his neighbors finally realized that Liu Zhen wasn’t joking at their expenses, the commotion of the scene instantly turned up a notch.

“Hey, Liu Zhen, do you still remember Uncle Quan buying you candied fruit on White Crane Street?”

“Hey Zhen, do you still remember Auntie Tao? Back then you wouldn’t stop bullying our Little Cui, but I almost never scold you for it, did I? Speaking of furniture, my family runs in this trade...” A large group of people rushed towards Liu Zhen to volunteer their aid. And why wouldn’t they? It was ten million saint spirit stones, with two million to be paid out in fees. Whoever got the job wouldn’t need to worry about money for the rest of their lives.

In less than half a day’s time, Liu Zhen’s home was completely put in order. All the furniture he bought was in place. Money truly made the world go round.

Liu Zhen still felt like he was in a dream even after his ancestral home was put into order. He never imagined that he would be able to move back into his home and regain everything he lost in such a short time. It was all about money in the end.

With twenty million saint spirit stones, he was able to order the former owner of the house to leave immediately. With ten million saint spirit stones, he was able to make his neighbors bow and scrape before him even as he laughed in their faces. This was the power of money.

Of course, this was just the first step in Liu Zhen’s plan. His next step involved the Liu family.

“What are you planning to do with the Liu family, Liu Zhen?” Jiang Chen asked. The young man hadn’t forgotten how Liu Zhen had dealt with the Heavensfall Society back then. He must have a way of dealing with this. The reason he’d lost his composure at the entrance earlier was because his emotions had temporarily raged out of control. Now that he had calmed down, Liu Zhen should be regaining his smarts.

Dalang means first son of his family. It feels strange for non-family to call him First Son Zhang, and since he’s a minor character, it doesn’t quite matter.

Chapter 1134: A Liu Family Thrown Into Chaos

Liu Zhen had learned a lot after wandering for many decades, and many thoughts occurred to him after calming down. If he went directly after the Liu family, it would make him seem petty and narrow minded. Moreover, this method of revenge was much too old-fashioned. Thus, he decided to take a different approach. This method required the help of both Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless.

Jiang Chen naturally wouldn't mind offering his assistance as he'd already decided to help Liu Zhen exact revenge. He was actually quite fond of Liu Zhen's plans after learning about them.

……

Vermillion Tang Empire's Defense Minister Wu was feeling rather downcast lately. His lioness at home was in the worst of moods in recent days and he'd rather avoid going home. However, the lioness had finally gone to visit her own family today. Minister Wu was finally enjoying the peace and quiet. Suddenly, he felt a light breeze by his ear. A person had appeared out thin air!

"A-..." Minister Wu was struck in the acupoint for muteness before he could yell.

A young man was standing beside him with a faint smile on his face. "Minister Wu, no need to panic. I'm only here to give you an invitation."

"Invitation? Who are you?" Minister Wu immediately asked after he regained his voice.

"You don't need to know who I am. It's all written in the invitation. Tomorrow at noon, I expect you to appear at the Drunken Immortal Tavern's sky suite, or you shall receive an invitation to your own funeral the next time we meet." The young

man flashed a sinister smile. “You should know that I’m perfectly capable of such things. There are more details written in the invitation. Take a close look.”

When the young man was finished speaking, he disappeared into thin air with a flash of his figure. Minister Wu was absolutely flabbergasted and trembled with fear. This was the minister’s manor! The security here was as tight as it could get! Somehow, that person had snuck past everyone without alarming anyone! W-who… exactly was this man?

He immediately opened the invitation to take a closer look. It was very eloquently written, cordially inviting him to the Drunken Immortal Tavern. The time and location were all clearly defined. The writing also implied that an unexpected misfortune might happen if he failed to attend the banquet. But if he did attend, the banquet host assured that he wouldn’t be harmed. In fact, there might even be a surprise in store.

Many other ministers and officials also received the same invitation. The contents and method in which they’d received the invitation were similar. The banquet host was apparently called Liu Zhen. Liu Zhen had been an insignificant character in Scarlet Tang City. None of the court officials had even heard of him. Their minds were blank when they tried to recall who he was. However, none of them dared disregard the invitation because of the way they’d received it. The messenger was simply too frightening.

……

On this day, the Drunken Immortal Tavern was bustling with activity. Many eminent court figures had appeared in the sky suite on this fateful afternoon. There was around forty august personages in total. These court officials felt a little awkward when they saw each other, but all of them had the same question in mind. Who on earth was Liu Zhen?

They quickly found out who he was when the banquet started. Of

course, Liu Zhen himself wasn't too scary. The scary ones were the people beside him. Even though he was the host, he was quite polite and cordial. Other than introducing himself, he didn't do anything that was out of line. Liu Zhen offered the guests a few toasts after the banquet started. After that, he gave every single one of them a gift.

The court officials were already used to a life of being showered with lavish gifts. They grew a lot more relaxed when the banquet neared its end. By the end of it, everyone was in a jolly mood. They finally realized that Liu Zhen had made it big outside. He'd returned to his home with great fanfare and made a huge commotion because he wanted to build relationships with them.

They weren't terribly pleased with the way they were invited, but they were willing to hear Liu Zhen out. It was only right to show him some face after eating his food and accepting his gifts. The banquet dispersed under a festive mood.

More banquets were held over the next few days. A similar group of people were invited, but the invitation methods were completely different every time. Because of that, Liu Zhen's name began to spread by word of mouth at court. Being invited to these banquets slowly became a normal occurrence. Gradually, it even became a milestone of success. Those who weren't invited to Liu Zhen's banquets were considered to be lesser individuals.

At first, the Liu family wasn't too concerned about the matter. But after a few days, the firstborn of the Liu family still hadn't received any invitations. They could no longer keep their calm. The banquet invitations spanned throughout the nation and almost every single eminent figure had received one.

The firstborn of the Liu clan, Liu Dalang, was second-in-command in the Defense Ministry. Minister Wu had already attended the banquet multiple times, yet the Liu family still had no idea who Liu Zhen was. And so, Liu Dalang was in a rotten mood when he returned home. He expressed his dissatisfaction during

the house dinner.

“Son, why are you in such a bad mood recently? Are you facing some difficulties at court?” His father couldn’t help but ask.

The firstborn sighed. “Father, a strange thing has happened in Scarlet Tang City lately. Apparently, someone has achieved a lot of success outside and returned to our city with great pomp and circumstance. Lately, he’s been inviting court officials to lavish banquets. Almost every single eminent court figure has been invited. In fact, Minister Wu has already attended the banquet four times! I heard that host was also extremely generous and showers the guests with food and gifts. It’s become a trend of some sort lately.”

“What’s wrong? That bastard didn’t invite you? You are a defense vice minister!”

“Aii... I’ve been brooding over it as well. Ministers lower ranked than me and even ministers from less prominent departments have been invited. I'm the only one who wasn't invited yet. It was very awkward for me when everyone was talking about the banquet.”

“Maybe he forgot about you?”

“Impossible. A smart person like him definitely has a list of court officials. He can check who has been invited and who hasn't with just a glance. I have a feeling that he's left me out on purpose.”

His father was displeased. “How unbecoming of him! Even ministers lower ranked than you have been invited! This is clearly a slap in your face!”

“Isn’t that?” The firstborn was extremely depressed.

“Brother, isn't he a little too arrogant? Should I have some brothers to teach him a lesson?” The Liu clan’s youngest son yelled out of exasperation.

“Who on earth is he? What's his name?” His father was very

unhappy as well.

“His name is Liu Zhen if I'm not mistaken. Xiao Feng, don't be brash. He seems to be quite capable. I'm not sure how, but he's recruited a few henchmen that's frighteningly powerful. The bodyguards of first rank officials have admitted that they're far no match for his henchmen.”

“Ah? That strong? Also, the Scarlet Tang City has never had a great clan that goes by any other character for Liu. There’s just us. Did you make a mistake?”

“No. Their invitation card clearly stated that his name is Liu Zhen.”

The youngest son was completely taken aback. “Brother, what did you just say? Liu Zhen?”

“Mm.”

“Liu Zhen?!” The youngest son jumped up from his seat. “Brother, are you sure you have that right? You're certain that his name is Liu Zhen?”

“Yes. I’m extremely frustrated over this matter, so of course I’d pay double the attention to this matter. His name is Liu Zhen. Apparently, he was a commoner that used to live in a place called the Chunk Alley.”

“Ah?!” Color immediately drained from the youngest son’s face. “How can it be? How can he possibly achieve so much with his capabilities? How is this possible? How?!”

His brother was taken aback. “Xiao Feng, what are you saying? Do you know him?”

The youngest son wanted to deny it, but his father and eldest brother were both staring at him sternly. He found it impossible to lie.

“I... I seem to know him a little. That man used to be just another

poor commoner!”

No one could know a man better that the man's father. The clan father's face darkened when he saw how his son was behaving. “Feng’er, judging by your reaction, did you perhaps offend him in the past?”

Liu Feng stuttered. “Y-yes… j-just a little bit.”

“Only a little bit?” His father didn't believe him.

“Well, maybe just a tiny bit more than that. Aii… it’s a matter from a long time ago. Back then I…” Liu Feng was stuttering nonstop and his face was as white as a ghost. His eyes kept darting around and was afraid of making eye contact with his elder brother.

The first son slammed the table, clearly enraged. “Xiao Feng, you bastard! I finally know why I wasn't invited! It's all because of you! You'd better tell me the truth! What happened between you two?”

“I…” Xiao Feng continued to stutter.

“Bastard! Nothing good from the way you’re acting!” His father was agitated. He understood his youngest son all too well. The little good-for-nothing was always been up to all kinds of mischief. No amount of atrocities was beneath him. If that good-for-nothing hadn't been his son, he wouldn’t have cared even if the boy died.

“Hurry up and tell us!” The firstborn slammed the table with his fist, launching the dishes into the air. The bowls and plates shattered when they hit the ground.

“Brother, don't hit me! I-I’ll tell you! Back then… I felt that his woman was incredibly alluring, s-so… I fooled around with her a little. I never imagined that she'd be like firewood. A small spark was all it took to set her on fire. Aii… that woman is Xiao Qing. You know her as well. She's now my sixth concubine. I've gotten tired of her already. Liu Zhen can have her back if he misses her so much! Not a big deal!”

His brother exploded in anger and gave Liu Feng a swift slap across the face.

Chapter 1135: A Proudly Strutting Liu Zhen

Liu Dalang wanted to explode from anger. How could there be someone so stupid?! This wasn't just any old grudge! His younger brother had stolen someone's wife! And here he was, talking about it so casually! Did he think that it was something like having taken a piece of candy? That he could just return it, and everything would be fine? The killing of another's parents and the taking of another's love engendered history's deepest grudges.

It was obvious to him that the victim was here for vengeance. His actions so far had been only appetizers, a small taste of what was to come. A pre-emptive ringing of their funeral bells, so to speak. The worst was yet to arrive!

And Liu Feng, that despicable brute... he thought that it wasn't a big idea, even now? 'I'll just give her back if I have to'. Was that even feasible?!

Hatred at being left destitute wasn't something that one would give up so easily, at least in Liu Dafang's opinion. He certainly wouldn't, if he were in the victim's shoes. In that instant, he wanted very badly to cut his useless brother down on the spot.

The Liu family's old man had a habit of spoiling his youngest son. He rushed to intercept his oldest son's murderous expression. "My child, calm down! The sky hasn't fallen in yet."

Liu Dalang was thoroughly upset. He sat back down on his chair angrily. "Father, you need to stop shielding this useless brute. Has he not troubled our family enough? And every time he does, I'm the one that has to clean up after him. But this time, he's practically drowned himself in the latrine! How am I supposed to deal with that? The sky hasn't fallen yet, but it's about to, alright?" The eldest Liu son was beyond exasperated.

"Impossible! Dalang, you are a government official that works for the imperial crown. He's just a commoner with no scholarly

honors whatsoever. He has no roots here in Scarlet Tang City. So what if he butters up some other officials? Do you think a few meals will be enough to turn them against us? It's not so easy as that." The old man was more astute than one would expect.

The man he spoke to, however, had a different opinion. "Father, those officials won't turn against us, but they can definitely indulge in inaction. It's hard to refuse requests after receiving all those presents. Liu Zhen is both generous and of means. Many among the court are singing his praises. They emphasize his benevolence and candor and that he's someone to befriend"

"So what? That doesn't matter. Like I said, he won't lay a hand on the family of a government official. Is he reckless enough to employ personal justice within the Vermilion Tang Empire?"

"Father, you don't know the half of it. He has a bunch of cultivation experts with him, probably exactly for dealing with us, I fear. He won't do anything in the open, but experts are all lawless men in private. If he really moves against us, we can't resist at all. The strongest cultivator that we have is only sky sage realm. He, on the other hand, seems to have brought a few emperor realms with him!" Liu Dalang really was worried.

He'd seen much violence in his time and knew that vengeance wasn't something to be trifled with. Anyone who thought further would realize that no sane man would tolerate Liu Feng's actions. Who could bear the pain of having his woman taken away from him?

"If things are as you say, Dalang, then what should we do?" The Liu family's old man was finally showing a hint of concern.

"There's no other way. We need to yield. This is as bad as being under another's roof. Let me prepare valuable presents and go visit him first. I'll give him a preliminary token of our apology."

"Will he accept it?" The old man asked.

“Of course not. This is only to test the waters. Liu Feng has to face this mess himself. Apologizing with utmost humility is the only possible solution. If he’s lucky, the other guy won’t kill him. If he’s not…” Liu Dalang trailed off, but it was obvious what he meant.

“What’re you saying?” Liu Feng jumped up angrily. “Brother, are you going to give up your own brother for someone to vent their anger on?”

Liu Dalang was upset in his own right. “Even if I did that right now, you pig, I don’t know if it’ll be enough to save our family. I’ll tell you straight that if sacrificing you keeps our family unscathed, I’ll do so gladly.”

He’d given up hope on Liu Feng quite a while ago. No matter how strong their brotherly bond, Liu Feng’s constant troublemaking had severed it many times over.

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There was a marked increase in the number of visitors Liu Zhen’s residence had been receiving of late. People from several of the nearby districts, some total strangers, began to act much more intimately all of a sudden. They seemed to think they had a life or death friendship with Liu Zhen. They came with annoying frequency, pretending to be polite and affectionate, but mostly came across as ingratiating instead.

One day, Liu Dalang came as well.

The Liu family had finally been unsettled enough to come on their own. This what Liu Zhen wanted to see after all of his machinations. He’d done everything to strike fear and agitation into the family’s hearts. He wanted them to spend their days in anxiety and unease.

“Oh? Who is this?” Liu Zhen looked at the Liu Dalang, feigning exaggerated surprise and bewilderment. “Excuse my poor eyesight.

May I ask who you are? Not one of my neighbors, are you?”

The eldest Liu felt great shame, but trudged forward anyway. “Brother Liu, I am Liu Yue, the assistant military minister at court.”

“The assistant military minister?” Liu Zhen blinked. “How quaint. I’ve invited many court officials to banquets recently, you know. I’m surprised I missed you. Did I? Or are you an imposter?”

Liu Dalang’s face stung with phantom pain. He didn’t know how to respond to a comment like that.

“Brother Liu, actually, the reason I came here today... is to express my sincere apology. That animal Liu Feng...” The eldest Liu gnashed his teeth, looking like he wanted to smack his younger brother to death.

“Hold on.” Liu Zhen waved a hand. “Who’s Liu Feng? I thought your name was Liu Yue. Can you represent him?”

Liu Dalang nodded. “I will apprehend him and bring him here straight away. You can do as you like with him, Brother Liu. Our family will not shed a single tear on his behalf!”

Liu Zhen’s only reaction was a faint smile. It was obvious that he wasn’t interested in Liu Dalang’s empty words. He wanted more concrete action.

Liu Yue grit his teeth, then saluted with cupped fist. “Kindly wait a moment. I will return shortly.”

As a man of resolve, Liu Yue had commanded his subordinates to watch over Liu Feng before his departure. He wanted to ensure his brother didn’t run off. As he expected, Liu Feng pulled the stunt when he realized the danger he was in. The precaution was put to good use.

In about an hour’s time, Liu Yue brought a restrained Liu Feng and Xiao Qian over to Liu Zhen’s. Upon trying to go in, however, he was stopped cold.

“Hold on. I won’t let these disgusting people dirty my home.” Liu Zhen’s tone was cold. He tossed the villainous couple a sidelong glance.

When enemies met in the street, it was normal for them to see red.

Liu Yue left Liu Feng and Xiao Qian kneeling in the street. Liu Zhen was free to let out his pent-up anger on them. It was a little shameful, but necessary for his family’s survival. Liu Yue felt that he’d done enough for his brother, anyway.

He couldn’t count the number of times that he had fixed his younger brother’s emergencies, making innumerable enemies along the way. But no matter how much effort he put in, he could not change Liu Feng’s nature. His younger brother never changed his behavior in the slightest. It slowly drove the elder Liu to despair.

This time, Liu Feng had brought down calamity upon their entire family. This wasn’t an exaggeration. Liu Yue was not the same kind of brainless dullard as his younger brother. He knew full well that Liu Feng’s victim had returned with full confidence about the success of their revenge. Why else would they have come back?

Liu Feng’s entire body was tied up. “Liu Zhen, you can’t blame me for this. Xiao Qian voluntarily came with me. I know you’re not happy about it, but do you think it’s my fault? Should I not accept a woman who comes to my doorstep?”

Liu Zhen? Xiao Qian had been somewhat confused before now. She’d had no idea why she’d been brought here. Her betrayal of Liu Zhen all those years ago had only been because of Liu Feng’s family’s wealth and superiority. She wanted more glory and grandeur than Liu Zhen could give her.

In Liu Feng’s home, she was only his sixth concubine, but she still stood by her prior choice. However, this new revelation stunned her. Liu Zhen? How could it be him? Hadn’t the house

here been sold long ago? Why was Liu Zhen living inside it once more?

What was going on? Her eyes followed the direction that Liu Feng spoke in, to find Liu Zhen, looking coldly back at her. His expression was an indecipherable mix. There was contempt, scorn, and a sliver of pity.

“Xiao Qian, is this the man that you sold me out for?” Liu Zhen’s voice was bland, but his heart was bitter.

Xiao Qian clearly didn’t understand the situation still. “You have the face to come back, Liu Zhen?!” She yelled. “A man like you should just lie down and die!”

“Hahaha,” Liu Zhen erupted in dismal laughter. “Well, sorry to say that I’ve let you down. I’ve not only come back, but I’ve made your man kneel before me and beg for mercy.”

“So what?” Xiao Qian shouted back loudly. “Do you think I regret anything? I regret giving you a chance in the first place. I know what kind of guy you are. What kind of airs are you putting on, huh?”

“Watch how you’re speaking to brother Liu, you tramp!” the eldest Liu scolded. “You’re the reason for all this trouble!”

Being berated was bewildering for Xiao Qian. In her heart, the Liu family’s eldest son was also their pillar. Why is he… why was he being so polite to someone as poor as Liu Zhen?

Has the world turned upside down?

Xiao Qian’s mind was full of questions.

The neighbors, meanwhile, began to gossip amongst themselves.

“Stupidity, your name is woman! Truly, they’re all witless creatures. A strapping young lad like Liu Zhen… why did she toss him to the wayside like that all those years ago? Pushing herself into the arms of some noble’s family didn’t work out for her, did

it? She gained a little but lost much."

"Isn't that right? How can Liu Feng compare to Liu Zhen?"

"Did you hear? These past four days, Liu Zhen has been holding feasts at the Drunken Immortals Garden. All his guests are prominent members of court. Even Liu Feng's brother, Liu Yue, wasn't important enough to go."

"Ah, young Liu Zhen has come into his fortune now. I knew long ago that he wasn't just some common man!"

The gossip summed up largely to meaningless flattery. On their lips, the once worthless Liu Zhen had become a model of success.

Chapter 1136: Returning to Veluriyam Capital

Xiao Qian finally figured out what was going on after listening to the comments floating around her. Had Liu Zhen actually gotten rich? Was he here to turn the tables on Liu Feng? Her heart skipped a beat when she looked at the battered Liu Feng, and then at the lofty-looking Liu Zhen. She finally understood everything.

She suddenly wailed. “Dearest Zhen, this really isn’t my fault. It’s this bastard who forced me to do this! You know he’s a tyrannical bully, and I have no choice but to... darling Zhen, you haven’t forgotten about me after so many years. You even came back for me. I... I’ve had enough of this! I want to come with you, dearest Zhen. Please, let me come with you. I can warm your bed. I can do anything. Please...”

The speed at which Xiao Qian suddenly changed her tune amused even Jiang Chen. This woman was extremely fickle. It was unbelievable how quickly her attitude had changed. Emperor Peerless and Madame Yun were also frowning. They never imagined that Liu Zhen’s woman would possess such a lousy character.

“Disgraceful!” Liu Zhen yelled angrily. “I’m not surprised at all to find that Liu Feng is a tyrannical bully, but I’m pretty sure he hasn’t forced you to sell my properties and sleep with him behind my back!”

Xiao Qian shouted and cried. “It was all his fault! He forced me to do everything. Dearest Zhen, you should know that the one I truly love is you. You are my one true love in this world. He was the one who forced me to abort your child! Darling Zhen, you can’t forgive this animal, you have to...”

“Enough!” Liu Zhen suddenly laughed bitterly. “Forced to abort? My child? Well said! The only thing I wanted to know today by

coming here was to learn who was the father of that child, but I guess there's no need to verify it any longer since they're already gone." His eyes reddened as he said this.

A moment later, Liu Zhen's eyes suddenly locked back on Liu Yue coldly. "Assistant Minister Liu, I've noticed your sincerity. However, there needs to be a conclusion to this disgusting affair, don't you agree? Do as you wish. I await your show of sincerity."

Liu Yue stared at him blankly. What did he mean by that? Was Liu Zhen asking him to punish his own brother?

Liu Zhen didn't waste time waiting for Liu Yue to break out of his daze. He immediately walked up and kicked Liu Feng in the groin.

Liu Feng let out a bloodcurdling scream as a terrifying, crunching sound came from his groin. The man collapsed on the ground and writhed all over, screaming in horrible pain during the process. It was the utter destruction of Liu Feng's family jewels!

Xiao Qian turned pale with fright and screamed again and again. "Don't kill me, darling Zhen, don't kill me! We were once husband and wife, and we loved each other deeply back then..."

"Shut up, slut!" Liu Zhen sneered. "I have no intentions of letting my blade be stained with your blood. That being said, I should thank you for being the cheap slut you are. You made me realize just how unnecessary my years of misery truly were. I won't kill you. From hereon, you and I shall go our separate ways." He looked back at Liu Yue. "This matter is settled. I hope that the Liu family won't forget today's matter. Remember that the heavens are watching before you commit such acts in the future."

Although this ending was a bit humiliating, Liu Yue knew that it was the best kind of ending he could hope for. At the very least, Liu Zhen didn't sound like he was going to pursue this matter any longer. That was a relief to Liu Yue, especially because of the pressure he felt from the unfathomable experts standing behind Liu Zhen. He almost felt like he'd just escaped from hell.

The entire Scarlet Tang City was in an uproar because of Liu Zhen's return, but the man himself soon mysteriously disappeared once more. A guard had been hired to protect his ancestral home, however. So it seemed that Liu Zhen had left the city again.

For a time, Liu Zhen became a moderate legend in Scarlet Tang City. His terribly idle neighbors shaped Liu Zhen's image into a mystical avenger, and a classic example of an underdog who fought against his oppressors and won. Many versions of the story were spawned and passed on over time.

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Liu Zhen looked a lot happier and relaxed after rid of his heartache. The group now headed towards Veluriyam Capital, and this time they encountered no obstacles along the way.

They reached Veluriyam Capital without a hitch a dozen or so days later.

After they passed the borders, Emperor Peerless concealed his magnificent bearing and maintained a low profile. The first thing Jiang Chen did after returning to Veluriyam Capital was to confirm if Mu Gaoqi and the others had returned safely.

Thankfully, everything had more or less proceeded as planned. Mu Gaoqi's group had returned safely to Veluriyam Capital since a month ago, and the Geng brothers were still hanging around, and they very excited to see Emperor Peerless and Madame Yun again.

Jiang Chen arranged Emperor Peerless' group to stay in the building across the street of Taiyuan Tower. Taiyuan Lodge had been another faction's property, but it'd changed hands after Jiang Chen won it from a bet. It was more than enough to accommodate Emperor Peerless' group.

Since Mu Gaoqi was Jiang Chen's sworn brother, Lin Yanyu had already taken him to the young lord residence at Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Lin Yanyu knew that his master valued Mu Gaoqi a

great deal, so he treated the latter with equal respect. Meanwhile, Elder Yun Nie stayed behind in Taiyuan Tower.

Shen Trifire had been the appointed manager of Taiyuan Tower, but the position had now been transferred to Elder Yun Nie. Everyone in Regal Pill Palace was extremely happy to see the elder again, because he was the first sect elder they'd run into after so many years post sect destruction. Additionally, Hallmaster Yun Nie of the Herbal Hall was very high up the totem pole.

After everyone was arranged for properly, Jiang Chen finally headed towards the young lord residence at Sacred Peafowl Mountain with his father.

Everyone in the young lord residence, especially Huang'er, was overjoyed when they learned of Jiang Chen's return. She had nearly singlehandedly managed the entire young lord residence on her own in recent times. Although it wasn't a difficult task, her longing for Jiang Chen had only increased with the passage of time. Naturally, the couple spent some sweet moments catching up.

"Come, Huang'er, let me introduce you to my father."

Huang'er had actually seen Jiang Feng a couple of times back in the Eastern Kingdom. However, he hadn't left an impression on her because Huang'er had no feelings for Jiang Chen back then, much less the duke of Jiang Han province. The duo had never interacted with each other. But today, Jiang Feng was no longer the duke of Jiang Han province. He was now her beloved's father and her senior. It was only a matter of time she called him "father" as well.

"Huang'er greets you, uncle." Huang'er's urbaneness, outstanding temperament, exquisite countenance, perfect figure, great intelligence and kindness made her literally flawless in every way. Her bearing of a well-bred young lady was especially unmatched by any top rate disciple in the Upper Eight Regions.

Jiang Feng laughed loudly. “Good, good! Huang’er, a girl as beautiful as tall bamboo. What a great name, what a wondrous temperament. Chen’er, you have a good eye for woman.”

Jiang Chen also laughed. “I believe it’s more luck than a good eye, father. If the heavens haven’t sent Huang’er to the Eastern Kingdom, there is no way our paths would have intersected.”

“You’re right, you’re right!” Jiang Feng was very happy. His son had grown up and even had a partner of his own now. His gratification and pride only increased when he saw how excellent his son’s partner was.

“I wonder how happy your mother will be if she sees Huang’er, Chen’er.” Jiang Feng sighed.

Jiang Chen didn’t conceal the matter of his mother from Huang’er. She looked very happy after he had briefly explained the ins and outs of this part of his journey. “Brother Chen, it is the heavens’ will and destiny’s power that have reunited uncle and auntie! Your filial piety must have touched the gods themselves!”

“Don’t worry, Huang’er. One day, I will accompany you to Myriad Abyss Island and rescue your father and mother as well.”

Huang’er agreed quietly as her heart became filled with limitless happiness. Ever since their relationship had been confirmed and they had become soulmates, her lonely heart had been slowly melted by Jiang Chen’s existence and contentment. The suffering she’d endured in the past was all worth it in the end. If she hadn’t gone through those hardships, she wouldn’t have met her beloved in this sea of humanity!

After Jiang Chen had set everything up for his father and arranged a few slaves to serve him, Jiang Chen finally left with Huang’er to express their longing for each other. Huang’er was full of admiration and praise when she heard of Jiang Chen’s experiences. She was deeply proud of him.

When she heard that Jiang Chen had become sworn brothers with Emperor Peerless, she felt joy for him from the bottom of her heart. She felt that her man was growing every day and that he was slowly becoming the true ruler of the human domain. Although that goal was still a ways away, it was looking like nothing could stop Jiang Chen in his rise.

“Oh right, Huang’er. How is Gaoqi doing right now? Does he show any signs of psychological trauma?” Jiang Chen still missed Mu Gaoqi.

“He has grown a lot and become a lot more mature after surviving this hardship. Mentality wise, I think he’s doing fine. That said, he seems to be extremely thirsty for knowledge and strength. It’s as if he wants to regain all the years he had lost during his captivity,” Huang’er responded.

“That’s good. Hard work can make up for the loss of time, not to mention that the mental fortitude he gained from this hardship may yet be a different form of wealth.”

Jiang Chen’s opinion of Mu Gaoqi had always been rather high. He had paid a high price to save Mu Gaoqi not only because Mu Gaoqi was his friend, but also because he valued his sect mate’s talents greatly.

Jiang Chen was surrounded by many people with great talent in pill dao, such his disciples Pill King Bu, Pill King Lu Feng and Lin Yanyu. However, none of them were as talented as Mu Gaoqi.

“Has His Majesty returned while I was gone?” Jiang Chen asked concerningly.

“Unfortunately, no. The atmosphere in Veluriyam Capital has been a little strange as of late, and Emperor Peafowl hasn’t returned from his journey. Thankfully, things are relatively well within Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but for some reason, Veluriyam Capital’s atmosphere feels oppressive right now. I feel like something is rising from the shadows.”

Sometimes, women relied on intuition instead of logical inference. However, such intuition had been proven to be better than rationality on many occasions.

“Huang’er, what do you mean, exactly?” Jiang Chen rarely let Huang’er’s opinions slide by his ears. On the contrary, he always listened to her opinions seriously. If she felt confident enough to voice her doubts, it was very likely that her worries weren’t unfounded. There must be some sort of basis behind all this.

Chapter 1137: The Scent of Danger?

While they were conversing with each other, a messenger reported that Emperor Coiling Dragon had come for a visit. Emperor Coiling Dragon was of course, the Coiling Dragon clan lord. Back then, Jiang Chen had lent him a hand by gifting a Pinecrane Pill that extended his lifespan by a thousand years. As a result, Emperor Coiling Dragon had overcome the bottleneck in his cultivation and entered the great emperor realm in one go. He was now officially the eighth great emperor of Veluriyam Capital.

Jiang Chen had participated in Emperor Coiling Dragon's crowning ceremony prior to leaving Veluriyam Capital. Today, the emperor's visit not long after the young lord's return must indicate some serious business to discuss. Jiang Chen didn't dilly dally. He immediately set out to meet the great emperor.

Emperor Coiling Dragon had brought young master Ji San with him as well. His friend had grown noticeably stronger and ascended into emperor realm after this period of separation. This shocking improvement caused Emperor Coiling Dragon to regard young master Ji San even more highly than before. For the past few years, the young man's cultivation had improved in an almost vertical fashion, and the powers of his bloodline had awakened continuously. It was to the point where even Emperor Coiling Dragon felt a little envious.

However, what the great emperor didn't know was that dragon bloodline essence Jiang Chen had gifted young master Ji San was the main reason for this drastic improvement. Young master Ji San's dragon blood was transformed thanks to the stimulation of this essence. As a result, many memories of inheritance had awakened in his mind. Most importantly, his bloodline was had been greatly improved. That was the main reason his strength had improved by leaps and bounds.

The current young master Ji San could absolutely stand toe-to-

toe with the rest of the top rate young lords of Veluriyam Capital. At this rate, he might surpass them all completely in just three to five years, including Emperor Shura's greatest disciple, Li Jiancheng.

"Long time no see, Emperor Coiling Dragon, Brother Ji. You both look much better than you were before."

"Haha, brother, don't think I haven't heard about you! It seems that you've made a name for yourself again during your trip! Right now, everyone is gossiping that you disguised yourself as Sir Shao and made a name for yourself in Pillfire City, Tilted Moon Region and even Great Yu Upper Region! You're famous everywhere," young master Ji San teased.

"Ah? Everyone knows all of this?" Jiang Chen was slightly caught off guard.

"Yeah, it did. Is there a problem?" Jiang Chen's reaction surprised young master Ji San in turn.

Jiang Chen wasn't sure how to react. He figured that the Han brothers of the Great Yu Sky Sword Sect must have spread the news to increase his fame. This meant that more and more people would learn about the name of Pill King Zhen in the Upper Eight Regions. The intention behind their actions was good, so Jiang Chen couldn't find fault. Most importantly, he had already returned to Veluriyam Capital. He no longer needed to worry about being attacked on the road.

"Alright, let us talk business, Ji Ole Third." Emperor Coiling Dragon tapped the table once with his finger. Young master Ji San chuckled before sitting down with proper posture.

"Your Majesty, what might you like to address today?" A bit of astonishment appeared in Jiang Chen's eyes.

"Young lord Zhen, both you and His Majesty, Emperor Peafowl have left Sacred Peafowl Mountain for almost a year. Sacred

Peafowl Mountain is quite empty during this period, and the state of Veluriyam Capital is... turbulent beneath the surface. You may not know this, but Emperor Shura left Veluriyam Capital for a short trip around the time the two of you were gone, followed by Emperor Skysplitter. A few months ago, Emperor Petalpluck announced sealed doors seclusion and didn't look like he was coming out any time soon... Even the boisterous Emperor Mountaincrush seems to have become much quieter during this time. Emperor Void is the only one who kept in touch with me, and we are both worried about the same thing."

"What is that you're worried about?" Jiang Chen asked solemnly.

"We are worried for Emperor Peafowl's safety," Emperor Coiling Dragon declared gravely.

"What do you mean?" Jiang Chen frowned. He didn't think that anyone in Veluriyam Capital would dare attack Emperor Peafowl. He didn't think anyone could succeed either.

If Emperor Peafowl was so easy to deal with, he couldn't have ruled Veluriyam Capital so firmly for three thousand years. There were no petty schemes that could bridge the chasm of strength that represented Emperor Peafowl.

"Don't you think that Emperor Shura and Emperor Skysplitter's time of departure this time is a little queer? Emperor Peafowl has always enjoyed travelling alone, but we haven't heard anything from His Majesty since his departure. It may just be a coincidence, young lord Zhen, but... there's no one in Veluriyam Capital who isn't aware of Emperor Shura's ambition. Young lord Fan's death quieted his ambitions a little, maybe he thought that Emperor Peafowl would give up the throne to him, but after you were made the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, this precarious balance was disrupted once more."

"Has his ambition reared its head again?" Jiang Chen asked with a smile that didn't reach the eye.

“You can say that.” Emperor Coiling Dragon sighed. “Young lord Zhen, now that you’ve returned, you must strive to run Sacred Peafowl Mountain well. Make some noise and let everyone know that Sacred Peafowl Mountain is still as strong as ever. Only then will the populace maintain their faith and continue to support us. Otherwise, if Emperor Shura manages to gather enough forces to attack us from all sides, Sacred Peafowl Mountain would be in a dangerous situation. We do not want to be on the wrong side of the wheels of history.”

“Brother, you must not take this lightly. The only reason Veluriyam Capital was peaceful for three thousand years was because Emperor Peafowl had absolute authority in this place. Now that His Majesty is gone, a lot of people is soon to bare their fangs and show their ugly faces.”

It wasn’t the first time Jiang Chen had witnessed the cruel fight for power. Emperor Peafowl had long since been wary of Emperor Shura’s kind. The latter had been mentioned more than once during their conversations.

Emperor Shura was the kind of person who might stake everything he had for the sake of grasping power. But on the other hand, he might not necessarily be willing to fight to the death for the future and destiny of Veluriyam Capital. To put it bluntly, he was a power hungry person. He wanted power, but not the responsibility that came with said power.

This was the greatest difference between Emperor Shura and Emperor Peafowl. Emperor Peafowl’s heart was big enough to hold every person beneath the heavens, but Emperor Shura’s eyes were set on his status only.

Jiang Chen dared not treat Emperor Coiling Dragon’s sincere advice carelessly. He had to be on his guard no matter what Emperor Shura’s recent actions might be. After all, there was no telling if his enemies might pull a trick or two behind his back even if they appeared to be at a standstill for now.

More importantly, Jiang Chen was the only young lord left in Sacred Peafowl Mountain. If he was gone, no one would be able to inherit Emperor Peafowl's legacy. All Emperor Shura needed to do then was to wait for Emperor Peafowl to pass him the throne.

If Emperor Peafowl didn't return from his trip after a long time had passed, Emperor Shura didn't even need to wait for Emperor Peafowl to pass the throne to him. He could simply coerce the populace into accepting him as the next ruler of Veluriyam Capital in the name of the greater good. This was an invisible battle between two sides.

The first step of caution Jiang Chen took was to improve his residence's defense. The residence had its own defensive formations, but they were not his own creations. Therefore, the young man decided to give them an upgrade.

He possessed the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's formation disk and formation flag. The possibilities available to him increased widely as a result. He originally had two sets of formation flags; a primary flag and a secondary flag. He had used the secondary formation flag to arrange a formation at the entrance of the desolate wildlands. It was to prevent more human cultivators from serving themselves up as food for the demon race.

The primary formation flag was still with him. The formation Jiang Chen had set up previously could hold back a peak emperor realm cultivator without problems. However, the same couldn't be said about a great emperor. Today, he would try to set up a formation that even a great emperor couldn't break through in a short period of time.

After rummaging through his options for a very long time, Jiang Chen finally chose a particular formation from the ten great ancient formations of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect. It was called the Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation.

This formation didn't have many variations, but it was a

defensive formation that boasted some offensive capabilities as well. Nine sparks made up the defensive positions of the formation and the formation itself. The petal storm was the formation's method of attack. Any attackers who attacked the formation would be retaliated with a rain of radiant, violent flying flowers.

Although the formation's offense wasn't as strong as its defense, it boasted a great number of projectiles. Anyone who attacked the formation must first consider if their defenses could hold out against the sheer number of projectiles, and it made it difficult for the attacker to launch a full offensive against the formation. In a way, the formation's offense increased its own defensive power.

Of course, the Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation took a long time to set up. Luckily for Jiang Chen, he had a set of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's formation flags with him. It would save him a lot of energy in the process.

The heart of this formation was its etching. The inscription of the formation lines was extremely important to maximize the output of this formation. While the tier of a formation determined the formation's power, the same could be said about the level of the formation's arrangement.

The Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation was a sky rank formation. With proper arrangement, it could contain not one, but two or even three great emperors for a time. This was a massive project, and the amount of spirit stones used was staggering as well. Luckily for Jiang Chen, he had plenty of spirit stones right now.

Everyone donated some spirit stones to Jiang Chen when they heard that he was arranging a great formation. Even Liu Zhen threw half of his wealth into the formation. Those in the young lord's residence weren't aware that Liu Zhen had more than a billion spirit stones in his pockets, earned from the sale of the Radiant Celestial Grass. Thus, many were shocked by this charismatic display. They couldn't help but be impressed by the

low key origin realm cultivator's grand gesture.

Liu Zhen had continuously maintained a low profile in the young lord residence. It was because he couldn't find a reason to puff himself up. Everyone in this place were closer to Jiang Chen than he was. For example, Jiang Chen's sect mates, personal guards and family all shared closer relationships than him. It was why he kept a low profile and donated so many saint spirit stones this time. He wanted to assimilate into this larger family more.

Chapter 1138: Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation

The Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation cost two to three billion saint spirit stones to construct altogether. It was a shockingly intensive project. Only first rank sects could spend a sum like that with ease. The average third rank sect simply couldn't provide that much, period. A second rank sect had the ability, but would feel severe strain if they did so.

First rank sects had the budget for this kind of blatant consumption, but spending that much on a single formation seemed overly extravagant. Formations represented continued consumption over time. Without additional investment, its power would wane. Therefore, the two or three billion could only be considered starting capital. Thankfully, any stone outflows at a later date would be much less than this.

At completion, the formation had enough energy to run for a few decades. If there were gaps in the spirit stones within the formation after that, then considerations for later-stage reinforcement could be made. The exact amount required wouldn't be too far-fetched.

The cost in spirit stones was one thing, but the process of setting the formation up was something else altogether. It was much like cooking. Having quality materials available was only one of the prerequisites. Exactly how good the completed meal would be depended on the cook's skill. The Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation would certainly test Jiang Chen's skill to its limit.

Jiang Chen had studied formations in his previous life and was now backed up with the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's heritage in this one. There were no problems with his foundations.

The entire difficulty here lay in the etching of the formation.

The Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation was one of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's ten great formations. It occupied a place of prominence within the sect. Sky rank was what a rudimentary projection of the formation looked like. It had a more advanced form called the Hundred Sparks Petalstorm Formation. The latter was one of the keystone formations of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect, a true empyrean rank formation.

Jiang Chen did not even dare think about setting that up. At minimum, it would cost three to five times more in spirit stones... as a conservative estimate. A more likely ballpark figure was as many as twenty billion. Even someone as wealthy as Jiang Chen couldn't shoulder that cost. Therefore, the most he could wish for was to perfect the rudimentary form of the formation.

As long as he did, the formation could handle two or three great emperors without trouble. However, if a gang of great emperors attacked in tandem without pause, then the formation would need a continuous supply of spirit stones as fuel. Ultimately, it would end up a war of attrition. Of course, Jiang Chen would never let that happen.

He had trump cards in his possession that were able to kill great emperors. It was better to not have to use them in the first place, but they were available. Their exceptional value prevented their indiscriminate usage. After all, they were virtually impossible to replace.

It took half a month to construct a basic framework for the formation. Having a framework made the next step simpler. Filling up the formation with spirit energy was phase two. Jiang Chen had no desire to involve anyone else in this process. He could not and would not be replaced. He had to ensure that the formation was absolutely flawless.

The formation was finally finished a month after that. A radius of several dozen miles around the young lord's abode signified the core defense area. Its outer rings were spread out over a hundred.

In a sense, the formation had coverage over half of Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Jiang Chen did not broadcast the fact that he was setting up a formation to a wider audience. Aside from a few select individuals within his abode, the outside world knew nothing of his activities.

Only after constructing the formation did he invite Emperor Peerless and his wife over. He had some idea of how to deal with Madame Yun's condition now. The first step was baptism within the waters of his wood spirit spring. Its purifying power was irreplaceable. The wood spirit spring had the dual abilities of purification and recovery. Sharing the same attribute as its namesake, it radiated vitality and vigor.

Madame Yun had never enjoyed waters as pure as these before and found the experience quite delightful. A seven-day soak was sufficient to remove the majority of her old injuries. Of course, the spring could not weed out the root of her problems. Jiang Chen needed another method to accomplish that.

After plenty of consideration, he finally arrived at a conclusion that he felt was most appropriate for his friend's wife. There were two vectors of attack to this plan. One of them involved ingesting a pill, and the other utilized potent inner energy in a cleansing effort.

Emperor Peerless was necessary to this end. Jiang Chen's own inner energy was not yet sufficient to carry out a project as large as what he had in mind. There was no reason for the emperor to decline a request where his partner was the main beneficiary. Under Jiang Chen's guidance, he took every precaution to protect her from potential harm.

The plan took gradual effect as soon as its execution began. After only half a month of therapy, Madame Yun was largely healed. Even the patient found it incredible. For a long time now, she'd expected her wounds to remain for the rest of her life. She had

been prepared for extended suffering. So, her restoration to good health once more in Veluriyam Capital was wholly amazing.

Emperor Peerless's eyes reddened. "Little brother, my promise holds then as now. If you need me, give me a call any time. My life is yours."

Madame Yun's anguish these past few years had affected him even more adversely than it had her. Blessedly, his cultivation partner had been cured almost overnight. How could he not be excited at that?

After resolving his affairs one by one, Jiang Chen finally had time to refine pills once more. He had so many specimens of Celestial Grass on hand, but there wasn't a single cauldron of Sage Smile Pills to his name. A strand of grass was good for a dozen or more pills. If he was lucky, he could instead extract several times that amount. This much Celestial Grass was sufficient for more than a thousand. It was an overwhelmingly attractive prospect even for him.

Jiang Chen did not need the pills himself. He couldn't use them at all. But many close to him could use them very well. The best thing about these pills wasn't that a sage realm cultivator could gain a free level from one; it was that they had no side effects on their users' future cultivation whatsoever. That was the most attractive thing about them.

Refinement of the Sage Smile Pills was a piece of cake for Jiang Chen. The most difficult thing about it, if it could be called that, was getting one's hands on Celestial Grass in the first place. With that out of the way, the refinement process itself was trivial.

Jiang Chen did not leave a single strand unused. There was no point to doing so. The sole purpose of Celestial Grass was to refine Sage Smile Pills. It had no other meaning for its existence. Keeping it only delayed its moment of destiny. What difference did it make?

One by one, the pills exited the cauldron. At first, Jiang Chen's methodology was a little imperfect. He was mildly wasteful with the details. Of his initial cauldrons, none produced more than twenty pills. But the more he refined, the better he performed. On the final cauldron, he received a whole three dozen of them.

Summing all the pills up resulted in six to seven hundred. This harvest filled Jiang Chen with confidence. He gave one pill to every member below sage realm of Taiyuan Tower and his young lord's residence. The slaves bought from the markets who'd demonstrated good performance were included in the mass gifting. Jiang Chen intended for his handout to them as a token of encouragement.

It was completely unheard of for a slave to receive a top rank pill like the Sage Smile Pill as a gift. If the outside world knew about it, countless would curse him for a wasteful dandy. Something like the Sage Smile Pill could easily fetch ten or twenty million saint spirit stones in the open market and often traded for more. Yet, he was so generous as to gift such a treasured pill as a reward to his slaves!

Everyone knew that it was an act done to purchase popularity, but people were emotional creatures. Who wouldn't jump at such a gift? Responding with wholehearted adoration was the least they could do.

Liu Zhen received two Sage Smile Pills. The original agreement had been only one, but Jiang Chen gave him an additional because he deserved it. As the provider of the Celestial Grass in the first place, Liu Zhen had the lion's share of credit. But Jiang Feng had a part in it too, of course.

Giving away Sage Smile Pills to everyone relevant was the same as leveling up all the sage realm cultivators by one. This essentially improved the young lord's residence and Taiyuan Tower's overall strengths by the same amount.

Jiang Chen also delegated to Lin Yanyu the task of delivering three Sage Smile Pills to Emperor Void and Coiling Dragon. Both these great emperors were close friends of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. It was natural to provide one's friends with some complimentary benefits from time to time.

The cost of Jiang Chen's present surprised Emperor Void, who reciprocated with a present of his own. Emperor Coiling Dragon knew how able Jiang Chen really was, and accepted without much ceremony.

One day, as Jiang Chen sat in closed door meditation, a stray recollection suddenly popped into his head. With a slap of his leg, he swore silently. He opened his eyes, face full of shame. He'd suddenly recalled a matter that involved a woman.

The former disciple of the Walkabout Sect back in Myriad Domain, present young mistress of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda in the Great Scarlet Mid Region. Wei Xing'er.

At first, Jiang Chen had thought that Wei Xing'er was perfectly happy with her new position. He found out later that she actually had as much authority as a lamp post. The Veranda master had made her the young mistress because he wanted her to become a pure yin human cultivation cauldron. She would be a useful tool for the master's breakthrough to seventh level emperor realm.

He had discovered this during his expedition into the desolate wildlands to retrieve some Requiem Wood. It had been over three years since then. In the heat of the moment, Jiang Chen felt a bit of embarrassment. He hadn't promised Wei Xing'er anything, but his ultimate decision had been to return and rescue her. If he did so now, would he make it in time?

Huang'er had been privy to the matter as well, but it had been a long while since then. The removal of her Generation Binding Curse and the subsequent convalescence had led to it being forgotten.

He had been fine in his forgetfulness, but remembrance caused a small shadow to edge into Jiang Chen's heart. It was best to make a trip to the Great Scarlet Mid Region and take a look for himself. Regal Pill Palace's reconstruction had taken great strides forward already. A jaunt to the Great Scarlet Mid Region could very possibly result in some news relating to them?

Chapter 1139: Revisiting Great Scarlet Capital

Veluriyam Capital was a haven for wandering cultivators. The weather was nice and the environment not as harsh as Pillfire City's. It was one of the most tolerant nations towards foreigners in the Upper Eight Regions as well. Take the Geng brothers, Geng Qianchi and Geng Qianzhang for example. After they escorted Mu Gaoqi back to Veluriyam Capital, they discovered that the longer they stayed, the more they fell in love with the city. Since Emperor Peerless himself was planning to stay in Veluriyam Capital, the Geng brothers decided that they would remain as well.

Since they used to operate in the northern area of the Upper Eight Regions, the unique culture of the south was also of great interest to them. Most importantly, Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Taiyuan Tower possessed a lot of cultivation resources. Being friends with Emperor Peerless and Jiang Chen, they didn't need to worry about of resources at all.

When Emperor Peerless and the Geng brothers heard that Jiang Chen wanted to visit Great Scarlet Mid Region, they all expressed their intentions to accompany him. He was aware that they meant well, but a bigger group would only be detrimental to his journey this time.

After all, everyone knew about Emperor Peerless now. He attracted attention like a magnet wherever he went. Moreover, at this point, everyone in the entire Upper Eight Regions knew that the so-called Pill King Shao Yuan was in fact the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Pill King Zhen himself. Therefore, anyone could arrive at the assumption that Pill King Zhen was nearby if Emperor Peerless were to show his face. Jiang Chen could hardly cover his tracks this way.

He most certainly had the Han brothers of the Great Yu

Skysword Sect to thank for his dilemma. In order to get word out that Pill King Zhen had become their guest pill king, they spared no effort in promoting the fact that Sir Shao, the pill king who had become famous in the west and the north region not long ago, was none other than Pill King Zhen himself. As a result, Pill King Zhen became the center of attention in the Upper Eight Regions once more.

Admittedly, the Han brothers' motives were kind, but that wasn't to say that their efforts were completely selfless. The good was that Jiang Chen's fame had reached even farther corners of the world. His legendary stories were now sung not just in Veluriyam Capital, but the entire human domain.

Back then, Jiang Chen was able to beat Pill King Ji Lang over the Longevity Pill because they were battling in his home ground. Pillfire City claimed that Pill King Ji Lang hadn't made much preparations before he attended the competition, so his loss to Jiang Chen wasn't that big of a deal. Pill King Ji Lang should've took the pill battle more serious than he had.

But this time, neither side had known that they were competing against one another while they were attempting to cure the Moon God Precious Tree. Neither side had known what to expect. In the end, Pill King Ji Lang was completely clueless, but Pill King Zhen had easily treated the tree.

Although this still didn't mean that Pill King Zhen completely surpassed Pill King Ji Lang in every way, it at least pointed out that Pill King Ji Lang was not infallible. Previously, Pill King Ji Lang was famed for being undefeated in his whole life and untouchable by anyone amongst the younger generation. However, he had lost twice to the same person already. As a result, Pill King Ji Lang was starting to look like Pill King Zhen's stepping stone.

It was exactly because "Pill King Zhen" was famous that Jiang Chen was forced to watch his every move. After all, there was no telling how many pairs of eyes in the entire human domain were

fixed on him behind his back now.

This wasn't the first time Jiang Chen had visited Great Scarlet Mid Region, but his anger hadn't diminished with the passage of time at all. Although the Eternal Celestial Capital was the mastermind behind the destruction of Myriad Domain, Great Scarlet Mid Region was the main force who did the dirty work. Even if they were just a tool that was manipulated by the Eternal Celestial Capital, it didn't change the fact that they were one of the main culprits. This was without mentioning that the bounty for his head, that had in fact, increased several times over.

He wasn't planning on starting a slaughter in Great Scarlet Mid Region just yet. To begin with, the timing wasn't right. Two, the main reason he was visiting Great Scarlet Mid Region this time was to rescue Wei Xing'er. Wei Xing'er had helped Jiang Chen a great deal during the auction at Great Scarlet Capital. He owed her a big favor.

Moreover, that was the first time Jiang Chen realized that the temptress had another side to her facade. No matter how bad she was in the past, Jiang Chen believed that she was worth saving after everything she had done for Myriad Domain.

In Great Scarlet Capital, Wei Xing'er was the young madam of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda. The Resplendent Emerald Veranda was a great faction in Great Scarlet Capital. Here, there were very few factions who possessed greater wealth than them, and there were less than twenty factions whose power exceeded theirs. Even the fourth rank sects of Great Scarlet Mid Region had to toe the line before the Resplendent Emerald Veranda. The only sects that came to the attention of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda in Great Scarlet Mid Region were the third rank sects. One might say that there were almost no factions, barring the royal family, who could make the Resplendent Emerald Veranda submit.

The headquarters of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda was

located in the most illustrious district of Great Scarlet Capital. This was also where Jiang Chen happened to be at the moment. When he looked in the distance, he was surprised to find that the entrance of the headquarters was surprisingly crowded. People thronged outside the wide entrance.

“Hmm? What’s going on?” Jiang Chen was a little astonished by this. To his knowledge, the Resplendent Emerald Veranda was a great faction that specifically traded in all sorts of precious and rare treasures. This faction had an almost perfect monopoly over the high-end market of the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region.

Since it specialized in high-end trade, it was hardly a place that could be afforded by most wandering cultivators. This meant that a festive scene and bustling crowd would never appear in any store belonging to them.

“Are they hosting an event or something?” Jiang Chen approached the crowd with doubts in his mind.

“The ranking list is about to be announced. I can’t wait! Four of the protectors chosen by the Veranda master were wandering cultivators, you know.”

“Hehe, they don’t exactly have a choice in this matter, do they? They can’t hire anyone from the great sects, and the senior executives of fourth rank sects suffered heavy losses when they were pursuing Jiang Chen. Right now, Great Scarlet Mid Region is in dire need of talent.”

“That’s true. If it wasn’t for that disaster, a wandering cultivator would never have been able to become a protector.”

“Haah, if only I could be as rich as the Veranda master! The Resplendent Emerald Veranda is quite possibly the only one who can afford twelve protectors at once. A normal faction would be hard pressed to hire one or two protectors, much less twelve.”

Jiang Chen couldn’t figure out what was going on despite

eavesdropping on the crowd for a moment. Left with no choice, he asked, “Excuse me, friend, but may I ask why the Veranda master had hired so many protectors? Is the Resplendent Emerald Veranda planning to do something big?”

“Hah, you’re obviously not from around here!” The guy receiving the question answered proudly, spewing spittle everywhere. “The Veranda master is planning to break through to sixth level emperor realm, so he wishes to hire a group of protectors to protect him while he makes the attempt. This has been the hottest news in Great Scarlet Mid Region for the past few months.”

Great Scarlet Mid Region wasn’t completely lacking in high level emperor realm cultivators. At the very least, the royal family and the third rank sects possessed experts at this level. However, the Veranda master either couldn’t afford to hire such experts, or the other parties thought the task to be utterly beneath them.

The Veranda master might be rich and powerful, but there would always be people who couldn’t be moved with just wealth and power. After all, there was always someone even richer and more powerful in Great Scarlet Mid Region. That was why the Veranda master had no choice but to set up a public tryout to choose his protectors.

This was where the Veranda master differed from a sect expert. If a sect expert was about to achieve a breakthrough, his sect mates would naturally act as his protectors. While Jiang Chen was listening for more information, a commotion suddenly broke out at the front.

“It’s coming out, the ranking list is about to come out!”

“Hehe, I’m looking forward to this. I’m guessing that all the ones who are chosen have to be at least third level emperor realm. Those who are first or second level emperor realm may not even qualify to enter!”

“But of course, a first or second level emperor realm cultivator is

a little too weak compared to the Veranda master."

Jiang Chen was pleasantly surprised to hear this. The Veranda master hadn't made his breakthrough to seventh level emperor realm just yet. As the cultivation cauldron, Wei Xing'er must still be safe for now. This meant that he hadn't come in vain.

Truthfully, the one thing that worried Jiang Chen the most was that the Veranda master had already sacrificed Wei Xing'er and made his breakthrough before his arrival. If that was the case, then even he couldn't turn back time and save her.

"Please be quiet, everyone. The final list of the protectors has been decided after the Veranda master has gone through the names multiple times. The list will be announced right away..."

The ranking list was hung high, revealing many prominent names in Great Scarlet Mid Region to everyone.

"Tsk tsk, Ole Zhang is on this list? But he's a sixth level emperor realm expert! He isn't weaker than the Veranda master at all. What on earth did the Veranda master pay him?"

"Hasn't Ole Zhang disappeared from public view for several hundred years? Did he seriously come out just to act as the Veranda master's cultivation protector? Just how persuasive is this Veranda master?" A series of shocked exclamations broke out from the crowd.

"Look, Elder Gao is in the list as well. Elder Gao is a third rank sect elder and supposedly a mid level emperor realm cultivator. I can't believe that the Veranda master is able to hire a sect elder!"

The names on the list represented a certain identity and status in Great Scarlet Mid Region. Even the four wandering cultivators at the end of the least were extremely famous in Great Scarlet Mid Region and its surrounding regions. The level of the protectors drew many admiring exclamations from the crowd.

Almost all of the names were unknown to Jiang Chen. However,

he knew that none of these protectors were small fry. They were all obstacles who would stand in the way of his attempt to save Wei Xing'er.

"It seems that this Veranda master has offended a lot of people and made a lot of enemies. If not, this level of protection is quite unnecessary."

Chapter 1140: The Four Great Wandering Cultivators

Jiang Chen paid attention to the list of names. Just as discussed, the weakest of the protectors was third level emperor realm. The strongest among them was sixth level: Elder Zhang, the man who was presently a hot topic of discussion.

Another was fifth level, a secluded elder of a certain third rank sect of the region, boasting of immense strength and eminence. Aside from those two, most on the list were fourth level emperor realm. Even the four comparatively weakest names had reached, rather alarmingly, third level emperor realm.

The fact that strength was all relative had to be emphasized. In truth, 'weakest' wasn't really the right word. Third level emperor realm cultivators were uncommonly valuable even in the likes of Veluriyam Capital. In a first rank sect, they would be more than worthy as common elders. If they were from a prominent or powerful background, their position would be even loftier.

The leader of Eternal Celestial Capital's invading force had only been fourth level emperor realm, his name Gong Wuji. Therefore, a third level emperor realm cultivator was more than adequate of ruling over a fourth rank sect.

The fourth rank sects that had come with Gong Wuji were led by sect heads who'd chiefly been second level emperor realm. Third level emperor realm sect heads were more than scarce. A certain Sect Head Qin Mo, third level emperor realm, spearheaded the advance into Myriad Domain because of his slight edge in cultivation. He'd managed to capture Ling Bi'er to blackmail Jiang Chen, who cut the sect head down by activating restrictions left behind by a mid level empyrean cultivator Guo Ran.

From this, it was evident that a third level emperor realm cultivator was more than qualified to lead a powerful fourth rank

sect. By extension, they occupied a tangibly important position in Great Scarlet Mid Region. And yet, the master of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda had been able to casually invite twelve emperor realm cultivators. Among the list of protectors, third level emperor realm ones were the weakest! Jiang Chen could only cluck his tongue at the luxury of the line-up.

Great Scarlet Mid Region wasn't exactly a remarkable presence in the entirety of the human domain. It couldn't hold a candle to several of the stronger middle regions, much less the Upper Eight. This comparison also illustrated how insignificant Myriad Domain had been. The lower region didn't even have a single emperor realm of its own.

Granted, there had been a possibility that Myriad Domain could've stood on its own merits at one point in time. The invasion from Great Scarlet Mid Region centuries ago had weakened it to a pitiable point.

All of the domain's emperor realm cultivators had been slain in that clash, as had any sky sage realm ones. The cataclysmic event had been the deciding stroke in the Myriad Domain's eventual decline. Otherwise, the domain had had the foundation to develop into a mid region once upon a time. Though it had lacked in both soft and hard power compared to the Great Scarlet Mid Region, the gap had been slowly shortening.

That was another reason for the Great Scarlet Mid Region's fervor in invading the Myriad Domain. The threat from a promising upstart and the push from their hidden backers in the form of Eternal Celestial Capital had both been compelling reasons for their mobilization.

Jiang Chen stared at the Resplendent Emerald Veranda's bustling doorstep, then glanced back at the list of names again. He sunk into deep reflection. The more he thought about it, the more he was convinced that something was off. If the Veranda master really did have so many enemies, he should've maintained a lower

profile to weather out a potential storm. That group of protectors should've been hired privately instead.

The unnecessary publicity was nothing short of an open announcement to any mortal enemies that hey, he was going to break through, and if they had any balls, then they should come and get him! Such behavior was understandable from a younger man, but the Veranda master was a successful businessman. Caution and risk management should've been part of his creed. Thus, Jiang Chen found the situation increasingly fishy. Exactly what about it was dubious, though, he couldn't figure out just yet.

He silently committed the list to memory. At the same time, the crowd suddenly diverted to the two sides. They were voluntarily moving aside, making way for someone apparently important. Jiang Chen kept his own troublemaking to a minimum and went with the flow.

Four emperor realm experts padded down this newly-created path. They all looked like wandering cultivators, taking large strides towards the Veranda headquarters' doors. Some of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda's most elite cultivators served as their ushers.

"It's them!"

"I know who that white-haired emperor realm cultivator is. He's Ole Clearcloud! A very distinguished senior wandering cultivator in the surrounding regions."

"Who doesn't know him? Senior Clearcloud defeated an entire fourth rank sect by himself many years ago and almost destroyed that sect entirely. That happened in the Swordfield Mid Region, I believe. After that, countless sects from the region invited him to join their sect. Many promised him their highest elder positions. But Senior Clearcloud refused all of them."

"Senior Clearcloud is a wild and unworldly man. I don't think he would much enjoy life in a sect. But a senior is a senior, alright.

He’s done well for himself despite his lone status.”

“That’s true. The strongest senior wandering cultivators have it much tougher than those in sects.”

“Of course, of course. If the senior wandering cultivators had good backgrounds and plentiful resources, perhaps they’d have attained even greater heights by now.”

“Senior Clearcloud aside, what of the three other seniors? Who are they?”

“I recognize that silver-browed senior! He is a wandering cultivator as well, though I recall he tried to join a sect at some point. But apparently that sect then angered a bigger sect and was completely wiped out. The senior remained unscathed, though... many call him Senior Silversand, or the Silversand Cavalier.”

“What, so he’s Senior Silversand?!”

There was a wave of cheers. The admiration for senior wandering cultivators was evident. Besides Ole Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier, there were two other wandering cultivators as well.

One of them was a decrepit old woman who looked like she could collapse at any moment. Her feeble mannerisms evoked suspicion in many whether she was merely here to make up the numbers. However, her eyes did exude a strangely bone-chilling light that caused involuntary goosebumps in the peanut gallery. A sharp gaze like that was clearly not within the capabilities of just any ordinary woman.

The last one was the handsomest and most well-dressed of the four. He was tall and slender, and carried a paper fan. He moved with a natural elegance and grace that was befitting of a dapper gentleman.

Despite his looks, his mouth was curved in a strangely eerie fashion. The corners of his eyes being snidely upturned certainly

didn't help things. Thus, he exuded an aura of aloofness. Though his appearance was comelier than the rest, it was difficult to feel any sense of friendliness from his direction. The other three cultivators walked with blank expressions, not looking to the left or to the right. In contrast, this gentleman's eyes wandered side to side as he moved, his irises mildly bewitching.

Jiang Chen stared at the man with indescribable disgust. He didn't want to give himself away and avoided locking eyes with the other man. At this time, a group of men exited the Veranda headquarters' doors. The man in the lead had a genteel demeanor of his own and commanded the limelight from his cronies. In this way, he was distinguished from the rest.

Is that the master of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda? Jiang Chen's heart skipped a beat. Although he had never seen the man in person before, he locked onto the man instantly. It had to be him, no question about it.

When one did not disguise one's bearing and mannerisms, he became easy to identify at a glance. The display that the Veranda master was putting on embodied that axiom perfectly. Unfortunately, Wei Xing'er was missing from the master's groupies.

"Haha, thank you for coming right on time. I greatly appreciate your presence and attendance. Come, come, please step inside." The Veranda master spoke with excessive politeness.

Even though the four of them were only wandering cultivators, emperor realms who were lower level than he, the master nevertheless made sure not to offend any of his guests. Each and every word and action was filled with respect. The four cultivators were beyond flattered.

"I've heard stories about the Veranda master's courtesies to the talented," Ole Clearcloud exclaimed. "It is clear to me that those stories, and more, are true of the man himself. You have my

admiration.”

The Silversand Cavalier inclined his head in agreement.

The decrepit old woman commented as well, her voice hoarse. “Your fame has spread far and wide, master of the Veranda. One of the reasons I even agreed to come in the first place. If it were anyone else, why should I bother? Not that anyone would care. I’m just a frail old woman.”

“Hah, if Granny Goldneedle can be called a frail old woman, then no man in the surrounding domains can be called at all strong!” The Resplendent Emerald Veranda’s master roared with laughter.

Finally, he looked to the handsome young gentleman. “Sir Miao, you’ve made quite the name for yourself these past few years. Perhaps it’s your first time here in the Great Scarlet Mid Region? Your face might be an unfamiliar one, but I assure you that you are known far and wide.”

Sir Miao? The name caused another ripple to wash through the crowd.

“He’s Sir Miao?”

“So that’s the famous Sir Miao, huh?”

“Tsk tsk, Sir Miao is a rising star in the wandering cultivator world. He’s pretty well-known, both here and in the surrounding regions.”

“I didn’t think the Veranda master had so much face that even Sir Miao came at his call!”

“Granny Goldneedle, too! She’s another of those senior wandering cultivators. As expected of the Veranda master’s splendid resourcefulness.”

Sir Miao? Granny Goldneedle? The names rang hollow on Jiang Chen’s ears. He had known very little of the outside world back when he was in the Myriad Domain. After he came to Veluriyam

Capital, his horizons were restricted to the Upper Eight Regions. He had neglected to gather any info about any lower and middle regions.

He knew of some of the bigger factions, but very little about their wandering cultivator bubbles. The four people here were likely the leading members of these bubbles. They wouldn't have entered the sight of a character like the Veranda master's, otherwise.

Chapter 1141: Slipping Into the Resplendent Emerald Veranda

Jiang Chen didn't pay much attention when the four venerated wandering cultivators were welcomed into the Resplendent Emerald Veranda. He was deeply entrenched in his thoughts. Not seeing Wei Xing'er made him worry about her well-being.

He could choose to blindly barge into the Resplendent Emerald Veranda, but there was no doubt that that was a dumb move. The Resplendent Emerald Veranda was as dangerous as a dragon's lair or a tiger's den. Fighting its master and the four wandering cultivators alone would be a great challenge unless he used his hidden cards. However, Jiang Chen didn't want to resort to brute force unless it couldn't be helped.

His experience from all these years enabled him to know when to apply brute force and when to apply his wits. Right now, brute force clearly wasn't the suitable choice. It didn't take long before an idea occurred to him.

Moments after the group entered the Veranda, Jiang Chen squeezed his way through the crowd and walked towards the entrance. He was stopped by four Veranda guards before he could even get close.

"Friend, please hold your step. Only important guests are allowed to enter today." The guards were quite well mannered even though they were standing their ground.

Jiang Chen had anticipated this. He kept a straight face and smiled. "I hear that the Resplendent Emerald Veranda collects every single treasure under the sky. I've stumbled upon something precious and travelled across many regions, but no one seems to realize its true value. Today I've come all the way here, only to find myself barred at its entrance. Is this how the Resplendent Emerald Veranda conducts its business?

The confidence and poise he exuded when expressing his displeasure was something the guards couldn't possibly ignore.

One of the guards explained patiently. "Friend, if you really possess a priceless treasure, perhaps you can wait a few more days? The Veranda will surely welcome you with open arms then. Unfortunately, we have important matters to attend to these days..."

"Hahaha! Important matters? How important can it be that you'd ignore your own business? Never mind. The Resplendent Emerald Veranda is clearly undeserving of its reputation. My treasure and the Veranda aren't fated for each other. Perhaps I must travel to the Upper Eight Regions to find someone who knows good from bad." Jiang Chen muttered to himself without being overly quiet or loud. However, his voice was properly penetrative.

An esteemed elder of the Veranda had heard the commotion outside. He walked out of the entrance and stared at Jiang Chen.

"Esteemed sir, how dare you blow your own horn and make such a big fuss in front of our premises? You are spewing out slander. Are you here to cause trouble?" This elder held a high position within the sect. His voice was filled with authority and dominance. He clearly felt that this newcomer was trying to cause trouble on purpose.

Jiang Chen flashed a smile and didn't back down. "If it weren't for the Veranda's reputation, I wouldn't have traveled thousands of miles to come here. I'd finally arrived after such a long and strenuous journey, yet you're telling me to wait for a few days more? Is it really wrong for me to complain about your attitude?"

The elder snorted. "What treasure could you possibly have to warrant such arrogance? I'll assist you in this matter if there's truly something great in your possession. If there isn't, don't blame me for being hostile!"

Jiang Chen couldn't be bothered to waste his breath. "I'll only see the Veranda master. Go back to where you came from, old man. What authority could you possibly have?"

"Insolence! He's an elder of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda! He definitely has the authority to represent the Veranda!"

"Sir, you're only here to stir up trouble aren't you?"

The elder smiled out of rage. "Fine. It's now clear that you're not here for business."

Jiang Chen frowned. "How can you be so sure?"

He immediately reached for a bottle that contained a drop of Kunpeng blood from Veluriyam Pagoda. He'd received three drops back then. One drop had been gifted to Emperor Peafowl, and he'd kept the other two drops. He was prepared to give one to Emperor Peerless, but the timing wasn't right yet. He would gift the Kunpeng blood to the emperor when he was completely certain of the latter's loyalty.

A single drop of this blood could transform anyone into an empyrean cultivator. The mysterious resculpting powers of this bloodline had been passed down from the ancient times. No matter how hard modern cultivators trained, they could rarely ever attain such heights. Therefore, every single drop of blood was of immeasurable value.

Its appearance could lead to a bloodbath if anyone had recognized its value. It was definitely something that could throw the entire human domain into an endless war. Countless bloodbaths and slaughters have occurred throughout history in the name of more resources and strength.

When Jiang Chen casually brought out the bottle, he figured that nobody in the Great Scarlet Mid Region would be able to recognize it. The aura radiating from it was vastly different from true dragon's blood. Anybody who knew a thing or two about

bloodlines would immediately recognize a true dragon's blood. The same couldn't be said for the Kunpeng blood however. Of course, he didn't fully reveal the Kunpeng blood's aura. He casually waved it in front of the elder and let some of its aura leak out.

Due to his superior handling, he was able to waft just enough to pique the elder's interest. As expected, the elder's eyes brimmed with curiosity as soon as the aura disappeared.

"Friend, what is that?" He was visibly moved by the item.

Jiang Chen wasn't at all surprised by the elder's complete change in attitude. He smiled blandly. "I wouldn't be here if I knew what it was. Oh well. Since you don't seem to possess even the slightest sincerity, I bid you farewell." He raised his hands in a cupped fist salute and was prepared to leave.

The elder quickly ran up to Jiang Chen and apologized. "Friend, please hold. It was my fault for being rude to you."

Jiang Chen waved his hands dismissively. He ignored the elder completely and kept walking on.

"Friend, please wait! Nobody except us can recognize what you hold and sell it to the appropriate party! Even if someone was willing to buy it from you, your returns will definitely be dwarfed in comparison to what we can offer!"

The elder was trying his hardest to make Jiang Chen stay. He was clearly mesmerized by the bloodline's majestic aura. Even the Veranda master wouldn't be able to contain himself if he were present, let alone a mere elder. The Kunpeng bloodline's power was extremely captivating after all. Even an idiot would realize its value.

Jiang Chen stopped abruptly and smiled at the elder. "I stand my ground. I will only see the Veranda master himself."

The elder didn't dare to promise anything on his own accord. Instead, he patiently explained everything. "The master is

receiving very important guests and isn't available right now. Friend... why don't you stay for a few days? We will treat you with the highest honors possible. Once the master is free, I assure you that he'll immediately see you and give you a reply which you'll be most satisfied with!"

Jiang Chen frowned. "A few days? How can you expect me to wait for a few days?"

The elder rubbed his hands together anxiously. "It's only a few days. It'll pass in a blink of an eye. Friend, surely you can spare us a few days?"

Jiang Chen grumbled deeply before he replied. "Fine. I'm willing to come to a compromise. I've once passed through the Great Scarlet Capital and heard that the young madame of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda is an extremely fair businesswoman. If your master is occupied, surely your mistress could spare some time?"

The young madame? The elder gave Jiang Chen a complicated look.

"What is it now?" Jiang Chen brimmed with annoyance.

The elder mumbled. "Esteemed sir, in recent days, it's even harder to see our mistress..."

"You might as well save your breath then. The Resplendent Emerald Veranda does lack sincerity after all. Farewell!" Jiang Chen had come all this way just to see Wei Xing'er. Since the elder was giving him all kinds of excuses, he decided that leaving was the best way to advance.

The elder hesitated greatly when he saw Jiang Chen leave.

"Friend, please wait a moment. I'll consult the Veranda master and the young madame to see if either of them are willing to receive you. It'll only take fifteen minutes. Surely you have fifteen minutes to spare?"

Jiang Chen snorted. “Fifteen minutes it is then. If I hear nothing from you after fifteen minutes, you may simply assume that the deal is off.”

The more arrogant Jiang Chen acted, the less suspicious he seemed. The elder was throwing all kinds of excuses at Jiang Chen to test if he was actually the master’s enemy. After close scrutiny, the elder concluded that this wasn’t the case.

A few moments later, the elder came running back to Jiang Chen. “Friend, our master has agreed to let you meet our madame. Esteemed sir, please understand that our mistress is a member of the rear court, so it’s advised that you show some respect and decorum during your interaction with her.”

Jiang Chen flashed a mocking smile. “Do you really think that everyone behaves like you?”

The elder smiled awkwardly. He felt a little insulted but he was able to cover up his anger well. The huge crowd watched on as Jiang Chen followed the elder’s lead and walked into the Resplendent Emerald Veranda.

In a remote hall, Jiang Chen finally saw Wei Xing’er again after so many years. She was still dressed in the same way as before, except she’d now lost some weight. However, she’d also become more mature and bewitching.

“Young madame, this is the guest. He has a treasure that he wants us to identify. He..”

“I know. Servitor Li, you may leave.” Wei Xing’er said coldly after making a dismissive gesture.

The elder hesitated a little. He was deciding if it was appropriate to leave. After all, the Veranda master had ordered him not to let anyone meet the young madame alone.

Wei Xing’er raised an eyebrow. “Servitor Li, do I not have the authority to dismiss you? If that’s the case, I’m no longer

interested. You can ask the master to deal with this himself."

She turned around and made to leave. The elder quickly stopped her. "This subordinate doesn't dare. I'll leave! Immediately!"

Chapter 1142: Wei Xingers Thoughts

It was only after the elder had left did Wei Xing'er's cold eyes mellow. There was a bit of anger and resentment in her eyes, but she was for the most part pleasantly surprised to see Jiang Chen. It was obvious that his unexpected visit had caught her off guard.

Wei Xing'er smiled slightly when she noticed the lingering caution on his face. "Rest easy, there are no eyes or ears around. This is the Resplendent Emerald Veranda's forbidden grounds and no one would dare scrutinize this place. To think that you would come to Great Scarlet Capital! I had thought our goodbye back then to be our last."

Wei Xing'er's smile looked a little bitter and resentful. It was obvious that her current lifestyle had ground away much of her willpower after so long.

Jiang Chen sighed quietly. "You did me a favor back then, Miss Wei. I'm here to save you."

"Save me?" Wei Xing'er smiled in self-derision. "I have no roots to return to. Where can I go even if I'm free? I am but a walking corpse here, but at least it's a peaceful and steady life. Too many years have passed. I hear that Myriad Domain has completely fallen under the Eternal Celestial Capital's control. Little guy, I know that you still haven't given up on revenge, but listen to me when I tell you to let go of that thought.

"We so-called geniuses of Myriad Domain are nothing compared to the members of a true first rank sect. It's true that your talents may be ten times of what I have, but no genius from Myriad Domain can ever compare to the geniuses of first rank sects and the Upper Eight Regions. Most importantly, the first rank sects have more than just geniuses. Those terrifying masters... ai!"

Wei Xing'er sounded a little depressed. She was different from when Jiang Chen saw her last time. Back then, she hadn't lost all

hope and optimism despite adopting a slightly pessimistic outlook of the world. At the time, she had even asked him about Walkabout Sect and hoped that Myriad Domain could rise once again. But after a few years had passed, it looked like she'd completely given up.

Jiang Chen stared blankly at her for a moment. A bit of disappointment entered his eyes.

"Miss Wei, I didn't think you'd actually want to be a walking corpse. Maybe I made the wrong choice when I travelled all the way here to save you." Jiang Chen's voice turned cold.

Wei Xing'er gave him a miserable smile. "The only reason you're here to save me is because you owe me a bit of favor from those years ago. You're simply trying to deal with this responsibility so you'll feel better about yourself. Tell me, do you really truly care if I live or die? If you do, then why didn't you rescued me before and waited for years before you finally came to me during your leisure? Save me? Save me how? There are prisons everywhere in this world that eats up losers like me. People who lost the protection of their sects like me are ultimately nothing more than ants..."

Jiang Chen frowned. "I see. You aren't aware of the truth even now, are you? Do you think you can live comfortably like this forever on after losing hope? Do you think that the master can't find another pretty face to hold up the Resplendent Emerald Veranda? Are you really so confident, or are you just lying to yourself?"

Wei Xing'er paled drastically. "What... what have you heard?"

"Do you really not know?" Jiang Chen sneered and threw the question back at her.

Infinite pain welled inside Wei Xing'er's eyes. She said sorrowfully, "And what if I know? What if I don't know? Ever since I joined the Resplendent Emerald Veranda, my fate is not mine to decide. How could I not know that the Veranda master has

something sinister in store for me? I may not be aware why he keeps me here, but if there's one thing I'm certain of, it's that he doesn't desire me for my beauty... he hasn't touched me, not even once!"

This wasn't out of Jiang Chen's expectations at least. After all, the Veranda master wanted to use Wei Xing'er as a cultivation cauldron. He would never take away her virginity so soon.

"So, you've truly given up?" Jiang Chen asked seriously.

"What else do you think I can do in this situation?" Wei Xing'er smiled bitterly.

"Do you know why the Resplendent Emerald Veranda is so lively as of late?" Jiang Chen asked another question.

"Hmph, the Veranda master is planning to achieve a breakthrough and become a high level emperor realm cultivator. He has enemies everywhere, so it's only natural that he'll seek out a couple protectors to defend him."

Jiang Chen nodded. He asked again, "I'm sure you don't know that he plans to use you as his cultivation cauldron, do you?"

Wei Xing'er swayed as her face turned deathly pale. Her delicate, ruby-lipped mouth was slightly agape with surprise. The surprise quickly turned into thick fear.

"How do you know about this?!" Wei Xing'er asked in a panicked state.

"That's not important. What's important is the two choices presented before you. One, leave this place. Two, give up and become his cultivation cauldron."

There was no sugarcoating it. She would die if she became a cultivation cauldron. Almost no one survived the experience. Wei Xing'er didn't recover from her fear and shock for a very long time. She might have submitted to her current circumstances, but that didn't mean she was so far gone that she could give up her life

on a whim.

She wasn't actually afraid of death, but dying as a cultivation cauldron was a different matter altogether. It was too sudden and terrible for her to accept. Real fear gripped Wei Xing'er tightly for a time. At first, the young woman thought that she had given up on life completely, but now Wei Xing'er finally realized that she couldn't accept her fate at all.

She was young and barely at her thirties. In the martial dao world, she was like a child who had just started to walk. She should be shining like a new sun and full of youthful energy, but she had been reduced into another person's puppet instead. Time had ground away her delusions of resistance and adapted her into this puppet's life, but when Jiang Chen told her the truth, her will to live finally burst out of her shell.

"I... I want to live." Wei Xing'er stared frightfully at Jiang Chen. "You have a plan. I know you have a plan, right?!"

"What do you think our chances are if I were to take you with me and escape from this place by force right now?" Jiang Chen suddenly asked.

Wei Xing'er was taken by surprise greatly. "Are you joking? Escape this place by force? Both of us would be turned into dust!"

Jiang Chen smiled and said nothing. He was that confident in his current abilities. Still, it was unwise to try and escape this place via force. Alone, he ultimately wasn't strong enough to take on the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region by force. He would be trapped inside Great Scarlet Capital and attacked by countless experts if he chose to forcefully break out. They wouldn't stop until he was completely destroyed.

"You must have another way, right?" Wei Xing'er couldn't help but ask.

Jiang Chen didn't answer her question. Instead, he asked, "Do

you know why the Veranda master chose this place to achieve his breakthrough?”

Wei Xing’er thought for a moment but shook her head in the end. “He never told me anything about martial dao, and I was never bold enough to ask him about it.”

The young madame might look well off on the surface, but in reality she possessed little to no power. She barely saw the Veranda master in person, and their conversations consisted of polite greetings and nothing more. They’d never had a true conversation with each other. There was simply no way that the master would tell Wei Xing’er something as important as his cultivation.

Wei Xing’er’s lack of answers wasn’t a problem for Jiang Chen though. He wasn’t someone who made reckless decisions without a plan. The young man passed over a bottle of powder to Wei Xing’er after pondering for a moment.

“Miss Wei, this is something I made by myself. I’m sure you’ve used a similar drug in the past, although it absolutely is incomparable to this one. For the next few days, you will consume some of it on a daily basis. Remember, it’s only for consumption, not outward application. This is so that I’ll be able to track you down accurately within a radius of a couple thousand kilometers for the next three months. I’ll be able to track you down the moment the Veranda master makes his move.”

Wei Xing’er didn’t accept the bottle right away. Instead, she asked in astonishment, “Track me? Are you planning to rescue me on the road? Little guy, I admit that I very much want to escape from this place, but if you’re going to use a suicidal method like this, we may as well call off this rescue mission.”

It wasn’t that Wei Xing’er looked down on Jiang Chen’s abilities. She just didn’t like this plan at all. Jiang Chen was undoubtedly a genius. Literally no youths in the entire Myriad Domain was comparable to him. However, no matter how talented Jiang Chen

was, he was ultimately a genius in the scope of only Myriad Domain. Even if he could still be considered a genius in the Upper Eight Regions, his cultivation was completely incomparable to the Veranda master's, not to mention the large group of protectors the Veranda master just hired for himself.

Wei Xing'er had definitely been a femme fatale in the past. She cared little for a man's life, and only the heavens knew how many many men she'd killed. Jiang Chen was the only exception to the rule though, and he'd come from a distant place today to save her. Even if he did it only because he owed her, his action still touched her. She might not want to die, but she didn't want to drag Jiang Chen with her when she did.

Jiang Chen didn't explain anything. He said coolly, "You don't need to know my plan. Consume this powder if you trust me. If you don't, then whatever."

Wei Xing'er stared blankly at him before she slowly accepted the bottle. She fell into silence for a moment as she held it.

"Are you leaving?" Wei Xing'er finally broke out of her reverie when she noticed that Jiang Chen was striding outside. She chased after him.

"Stay here." Jiang Chen stared at her meaningfully and moved his arms a little. A strange smile tugged at the corners of his lips slightly, but he didn't say anything more. Suddenly, he dashed out of the side hall as quick as lightning.

Jiang Chen swore the moment he exited. "I knew it, a woman has no eye for true value at all. This Resplendent Emerald Veranda is truly a disappointment! I'd be a fool to step into this place once more!"

When Jiang Chen saw the elder walking towards him, his anger turned even more overt. "Elder Li, you have nothing to say to me. Even if the Veranda master were to show up himself, I have no interest in discussing anything with you lot any longer!"

Elder Li was completely stunned. He had no idea what the young madame had done to earn such fury from this man.

Chapter 1143: A Formation Obstacle

Elder Li kept urging Jiang Chen to stay, but the latter stomped out of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda in a thundering rage. He didn't give Elder Li the opportunity to stop him. Jiang Chen hadn't really planned on selling anything to the Veranda anyways. His ultimate goal was to see Wei Xing'er. Since he'd achieved his goal, he no longer had a reason to stay.

He had given Wei Xing'er the powder, but there was a possibility that the stubborn girl might not consume it for fear of putting Jiang Chen in harm's way. Because of that, Jiang Chen had resorted to a few other tricks to track Wei Xing'er.

The Veranda master was a respected figure in the Great Scarlet Mid Regions, but not even Emperor Peerless could see through Jiang Chen's methods, let alone a sixth level emperor. The Veranda master likely didn't expect that anyone would leave an imprint on Wei Xing'er's body. Thus, he'd never considered this possibility and taken any precautions.

Jiang Chen had made sure that he'd have a backup plan in case anything went wrong with the first. This made him a lot calmer than before. He headed to a nearby inn and booked a room. His tracking techniques were effective even if he was a few hundred miles away from Wei Xing'er. He didn't keep a close distance with the Veranda in order to avoid alerting them.

Jiang Chen initially thought that he'd have to wait for a few more days, but he sensed something odd happen that very night. When this spiked in his awareness, he activated his abilities and noticed that Wei Xing'er had already left the Great Scarlet capital.

……

Wei Xing'er was taken away by the Veranda master under the cover of the night sky. She acted like a puppet and didn't put up even the slightest resistance, but she seemed resolved.

It was evident that she'd resigned herself to fate after Jiang Chen had given her the warning. And just as he'd thought, she didn't consume the powder. Instead, she tossed it into a trash heap.

"Jiang Chen... your attempt to save my life makes me feel that everything I've done wasn't for nothing. Everyone calls me a femme fatale, but nobody realizes that the men I've killed were all worthy of a thousand deaths. It's true, I'm a selfish and vile person. But... I don't want to drag you down into the pits of hell with me. I want you to owe me a favor that you'll never get to repay. That way... you'll never forget about me even when you're with another woman..."

Wei Xing'er became as calm as still water after such thoughts passed through her mind. The fear and terror that she'd previously felt was gradually taken over by a peaceful acceptance of her inevitable death. If the hands of fate really did rule one's life, then she'd given herself over to them.

She was very touched that Jiang Chen had personally come to save her, but she was convinced that the young man wouldn't succeed. Instead of letting Jiang Chen walk down a path of certain destruction, she'd much prefer to have a quick and silent death. This was her resolve. There was no way she could've known that Jiang Chen had already noticed the anomaly within two hours of her departure from the capital city and was giving chase via the imprint on her body.

Night was no different from day for Jiang Chen. He'd cultivated the God's Eye almost to its peak. His vision wasn't affected at all by night or day, and te darkness of the night was no match for the God's Eye.

He didn't follow too closely because the cunning Veranda master had set up multiple sentries along his path beforehand. If Jiang Chen hadn't anticipated it and rushed in bull-headedly, he likely would've been detected. However, he was taken aback by the fact that only four of the twelve protectors were with the Veranda

master. The other eight were nowhere to be found. He was slightly bewildered, but quickly noticed the crux of the problem.

Four of the strongest protectors were escorting the Veranda master, while the other eight were escorting a man who looked very similar to the Veranda master. The two groups were headed in completely different directions.

Misdirection. The oldest strategy in the book. Jiang Chen was impressed by the Veranda master's wits.

This move would indeed lure away a big portion of his enemies. His way would be much safer after that. Moreover, he'd also planted numerous eyes and ears around his original path. If someone was tailing him, these hidden senties would issue an early warning so that he could be prepared for the fight ahead. With such powerful escorts, not many could even attempt to do the Veranda master harm unless they were high level emperors.

Jiang Chen's speed was comparable to Emperor Peerless. Keeping up with the Veranda master wasn't difficult at all, and the hidden sentries were the only thing giving him trouble. He went through great lengths to evade each and every one of them.

In order to protect himself from hidden dangers, Jiang Chen also planted a bunch of sentries along the path. However, his personnel was made up from a group of Goldbiter Rats. The Goldbiter Rats was much stronger in general after the awakening of their bloodline, and the Rat King in particular was already inching towards emperor realm.

The handpicked geniuses of the clan had seen much improvements as well. The Goldbiter Rat clan's strength lay not on their individual prowess, but in their unity and numbers. Of course, their biggest advantage was still their incredibly destructive jaws and devouring ability.

A single Goldbiter Rat wasn't that scary, but once their numbers crept up into the hundreds, they became a force to be reckoned

with. Even an elephant could be bitten to death by a large colony of ants. The Goldbiter Rats were the embodiment of that proverb. Their clan had once taken the heavenly planes by storm with their incredible numbers and powerful jaws. But that was Goldbiter Rats of old, the Goldbiter Kingrats.

Additionally, their powerful jaws wasn't their only strength. They also had the innate ability to tunnel into the ground and collect intelligence. Eavesdropping was what they did best because of their underground nature. They always lived in the shadows, far away from the light. If they ever appeared, it meant that a rat tsunami was about to befall the surface. They wouldn't appear otherwise. It was simply against their nature.

After placing vast numbers of Goldbiter Rats along the way, Jiang Chen had also created a surveillance network.

As the sky gradually brightened, he could sense that the Veranda master's group was slowing down their pace. He soon found out that the group he was tailing was now located in an enormous mountain range, tens of thousands of miles away from the Great Scarlet capital.

The mountain range spanned as far as the eye could see and was extremely majestic. At first glance, it almost seemed like an ocean comprised of numerous green mountains. The sense of scale gave its viewers an inexplicable sense of awe.

Jiang Chen entered the range and immediately sensed that the Veranda master was looking for a suitable place to breakthrough. He slowed down his pace after entering the depths of the mountains. He could easily track down Wei Xing'er due to the imprint on her body. There was no need for him to worry that he might lose track of her.

"Young master Chen, there's a cave one hundred and fifty miles from here. However, it's enclosed by a formation and four emperor realm experts. Every single direction is being watched by an

emperor cultivator. I dare not go near for fear of alerting them of our presence." The Goldbiter Rat King had personally collected this information for Jiang Chen.

"There's a formation as well?" Jiang Chen was mildly taken aback. The Veranda master had done a lot of preparation for his breakthrough. A formation wouldn't appear out of nowhere in a place like this; it must've been set up beforehand.

"Indeed. Every single formation is guarded by an emperor. The formation will activate if someone tries to force their way through, alerting all four emperors. If you get too close, you might trigger a combined attack from all four emperors." The Goldbiter Rat King had investigated very thoroughly. "We can't avoid triggering the formation even if we try to tunnel through it underground. It's very peculiar. It's almost as if it was made specifically for this terrain. Oddly enough as well, the earth also seems to be pulsating."

"The earth is pulsating?" Jiang Chen was taken aback.

Pulsating earth was one of the unique properties of the earth attribute. If integrated into the formation, trespassing would trigger an enormous tremor that spanned the surface to the very depths of the earth. The tremors would summon a strong pulsating attack that would lay siege to the trespassers and churn everything underground into pieces. Once the earth began to pulsate, one had to escape immediately or there was very little chance of survival.

Of course, there were always exceptions, but Jiang Chen found it very strange. This wasn't an everyday occurrence. Making the earth pulsate through the operation of formations was extremely difficult and required a large sum of earth attribute spirit stones. In fact, ancient sects that could create such a powerful formation was few and far between. They were as rare as a hen's teeth.

There was only two possible ways to explain the formation's existence. Either an empyrean formation master was present, or

there was an earth attribute treasure underground creating this movement.

Chapter 1144: Putting On a Show

These were the only two possibilities.

With respect to the first, Jiang Chen surmised that Great Scarlet Mid Region had no formation master of that caliber, period. A formation master at the level of the heavenly planes was probably alive somewhere on the Divine Abyss Continent, but there was no chance he was in Great Scarlet Mid Region. It was possible that he wasn't even located in the human domain. Therefore, that possibility could be eliminated. All that remained was the second.

His heart was conflicted. He had spent his utmost efforts on finding a powerful earth attribute treasure. Among the five elemental attributes, he'd always lacked completion of earth. That was one of the fundamental reasons he hadn't yet broken through to emperor realm. He had been waiting–no, was still waiting–for an earth attribute treasure to appear.

If this place really did have an earth attribute treasure that could make the earth pulsate, then it was definitely an extraordinary one! Despite his experienced eye from a previous life, he felt a fire beginning to burn in his heart.

He had seen treasures ten or a hundred times more potent than this in his previous life for sure, but they weren't exactly available to the present him. They might as well not have existed either in his past life, since he had literally zero cultivation talent, and therefore couldn't use any of them. This time, things were different. It was the exact kind of treasure he was missing. Fancy the sheer luck involved in such a coincidence!

He had originally come to seek out the Resplendent Emerald Veranda's master in an attempt to save Wei Xing'er. This discovery was the definition of serendipity! It was an astoundingly valuable reward for his troubles.

Jiang Chen's brain fired up for only a moment before cooling

down again. He sat down cross-legged, and began to meditate on his assumptions. To ensure accuracy, he sent out the Goldbiter Rat King to scout the premises once again. He needed to double-check the earth pulse's veracity. As a fine specimen of the Goldbiter Rat species, the king wouldn't attract any attention from the emperor realm cultivators guarding the formation upon approach. In the heart of the mountains, it was normal to find powerful spirit beasts glutted with cultivation.

Though the king was a cowardly critter, he still carried out Jiang Chen's commands to the letter. After about an hour, he returned to confirm that the pulse of the earth did indeed exist here. There was no problem, no sir!

Having received supporting evidence for his hypothesis, Jiang Chen was increasingly reassured that there was an earth attribute treasure in the area. What was it exactly, though? He had no idea.

He knew only that it had been here a long time. Its tendrils of influence wouldn't have extended this far, otherwise. The formation of a pulse in the earth required a great deal of energy. A piece of pulsating land like this could be adapted into any number of terrifying formations by even the most rudimentary of formation masters.

Simply triggering the pulse of the earth was enough to eliminate emperor realm cultivators on the spot. There was no need to encode any offense into any superimposed formations. The original discoverer of this place had been a lucky man indeed!

Was it the master of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda? It was yet another guess, but Jiang Chen believed there was a very good reason that the Veranda master was breaking through here. The pulse of the earth was a prime candidate for that.

It had probably been a long time since the Veranda master first noticed the phenomenon. He wouldn't have set up the formation and the other periphery here otherwise. The stage wasn't entirely

flawless, but fleeting workmanship could not have accomplished it. A decade or so at minimum had gone into the execution.

Having mused out his thoughts, Jiang Chen decided that it was better to take a look himself. Calling upon the Bewitching Lotus of Ice and Fire, he approached the edge of the formation from deep underground.

Coming to the formation's edges, Jiang Chen began to study it with all he knew. The formation itself was rather elementary. What made it special was a vortex of energy in the middle of its eye. The pulse of the earth originated from there, radiating into the surroundings as an enormous field of energy.

The only function of the formation was to guide the energy from the pulse of the earth outwards. It shaped that energy into an impenetrable bulwark, restraining all trespassers.

Jiang Chen scrutinized the formation from every angle a long while. He wanted to find a loophole, a path of escape through which he could proceed. Disappointingly, the formation had no vulnerabilities whatsoever despite its simplicity. More accurately, the pulse had no gaps whatsoever in its energy field.

Unless the formation was brought to a halt entirely so that it no longer drew on its source of power, not even a great emperor cultivator could pass by unscathed. One thing relieved Jiang Chen, however. The formation was also far too basic to make full use of all of the energies available from the earth's pulsation.

Otherwise, things very well could have been different. This place would've become a dead zone thanks to the all-encompassing power of the pulse. The area of the pulse's reach was like that of a great grindstone. It generated enough force to pulverize everything that dared to come into its vicinity. Any living beings especially who entered the area's core would be reduced to grit.

"Ole Gold, what do you think?" Jiang Chen looked down the formation's four corners with a long stare. Four of the Veranda

master's invited protectors stood at them, one to each cardinal direction. It seemed that there was no opportunity to take advantage of a breach in the line. Unless the protectors came out themselves, an outsider had no room to sneak in undetected.

"Young master Chen," the Goldbiter Rat King sighed, "I'm not being pessimistic, but... we've seen what the pulse is doing on the outside. I reckon it gets much worse further in. Even if all of my children went in at once, the pulse would still stop us. Unless... that formation stops."

The rat king understood the pulse of the earth to a certain extent thanks to knowledge inherited from his bloodline.

"There's four emperor realm experts holding down the fort here," Jiang Chen sighed softly. "There's no reason for the formation to stop by itself. We'd have to get them to leave the formation voluntarily, or we can't even attack them through it."

He had been looking for a loophole all the while, but nothing of the sort sadly existed.

The Rat King nodded incessantly in agreement. "Young master Chen, you know... only an idiot would leave the formation normally, but an irresistible lure can turn anyone's brain to mush. You have so many treasures on you. Why not try baiting one or two of them out?"

The spirit creature's words were a spark of inspiration to Jiang Chen. None of the four protectors were ordinary people. One was sixth level emperor realm, one was fifth, and the other two were at the peak of fourth level. The Upper Eight Regions notwithstanding, here in the Great Scarlet Mid Region, they were nothing short of elite. Ordinary bait would be insufficient to attract their attention. But Jiang Chen had no shortage of bait-worthy treasures.

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The Goldbiter Rat King fled with maddening haste, the outline of sky rank spirit herb leaves visible between its teeth. Feigning disorientation, it pounced at the formation's boundary with every ounce of its strength. Behind it, someone cried out. "Where are you going, filthy animal? No matter where you go, I won't let you escape!"

The owner of that voice was none other than Jiang Chen himself. They were putting on an act of hardship to win their enemies' confidence. However, the fear on the rat king's face was no act. Goldbiter Rats were craven by nature, and proximity to the formation exponentially increased the amount of psychological pressure on the rat.

The formation had four manned positions. The protectors stood independently, but each man was ready to support the others at a moment's notice. The position closest to him was occupied by one of the most senior elders of a third rank Scarlet Parting Sect. He had been specially invited by the Veranda master.

Surnamed Gao, the old man was a fifth level emperor realm cultivator, edging on sixth. He was an exceptionally important member of his sect, but minded few worldly affairs because of his age. The Veranda's successful invitation of him had been a big surprise to many.

A man as paranoid as they came, the elderly Gao deployed an art of the eye as soon as he heard Jiang Chen's cry. His scan revealed a large, golden-furred mouse rushing towards his direction. Not three or five miles behind it was a cultivator in hot pursuit, his dash as frenzied as his prey's.

Elder Gao furrowed his brow. He hadn't expected a human cultivator to show up here at all, much less for them to be charging straight at him. The two sky rank spirit herbs in the mouse' maw impelled him to cut down the oversized rodent immediately, so that he could take the spirit herbs for himself.

Coming through at the last second, his reason told him that such recklessness was folly. His most important mission right now was to protect the formation. He was absolutely safe within its range, but had zero guarantee as to his security outside. Though Elder Gao did not think that either the rat or the cultivator could threaten him at all, an elderly old man always maintained the most basic of cautions. Despite the fact that his heart was beckoning for him to make a move, he maintained a cool head. He chose to stand at the border of the formation in silent observation.

The Goldbiter Rat King quickly collided with the formation's boundary, stumbling at the impact. It was summarily sent flying by an invisible repelling force. The formation intrinsically rejected outside energies as a kind of warning. Any forced intrusion would trigger the pulse of the earth completely, consuming the invader with its power. A hapless trespasser who got caught up in the pulse would certainly be ground into dust. The Goldbiter Rat King reeled from the formation, but Jiang Chen was behind it in the next moment.

"Keep running, why don't you," he snickered.

The Rat King ran about all helter-skelter, screeching all the while. "Don't kill me, don't kill me. I'll give you your spirit herbs back!"

"It's too late to do that now," Jiang Chen sneered. "I don't just want my spirit herbs back, I want you to serve me for the next three thousand years!"

Chapter 1145: A Treasure In a Secret Realm?

The Goldbiter Rat King paled greatly and howled in anguish. As he spoke, Jiang Chen trapped it with the Featherflight Mirror and urged the Mint Ginseng into action once more. Countless green tentacles instantly wrapped around the rat king and held it tight. Despite its desperate howls and struggles, the Goldbiter Rat King was unable to break free from the green tentacles. The more it struggled, the tighter its bonds became.

Jiang Chen pulled out the two sky rank spirit herbs from the rat's mouth and put them away. Then, he slapped a seal onto the rat's body. The Goldbiter Rat King writhed as if he was electrocuted by electricity. Finally, it was unable to struggle any longer and lay limply beside Jiang Chen's feet.

After Jiang Chen was finished with everything, he looked thoughtfully towards the direction of the formation. With his God's Eyes, the person hiding at the edge of the formation naturally didn't escape his attention. Everything done up to this point was a show to lure this person out of the formation.

Unfortunately, he didn't expect his prey to be so steadfast. Despite being tempted with the sky rank spirit herbs and Mint Ginseng, the cultivator had suppressed his greed and moved not a millimeter from the edge of the formation. Jiang Chen had a bag of tricks, but they were completely useless as long as the cultivator refused to step out of the formation.

In fact, his entire show with the Goldbiter Rat King was built on the assumption that their enemy would be greedy. If the cultivator was able to control their greed, then his plan to lure the snake out of its hole was a complete failure. Jiang Chen felt a little depressed when he saw that the person inside the formation hadn't made a move at all. Still, he remained calm and looked into the formation for a bit. In the end, he decided not to attack the formation by force.

Elder Gao was a member of the Scarlet Parting Sect. Countless thoughts passed through his mind as he watched Jiang Chen conducting his show, but he'd forcibly pushed them down in the end. Obviously, the elder thought the chase scene to be incredibly bizarre.

The two men standing inside and outside the formation didn't say anything, but they were well aware of the situation.

Jiang Chen felt anxious because his ploy had ended in failure, but he didn't let it show on the surface. After retreating fifty or so kilometers away from the formation, he let out the Goldbiter Rat King once more and smiled dejectedly. "Was our show really that bad, Ole Gold?"

The rat king hurriedly answered, "We did all we could. I feel like he was tempted by what we showed, but the fact that he restrained himself means that there must be something that he thought was even more important than the sky rank spirit herbs."

Jiang Chen felt that the Goldbiter Rat King's reasoning was sound. Even he had noticed that the cultivator inside the formation was tempted by their bait. This meant that something incredibly important was keeping him in check.

While Jiang Chen was at his wits' end, the other Goldbiter Rats suddenly sent over a message.

"Young master Chen, my children have noticed something amiss along the road."

"What is it?" Jiang Chen's eyes turned a little.

"A large number of experts are approaching this place through many different routes."

"Why?" Jiang Chen was largely surprised by this. The Veranda master had taken extreme precautions precisely because he wanted to avoid notice, hadn't he? So why was there suddenly a large number of experts approaching?

It couldn’t be that the painstaking efforts in maintaining secrecy were so terrible that his enemies had found him out in a single night, could it? It would be pathetic if this was all the Veranda master amounted to.

Did someone inside the Resplendent Emerald Veranda turn traitor or something? Jiang Chen entertained the thought for a moment, but it just didn’t seem all that likely. Anything relating to the Veranda master’s breakthrough is such a tight-lipped secret that even the young madame in name, Wei Xing’er, knows nothing about it, so there’s no reason to think that the common workers inside the Resplendent Emerald Veranda will know about this. Those who are trusted enough to let know, well, why on earth would they ever spill this secret?

Did the protectors betray the master then? But the man clearly trusts his protectors, so there’s no reason to think that they’ll betray him either. He isn’t nearly foolish enough to not consider this possibility. Jiang Chen mulled over the questions, but he wasn’t able to arrive at an answer.

This entire incident was incredibly bizarre. It was unfathomable in some ways no matter how many times he played it out in his head. The young man didn’t hesitate though. He immediately asked the Goldbiter Rat King to contact his descendants and analyze the attackers’ paths. It was impossible to break through the formation by force, so he could only hope that these attackers could create him an opportunity for him.

He decided to first capture one of the attackers and question them for answers. He quickly located a suitable ambush spot with the intelligence provided by the Goldbiter Rats. Not long after, a lone expert rapidly approached towards his location.Jiang Chen had arranged his formation and was lying in wait. The expert immediately noticed that something was amiss when he stepped into the formation, but it didn’t matter. The chances that a second level emperor realm cultivator could escape Jiang Chen’s

formation was almost zero, not to mention that the young man was already half-step emperor realm. He could fight a mid emperor realm expert head on and have more than a fifty percent chance of beating his opponent. As for an initial emperor realm in this case, Jiang Chen could easily kill his enemy even if he hadn't arranged a formation. It was the benefit of having countless trump cards.

Right now however, he needed to capture his opponent alive. That was why he had arranged a formation and moved in tandem with the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice to do just that.

The second level emperor realm target in question hdn't never thought that he'd be captured alive here in Great Scarlet Mid Region. He was both frightened and worried. Jiang Chen commanded the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice to bring the target underground.

When the second level emperor realm cultivator opened his eyes and saw an unfamiliar face, he asked in a complicated tone, "Who are you, friend? Is there some sort of misunderstanding between us? Why have you captured me?"

Jiang Chen smiled. "I don't have time to bullshit with you. I have in my hand a bottle of poison that can kill you the instant it touches your blood. You can choose to either answer my question or take it."

A bit of panic leaked out of the cultivator's eyes. "What do you wish to know?"

"Are you really just passing by?" Jiang Chen snorted coldly.

The cultivator tried to stall, but Jiang Chen froze him with the God's Eyes and fished out something from the cultivator's waist. It was a token; a secret order from the royal family itself.

"Oh? My apologies, I didn't realize you're a member of Great Scarlet Mid Region's royal family." Jiang Chen's tone contained a bit of ridicule and mockery.

The second level emperor realm expert's face changed drastically. "You... who on earth are you?"

Jiang Chen's voice turned cold. "It seems that you haven't figured out the situation you're in. I guess I have no choice but to give you a taste."

He acted to pour the poison into the cultivator's mouth as he spoke. The man turned deathly pale as he spoke hastily. "Wait. Wait! Ask me anything you want to know. Please don't kill me!"

Survival instinct flared indiscriminately in both strong and weak beings. The second level emperor realm cultivator wasn't an exception to the rule.

"Are you really just passing by?" Jiang Chen repeated the question, but with a tone that was much stronger from the one he used earlier. He also held the poison right next to his victim's mouth.

"No... no." The man dared not lie at all. He knew that he might not get a second chance to speak if he squandered this chance to answer Jiang Chen's questions properly.

"The Veranda master is just achieving a breakthrough to seventh level emperor realm. Don't tell me he's so charismatic that even the royal family has decided to send him a protector?" Jiang Chen asked coldly.

The cultivator stared at him with a bit of surprise. "Friend... you don't sound like a protector of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda at all."

"And what if I'm not?" Jiang Chen asked coldly.

"Then that's perfect! That means we're probably on the same side. Man, I can't believe we mistook each other for enemies. I may be a servant of the royal family, but I am here with orders to investigate the Veranda master. If he's an enemy of yours, then we can become allies and help each other out!" When the man noticed

Jiang Chen didn't sound like one of the Veranda master's protectors, his tone actually relaxed quite a lot.

Jiang Chen snorted coldly. "Become allies? How will that benefit me?"

"Friend, this is the perfect opportunity if you're here to take revenge against the Veranda master because the royal family of the Great Scarlet Empire suspects that the Veranda master has colluded with foreigners. They're currently searching for proof of his crimes."

"Hmph, if the royal family really is investigating the Veranda master, they wouldn't have allowed him to hire as many protectors as he has, would they?" Jiang Chen didn't believe his captive's words easily.

"Haah, I guess you really don't know anything, sir. I dare say that at least half of the Veranda master's protectors are planning to betray him."

"What do you mean?"

Suddenly, the man's eyes turned a little shifty. "Take Elder Gao of the Scarlet Parting Sect, for example. I believe that his hiring was approved by the senior executives of the Scarlet Parting Sect themselves. In fact, the senior executives are probably investigating this matter personally."

Jiang Chen snorted coldly. "Even if the Veranda master did betray the royal family, the Scarlet Parting Region is just a third rank sect of the Great Scarlet Mid Region. There is no reason for them to be this enthusiastic, is there?"

Judging from Elder Gao's previous reaction, Jiang Chen was absolutely certain that they weren't just here to investigate the Veranda master. There must be something more important here that he wasn't aware of. He cut off the man before he could say anything more with a sneer.

“Your eyes are shifty, and your words are made up of half truths. I guess you don’t value your life as much as I thought, do you? You have my final warning: what did the royal family send you here to investigate? Also, do you have an accomplice among the Veranda master’s protectors? Remember, this is your last chance. If you still refuse to tell the truth, well then, don’t say I didn’t given you any chances.”

Jiang Chen had completely lost his patience. He had no time to play around with this guy because Wei Xing’er’s life was constantly counting down.

Upon seeing the young man’s eyes as unfriendly as they were piercing, the captive quivered and hesitated for a long time before finally asking, “Will you let me go if I tell you the truth?”

“You and I share no enmity between each other. Why not let you go if you’re willing to tell me the truth?” Jiang Chen retorted coldly.

His captive shook his head. “You can always change your mind later.”

“Alright, I swear on the heavens that I won’t kill you if you tell me the truth.” Jiang Chen acted decisively.

His captive pondered for a moment before finally nodding. “Alright, I’ll tell you what you want to know. The Veranda master has been acting very strangely for the past few years, and it’s only recently that a secret was leaked out from the Resplendent Emerald Veranda. Apparently, the Veranda master has found a treasure in secret realm, and he is the only one who knows its exact location. His so-called cultivation breakthrough is just a front. In reality, he’s planning to extract the secret realm’s treasures.”

Chapter 1146: The Master of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda

Hearing those words left Jiang Chen's jaws slack. That piece of news was one of the last things he would've expected. A secret realm with treasure? And the Veranda's master wanted to keep its treasures entirely to himself?

Jiang Chen peered into the man's eyes for a long while. There was no hint of duplicity there. In other words, the captive was probably telling the truth as he knew it. As for whether that was the actual truth, that was another matter. The man was just an underling. He was unlikely to be privy to any important or hidden information.

However, Jiang Chen surmised that it was more likely to be slightly inaccurate rather than outright false. This man was a second level emperor realm cultivator. He was someone strong enough to be a decision-maker, even in the Great Scarlet imperial family. So, did that mean the supposed cultivation breakthrough was just an act? Was a struggle over treasure at the heart of all this?

The revelation astonished Jiang Chen. How daring was this Veranda master, huh? What a monstrous appetite he had! He was planning to keep the treasure all to himself??

But there were still a few things the young man couldn't understand. If the Veranda's master really had found a secret realm filled with treasure all his own, why had he invited so many protectors? Didn't that increase the risk of him getting found out? Or did he think that his cultivation breakthrough was a good enough excuse to bluff to the world with?

If the latter, then his plan had been a thorough failure. It wasn't just the imperial family who was involved now, but a local third-ranked Scarlet Parting Sect as well. This made for two factions in

the open, with more likely in the wings.

Jiang Chen brooded a moment, but couldn't quite put all the threads together. He couldn't fully analyze the problem. He didn't have time to do more though. He could only take one step at a time and proceed with caution.

"There's a formation blocking the path up ahead," he declared. "If you don't have an accomplice nearby, then you wouldn't have been able to head on through yourself. Who is your accomplice?"

"Ah, whatever," the man sighed in exasperation. "With things as they are right now, I don't think I can be blamed for selling out a friend. The strongest of the four protectors, Ole Zhang, is also the imperial family's man. I don't think the outside world knows about this though."

Ole Zhang? Jiang Chen had paid attention to the list of protectors a while back. Ole Zhang was the most famous of the twelve, and certainly the highest in terms of cultivation level. He was a whopping sixth level emperor realm expert! Even Elder Gao of the Scarlet Parting Sect was a hair inferior to Ole Zhang.

"How many has the imperial family sent?" Jiang Chen asked once more.

"I'm just one of their many dogs," the man smiled wryly. "Do you think I know everything? I'm following orders, no more than that. I was supposed to come here and contact Ole Zhang."

Jiang Chen nodded, then asked a few questions about their communication techniques and things of note. He was exhaustive in his questioning.

"Friend, I've been very cooperative with you," the man could not resist commenting after the fact. "You're not going to…"

"You're a dog of the Great Scarlet Empire, yes? I won't kill you myself, but I guarantee that you will die."

The man blanched instantly. He hadn't noticed at the time, and

his realization that the young man's oath had a hidden clause came too late. With a snap of his fingers, Jiang Chen called out the Rat King.

"Ole Gold, you and your brethren have done well today. I'm leaving this guy as food for you."

The Rat King was overjoyed at the turn of events. An emperor realm cultivator was quite nutritious indeed. Goldbiter Rats ate anything and everything. Every part of a second level emperor realm cultivator was beneficial to them, from flesh and blood to marrow and tendon.

Jiang Chen didn't lie idle himself, either. He immediately began to disguise himself as the Rats' unfortunate victim. It took less than fifteen minutes for the process to be complete.

"This is like finding a pillow when you feel sleepy," The Goldbiter Rat King laughed ingratiatingly. "Now you can get past that formation in the easiest way possible."

"You did very well today." Jiang Chen nodded. "If there's an opportunity later, I'll give you another reward."

Because of his disguise, Jiang Chen was able to walk about in the open with impunity. Before long, he came to the corner of the formation that Ole Zhang stood at. Because he had familiarized himself ahead of time with their communications and its finer points, the old man didn't suspect a thing.

"Go on ahead and find a good place to hide. I will send out a secret order to gather together after everyone else arrives. Remember, don't wander off. It's not just the imperial family's cultivators who came in here this time. The Scarlet Parting Sect, the Sky Eagle Sect, and the Myriad Buddha Sect have their men snooping around as well." Ole Zhang issued a helpful warning.

Jiang Chen secretly found it funny, but nodded in apparent agreement to the command.

“Go on.” Opening up a corner of the formation, Ole Zhang let Jiang Chen in.

Considering his prior difficulties with the formation, Jiang Chen hadn’t expected the solution to be this easy. Naturally, he didn’t care much about Ole Zhang’s advice. He had only one goal in mind, and that was to rescue Wei Xing’er as soon as possible.

Besides that, he also intended to investigate the treasure at the cause of the earthen pulse. An earth attribute treasure was exactly what he needed. It would be an amazing prize if he could somehow conveniently snag it.

But he didn’t let himself get carried away by his current bit of smooth sailing. He knew full well that the imperial family was only one of the factions with its eyes on the Resplendent Emerald Veranda’s master. There were three third rank factions who shared that stance. Ole Zhang had admitted Jiang Chen, and the other agents within could do the same.

The Veranda master’s lifetime of cleverness has been mucked up by this moment of stupidity. He thinks that he can use money to buy these four protectors over, but in actuality, all of them are secretly plotting against him. His impression of the man worsened greatly.

Just as Jiang Chen had guessed, several others had been let in as well. He easily noticed them on his way further in. Despite their skillful concealments, his immeasurably powerful consciousness captured all of their positions. His senses were keen enough to find even great emperors if they weren’t particularly well-hidden.

However, he didn’t find it likely that they would attack him. No one would want to show themselves given the current state of affairs.

Jiang Chen quickly found a private place of his own, and sent out a horde of Goldbiter Rats in every direction to search. At the same time, he used a tracking method to attempt to find where Wei

Xing’er was.

He found her approximate location without much delay. Just as the Goldbiter Rat King had said, there was a system of caves hidden deep within the mountain. It was a dark and lightless place. Jiang Chen wasn’t in a rush to barge in, instead relying on a swarm of Goldbiter Rats to scout the way.

Rats were born diggers. There was plenty of feedback before long. The system of caves opened up into an underground city. There were structures of all stripes here, all sorts of alien, exotic, or just flat out weird building styles.

Under the guidance of the rat king, Jiang Chen quickly made his way into the city proper. The buildings here definitely showed their age and were veritably ancient.

“Young master Chen, this place is weird. Why did the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master pick a place like this to break through? I think there’s something we don’t know,” the Goldbiter Rat King said.

“Never mind that, we need to find Wei Xing’er first.” Jiang Chen had a feeling that he was getting closer and closer to her.

“Oh, there’s news from up ahead.” The Rat King’s descendents had managed to scout up fresh information. “There’s a prison area here full of women. More than a hundred of them, by the looks of it.

“All of them are fairly young.

“Wei Xing’er is here too, but there’s someone watching her.”

Tidbits of intelligence streamed in from the rodents.

“Let’s go see, then.” Jiang Chen had a clear advantage when exploring deep underground. The Goldbiter Rat King made way ahead of him with ease, and his Bewitching Lotus of Ice and Fire also excelled at burrowing.

These amenities allowed him to tunnel to the area Wei Xing'er was being kept in in only moments. However, she wasn't in the best of shapes. She was barefoot with shackles around her ankles. Her expression was completely wooden.

There was an altar not far from her. Around it were all kinds of deviant devices that gave off a sinister, bizarre aura. The Resplendent Emerald Veranda master sat cross-legged beside it, a half-smile hanging on his lips. He seemed lost in meditation, and gave off the same feeling as the inanimate objects beside him.

"After all these years, Cui Yu, you're finally revealing your true colors. Did you keep me around this long just for this?" Wei Xing'er jabbed at him mockingly.

The Resplendent Emerald Veranda's master's name was Cui Yu. His eye twitched, but his face remained expressionless. "Wei Xing'er, I admit that you have reasonable skill. Too bad you can't say the same for your luck. That's right, the reason I kept you around all these years was to bring you here. Only here can your life take on a new, higher meaning."

"Stuff it with your drivel. Cui Yu, I don't care about what you're trying to do, but I'd rather die than be a cultivation cauldron for you!" Wei Xing'er began to loudly protest.

"Hmm?" The master blinked, then exhaled serenely. "So you knew about it? I must've underestimated you, huh."

"Me and everyone else in Great Scarlet Capital. We all know that you cultivate with a vile and heinous method that uses living humans as its cauldrons. Even if you prevail today, Cui Yu, you'll become infamous and die a horrible death. After I die, I'll haunt you for eternity as a malevolent ghost!" She bit off her words.

"Hahaha, do you think I'm scared of ghosts? Me, a cultivator? The throne of the Great Scarlet Mid Region is at hand. Do you think your accusations of infamy will matter? History is written by the victors. It's just too bad that you won't be there to see my

victory. Your destiny has already been sealed as a mere stepping-stone. Hahahaha...”

In his pride, the Veranda master began to cackle. Suddenly, his ears picked up something in the air. With a frown and a “hmm”, he glared into a section of empty air.

Chapter 1147: A Formation of Blood

"Hmph. They're here much earlier than I'd expected!" The Veranda master muttered to himself with a sinister smile. He clapped his hands and summoned tongue after tongue of crimson red flames around the altar, flooding the area with a baleful aura.

The Veranda master smiled. "Xing'er, some large rats are attempting to trespass. I must go show them some hospitality. Please excuse me for a second. Don't worry, we're husband and wife after all. I'll give you a proper loving after I take care of the vermin. I'll relieve you of your virginity and have a good time before you die."

Wei Xing'er felt extremely disgusted when she heard those perverted words. "Cui Yu, you unscrupulous bastard! The heavens will smite you one day!"

"Hahaha! If the heavens truly had eyes, they never would've let the Yan clan take over Great Scarlet Mid Region! You despicable humans should've gone extinct a long time ago!" The Veranda master cackled sinisterly and disappeared into thin air with a flash of his figure.

Jiang Chen was hiding in a dark corner and didn't feel the slightest relief when he saw the Veranda master leave. The bizarre actions had given him an ominous feeling. What exactly did the Veranda master mean?

Despicable humans? Does this mean that he isn't a human cultivator? Those two words sent a chill down Jiang Chen's spine. He couldn't help but hesitate after hearing them. Wei Xing'er was right in front of him. Should he or should he not save her? Ultimately, he decided to do what was right.

Even though the Veranda master hadn't gone far yet, he had to save her right now as this was the only chance. He flashed into the area and launched himself at Wei Xing'er with the Kunpeng

Meteoric Escape and cleaved through the chains on her leg with the Pentecolor Divine Sword.

Wei Xing'er was flabbergasted by the unexpected turn of events. "You..."

Jiang Chen made a sweeping gesture. "Don't speak. Come with me."

Wei Xing'er sucked in a deep breath when she heard Jiang Chen's voice. "Y-you... how did you find me? Didn't I tell you not to come?"

\Jiang Chen answered blandly. "I had a feeling you wouldn't consume the powder, so I had a backup plan. Leave the talking for later. There's something very off about the Veranda master. We aren't safe here."

Wei Xing'er nodded. Her life was more important than answers. "He's a lunatic! Let's escape now! That pervert isn't right in the head!"

Suddenly, a sinister laugh echoed through the air.

"Indeed. I'm a pervert with something very wrong about me. Hahaha! Wei Xing'er, you're more charming than I'd expected! Someone actually came to save you? This is truly out of my expectations!" As the laughter died down, the Veranda master suddenly appeared at the outer regions of the altar like a ghost. He stared at Jiang Chen and Wei Xing'er as though they were prey. The faint smile on his face thoroughly conveyed his bloodthirst.

Color drained from Wei Xing'er's face when the Veranda master reappeared. She immediately pushed Jiang Chen away. "Go! Leave me!"

She didn't know what the Veranda master was planning, but she understood him well enough to know that he was up to something very bad.

"Go?" The Veranda master smiled blandly. "Can you really run

away from me?”

His face darkened as he glared at Jiang Chen. “Brat, who are you? How did you contact her with her under my eye? This wench is a lot more of a temptress than I thought! There are actually men who’d actually risk their lives for her!”

Wei Xing’er was overcome with dread and anxiety. She knew from the master’s voice that he was completely enraged, that his next steps was to commit murder!

Jiang Chen smiled blandly. “Master of the Veranda, you must be really pleased with yourself for having come up with these plans. However, you probably don’t realize that you’re being seen as a walking slab of meat by your four protectors! The royal family and the three great sects have already set their eyes on you! Do you honestly still believe that you can claim the Great Scarlet throne?”

Jiang Chen thought that his words would enrage the Veranda master, but the latter didn’t seem to be affected at all. In fact, his smile was even tinged with jeering.

“Royal family? Three great sects? So what? My schemes and plots were all for the sake of this day! I’d be even more disappointed if they didn’t come! I’ve meticulously planned everything to lure them here!”

“What?” Wei Xing’er and Jiang Chen were taken aback.

Jiang Chen had already suspected that the Veranda master was up to something after the first spiel to Wei Xing’er. His question had merely been a probe to unearth the master’s true motives. The reply had confirmed his suspicion that everything was part of a bigger plan.

The was very meticulous and well-made plan and actually had plans with a plan. Using a cultivation breakthrough as a front, the Veranda master had left breadcrumbs and revealed the treasure in a secret realm at the most appropriate timing. He was casting food

to lure fish into the net.

Each part was connected to another and was overall very intricately woven. Jiang Chen didn't know how the Veranda master planned on dealing with the onslaught from the Great Scarlet Mid Region, but the latter's confidence was a clear indicator that everything had been accounted for.

The royal family and the three great sects believed that they'd successfully infiltrated the Resplendent Emerald Veranda and gained access to the Veranda master's secrets, but the tables had actually long been turned on them instead.

Jiang Chen glanced coldly at the Veranda master. He didn't want to participate in the dogfight between the people of Great Scarlet. He'd rather stand aside and watch the fight play out if the circumstances allowed it. However, he couldn't help but feel a sense of danger looming ahead of him.

The Veranda master smiled leisurely at Jiang Chen. "Brat, I'm just a bit impressed. Being able to keep your calm under these circumstances is a talent in itself! The others have all gone for the earth attribute treasure, yet here you are. Do you perhaps love women more than power?"

"Cui, do you really think that victory is at hand?" Jiang Chen smiled coldly.

"Isn't that the case?" The Veranda master spoke in a mocking tone, like a hunter fooling with his prey.

"Hmph! We shall see then!" Jiang Chen grabbed onto Wei Xing'er's waist and activated the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape into action. He transformed into a flash of light and shot for the outskirts.

"Hmph! You're quicker than you look!" The Veranda master smiled indifferently and made a sweeping gesture. A crimson red flag suddenly appeared in his hands.

As the flag fluttered, a sea of blood emerged from thin air and sealed off the surrounding area. Jiang Chen was quick, but the bloody ocean was quicker. He was just about to break free when the waves came roiling towards him.

The bloody light was extremely corrosive and could instantly dissolve a cultivator's flesh. Jiang Chen felt a chill shoot down his spine as it came closer. He brandished his sleeves and swept away the light right before it struck him. He wasn't afraid of the corrosive light. He was merely worried that Wei Xing'er's body wouldn't be able to handle it.

He continued to attempt an escape, but no matter how hard he tried, the ocean was always one step ahead of him and blocking off his route. Tidal waves of gory light materialized and dematerialized on the outer regions. They flashed like a red sky, imparting an ominous sense of doom. The blood-red ripples had sealed off the area around the altar completely.

Jiang Chen kept trying, but gave up in the end and returned to a far corner of the altar.

"Brat, you're pretty quick. It's unfortunate that you weren't smart enough. Why would you come here even though you knew that only death awaits?" the Veranda master mocked.

Jiang Chen looked solemnly at the bloody light around him. He knew that it was a very advanced formation and was likely powered by the altar.

If he fully activated his Demons and Gods Body and incorporated it with the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape, he was ninety percent certain that he could break free. However, if he had to bring Wei Xing'er with him, the probability would drop all the way to ten percent. Having another person didn't really affect his speed, but he was worried that Wei Xing'er's body wouldn't be able to cope with the erosion.

"Cui, this blood formation is a demonic art. You must've sold

your soul to the demons.” Jiang Chen’s voice was cold and foreboding.

The Veranda master was mildly taken aback. “Y-you... who exactly are you? You seem to know a lot.”

Jiang Chen nodded. “As expected. To think that a demonic follower would appear outside of Myriad Domain! Cui, from now on, you shall be the common enemy of the entire human domain!”

“Hahaha! Humans?” The Veranda master broke into a wild laughter. “What’s good about being human? The human race should’ve gone extinct long ago! The might of the ancient demons are known throughout the heavenly planes! As long as the sacred flame continues to burn, the demon race will never die!”

“A frog in a well.” Jiang Chen sniffed dismissively.

Indeed, the demon race was one of the most powerful races among the heavenly planes. They were natural fighters with an extremely invasive bloodline that could transform most other races into a demon. However, calling them unrivalled under the heavens was a clear overstatement. There were many races that were just as strong, if not stronger than them.

The demon race was only notorious for their strength because of their aggressiveness. The common races couldn’t help but tremble in fear when they heard about the demons. Occasionally, this fear would transform into a mindless worship. The Veranda master was a good example. He was human, yet he’d fallen prey to the demon’s brainwashing and become their loyal follower.

Chapter 1148: Saving Wei Xinger

Jiang Chen didn't bother trading verbal barbs with the Veranda master. He focused all of his thoughts on investigating the secrets of the formation.

The Veranda master snorted disdainfully when he saw that Jiang Chen hadn't panicked despite his predicament. Suddenly, the ghost of a sneer appeared on his face as he stared at the duo. "I'm going to deal with those people first. As for you two ants, enjoy being trapped by an ocean of blood while I'm gone!"

The Veranda master flew away with an ugly chuckle and vanished into the air.

Wei Xing'er didn't feel relaxed in the slightest even though their enemy was gone. She stared anxiously at Jiang Chen in apology. "Sorry for dragging you down in the end."

Jiang Chen didn't give her a response. He simply stared at the formation with calm and serious eyes. Although the corrosive light was deadly, he noticed that its full power hadn't been deployed yet. The Veranda master was able to activate this formation, but it was obvious that it was slightly lacking in energy. As a result, it wasn't able to operate at full power. If his calculations were correct, he should be able to resist the bloody light's corrosion if he pushed his Golden Body of Demons and Gods to the absolute maximum.

"Miss Wei, this formation can only unleash its greatest power after a sacrifice is made. Since Cui hasn't done so, it's still possible to break out of this formation. I'm fast enough that this shouldn't be a problem for us, but I must say that there is still a certain amount of risk involved."

Wei Xing'er was delighted to hear this. "I'm not afraid of risks. Take me away from this place as quickly as you can! I won't blame you even if we're eaten away by this bloody light in the end."

She thought she could die peacefully as long as it was in Jiang Chen's embrace. That was why she didn't hesitate at all when Jiang Chen told her this plan.

Jiang Chen nodded and activated the Golden Body of Demons and Gods. A moment later, a golden light about thirty meters tall surrounded him.

"Are you ready?" Jiang Chen held Wei Xing'er in his arms and dashed forwards with lightning speed. After activating the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape, the duo flew towards the periphery of the formation with perfect form.

Their speed was that of a loosed arrow. The Kunpeng's arc was nearly flawless. However, this formation was no ordinary trap. Its current corrosive power was less than a tenth of what it was truly capable of, but still extremely deadly.

While Jiang Chen was attempting to escape, the bloody light surged and attacked from all directions. The light of his golden body sizzled ghastly as it was eaten away. The protective golden hue was an incredibly high level defensive aura, but it was devoured continuously all the same. Thankfully, all he needed was a breath's time. He managed to break out just as the corrosive light was about to overcome the golden aura completely.

That was close! Jiang Chen exclaimed silently. Still holding Wei Xing'er, he didn't stop and dashed outside immediately. He might've escaped the deadliest zone, but he dared not linger for long to see if anything new cropped up. The eerie formation scared even him.

It was only after they had dashed out of the underground maze entirely did Jiang Chen put Wei Xing'er down. The woman brimmed with the joy of having escaped certain death. At the same time, she was staring at Jiang Chen with a complicated gaze. It was a look of worship, adoration, concealed resentment, and sorrow.

Jiang Chen had swooped down and saved her from death's grip

like a god from the heavens. Such heroism made women most susceptible to falling for their savior. However, Wei Xing'er also knew better than anyone that this enigmatic genius didn't tread the same path as her.

She was a vain woman, but after meeting Huang'er once in the past, even she had to admit that only that angelic woman should be paired together with this unparalleled genius. She herself was unworthy of him. In her opinion, even Ling Bi'er was unworthy.

"Miss Wei, this isn't a place to linger for long. Let me take you away first." Jiang Chen didn't pause along the way. He called upon the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape to the utmost and flew at top speed.

While enjoying the rush of the speed and dense musk of a man, Wei Xing'er struggled to rein in her emotions as her heart hammered. She was hailed as succubus and a beauty with the heart of a scorpion, but she was in fact a virgin. Everything that had happened so far was making her icy heart warm with anticipation. If Jiang Chen decided to do anything to her right now, she knew that she wouldn't reject him. She would even meet his demands and satisfy him in the best way possible.

However, such thoughts were completely absent from the young man's mind. Jiang Chen arrived at the edge of the large formation not long after. No one was guarding this area of the formation at the moment. It might be incredibly hard to invade the formation from outside, but the same couldn't be said about exiting the formation at all.

Jiang Chen summoned the Goldbiter Rat King immediately. "Ole Gold, tell your descendants to guide Miss Wei away from here. Tell them to take her back to Taiyuan Tower first."

Wei Xing'er looked surprised. "You're not leaving?"

The ghost of a strange smile tugged at the corners of Jiang Chen's mouth. "How can I miss such a grand occasion? Plus, the Veranda master has submitted himself to the demon race. It is only a matter

of time before he becomes a scourge to humanity if he's allowed to escape."

Wei Xing'er felt very conflicted when she saw the look of confidence on Jiang Chen's face. The reason she didn't consume the powder he gave her was because she didn't want to drag the man into the mess. It was because she didn't think highly of his strength as a Myriad Domain genius.

However, it turned out that she had gravely underestimated Jiang Chen. Not only had he come alone to save her, the amount of skills and trump cards he possessed seemed endless. Even when he was fighting the Veranda master, a seventh level emperor realm cultivator, he looked calm and didn't seem pressured at all. It had only been ten years or so since the destruction of Myriad Domain. Could a Regal Pill Palace genius really grow this much in just ten years?

Wei Xing'er's disbelief was only natural. Even those who thoroughly knew of Jiang Chen's strength were shocked by the speed of his growth.

She felt like saying something, but she also knew that it would only be a pointless waste of breath. Even if she wanted to stay behind to help him, she dared not utter a word considering how serious Jiang Chen was looking right now. Plus, with her level of strength, she would be nothing more but a burden to him.

"In that case... take care." Wei Xing'er sounded a little cautious. "Um, thank you for saving my life. I'll repay this favor even if you want me to serve you as oxen or horse."

Jiang Chen hadn't saved her to enslave her though, so he waved it away. "Everyone's attention is focused inside, so you should be able to leave safely. Remember, this is your one and only chance at rebirth. You won't get another one if you miss this."

His tone was a little stern. Feeling a bit apprehensive, Wei Xing'er hurriedly promised. "Don't worry, I will treasure this

chance.”

After sending Wei Xing’er away, Jiang Chen looked around the formation again before turning to the Goldbiter Rat King. “How many people have come inside, Ole Gold?”

The Goldbiter Rats covered at least several hundred kilometers of ground. They were everywhere and Jiang Chen’s personal spy network.

“Young master Chen, preliminary calculations suggest that around seventy to eighty people have entered the formation. They’re all all emperor realm cultivators.”

Jiang Chen nodded thoughtfully. “This means that at least half of the experts of the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region are gathered here right now.”

Great Scarlet Mid Region was just an average middle region. There might be a lot of emperor realm cultivators, but not so many that one could find such a cultivator randomly on the streets. Compared to the Upper Eight Regions, the number of emperor realm cultivators in Great Scarlet was pitifully small.

“Young master Chen, it is highly likely that Great Scarlet’s emperor realm cultivators are not the only ones here,” the Goldbiter Rat King said.

“Never mind that, let’s head back inside. There must be a powerful earth treasure somewhere considering the earth pulses being generated. These people must have come for it. Ole Gold, tell your descendants look around and find out where it’s hidden.” Jiang Chen ordered.

There were two reasons Jiang Chen didn’t want to leave just yet. One, he wanted to claim the earth treasure for himself. Two, he had to deal with the Veranda master who’d surrendered to the demon race.

As of late, the demon race was popping up everywhere. Although

a large scale demonic calamity hadn't broken out yet, it was obvious that the demons were itching to make a move. Jiang Chen knew very well that even he wasn't exempt from this calamity when it truly started. He was ultimately a member of Divine Abyss Continent. No one could escape the demonic scourge when it erupted.

That was why Jiang Chen had no choice but to treat all incidents relating to the demon race with caution, if only to protect himself from harm. This was without mentioning the promises he had made to Emperor Peafowl. He himself was very wary of the demon race. He knew them very well thanks to his past life. It was exactly due to this knowledge that he knew just how bad things could be if the demon race were to revive completely. It wouldn't be a surprise if entire races and species were eradicated as a result.

If the ancient cultivators hadn't risen to the occasion and fought valiantly during the war against demons, if they hadn't barely sealed the demon race with their remaining strength, the demons might have already conquered Divine Abyss Continent. Nowadays, the human race didn't even possess even one tenth of their former martial dao strength or level. It was easy to imagine what kind of fate would befall humans when demons emerged once more.

Thankfully, Divine Abyss Continent didn't just have humans. There were plenty of other races out there.

Before the demon race showed up, the major races often fought and killed each other out of personal interests. However, they were unusually united against the demon race. They knew that Divine Abyss Continent would become a barren land with no other races if they lost. This wasn't a mere fight for territory or resources. It was a life and death struggle and a fight for all race's survival.

As a member of the human race, he might not be so passionate that he would actively seek out the demon race and thwart their plans. But now that he actually encountered a plot, he had no intentions of letting it take root right before his eyes. He would

eliminate this threat even if it was as insignificant as a spark. This was Jiang Chen’s bottom line.

Chapter 1149: Defense from the Four Great Wandering Cultivators

Wei Xing'er's departure alleviated the last of Jiang Chen's concerns. His load thus lightened, he was ready to jump back into the fray. He lingered another few moments on the formation's edges before he readied himself for reentry.

Just as he was about to move, something tickled at his ears. He slowed his body and footsteps, pausing beneath a tree and probed the surroundings with his consciousness. His eyes were focused straight ahead.

"Come on out!" he harrumphed softly. His scan had told him about the ambush in the wings. There were two assailants on each side, clearly prepared to intercept him.

Jiang Chen found this a little odd. On his first time out with Wei Xing'er, there had been no one here. He hadn't taken long to send the girl off, and yet four new people had suddenly shown up.

Have these people come specifically for me? Jiang Chen mused in surprise, but let none of his astonishment show through. His consciousness told him that these four assailants were quite strong. All of them were third level emperor realm. However, there was nothing for him to be afraid of. His own cultivation level was far too high for that.

"Kekekeke..." An ear-piercing cackle suddenly came from his right. A figure in hemp flew out from within the grass.

With that figure came a ray of blinding light. Suddenly, a strong sensation of danger crept into his heart. Jiang Chen instinctively dodged.

A pillar of gold shone down like a blast of harsh sunlight. It was a storm of gold needles, shot at an impossible speed!

A decrepit old woman wearing tattered hempen clothes stood

before him. Her face was as wrinkled as a sun dried orange peel, utterly ugly to behold.

“Hmm. You got out of the way of granny’s gold needles, eh? Not bad, kid. Too bad you’ve come to the wrong place!” The old woman was one of the twelve protectors that the Veranda master had handpicked. She was Granny Goldneedle and one of the four wandering cultivators.

Jiang Chen had seen the four’s reception by the Veranda master. This old granny had definitely been there. But shouldn’t she be with the other couple of protectors right now? And shouldn’t they be somewhere else?

The Resplendent Emerald Veranda master’s misdirecting strategy involved sending off a group of protectors with an impostor. In theory, the old lady should’ve been there. So why was she here?

Did they return after going somewhere else? What’s the point of having a plan in the first place, then? Jiang Chen was thoroughly confused. This was growing curiouser and curiouser. There was a grand conspiracy behind all of this, an invisible man behind the curtain. The puppeteer… was the master of the Veranda.

Or… is he? Jiang Chen was doubtful that a man of his abilities could set up such a large game board on his own.

Does he have helpers? Or is he one of the puppets too? The young man felt a jolt of sudden unease. This was where his Boulder’s Heart came in. He was able to maintain mental calm despite his anxiety.

“There’s more of you. Are you mice? Do you plan on hiding forever?” Smirking, Jiang Chen look straight at the remaining trio’s hiding place. He hadn’t seen the other three yet, but they were sure to be none other than Old Man Clearcloud, the Silversand Cavalier, and Sir Miao. The other three wandering cultivators had also come.

“This is no place for your insolence, child!” A thunderous shout cracked through the air, heralding the entrance of another figure into the fray. This man had uniquely silver eyebrows. Yep, the Silversand Cavalier.

From the left and the right, two more showed themselves. Old Man Clearcloud had snowy hair, and Sir Miao, a handsome appearance. The four wandering cultivators took one corner each, pressing Jiang Chen in.

With lightly furrowed brow, Jiang Chen swept his God’s Eye across the quartet’s eyes. His gaze was deep and soul-searching, piercing against the defenses of their consciousnesses.

Refusing to be cowed, the four emperor realm experts sneered back. There was apathy, devilry, disdain, and solemnity. The personality of each member in the quartet was revealed in their look.

Granny Goldneedle was the apathetic one, Sir Miao, mocking; Old Man Clearcloud, disdainful, and the only solemn one was the Silversand Cavalier. The last of these was the only one who took Jiang Chen seriously. It had something to do with his experiences. Having once been part of a sect, the Cavalier had the painful experience of having his entire sect wiped out. Therefore, he tended to be a bit more cautious than the others.

Granny Goldneedle was undisciplined and unruly, and used to having her own way. Her aloofness biased her towards apathy.

Sir Miao was young, famous, talented, and flippant. In his eyes, Jiang Chen was a mere ant. He was easy prey, nothing more–hence his more toying attitude.

Ole Clearcloud was a man of high position amongst the wandering cultivators. A well-traveled individual, he found very few people worthy of serious consideration. This transferred to Jiang Chen as lackadaisical disdain.

“Tsk tsk, the Resplendent Veranda Master is overcautious. Why did he ask the four of us to deal with a child?” Sighing, Sir Miao shook his head. Clearly, he found the task to be joyless and boring.

The old granny’s face gained a few wrinkles. “Don’t take him too lightly, Sir Miao. He dodged an attack from my gold needles. He’s no lightweight.”

Sir Miao smiled serenely. “Why flatter him like that, granny? He’s just a half-step emperor realm cultivator. Any one of us can easily take him.”

“Alright,” Old Man Clearcloud spoke up. “We were paid to do a job and now we must deliver. We have the instructions. Even if it’s as easy as a tiger hunting down sheep, we still have to put on a show. Since you’re so confident, Sir Miao, I’ll leave him to you.”

“Why are you leaving him to me?” Sir Miao shrugged.

“You’re the youngest one here,” Old man Clearcloud frowned. “We’re giving you a chance to shine because we trust you.”

“Don’t feed me that nonsense. Granny Goldneedle struck first. I think there’s no point bothering someone else to do it. After you, Granny.”

“You’re all too selfish,” Granny Goldneedle huffed. “Fine, I’ll do it.”

Ole Clearcloud nodded. Sir Miao smiled, but said nothing.

“Don’t underestimate him, Granny,” the Silversand Cavalier said unexpectedly. “There’s more to him than meets the eye.”

A disconcerting grin appeared on the old woman’s face. “Don’t worry. That kid is pretty fast, but dealing with the fast ones is granny’s specialty!”

Granny Goldneedle was a master of needles. Her attack from ambush a few moments prior had only been testing the waters. Her adeptness with gold needles was almost legendary. When

pushed to her limits, she could fill the air with nothing but needles. No matter how quick one was, it was difficult to make full use of that speed given the needles' density. After all, each emperor realm cultivator had their own domain.

"Get ready to back me up!" A low bark heralded the granny's preparation to attack.

A sneering Jiang Chen chose this moment to laugh aloud. "Ole Clearcloud, a sectless man unafraid of authority... the Silversand Cavalier, a man whose sect was destroyed and yet refused to bow to his enemy... I thought you two were men of character. As for you, Granny Goldneedle, with how individualistic and maverick you tend to act, I imagined that you would have your own principles. How... unexpected. But I suppose fame is often undeserved."

"Hmm? Are you trying to get me to kill you on the spot, kid? Saves you some suffering in the long run, eh?" Jiang Chen's words darkened the granny's face.

"You're well-known, Granny Goldneedle, but don't let that fame get to your head." Jiang Chen was back to his default faint smile. "I'll stand without moving a finger. You can attack with your gold needles all you want. If you can hurt one little hair on my body, then I'll let you do whatever you want with me. Deal?"

The old woman's eyeballs bulged. She was angry enough to cough up blood. "Do you just not know any better, kid, or are you getting your last words out before you die?"

"I suppose words aren't convincing enough." Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "Try me."

A wave of his hand caused something to materialize in his palm. It swiftly expanded to the size of a mountain–no, it was a mountain in the first place!

It was his magnetic golden mountain!

Enraged by Jiang Chen's arrogance, Granny Goldneedle swept her sleeves towards him. Countless gold needles flew at the young man from every direction, assaulting him like a torrent of hairs.

Her needles weren't simple throwing weapons. Each and every one of them had been specially refined. The granny had full and absolute control over their movements. Because of this, she could change their trajectories at any time. Indeed, each needle followed its own path.

They moved almost as if they were sentient. They automatically sought their target's weak spots, and constantly looked for defensive openings. With a shift of his eyes and a push of his palm, Jiang Chen magnified his mountain instantly. It became ten yards tall, and exerted a terrifyingly powerful magnetic field. This caused a strange scene to occur.

The innumerable needles were sucked up by the magnetic field like a dragon drinking water. None of them were left airborne, each and every strand of metal tightly held in place by the mountain's magnetic force.

In a flash of golden light, the mountain's absorbing power took the refined needles as its own.

"Do you have more?" Jiang Chen's faint smile grew wider.

Granny Goldneedle's eyes were as big as porcelain plates. She could hardly believe what she'd just seen.

"How can this be?" The others echoed her surprise.

The wandering cultivators present were all aware exactly how scary the granny's needles were. They had relied on Granny Goldneedle to take care of it precisely because they had faith in her ability to fight speedy cultivators. How could they have thought of the possibility that the young man would devour the granny's entire attack?

"What dastardly trick did you pull, kid?!" Granny Goldneedle

was grim. Her gold needles were precious to her. She had plenty more left, but she didn’t want to waste them.

Chapter 1150: Shocking Emperor Realm Cultivators

Jiang Chen rarely ever used the magnetic golden mountain. He hadn't even used it once in Myriad Domain and once during the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering, but the audience was mostly citizens of the capital. Others who recognize it were dead by now.

The four wandering cultivators were active within the confines of Great Scarlet Mid Region, located tens of thousands of miles away from Veluriyam Capital. The fact that they knew nothing about the magnetic golden mountain was no surprise.

The cultivation world was simply too big. Jiang Chen wasn't reknowned throughout the world yet and hadn't had much of a chance to shine. His arsenal was relatively unknown. His abilities would only be recognized when he transcended to great emperor realm and became the biggest topic in the entire human domain. Maybe then, others would instantly recognize his treasures and techniques.

For now though, he didn't need worry about such things. The magnetic golden mountain was capable of multiple forms. All he needed to do was switch it up a little and no one would be able to recognize it.

"Granny Goldneedle, feel free to throw everything you have at me. Like I said before, count it as my loss if you make me move." Jiang Chen remained as nonchalant as ever before, but the granny had completely changed her attitude.

She was extremely furious, but not a complete idiot. Even though her golden needles were powerful and ever-changing, it was obvious that her enemy was in possession of a treasure that directly countered them. No matter what variation she tried, her needles were not going to be very effective against him. It was so pointless that she might as well be throwing sticks instead!

This infuriated Granny Goldfinger even more. Her cultivation was completely based on her needles. She'd faced a number of difficult foes over the years, but she'd never lost to someone in such an embarrassing manner before. It completely crushed her will to fight! Without her needles, she was basically worthless.

Sir Miao burst into an eccentric cackle when he saw this. "Granny, your gold needles are a lot more situational than I'd imagined. Old Brother Clearcloud and Silversand, what do you make of this?"

Silversand Cavalier frowned. "Sir Miao, you've going overboard. We may not see things eye to eye, but we're on the same side in the end. Granny Goldneedle's loss reflects badly on all of us."

Old Man Clearcloud nodded in agreement. "That brat is a freak! For the sake of fairness, we should join forces! We can cover for each other that way."

Sir Miao shrugged. "All four of us? Against a nameless scrub like him? I refuse to stoop so low. You three can join hands against him if you want to. I'll be backup."

Jiang Chen smiled blandly. "Why waste your breath? All of you have gone beyond your bottom line and stomped on your own faces when you became the Veranda master's lackey. You should join forces. It saves me the trouble of taking you on one by one."

"Such impudence!" Old Man Clearcloud flew into a rage after being ridiculed by Jiang Chen. "Brat, by the looks of your abilities, I can tell that you're not from an ordinary background. Don't think you can put airs because you're from a great sect!"

"Hahaha! Put on airs?" Jiang Chen suddenly crowed with laughter. "My respect is only given to those that are worthy. You're strong, yet you serve a master that's clearly unworthy of your loyalty. How do you expect me to show you respect?"

"The Veranda master pays us for our labor. It's only right that we

serve him well!" Old Man Clearcloud said bluntly.

"Only right?" Jiang Chen replied in a mocking tone. "Even though the Veranda master has betrayed humanity and devoted himself to the demon race?"

"What?" Old Man Clearcloud was taken aback. He didn't understand.

The Silversand Cavalier was stunned as well. "Demon race? Young man, clearly you lie!"

Granny Goldneedle stared at Jiang Chen solemnly. She didn't understand why the latter had spoken those words either.

The large smirk on Sir Miao's face suddenly flitted between uncertainty and uneasiness.

Like an all-seeing clairvoyant, Jiang Chen threw a piercing glare at the last. "Sir Miao, I heard that you've become quite famous among the wanderers in recent years. So it seems you're quite pleased with the fame you've received in exchange for your devotion to the demons!"

A bloodthirsty expression instantly flashed onto Sir Miao's face. "Brat, how dare you resort to slander? Are you trying to escape by turning us against each other?"

Jiang Chen laughed heartily. "Even that formation with the bloody light couldn't hold me back! What can a demon runt like you possibly do to me?"

A glint appeared in Sir Miao's eyes. An odd expression slowly emerged as he glared at Jiang Chen.

"Old Brother Clearcloud, Old Brother Silversand, Granny Goldneedle! That cunning brat is trying to turn us against each other! This cannot do! We must join forces and eliminate him before we're influenced any further!" Sir Miao suddenly shrieked at the top of his lungs.

Granny Goldneedle roared for a fight, but Old Man Clearcloud kept silent. The Silversand Cavelier shifted his gaze between Sir Miao and Jiang Chen. A grave expression began to surface on his face as well.

“You claim that the master of the Veranda has devoted himself to the demons, but do you have proof?” The Silversand Cavelier asked.

“Proof?” Jiang Chen smiled coldly. “You’ll know what I’m talking about once you see the demon altar and its formation, but I’m afraid you won’t have long to live after as you’d be a blood sacrifice then.”

“Altar? Blood sacrifice?” The Silversand Cavelier shifted his gaze towards Old Man Clearcloud. “Old brother, what do you think?”

Old Man Clearcloud shook his head. “I’m not good at making judgements. Silversand, you’ve always been the clear-headed one. What do you think?”

The Silversand Cavelier furrowed his brows. “I’m on the fence. The Veranda master’s actions are indeed a little out of the ordinary.”

“Listen, I don’t have the time to listen to your discussion. I don’t care whether you believe me or not. By the time you’re done prattling, the blood sacrifice would be completed and a demon lord will be summoned into this world. No one here will be left alive then.” Jiang Chen unleashed the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape in the middle of his sentence and broke through their encirclement. He was so quick that they didn’t even have the time to react.

“Please hold!” The Silversand Cavelier immediately yelled.

Jiang Chen suddenly stopped and launched a lightning quick Supernova Point at Sir Miao. The latter reacted very quickly and engaged the powerful finger strike with his fan.

“Don’t believe his lies!” Sir Miao yelled in exasperation. He

swung his fan and launched a frighteningly powerful hurricane at Jiang Chen.

The latter snorted coldly and unleashed the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape again. Whoosh! He instantly vanished into thin air. The crowd stood with their mouths agape as Jiang Chen vanished before their very eyes.

Sir Miao's ears twitched. He immediately swung his fan around defensively after that.

Bang bang bang! Explosive sounds reverberated through the air. Multiple runes suddenly appeared in front of Sir Miao and exploded in spectacular fashion. He had been hit by a sneak attack! If it wasn't for his superior defenses, he would've died to the strange attack!

Jiang Chen's attack potential had increased exponentially ever since he cultivated the Kungpeng Meteoric Escape and gained a drastic advantage in speed. He'd gained many more viable ways to fight his enemies.

Sir Miao was struggling. Granny Goldneedle frowned at the Silversand Cavelier and Old Man Clearcloud. "Are we going to just stand aside and watch?"

Old Man Clearcloud asked blandly. "Who do you think we should help then?"

"But we were all hired by the Veranda master!" Granny Goldneedle answered in a depressed manner. There was nothing she could do against Jiang Chen. She bore a subconscious hatred for the young man because her anger hadn't subsided yet. The fact that he'd taken her needles didn't help matters either.

The Silversand Cavelier shook his head. "I find this matter incredibly bizarre. Sir Miao's background has always been a mystery. It's against logic for a wandering cultivator to rise that quickly. Even the geniuses from influential sects can't achieve such

a meteoric rise in such a short time."

"What are you saying?" Granny Goldneedle couldn't help but ask.

"It's unwise to take this matter lightly. Especially when the demon race is involved." The Silversand Cavelier didn't have a clear stance on this matter, but he no longer had a reason to be at odds with Jiang Chen.

"You believe that brat's lie? The demon race is just imaginary! Why would they suddenly appear in Great Scarlet Mid Region?" Granny Goldneedle remained unconvinced.

"Nobody has seen a demon in the human domain yet, but rumors of their reappearance have been spreading all over the lands. Many groups of cultivators have gone missing in the desolate wildlands in the past few years. Apparently, they are never seen or heard from ever again when they wander into the restricted lands," the Silversand Cavelier murmured lowly.

"Those are mere rumors, not solid facts!" Granny Goldneedle remained adamant.

"But those rumors can possibly be true! Years ago, the restrictions in the restricted lands was weakened for a short period of time and gaps appeared every now and then. After that, a powerful expert appeared out of nowhere and set a powerful formation to reseal and barricade the restricted area from other cultivators. It's impossible to know how many entered the area and how many demons have escaped before that." The Silversand Cavelier spoke solemnly.

Old Man Clearcloud suddenly asked. "Silversand, what do you think we should do then?"

"We should head inside the formation and get a better bearing on the situation. That young man is determined to enter. If he's lied to us, it's easier to defeat him inside. If this matter is really related to

the demons, I cannot sit idle and do nothing."

Old Man Clearcloud nodded and glanced at Granny Goldneedle. "Goldneedle. Silversand has made a good point. The fate of the human race is at stake here. We cannot afford to be negligent."

Granny Goldneedle was extremely dissatisfied. "If you want to go, go by yourselves then! This is absurd! Demons can't possibly be real! Even if they are, why should I care? As long as it doesn't affect me, who really cares if they are demon or human? When I was at my most desperate, not a single human offered me a hand! Why should I care about the fate of the human race? What a joke!"

Chapter 1151: Sir Miao Turns Into a Demon

Sir Miao never imagined that the young cultivator he deemed to unworthy of attention would be able to overpower him completely, despite just being at half-step emperor realm. He was third level emperor realm to begin with. After he joined the demon race and obtained some of their secret arts, his combat power was top tier amongst the four great wandering cultivators.

He'd originally thought that he would be able to take down this cultivator with ease. Realization of how naive he was quickly followed. Not only was this half-step emperor cultivator not easy to deal with, his opponent had the complete upper hand!

If there was a list announcing those least afraid of the demon race in the Divine Abyss Continent, Jiang Chen would absolutely be ranked among the top. The young man wasn't afraid of the demon race not because he possessed unparalleled strength. He just wasn't afraid of them in the first place. This was separated Jiang Chen from the cultivators of Divine Abyss Continent the most.

As the son of the Celestial Emperor in his past life, his knowledge was exceeded by no one in all of the heavenly planes. The demon race wasn't unfamiliar to him, and he could never bring himself to fear them.

Demons were but one of many races his father ruled over. At the time, they were just an average race in the Taiyuan Plane and utterly incapable of stirring much waves. That was why Jiang Chen had a psychological advantage to begin with.

Strength-wise, he had many advantages as well. It was true that he was just half-step emperor realm, but it was also true that he couldn't think less of the average emperor realm cultivator. This was without mentioning the bag of trump cards he possessed.

Sir Miao had learned some superficial arts and technique from the demons in return for his submission. It had allowed him to rise

in the wandering cultivator community like a meteor. However, it was one thing to be famous there, and another thing entirely to fight Jiang Chen.

Even a third level emperor realm cultivator of a sect would find themselves hard pressed to battle the current Jiang Chen. Ultimately, Sir Miao was just a wandering cultivator. He might have learned some superficial demonic arts and techniques, but a shortcut was still just a shortcut. Foundation-wise, he was incomparable to Jiang Chen.If Jiang Chen were to unleash the trump cards he possessed, he could absolutely slaughter Sir Miao with no difficulty. The only reason the wandering cultivator was still alive was because Jiang Chen hadn't gone all out against him. Even then, Sir Miao was finding it very difficult to deal with Jiang Chen's ghost-like attacks.

Of course, he himself hadn't used his own trump cards either. But, he had a reason not to use it despite his precarious situation.

Currently, Old Man Clearcloud and Silversand Cavalier were taking a neutral stance and refrained from joining the battle. The moment he used a demonic art and exposed himself, the number of enemies he had to face would immediately increase. Old Man Clearcloud and Silversand Cavalier would definitely turn on him.

Sir Miao felt tremendously pressure from Jiang Chen. This can't go on. This guy will run me dry and kill me if this continues. Sir Miao's handsome face was now deathly pale. A savage grimace flickered through his features. He had to make a gamble!

He secretly activated his demon arts. Suddenly, his pale white face turned eerily red, almost as if he was drunk on alcohol. Waves of red, cloudy light dimmed and brightened on the surface of his skin. Every vein in his body came alive and expanded as a terrifying, harsh aura flared imposingly.

Jiang Chen didn't look surprised by the transformation. A scornful smile sprung to his face instead. "Finally revealing your

true self, hmm?”

A flame-like mark appeared at the center of Sir Miao’s forehead. It glowed piercingly and looked almost like a strange eye. The bizarre transformation stunned both Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier.

“What… what’s this?” Even Granny Goldneedle could feign indifference no longer as she stared at Sir Miao with great astonishment.

In the martial dao world, there were plenty of martial arts that forced one’s bloodline to evolve. This was especially true for the cultivators who cultivated the power of a totem. Bloodline evolution was a norm to them.

Sir Miao’s transformation did look like the berserk transformation of a bloodline power. However, the similarity between the two transformations were superficial. As he transformed, he also exuded a strange aura that intimidated and struck fear in people’s hearts. It meant that this was no ordinary berserker transformation.

“…has he truly surrendered to the demon race?” The Silversand Cavalier muttered to himself. His expression turned serious, and his eyes were full of wariness.

Old Man Clearcloud was also frowning deeply. It was obvious that this turn of events had caught him surprised him greatly as well.

“I don’t care who you are, kid. You’re not leaving Cloudshatter Mountain alive today!” Sir Miao chuckled evilly. His tone had turned impossibly cold.

Granny Goldneedle shivered all over and frowned when she heard Sir Miao’s strange voice. She mumbled, “Excuse me, but I have no interest in getting involved in this mess. Goodbye!”

The granny had plainly noticed that she had been dragged into a

terrible plot. She always looked out for number one, not to mention that Sir Miao's bizarre appearance had intimidated her a little. That was why her first thought was to leave as soon as possible.

Before Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier could say anything in reply, Granny Goldneedle was already flying away from the mountains in a beam of light. The Silversand Cavalier shook his head. "Granny Goldneedle is quite strong, but unfortunately, she's much too selfish."

Old Man Clearcloud sighed quietly but didn't say anything.

However, not long after the granny left, a bloodcurdling scream suddenly resounded from the distance. It obviously belonged to Granny Goldneedle. The scream was so terrible that no one could imagine the kind of terror that could cause that stubborn, unreasonable granny to scream like that.

"What's going on?" Old Man Clearcloud frowned.

Sir Miao suddenly laughed loudly. "Want to leave? It's too late! The demon emperor is about to descend, and all life in Cloudshatter Mountain will be his sacrifice! Now that the formation is closed, there are no longer any exits for you people to escape to! Hahahaha..."

Both Old Man Clearcloud and Silversand Cavalier turned pale when they heard this.

Surprisingly, Jiang Chen answered as if he had expected this to happen. "As expected, the demon has revealed itself. What else are you two waiting for? Are you going to wait until the demons devour you before you're finally willing to act?"

Moved by Jiang Chen's words, Silversand Cavalier looked at Old Man Clearcloud. "Brother, he really is a demon. You and I have no room for further hesitation."

Even Old Man Clearcloud dared not stay his hand any longer. He

nodded. “Let us attack him together!”

Although both of them moved to attack Sir Miao, their performance varied slightly. The Silversand Cavalier had gone all out against Sir Miao, but Old Man Clearcloud was reserving his strength.

Jiang Chen saw this as clear as day, but he didn’t say anything against it. In this situation, Ole Clearcloud’s actions might be the wiser move. After all, they didn’t know each other and there was a demon present. The smart and cunning would naturally hide a portion of their strength so they could protect themselves during critical moments.

What surprised Jiang Chen was Silversand Cavalier’s passion. He hadn’t imagined that the wandering cultivator would be willing to go all out against the transformed Sir Miao. It greatly changed Jiang Chen’s impression of the other.

With Sir Miao having fully awakened his art, the demonic aura enveloping his body was much stronger than before. The violent aura of a demon soared into the clouds and was an enormous psychological impact. The man himself had become a lot faster as well.

Jiang Chen warned the two wandering cultivators who joined the battle. “Gentlemen, don’t let the demonic cloud strike your core. Also, you only need to harass him. I will bear the burden of killing this demon.”

Old Man Clearcloud was at ease with Jiang Chen’s instructions. He was very wary of the demonic clouds because they were likely corrosive. If they entered his mind and reached his core, he might become a demon puppet in no time. He was aware that the blood of the demon race was extremely invasive.

However, the Silversand Cavalier had different thoughts. Seeing how young Jiang Chen was, he couldn’t help but be worried for the young man. He worried that Jiang Chen might falter under

pressure and be killed by the demon. And so he maintained a fierce offense and put great pressure onto Sir Miao, even though he obeyed Jiang Chen's instructions and toned down his strength.

His actions improved Jiang Chen's impression of him even more. That being said, Jiang Chen didn't fear the demonic clouds at all. He had assimilated the Thundercloud Cicada's bloodline and was one of the very few who were completely impervious to poison and thunder.

The demonic clouds were in fact a type of poison. It was also a lot stronger than the average demonic poison. Protected by the Thundercloud Cicada's bloodline, Jiang Chen was able to ignore the clouds completely. Not only was the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape completely unaffected by the clouds, his attacks were growing fiercer over time.

He was actually attacking Sir Miao barehanded, using neither the Pentecolor Divine Swords nor summoned the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice. The Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice was a natural spirit, but the demonic clouds were incredibly corrosive. Jiang Chen didn't want it to be hurt by the poison.

It wasn't a problem however. Although he couldn't deploy the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice, he still had a lot of trump cards to play. While repeatedly using the Supernova Point, Jiang Chen threw the mountain into the sky once more. A flash of golden light later, an enormous mountain had materialized again.

Jiang Chen made a series of hand seals and guided the violent magnetic storms of the mountain towards Sir Miao. The storm now was completely incomparable to the one before.

As he'd unlocked more and more of the mountain's potential and continuously increased his strength, the storm's power had increased correspondingly. The deadly power of the storm put Sir Miao on his toes even thought he had transformed into a demon.

He shrieked. "Who on earth are you? How did you come by such

a treasure? I demand to know who your master is!”

Jiang Chen sneered. “You’re not worthy!”

Sir Miao howled like a frightened cat. A look of infinite brutality distorted his features. “I want you dead!”

Chapter 1152: A Lethal Blow From the Vermillion Bird Image

Now demonized, Sir Miao had ranked up several times both in terms of speed and power. But no matter how much he increased his raw characteristics, each and every one of his techniques was easily predictable. Jiang Chen's Golden Cicada bloodline allowed him to ignore Sir Miao's demonic clouds and his tempered body countered the melee attacks. Therefore, he felt no pressure whatsoever despite Sir Miao's rampage.

However, Jiang Chen didn't skimp on making full use of his extraordinary perception. When Sir Miao began a new pouncing attack from his demonic cloud, Jiang Chen paid close attention to it. The trajectory he saw made his heart skip a beat. "Careful, gentlemen!"

He made several hand seals as he called out, creating streams of magnetic force between Sir Miao and the other two wandering cultivators. The force couldn't shackle Sir Miao completely, but it was effective to a certain degree.

Thanks to Jiang Chen's reminder, Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier realized just in time that they were the real targets. As well-established emperor realm cultivators, they didn't let surprise freeze them.

Both men dodged outwards. In terms of speed, the three wandering cultivators had been on the same level. But Sir Miao in demon mode was twice as fast as before and now had a clear advantage in speed. If not for the magnetic force affecting Sir Miao's movement, the sudden attack would've spelled their demise. Being touched by the demonic cloud and invaded by its bloodlust meant that one would become a demonic puppet within a very short amount of time. Sir Miao's puppet, to be specific.

Yet how could Jiang Chen not know what Sir Miao was

planning? The corrupted cultivator wanted to turn Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier into demons so that he could turn the tables. Jiang Chen wasn't scared of having the tables turned on him, but he didn't want to see the demonic race gain in strength. Especially around Cloudshatter Mountain, an extra demon was an extra threat.

"Back off a little, friends. That man's demonized mode won't last. He's burning his own life force to fight and it'll cost him a great deal to maintain this status." Jiang Chen understood Sir Miao's methods well. He knew that the other young man wasn't actually a pure blooded demon, but had obtained some methods of the demon race.

Not having a demon bloodline meant that he was forcibly using demonic arts. That required using his bloodline as fuel. Though it increased his prowess in the short term, he could hardly keep it up for long. Furthermore, the aftereffects of doing so were quite severe.

After an instance of entering a demonized mode, several days or more of recovery was needed. But, if one practiced demonic methods to an authentic degree, then one's body would gradually become the same as a demon's over time. Sir Miao was evidently not at that level yet, though. Otherwise, a third level emperor realm like him could've easily taken out experts like Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier.

Jiang Chen's reminder was the cue for Old Man Clearcloud to back off a long way. "Brother Silversand," he called out. "Let's watch for now and help if our young friend needs it."

The cavalier disagreed. "Old Brother Clearcloud, Sir Miao is in a demonic rage. If we're scared of danger, how is our young friend over there supposed to take care of him? Plus, the Resplendent Emerald Veranda's master seems the mastermind here. Sir Miao is just one of his henchmen. If we can't take down a mere henchman, how can we expect to live when the Veranda master's conspiracy

comes to fruition?”

The Silversand Cavalier was more farsighted than most. “Old Brother Clearcloud, our way out has been sealed. Either we die like Granny Goldneedle did, or we put our lives on the line and fight our way out.”

Old Man Clearcloud became serious when he heard the analysis. Sir Miao’s undiscouraged assault on the Silversand Cavalier and Old Man Clearcloud also enraged Jiang Chen. He pushed his magnetic golden mountain to its limits. A mad torrent of magnetic energy flooded downwards like a golden river.

Guiding them with hand seals, Jiang Chen commanded two rays of aureate light towards the two wandering cultivators on his side. Both of them were surprised at this radiant development.

“Don’t worry, gentlemen. I’m giving you an extra layer of protection.”

Old Man Clearcloud looked hesitant at that, but the cavalier nodded plainly.

“Alright, thank you for your kind assistance.” The light wrapped around the Silversand Cavalier, forming intricate markings that covered him in a sort of golden armor before long. Seeing that there was no problems, Old Man Clearcloud tossed aside his own misgivings, allowing the light to protect him as well.

Jiang Chen had used his magnetic energy to enshroud the two of them in magnetic armor. The armor had phenomenal defensive potency. Though it didn’t quite match up to the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman, it was at least a third as good. More than enough to take a hit from a demonic cloud, in any case.

Sir Miao was furious. “Mind your own business, kid!”

“You’re a demon through and through,” Jiang Chen sneered. “Know your place!”

He pressed his hands downward as he spoke, causing the

towering magnetic mountain to crash in the same direction. A glowing beam shot out from the mountain after a muttered incantation. A colossal giant descended from the heavens, his muscles rippling with power. It was as if a deity had showed himself amongst mortals.

The Lord of the Golden Seal! Jiang Chen had summoned the mountain's final guardian. Roaring into the firmament, the Lord of the Golden Seal shook both of his arms fiercely. The gesture gave off an impression of explosive strength.

"Crush him!" Jiang Chen ordered.

The agreement between the Lord and Jiang Chen required the former to follow orders to the letter. The magnetic golden mountain's pressure on Sir Miao immediately intensified, limiting the corrupted human's freedom of movement more and more. As for the Lord of the Golden Seal himself, he charged forward like an arrow, jabbing a fist at Sir Miao in a furious smash.

The gentleman was very fast indeed, but the simple attack almost landed on him nevertheless. The first punch ignited the mountain guardian's bloodlust. His fists quickly turned into a storm of pummeling motions, advancing with unrivaled ferocity towards Sir Miao.

Sir Miao's demonic cloud was essentially nonexistent in the face of this assault. Whether the cloud tried to attack or defend, it held no advantage before the Lord of the Golden Seal's flurry of invincible blows. Demonic methods were strong, but not omnipotent or unbeatable.

The most fearsome thing about the demonic cloud was its supreme corrosiveness. The fact that it could infect bloodlines and take cultivators for its own was absolutely horrific. That ability alone was enough to terrorize any regular cultivator who faced it. One misstep in the defenses of their consciousness was enough to let the demonic cloud consume them.

But the Lord of the Golden Seal wasn't a human cultivator, being a spirit born of the mountain. There was no bloodline to be invaded by the demonic cloud. It was uncertain if he could even be considered a living thing.

Everything had its pros and cons. The magnetic golden mountain wasn't particularly suppressive of the demonic clouds, but neither could the clouds do anything to the Lord of the Golden Seal.

However, the mountain's magnetic energy was able to lock down Sir Miao reasonably effectively. His demonic cloud gave him no counter advantage and made Sir Miao's position rather awkward. In fact, he could do little else besides passively take a beating.

Under the Lord of the Golden Seal's tempest of attacks, none of Sir Miao's methods did anything of note. Raw force prevailed on this day. Sir Miao was chased off like a homeless stray beneath Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier's shocked eyes. His yelps definitely matched the comparison.

There was no way a miserable fight like this could last very long. A few moments of barely holding on was enough to incentivize Sir Miao into a full-on retreat. Unfortunately for him, the pressure of the golden mountain prevented him from using any of his speed. No matter how much he tried to flee, the mountain kept him in the same place. Meanwhile, Jiang Chen stood to the side like a bystander, throwing in the occasional sneak attack for good measure. It was annoying enough for Sir Miao to cough up blood.

"If you're a real man, kid, then put away your treasure! Let's have a fair fight," Sir Miao shrieked angrily.

Jiang Chen wasn't nearly stupid enough to agree to something as naive as that. Even Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier felt that Sir Miao was being too shameless. What, he was allowed to use demonic methods as a race traitor, but the other guy wasn't allowed a simple treasure?

Jiang Chen snickered. "Sir Miao, you're just one of the demons'

goons. I have no time to waste on you. These are your last moments. Lay down and die!”

A crimson halo appeared around his tempered body as he spoke. A powerful force began to invisibly gather behind him in the next moment. It was like a blazing sun was hidden, on the verge of erupting forth at any moment. The upward heat waves cast by the celestial body created a formidable aura.

Jiang Chen shook both his arms. Heralded by brilliant light, a sea of flames poured out into the open. From that sea grew a strong presence that covered the skies, a vermilion image noble and pure.

It was the image of a Vermilion Bird!

Though Jiang Chen didn’t have the bloodline to back it up, the image had nevertheless been created out of the essences of prehistoric skyfire. Paired with his tempered body’s image-based methods, he was able to deliver a killing stroke.

“To ashes with you!” Jiang Chen cried out. The image swept a tapestry of endless fire towards Sir Miao, hemming him in from every direction.

Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier couldn’t close their mouths. The attack was incomprehensibly powerful. Before this, they hadn’t quite understood why the Veranda master had delegated the four of them to kill this young man. But now, after seeing what he could truly do, they knew how foolish they had been to underestimate him.

Chapter 1153: Lingering Fear

Sir Miao's strength was fit to bursting after transforming into a demon. He thought he'd be able to easily dispatch this mysterious half-step emperor cultivator, but things didn't go as expected. Not only did he fail to trick the enemy, he was the one being controlled like trapped prey, unable to struggle free.

The fatal attack arrived as he was still panicking. A terrible Vermillion Bird image descended from the sky in dominating fashion and headed straight for his face.

"No!" Sir Miao barely had enough time to emit a bloodcurdling scream. The powerful image enveloped him in a sea of flames a second later. By the time it passed through the corrupted human, the man was no longer anywhere to be seen. The sea of flames was so hot that the image dyed the sky red when it surged upwards!

Even Old Man Clearcloud and Silversand Cavalier had to retreat a couple of kilometers before they barely dodged out of the way of the terrifying attack.

"Damn, that is too scary. It's completely comparable to an attack of sixth or seventh level emperor realm. Who is this young man?" The Silversand Cavalier muttered in shock.

Even if discounting the unnaturally powerful treasures Jiang Chen possessed, this was still one of his most powerful arts. The True Dragon image and Vermillion Bird image were the two most forceful attacks that he cultivated. The only other attack comparable to the two images was the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique.

Old Man Clearcloud's forehead was covered in sweat. He was very glad he hadn't obstinately tried to get in this young man's way. Theoretically, he, the Silversand Cavalier, Sir Miao and the deceased Granny Goldneedle might not be able to gain the upper hand against this young man even if they were to combine forces.

In fact, they might still end up dead in the end.

Even if Jiang Chen's deadly attacks were excluded from the equation, the golden mountain's incredible restriction power alone was something none of them could deal with. To put it bluntly, the emperor's domain that these cultivators prided themselves on was nothing before this golden mountain. This was without mentioning that the young man's domain power was ahead of theirs, even though he was just a half-step emperor realm cultivator.

They had no idea how Jiang Chen had honed his powers, but one thing they knew for sure, it was that his martial dao level and horizons completely exceeded theirs. Third or fourth realm emperor realm experts they might be, but their level was completely inferior to this young man's.

Again, Old Man Clearcloud was glad that he hadn't attacked Jiang Chen recklessly, and that the Silversand Cavalier kept a cool head on his shoulders.

The Silversand Cavalier couldn't say anything for a long time as he stared at the Vermillion Bird image that had devoured Sir Miao whole. It was only after the image disappeared into thin air that he walked forward to speak with Jiang Chen. He cupped his fists together in a salute.

"Your techniques are wondrous! The Silversand Cavalier thanks you for your chivalry. If it wasn't for you, we would've been sacrificed by the demon race already."

Jiang Chen's impression of the Silversand Cavalier was good enough, so he smiled faintly and waved his hands. "You can thank me later. We're still in danger right now."

Old Man Clearcloud had also come over. Doing his best not to show his embarrassment, he clasped his fists together. "I've lived for a long time, but it is only today that I understand what 'promising youth' and 'always someone better' truly means. Ai! To

think that we would be foolish enough to…”

“Gentlemen, I’m going to get straight to the point.” Jiang Chen cut off Old Man Clearcloud. “The Veranda master has surrendered to the demons, and there’s even a demon base in Cloudshatter Mountain. Perhaps it was left here since the ancient times. But how did no one in the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region miss this?”

The Silversand Cavalier smiled wryly. “Great Scarlet Mid Region hasn’t been doing so well in recent years.”

“I guess they were so busy invading others that they forgot to take care of their own domain,” Jiang Chen responded indifferently.

Neither the Silversand Cavalier nor Old Man Clearcloud were Great Scarlet locals. They were wandering cultivators used to drifting in and out of many different regions. Therefore, they didn’t feel much of a sense of belonging to Great Scarlet and didn’t mind Jiang Chen’s insult.

Jiang Chen didn’t continue his mocking. “The two of you were supposed to escort another fake Veranda master to a different location, weren’t you? Why did you show up here instead?”

“Ai!” Silversand Cavalier sighed painfully. “The escorts who escorted the fake Veranda master are actually also fakes. The twelve of us disguised ourselves as normal cultivators and followed the group here. You can say that we are the first group to enter Cloudshatter Mountain. However, the Veranda master didn’t tell us to guard the formation. Instead, he arranged us at various locations and told us to stand by for orders…”

Jiang Chen nodded thoughtfully. Everything made sense now. He could guess that the Veranda master was planning something nefarious for the four wandering cultivators, most likely as a sacrifice to his demon emperor. Everything around the entire Cloudshatter Mountain had been prepared long ago. No one could enter or exit anymore because the formation surrounding the

mountain had been shut down.

Jiang Chen thanked his lucky stars at this point. Thank goodness he'd been one step ahead of his enemies and had managed to send Wei Xing'er away before they shut down the formation. Otherwise, she wouldn't be able to leave even though he'd rescued her from the Veranda master!

Old Man Clearcloud couldn't help but ask when he saw the stern look on Jiang Chen's face. "Young friend, has the entire Cloudshatter Mountain come under the demon race's control?"

Silversand Cavalier also looked inquisitive. It was obvious that the question interested him greatly.

Jiang Chen shook his head. "I'm not entirely certain of the details myself. I only know that the Veranda master is the mastermind, or at least one of the masterminds involved in this scheme. Do you know how many have entered?"

"We were arranged at a secluded spot and told to wait for the Veranda master's orders. We don't know how many have entered either." The Silversand Cavalier shook his head blankly.

Jiang Chen thought that was the case. Still, he could guess that a great number of cultivators had entered Cloudshatter Mountain. Nearly half of Great Scarlet's elites were here. That being said, he didn't pity the region's experts at all. He had no plans to become their savior and rescue them from their fates. There were only two objectives for him right now. One, to claim the enemy's precious earth attribute treasure for himself and two, prevent the demon emperor from resurrecting.

Jiang Chen might not know the ins and outs of the situation completely, but Sir Miao's words had revealed some information. For example, this mountain was likely a base of the ancient demons. However, it was so well hidden that it hadn't been discovered even to this day. Obviously, the Veranda master was planning to sacrifice many lives to that strange altar and awaken a

demon emperor slumbering inside the ancient seal.

If the demon emperor were to awaken, Jiang Chen had no doubt that the enemy would be powerful enough to take down Great Scarlet Mid Region and its surrounding regions. Even if the ancient demon emperor was just a great emperor, he would still be stronger than most of the existing great emperors. Most importantly, it was highly improbable that great emperors were present in a mid region like Great Scarlet at all.

Most of the strongest great emperors were in the Upper Eight Regions. Even if Jiang Chen assumed that a great emperor secluded from the world happened to be somewhere in Great Scarlet, he doubted that they would stand a chance against the demon emperor. All ancient demon emperors had lived through the great war of races and were baptized by many life-and-death experiences. This was without mentioning that the demon race was an incredibly powerful race.

One demon great emperor might be powerful enough to take on two human great emperors. Of course, a demon might not necessarily be able to regain peak strength immediately after it awoke from slumber. That was why the sacrificial ritual was necessary.

The more and the stronger the sacrifices, the faster the demon emperor would regain his strength. This was likely why the Veranda master had lured so many emperor realm cultivators here. There was no better level of sacrifices than this.

Even if the Veranda master could lure over a great emperor, the demon emperor might not be able to deal with that caliber of cultivator due to his weakened state. If unlucky, he would even be eliminated by the human instead. And most importantly, this was Great Scarlet Mid Region. The Veranda master’s network wasn’t good enough to lure a human great emperor here.

Old Man Clearcloud was very worried when he considered that

all the exits were sealed off within Cloudshatter Mountain.

“Young friend, the exits are all sealed. Doesn’t that mean that it’s only a matter of time before we become the demon emperor’s food?”

Silversand Cavalier asked, “That Sir Miao was originally a nobody, but because he cultivated the demonic arts, he rose to fame within the wandering cultivator community in just a few years. Are demons really that scary?”

Old Man Clearcloud also sighed. “If they truly are as scary as they seem, the demon race would not need to expand their territories. Countless mediocre people would automatically want to serve them at all costs.”

That wasn’t random alarmist talk.

In actuality, the demon race had poor reproductive abilities. The number of pure demons in the demon race were pitifully few. Every time that race attempted to conquer a plane, the number of troops they sent out was actually quite modest. However, the demon race was good at enslaving other races and converting them into demons.

Moreover, the demon race possessed certain characteristics that made them highly attractive to worshippers. For example, those such as Sir Miao desired strength, the ability to do whatever they wanted in the martial dao world and to be superior to others. He wanted to be so powerful that he could ignore all rules and conventions of the world. A person like this could cast aside faith at any given moment and join the demon race to acquire strength that no one else possessed.

“The demon race wasn’t scary and they don’t just accept anyone into their midst. On the contrary, the demon race actually demands a lot from their worshippers. Only those who have the right talent and mental state are chosen. While it’s true that demonic arts can be cultivated very quickly, the side effects are

just as enormous. For example, the demonic clouds Sir Miao conjured may seem incredibly dominating, but he has to spend an extremely long time recovering afterwards. And if he runs into a true expert, his half-assed demonic art isn't all that scary." Jiang Chen didn't purposely belittle the demon race, but he didn't exaggerate their abilities either.

Chapter 1154: An Enormous Stone Forest

Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier traded a look. Jiang Chen's explanation didn't alleviate their concern one bit. According to what the young man was saying, Sir Miao was nothing more than a pawn. Even the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master wasn't likely to be the mastermind. If that was true, then no one who'd entered the mountain today could escape. If a mere pawn was this strong, wasn't the mastermind sure to be a hundred times moreso?

"What kind of ability is that demonic cloud? Getting close to it is enough for my consciousness to waver. My entire body feels uncomfortable because of it. It's like i'm suffocating."

"That's a long story and now is not the time. Just remember that you shouldn't be touched by the demonic cloud. Protect your consciousnesses well. The demonic cloud is one of the most aggressive abilities the demons have and belongs to an equally aggressive branch."

The demon race had many branches. The formation and usage of demonic clouds was a method that belonged to the blood demons. The blood demons were the most murderous and vicious of their brethren. The word 'blood' was in their name, and they loved exposing themselves to as much of it as possible. Copious amounts of slaughter was typically involved.

Back in the desolate wildlands, Jiang Chen had met both shadow demons and wood demons. Blood demons had been missing from that lineup. Meeting a nasty race like the blood demons here in Cloudshatter Mountain of Great Scarlet had been completely out of his expectations. If the demon emperor was allowed to awaken and consume all of these emperor realm cultivators, he would return to peak performance in no time. When that happened, even someone like Jiang Chen would be in great trouble.

“Alright, you two. This place has been locked down, but there’s always a ray of hope in times of despair. We just have to look for it ourselves.” Having said his piece, Jiang Chen disappeared into the distance without delay.

Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier exchanged another look, unsure of how to proceed.

“Silversand, my friend, I didn’t expect the Veranda master to deceive us like this. We really put our foot in it this time.” Old Man Clearcloud sighed. “If we escape with our lives intact, I won’t meddle in any worldly affairs ever again.”

“Let’s hope there’s a miracle,” the Silversand Cavalier let out a dry laugh. “Our young friend was right, though. We need to find our own ray of hope. It’s no use waiting around for one to simply appear.”

“How are we supposed to look?” The old man was morose. “His words sounded like spurious nonsense. It’s hard to make heads or tails of it. I think he might be exaggerating the danger we’re in.”

“I don’t agree,” the Silversand Cavalier shook his head. “If he means us ill, there’s no need to do something as absurd as warning us. Someone of his abilities doesn’t need us on his side. Since he neither means ill nor needs us, there’s no reason for him to deceive us.”

The cavalier was a bit smarter than the old man at the end of the day. “I’ve decided. I’m going to follow his lead and head inside to check things out. Only through information can there be a chance at life.”

Old Man Clearcloud hesitated a moment, but didn’t immediately agree. “Brother Silversand, further in means you’d be closer to the zone of trouble. Aren’t you heading straight into the jaws of death?”

“The formation is sealed now,” the Silversand Cavalier replied

seriously. “If we can’t leave, then there’s not much of a difference how close we are to the center. If a demon emperor really is awakening, does it really make it safer to be a bit further away?”

Old Man Clearcloud looked shaky. “Better than putting yourself into the path of danger, no?”

“Not necessarily! If we all put in the work, perhaps we can stop the Veranda master as a collective. I believe that young man has left to do exactly that.”

“Him?” The old man was still a bit upset when he spoke of the young man. “If he’s so great, why didn’t he invite us?”

“Maybe he doesn’t care for our strength,” the cavalier smiled wryly. The duo hadn’t been able to help much in that last encounter.

“Hmph! He’s just half-step emperor realm. If he didn’t have so many treasures–from a prominent sect, no doubt–it wouldn’t have been so easy for him to beat Sir Miao.” Old Man Clearcloud harrumphed. “I think he has his own agenda.”

The Silversand Cavalier disapproved of the old man’s suspicion somewhat. “Old Brother Clearcloud,” he frowned, “he did save our lives back there. It’s rather ignoble for us to speak poorly of him behind his back.”

Old Man Clearcloud was displeased. “Brother Silversand, if you’re set on heading inside… then I’m sorry to say this, but I’m not going with you.”

It was obvious to the cavalier that the two men had differing goals. He sighed softly, presenting his comrade with a cupped fist salute. “If so, then let’s split here. In a sense, the Veranda master’s task for us to serve as his protectors has ended early. There’s no need for us to stick together any more.”

The cavalier’s tone was a bit chilly. He was clearly disgruntled by the old man’s irresponsibility in the face of danger. Clearcloud was

no different from the late Granny Goldneedle. He didn't have the courage to do some simple investigation, despite evidence of the demon race's resurgence. The old man's fame alone wasn't enough to make the cavalier respect him.

……

"Young master Chen, there's a secluded valley eighty miles southwest of here. There's a forest of stone there, and the pulse of the earth seems to have its origins around that area as well." The Goldbiter Rat King had some breaking news for his master.

Jiang Chen nodded. "Sounds good. Let's go there."

He had no time for delay. Soaring towards the direction the Rat King had informed him, he saw numerous cultivators in his flight. Some even tried to attack him, but the speed of the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape technique removed any possibility of their success.

It didn't take long at all for Jiang Chen to land near the forest of stone. The granite formation was imposing indeed and looked like a potential home for a tribe of giants. Each stone was grand in its own way, a blend of ruggedness and splendor. In this forest, the wonders of the natural world were evident. At the moment, there were roughly two hundred gathered here in the forest. All of them were emperor realm cultivators.

Jiang Chen didn't rush closer immediately, instead opting to hang far away on the outside. He was perfectly willing to approach, provided the two dozen emperor realm cultivators nearby made themselves scarce in the near future. As long as they were around, he would definitely be attacked.

It seems that these people are all here for the earth attribute treasure. The terrifyingly potent earthen pulse it generates marks it as something truly extraordinary. But what treasure is it, actually? Jiang Chen mused in curiosity.

He was certain now that the treasure really did belong to Great Scarlet Mid Region. It wasn't just some demonic trick. A pulse in the earth was not so easily faked. Even if this place had been the site of an ancient demon fort a long time ago, the treasure definitely also existed. Perhaps this truth was the foundation of the Veranda master's plot. Without it, how could he have drawn so many emperor realm cultivators here?

"Humans die for wealth, birds die for food." Jiang Chen watched the mad crowd of cultivators from the Great Scarlet Mid Region a long distance away, internally sneering. He felt no compassion for them. If there was the opportunity to do so, he would've liked to watch their slaughter in person. After all, many people here had participated in the invasion of Myriad Domain.

"These people are so fired up. Why is it that none of them suspects the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master?" Jiang Chen found that fact rather odd.

No matter how attractive a treasure was, the people gathered had ultimately followed the Veranda master's trail here. But the man in question was currently nowhere to be found. Was there not the slightest shred of doubt? Why were they behaving in such a frenzied manner?

Jiang Chen didn't know the precise origins of these experts, but there weren't many possibilities to choose from. The imperial family and the three sects, plus possibly a few extra wandering cultivators. Maybe a few others from the surrounding regions who'd caught wind of this. Without counting things out, he estimated that at least eight factions stood here today.

Unfortunately, these factions seemed to have reached consensus about not allowing anyone else to enter this place. The agreement involved collective expulsion of any latecomers. However, the formation outside Cloudshatter Mountain' closure meant that no one else had come into the valley. Thus, internal conflict began to intensify. Everyone wanted to take the first bite. They all wanted

the best position. It quickly devolved into a shouting match.

“What right do you have to say that? What right does the Sky Eagle Sect have to take the most privileged position?”

“Exactly. We’re in a fair competition here! You Sky Eagle Sect guys better be careful with that cocky swagger! The rest of us can very easily gang up on you.”

“Hmph. And what do you think you’re doing? You look pretty unfamiliar. You’re not from Great Scarlet, are you? Why are you minding our region’s business?” One of the experts from the Sky Eagle Sect stared coldly at the second speaker.

“Everyone, please listen! We of the Sky Eagle Sect have no intention of becoming a public enemy. But we are the first ones that got here, and I think we deserve a small edge because of that. It’s not because we think we’re superior to everyone else here. First come first served makes sense, no?”

The Sky Eagle Sect expert followed the speech up with a cupped fist salute. “These are my thoughts. The affairs of our Great Scarlet Mid Region should be settled only by the locals. The strongest sects here are the Sky Eagle, Myriad Buddha, and Scarlet Parting Sects. We three sects should therefore naturally take a leading position today. Don’t you all agree?”

The speech was very persuasive. A few words were enough to dismantle the others’ common hatred. Furthermore, it pulled the other two sects closer to their side and pushed away everyone else. The member of the Scarlet Parting Sect was placated and now agreed rather than opposed.

“Quite so. The Great Scarlet Mid Region is dominated by our three sects. Everyone else must either take our orders or leave!”

Someone from the Myriad Buddha Sect opened his mouth as well. “I suggest that we three sects join forces. We can clear out the riff-raff out with ease.”

“Who’re you calling riff-raff? We come as representatives of the imperial house. You three sects are strong, but are you stronger than the entirety of the empire?” Ole Zhang was talking now, the strongest of the protectors from back at the formation.

Jiang Chen had been able to pass because Ole Zhang had let him in. The old man was a peak sixth level emperor realm cultivator and a hair’s breadth away from seventh.

Chapter 1155: Imperial Prince Zhao

The heated argument came to a halt when the powerful factions began speaking.

“Old Zhang, your virtuous and upright reputation commands great respect from us. Forgive us for our ignorance, but we never knew that you’re a royal representative?”

“Yeah! The royals are surnamed Yan, but you are a Zhang! How do you expect us to believe that you represent royalty?”

The three great sects took turns to speak their mind. Their fear for the royal family was evident, but that didn’t mean they feared any random royal representative. They would never willingly forego such a valuable treasure unless the Great Yan emperor was present.

Old Zhang smiled blandly. The response from the three great sects was within his calculations. He looked leisurely at the side, his eyes gleaming meaningfully.

“It seems the three great sects only acknowledge royalty! Very well. Imperial Prince Zhao, the representatives of the great sects have asked for you. It’s time to reveal yourself!”

What? The crowd was dumbfounded.

An ordinary looking, middle-aged man beside Old Zhang suddenly burst into laughter. “I never knew that the great sects held so much respect for royalty! It’d be incredibly rude if I continued to conceal my identity!”

He turned into an entirely different person with a swipe of his hands across his face. A shake of his arms tore his outer garb apart to reveal his royal attire. His long hair made him seem extremely dignified. The air of royalty emanated naturally from within.

Imperial Prince Zhao was the royal emperor’s younger brother. He held enormous authority in Great Scarlet and was the third

most powerful royal personage. His authority was second only to the emperor's and the patriarch of the royal family. He was greatly revered by Great Scarlet citizens and was often put in charge of jianghu matters. He was quite renowned among the great sects as a result of that.

Moreover, he was also extremely talented in martial dao. He was just as strong, if not stronger than the emperor in both cultivation and martial dao knowledge. However, Imperial Prince Zhao's passion in martial dao far exceeded his interest in the throne. His frightening talent paired with the royal family's limitless resources made him a force to reckoned with in the martial dao world. Even the emperor paled a little in comparison.

Because of this, the prince was almost always in charge of matters related to war and conquest. This only served to further heighten his fame and prominence, making his reputation eclipse even the heads of great sects.

In the hunt for Jiang Chen, Imperial Prince Zhao surely would've led the mission if he hadn't been in closed cultivation. It was his responsibility, given his position and duties. The representatives of the three sects were completely dumbfounded when Imperial Prince Zhao revealed himself. They were mere senior executives of their own respective sects. Without the presence of their heads, they didn't have the courage to speak against Imperial Prince Zhao. They exchanged glances with each other that expressed their dejection.

"Everyone, this prince is here to acquire the treasure for our Great Scarlet Mid Region. The sects you represent are from our great region, so it's only right that you assist me in acquiring the treasure to bolster our great region's heritage."

"Imperial Prince Zhao, you've hid yourself well!" The representative of the Sky Eagle sect was extremely depressed and spoke with a slightly sour tone.

“If we’d known that Prince Zhao was here, we wouldn’t have been so passionate about the treasure!”

“Obtaining valuable treasure is up to the fates themselves. If Prince Zhao is going to swallow it whole, shouldn’t we be given a few mouthfuls of soup as compensation?” Only the three great sects had the right to open their mouths in a time like this, the remainder didn’t even have the right to speak.

Prince Zhao burst into hearty laughter. “Fine! I can make the decision in this. If the treasure is turned over to the royal family, all gains derived from it will be shared with the three great sects. As for the others, depending on the situation, we may come to a…” He suddenly changed his tone mid-sentence. “But to those that are not from our region, I’m sorry to say that this no longer has anything to do with you! You can either do nothing and watch from the side, or leave.”

Prince Zhao was extremely domineering. They were in Great Scarlet Mid Region’s territory after all. As the prince of this region, he could act however he wanted. After he spoke, other powerful royal experts quickly ran to Prince Zhao’s side to bolster the numbers and strengthen his presence. The air suddenly became incredibly tense.

The representatives of the great sects exchanged glances. They were still on the fence about it, but they didn’t have the courage to revolt against Prince Zhao without their sect heads. They might have a chance if all three sects banded together and formed an alliance, but the authoritative figure of royalty was right in front of them! They didn’t dare openly oppose their liege.

There would be a complete fallout in which only one side would survive. Working together, the three sects might actually have a small advantage over the royal party. But after an intense fight with heavy losses on both sides, they’d have to slaughter every single person in the chamber, including Imperial Prince Zhao! Unfortunately, there was no guarantee that they could actually kill

him. And even if they could, they probably didn't have the courage to do so!

It'd be incredibly disastrous if word got out that the three great sects had betrayed royalty. The royal family was so powerful that they'd never hesitate to crush the sects. The representatives of the great sects were incredibly dejected when they arrived at this conclusion. They realized that they didn't have the power to resist.

"Old Zhang, clean the place up a little. Kindly send away those that aren't Great Scarlet citizens. If they resist... treat them as an enemy."

Old Zhang immediately nodded. "Understood."

Old Zhang had always been an authoritative figure in the Great Scarlet Mid Region. Now with Prince Zhao behind him, nobody dared resist his orders.

Jiang Chen was struck with an idea when Old Zhang was counting heads. He quickly waved his hand at the old man. "Elder Zhang, I'm here! They're not letting me in!"

He hadn't been exposed for impersonating the person he'd captured yet. Thus, he decided to be a bit bolder.

Old Zhang frowned when he saw Jiang Chen. "Xiao Chen, hasn't it been a while since your arrival? Where did you run off to and what took you so long?"

The person Jiang Chen was impersonating went by the surname of Chen. He responded with a wry smile. "Old Zhang, let's not talk about it. I was ambushed on my way here and almost lost my life!"

Prince Zhao didn't mind having one more person by his side. Jiang Chen was a mere nobody whose sole purpose was to prop up the numbers anyways. However, he furrowed his brows when he heard that a member of royal party was ambushed. "Who ambushed you?"

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. "Who else can it be? Granny

Goldneedle and Sir Miao! The Veranda master's men!"

He'd noticed that the crowd was more than happy to forget about the Veranda master's existence, so he decided to ring the alarm bells instead. He couldn't care less if these people lived or die. In fact, he'd rather they all died. But compared to the demon king, they weren't much of a threat.

Jiang Chen didn't want them to drop their guards against the Veranda master before catastrophe struck. He dropped them a hint so that they'd continue to be on the alert and let him profit from the impending battle.

As expected, Prince Zhao immediately furrowed his brows when he was reminded about the Veranda master. "The Veranda master? Did any of you see him while you were enroute?"

The crowd collectively shook their heads. They'd completely forgotten about him. Clearly, nobody thought that the Veranda master was much of a threat. With this reminder, the crowd came to a sudden realization that they were here to tail the Veranda master. But in the middle of everything, the Veranda master had suddenly disappeared into thin air.

Prince Zhao's face immediately darkened. "Xiao Chen, you said that you were ambushed by Granny Goldneedle and Sir Miao, but aren't they supposed to be elsewhere?"

"This subordinate finds it very strange too. The Veranda master must be planning something. Why else would he suddenly disappear?" Jiang Chen kept planting the idea inside their heads.

Prince Zhao nodded with a solemn expression. "Just what is the Veranda master up to? I've been told that he intends to betray Great Scarlet royalty! It looks like he definitely has an ulterior motive! He's definitely up to something if he suddenly disappears at a time like this!"

Old Zhang nodded in agreement. "Esteemed prince, shall we send

someone to investigate?”

Prince Zhao thought about it for a moment and shook his head. “Forget it. He’s a sixth level emperor only on the verge of breaking into the seventh. Our men will only be sent to their deaths. We needn’t spread ourselves thin. I want to finish up matters here.”

Jiang Chen cursed inwardly when he heard Prince Zhao’s reply. He decided to add even more oil to the fire. “Imperial Prince Zhao, the formation that led us into this place is completely sealed. We no longer have a way out. This subordinate strongly believes that we’ve walked into his trap.”

Since the prince was being extremely pig-headed, Jiang Chen had no choice but to break even more pressing news.

“What did you say?!” Color immediately drained from the prince face.

“Every word I say is true.” Jiang Chen quickly replied.

The representatives of the three great sects were completely dumbfounded as well. They weren’t idiots. The sealed entrance was a clear indication that they’d walked into a trap! Someone was trying to get them all in one fell swoop! However, was the Veranda master’s appetite really that voracious? Was he truly planning on killing every single person from the three great sects, the royal family, and various other fourth ranked sects?

A specific title given to princes that are not the Heir Apparent

Chapter 1156: The Giant Rock Formation

Complicated looks graced the crowd's faces for a time. Even Imperial Prince Zhao looked grave and beckoned Jiang Chen over. "Little Chen, tell us everything you know in detail."

Jiang Chen had prepared his script early on, so he immediately responded with, "I was attacked by both Granny Goldneedle and Sir Miao at the same time, but for some reason the two of them suddenly fell out with each other afterwards. Granny Goldneedle was no match for Sir Miao, and she tried to escape Cloudshatter Mountain. However, she was devoured by a kind of energy when she reached the edge of the formation. It was then I realized an unknown power has blocked the way out of the formation completely."

"What happened to Granny Goldneedle after she was devoured?" Prince Zhao had heard of the old woman's name. He knew that she was a third level emperor realm cultivator.

"There are no more signs of life. She's probably dead." Jiang Chen sighed.

"What about Sir Miao?" Prince Zhao asked again.

"I killed him." This wasn't a lie at least. "After I killed Sir Miao and discovered that the way out was completely blocked, I didn't linger and immediately made my way here. However, these people tried to stop me. If you haven't arrived, I may not even be able to come in, Your Highness."

Jiang Chen's words were woven with half lies and truth. He had cleverly taken himself out of the picture and avoided mentioning the demon race at the same time. He wasn't afraid to bring up the demon race, but he was afraid that these people would immediately lose heart, scatter, and be easily turned into sacrifices for the demon emperor.

He might not feel any goodwill towards these people, and in fact wished only misfortune on them, but he couldn't allow them to die right now. They were useful pawns in the fight against the Veranda master. Even If they had to die, Jiang Chen would rather he killed them with his own hands instead of the demon emperor. Their deaths would greatly fuel the demon emperor's cultivation, placing Jiang chen in a very disadvantageous position.He might not be able to eliminate all of the people on his own, but he was absolutely confident in his ability to protect himself. But, he had almost no chance of victory if his opponent was a peak demon great emperor of ancient times, unless he used Guo Ran's restriction left in his abode, assuming that the demon great emperor was gullible enough to walk inside.

Considering the wealth of knowledge and experience an ancient demon emperor might possess, it was doubtful that he would be careless enough to make an entry. If his enemy didn't walk inside, then the restrictions it contained were completely useless.

He could use the abode to save himself, but he wouldn't be able to stop the demon emperor from leaving the mountain. Therefore, the ideal outcome would be to make this group fight the Veranda master to a standstill and prevent the demon emperor from emerging at the same time.

"Your Highness, if the way out really is blocked, I think it's a sign of how greedy the Veranda master truly is." Elder Zhang couldn't help but speak a word of caution.

Prince Zhao frowned. "What is he planning? He can't be planning to catch us all in one fell swoop, can he? Is he really that greedy?"

Everyone fell silent at this and the atmosphere grew a little heavy. The prince waved his hands once as his ruthless personality shone. "Let us forget the Veranda master for now. We'll deal with whatever comes our way later. We have great numbers on our side, and he's just a coward who doesn't even dare to show his face.

What can he possibly do to us?”

Imperial Prince Zhao was forced to make such a statement in order to raise his men’s spirits. He was aware that an evil plot lurked behind the scenes, but his first priority was to find the treasure that made the earth pulse.

As for the other matters, they had to be set aside no matter how urgent they were. Even if the treasure was bait and he was prey stepping into an obvious trap, Prince Zhao still couldn’t find it within himself to walk away from it. He had a feeling that this treasure could rewrite the destiny of the Great Scarlet Mid Region itself! If he could obtain this treasure, the decline that had afflicted the region lately would be swept away in an instant. Success and prosperity would come to them, and perhaps one day their destiny might even grow big enough to qualify them as an upper region.

“Old Zhang, take a group of men with you and guard this place unto the death. Kill the Veranda master the second he shows up!”

Old Zhang was a sixth level emperor realm cultivator himself, which put him on equal footing with the Veranda master. With the men Prince Zhao lent him, he should be able to deal with the Veranda master even if the latter suddenly grew another two heads and four hands.

Prince Zhao then looked to the three great sects. “Everyone, it seems that the Veranda master’s web of schemes extends even to us. Since all our lives are currently at stake, don’t you think you should lend us a hand too?”

As the three great sects hesitated, a voice suddenly came from the crowd. “Prince Zhao, I am but a mere wandering cultivator, but I can’t help but feel that something’s a little odd about this whole thing.”

Prince Zhao’s face turned dark. “Who are you?”

The man smiled. “I am just a nobody, so I doubt you have use for

my name. I am curious about something though, do you think that Daoist Chen's words can be trusted?"

"What do you mean?" Prince Zhao was expressionless. "My men are absolutely loyal to the royal family. If you plan to sow discord among my people, I must say that your method is a little crude."

"I have absolutely no intentions of sowing discord among the royal family, on the contrary, I am thinking on behalf of the royal family's well being. Imperial Prince Zhao, this Daoist Chen isn't anyone important within the royal family, right? Do you really think he can take out the famous wandering cultivator, Sir Miao, in such a short time? Moreover, don't you think that his statement lacks substance and is full of holes if you scrutinize it closely?"

Jiang Chen smiled and stared at this person deeply. "Now I'm curious. This is the royal family's internal business. Are you telling me that you, an outsider, knows us better than we know ourselves?"

Jiang Chen looked calm, but anxiety was actually gnawing at him from the inside. Judging from his tone, this wandering cultivator was obviously trying to undermine his credibility. He might even be in cahoots with the Veranda master! Perhaps the Veranda master had secretly ordered him to stand up in accusation.

After all, he had survived the attack from the wandering cultivators. The fact that he was still safe and sound was no doubt ringing alarm bells in the Veranda master's head. Moreover, he had tampered with the Veranda master's plans and sent Wei Xing'er away from here. It must have affected the Veranda master's plans somehow. Considering the other's personality, Jiang Chen was certain that the man would try to prevent him from causing further damage even if he wasn't present to deal with Jiang Chen personally.

"The royal family? Can you swear a heavenly oath and prove that you truly represent the royal family?" The wandering cultivator

who accused Jiang Chen sneered in response.

Jiang Chen refused to show weakness. “If you’ll swear a heavenly oath and prove that you’re not an accomplice of the Veranda master, then why not!”

He turned with a cupped fist salute and looked at Prince Zhao.

“Your Highness, you can send someone to check the edges of the formation and know if I’m trustworthy right away. I may not have witnessed everything with my own eyes, but if there’s one thing I’m certain of, the Veranda master is cooking up a big plot that involves all of us. He’s planning to get us all in one go! If you remember, Granny Goldneedle is someone the Veranda master spent a lot of money to hire. If she hadn’t discovered some clues about his scheme, why would she suddenly leave? Why would she be killed by the restriction in the end?”

Prince Zhao frowned and shot Jiang Chen a meaningful glance, then looked back at the wandering cultivator. “Since you’re the one who’s accusing my subordinate of lying, would you mind swearing a heavenly oath and prove that you’re not an accomplice of the Veranda master?”

The wandering cultivator snorted coldly. “I was hired by the Veranda master. It’s my job to handle his problems. So if you wish to call me an accomplice of the Veranda master, I can’t exactly deny it, can I? This has nothing to do with me accusing Daoist Chen of lying, however.”

“Like hell it isn’t! If you represent the Veranda master’s interest, then you are causing trouble by accusing my subordinate!” Prince Zhao scolded coldly.

Old Zhang beckoned Jiang Chen to walk closer. He had no choice but to comply.

“Little Chen, are you absolutely sure that what you told us is the absolute truth?” Old Zhang asked calmly.

Jiang Chen's eyes were honest. "Elder Zhang, I'm going to say this again. If we let our guard down around the Veranda master, I don't think many of us are going to leave this place alive!"

As they spoke, the ground beneath their feet suddenly shook. Everyone stumbled on their feet as the tremors grew in intensity. The shaking quickly turned into a full blown earthquake. In the next moment, the giant rocks of the rock forest stood up one by one like stone giants. They floated as if they were given a life of their own. The rocks floated slowly at the beginning, but they quickly gained in speed.

Rumble!

It was as if meteors were falling from the sky as the rocks moved about swiftly. They flew and rammed into one another seemingly at random in the enormous area, blotting out the sky. Even the smallest rock was three meters tall. The biggest one was around sixty to ninety meters.

When giant rocks of this size rammed into one another, it literally felt like the mountains were crumbling, and the earth itself was cracking in half.

A lot of cultivators were struck by the flying rocks. Logically speaking, the flying rocks shouldn't be a fatal threat to any emperor realm cultivator despite their flying speed. However, they seemed to be imbued with some sort of powerful art of strength that hurt badly even at the slightest brush. Those caught by the rocks died upon impact. Their flesh and blood splattered all over in gory fashion.

For a time, the place was in absolute chaos. Naturally, Jiang Chen couldn't afford to hang around and speak with Old Zhang in this situation. He immediately executed the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape and dodged the rocks. No one was faster than him in this place.

The others weren't as lucky, however. The flying rocks were

moving faster and faster, and anyone who ran to the edge of the giant rock formation were immediately thrown back into the center by a powerful pulse. It completely cut off their retreat.

Jiang Chen immediately understood that they were all in great danger when he saw the same thing happening everywhere. This giant rock formation was obviously the very core of the earthpulse.

“This isn’t good!” An unsettling feeling passed through Jiang Chen’s mind. In the next moment, order suddenly took over the flying rocks.

The flying rocks started arranging themselves into an enormous disk as if they had a mind of their own. The disk spun so quickly that a powerful vortex in the air sucked everyone in. Not even Prince Zhao was able to escape.

The scene before everyone’s eyes grew dimmer and dimmer. The enormous disk-like formation of rocks that covered the sky cast darker and darker shadows upon them. It didn’t take long before absolute darkness consumed everyone.

Chapter 1157: A Bloody Fog

Jiang Chen was also caught in the vortex. He was able to protect himself with his superior speed, but he wasn't able to escape its powerful suction. He reached for a spacetime seal and held it gently in his hands. He would crush the seal as soon as he sensed that his life was in danger and be teleported into Veluriyam Pagoda's Six Palaces of Heritage.

Fortunately, even though the vortex had an extremely powerful pull, it didn't contain a shred of lethality. That was all for the best as he didn't want to use the spacetime seal lightly.

The free falling sensation ended in just a few breath's time. The crowd had all ended up in a sea of red misty fog. The red fog was the same exact color as the bloody mist surrounding Sir Miao when he transformed into a demon. However, this patch was even thicker and felt even more eerie and sinister.

Sir Miao's transformation had given others only an uncomfortable feeling, but this sea of red mist sent chills down everyone's spine. The vortex disappeared after everyone had been deposited into the fog. The crowd regained their movements soon after its disappearance.

Those who didn't cultivate eye techniques couldn't see further than three meters in the fog. Those who did couldn't see any further than thirty. Even though Jiang Chen had cultivated both the God's Eye and Evil Golden Eye, he could only see at most a hundred meters in front of him without exerting himself to the utmost. If he did, he could double the range and see two hundred meters in front of him.

However, only a further blanket of bloody fog was revealed to him. There was no signs of life, buildings, or even a single piece of vegetation. It was as though they'd fallen into a barren sea of mist. Jiang Chen was quite alarmed, but after observing with his

consciousness, he immediately realized that they were inside a formation. This made sense. There was no way they'd suddenly be teleported into a place filled with only red mist and nothing else within two hundred meters.

We're definitely inside a formation and the Veranda master is absolutely behind this frightening fog. His hand tightened around the spacetime again. The seal could teleport him out of even the most powerful of formations.

However, Jiang Chen didn't intend to leave. He wanted that earth attribute treasure. The powerful giant rock formation and earth pulses were a clear indication that the treasure was nearby. But where exactly was it?

He probed around, but no matter how hard he pushed his consciousness, all he could see was a blanket of crimson mist. After further observation, he was even more certain that they were inside a formation. To locate the treasure, he'd have to crack the scarlet fog first.

Jiang Chen was in a difficult situation. He was confident that he could escape, but deciphering the formation while searching for the treasure was a different situation altogether. It seems like obtaining the treasure isn't going to be easy. But going home empty handed and also allowing the demon lord to reawaken is going to leave a bitter taste in my mouth. The greatest treasures are typically fraught with danger! It'll be risky, but I must obtain that treasure. He made up his mind in this instant

The giant stone formation had crushed a number of cultivators, but those happened to be the weakest ones. A majority of the emperor realm cultivators had been sucked into the crimson fog. Fortunately, the mist hadn't completely separated them. The cultivators began to call and shout for allies. Desperate times called for unity.

"Imperial Prince Zhao, we really were tricked!" Old Zhang

exclaimed solemnly.

The prince snorted coldly. “The Veranda master’s appetite too big for his own good. Does he really think that he can defeat us with this puny red mist?”

Old Zhang sighed. “The fog is everywhere and spans far beyond what the eye can see. I’ve scouted the surrounding area and failed to find the border. This subordinate suspects that we’re trapped in a formation.”

“No need for suspicions. We’re definitely trapped in a formation.” Prince Zhao had a very keen eye. He’d noticed the peculiarity of the red mist with just a glance.

“What can the Veranda master be planning? Isn’t he a Great Scarlet citizen as well? What could he possibly stand do gain by capturing all of us?” Old Zhang was perplexed.

Imperial Prince Zhao flew into a rage. “Who the hell knows? Maybe he covets the throne and the entire region?”

Ambitious lunatics like these were a relatively common sight in the martial dao world. For the sake of their ambitions, they were willing to do things that outsiders might deem crazy or ludicrous. The prince had no doubt that the Veranda master was one of those men.

“Your Highness, what should we do?” another royal subordinate asked.

The prince furrowed his brows. “No need for panic. This crimson fog isn’t lethal. The Veranda master is using it to wear away at our morale. Don’t be frantic and defeat yourself with fear. Remember! As long as we don’t panic, the Veranda master will not be able to catch us by surprise!”

“Mm! Everyone listen to the imperial prince’s orders. Group up into a team of three to five. Those of the same sect should band together and form a defensive line! As long as we remain vigilant,

the Veranda master will not be able to break through our lines! We can afford to play the waiting game, but he might not be able to!" Old Zhang yelled loudly.

"Hahahaha..." An eerie laughter suddenly echoed through the air. "Is that Old Zhang? The older you get, the more naive you become."

Many instantly recognized the owner of the voice.

"It's the Veranda master!"

Old Zhang's eyebrow twitched when he heard the voice. "Master of the Veranda! We're all citizens of the Great Scarlet Region! Don't you feel ashamed for scheming against your countrymen?!"

Jiang Chen shook his head. The old man's naivety was truly growing as he aged. The Veranda master's intent was as clear as day. What was the point of sprouting all this idealistic bullshit now?

The Veranda master's voice seemed to originate from all sides. "Scheming against my countrymen? How could I have succeeded if not for your own greed? Every single one of you is full of it. You wanted to plot against me, but your feeble minds are too simple. You've simply fallen into my trap because of your own inadequacy."

The Veranda master was right. They had both been scheming against one another. Old Zhang was supposed to serve his employer, but he was a royal representative in the end. The Veranda master had been farsighted enough to have ploys within his schemes so that he could trap the entire group.

He'd feigned a cultivation breakthrough and released subtle hints to let everyone know that he here to unearth a priceless treasure. The crowd had been so consumed by greed that it was already too late when they realized that it was all a trap.

The imperial prince snorted coldly. "Cui! You're a well-respected

figure in Great Scarlet! When has the royal family ever mistreated you? If it weren't for our support, do you really think that the Resplendent Emerald Veranda could become as prosperous and influential as it is today? Instead of being thankful, how dare you bite the hands that feed you? Have you no shame?!"

"Shame?" The Veranda master burst into laughter. "Why should I? Did the Yan emperor feel shame when he forced my younger sister sister to warm his bed? Was he ashamed after sleeping with both my sister and my daughter? Did he feel shame for summoning me to the palace for drinks after doing all that? Imperial Prince Shao, does your family really think they're superior beings and are born to reign over others?!" He grew increasingly furious as he spoke.

The crowd went completely silent. This information was known to many, but many had also thought that the Veranda master had been a willing party in all of it. Giving one's sister and daughter to royalty was a good way to curry favor. But now it seemed like he'd never been a willing party in any of it?

The prince's face darkened. "Cui! My royal brother is the emperor of the Great Scarlet! His right to rule was given to him by the gods! You've sacrificed a lot to royalty, but you've received your current wealth and status in return! You're much too foolish if this is the sole reason behind your betrayal. There's no guarantee that you'll succeed, and even if you do, you'll become a public enemy in the region afterwards. Do you think you can live a good life even after succeeding?"

The Veranda master snorted coldly. "So what? The Great Scarlet has plenty of public enemies. A genius from the backwater Myriad Domain threw the entire region into chaos years ago. He killed o many fourth rank sect heads and gifted their heads to the palace, but was any retribution forthcoming? You've not harmed even a single hair on his body after so many years! Imperial Prince Zhao, the Great Scarlet has long been ruined by the Yan clan. It's time to

your family to give up the limelight!”

His voice was filled with boiling rage and didn’t even contain an ounce of respect for royalty.

The crowd stood with their mouths agape, except for Prince Zhao. The Veranda master wasn’t just plotting against the present crowd. His goal was to topple the monarchy and gain control of the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region! His appetite was clearly insatiable!

Could he really topple the Yan clan that had governed the Great Scarlet for over ten thousand years? Prince Zhao flew into a rage. These blasphemous words were hated by all royalty.

“Cui! Your ambition is bigger than I could’ve ever thought! Why don’t you take a piss and take a look at yourself first? Do you really think that you can overthrow the Yan monarchy by your own meager self?!”

The Veranda master answered coldly. “The Great Scarlet is already as good as mine. Unfortunately, you won’t be here to see it.”

Prince Zhao snorted coldly. “How conceited! I sure look forward to seeing how much weight is behind your nonsense!”

Chapter 1158: Haggling

Imperial Prince Zhao far surpassed the Veranda master in martial prowess. Even though the latter had the initiative, the prince staunchly believed that things were still undecided. That advantage plus a few of his trademark treasures could very well be enough to turn the tables. At least to him, he was far from being at the end of his line. So what if the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master had succeeded in his plot against them?

For that plot to come to complete fruition, the Veranda master needed sufficient strength to back it up. As long as the prince had the upper hand on that front, he was unafraid of any plot from his adversary, no matter how dastardly.

While Prince Zhao and the Veranda master duked it out verbally, Jiang Chen roamed some more within the bounds of the formation. His goal was the earth attribute treasure found somewhere within. He didn't much care about the fight between the prince and the Veranda master.

However, being trapped within the formation of fog was a death sentence for Imperial Prince Zhao and company. The master of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda suddenly cackled ominously.

"Don't look around like that, brat! I never thought that you would create the only chink in the curtain of my perfect plan."

Everyone was confounded by the sudden declaration. They didn't quite understand why the Veranda master had made such a baseless comment.

Only Jiang Chen knew that he was the target. Laughing softly, he responded with indifference. "I'm impressed with your ambition, Cui, and also your cunning. But have you considered that our current differences are completely reconcilable?"

Jiang Chen's words shocked the audience once more. Even

Imperial Prince Zhao didn't know what to say. He deployed an eye ability with utmost force in the youth's direction, struggling to confirm whether the new speaker really was his subordinate 'Little Chen'.

Ole Zhang was just as confused as the prince. "What are you talking about, Little Chen?"

"I'm not really him," Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "The real 'Little Chen' is already dead."

"Really?" Old Zhang blinked. "Who are you, then?"

The prince's brow furrowed. "Kid, you dare lay a hand on a servant of the royal family?!"

"Royal family, hmm?" Jiang Chen's detached tone continued. "Is that something impressive or important? If that's so, why are you locked up here like a homeless mutt?"

Prince Zhao was almost angry enough to cough up blood. "You! Good, good, very good! I didn't know so many geniuses lived in the Great Scarlet Mid Region. First the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master, and now you. You're an oddball, alright. Identify yourself, kid!"

"Rather than being interested in who I am, maybe you should pay some more attention to yourself," Jiang Chen grinned mockingly. "I reminded you earlier out of the kindness of my heart. I told you not to fall for the Veranda master's stratagem. But you didn't listen to me, did you? My betrayal here should be unsurprising."

Prince Zhao's face was as dark as the night sky, his ugly expression a sight to behold. It was true, there had been a reminder earlier. He simply hadn't taken the warning seriously. The treasure had been their top priority at the time. He hadn't expected the Veranda master to show up so quickly.

"Friend," Ole Zhang replied hurriedly, "it doesn't matter

whether you're Little Chen or not anymore. We should be on the same side right now. The Veranda master won't let us escape, but that is true for you as well."

Smiling still, Jiang Chen glanced towards the aforementioned man. "Let's see what the Veranda master himself has to say about it."

"Are you trying to strike a compromise, kid?" The Veranda master grinned in his own bizarre way. "You robbed me of my woman and ruined the most important part of my blood sacrifice. Do you think you have the right to talk to me like this?"

"I don't think I can force you to actually forgive me, but I certainly can force you to compromise," Jiang Chen said coolly.

"Oh?" The Veranda master's grin widened.

"I'll start killing everyone in here. Each casualty means that your sacrifice has a higher probability of failing. If I finish my task, then your ritual will be done for. You can say goodbye to your plans of summoning the demon great emperor!" Jiang Chen's countenance was cheerful as he said this, but his tone rang dread through his listeners' hearts.

The Veranda master was stunned. The emperor he was trying to awaken was in a crucial period within the altar. He couldn't yet consume flesh and blood with a physical body. If the young man went on a killing spree now... it was possible for him to eliminate all sources of food for the demon emperor!

The Veranda master had prepared eighty-one pure yin female cultivators to fuel the blood sacrifice. Through a specific ceremony, the demon emperor could use them to struggle free of his restrictions.

Wei Xing'er's time of birth and bloodline potential had perfectly matched the blood sacrifice's criteria. She had been one of the most key components of the sacrificial process. Without her, the

ritual could only unleash a third of its intended effects.

That was the reason the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master had sent the four wandering cultivators to cut Jiang Chen off. Thankfully, the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape ability had been too fast for them. When the quartet caught up, Wei Xing'er was long gone.

The Veranda master didn't even close off the formation in time. Without her, the sacrifice was significantly less powerful. If not for the fact that the ancient restrictions had already loosened considerably, a thirty-percent ritual would've been nowhere near the amount of needed energy to wake the demon emperor.

However, with an incomplete blood sacrifice, the demon emperor would take much longer to recuperate. Because of that, he needed more food to hasten his recovery. With enough food, the demon great emperor could just as easily return to peak performance. As the heir to the emperor, the Veranda master's status would rapidly rise as a result. His goal was control of the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region. He wanted to act as the demon emperor's agent, and rule with an iron fist of expansionism.

Lofty ambitions for a pitiful man.

His plans were also close to flawless. He had played the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region for fools. However, no amount of calculation could've prepared him for Jiang Chen's appearance out of the blue. A crucial segment of the plan had been broken. The Veranda master hated Great Scarlet Empire's ruling family, but he hated the outrageous Jiang Chen just as much. He wanted to feast on the entrails of both parties.

The conversation took place as if no one else was present. Prince Zhao was furious at being ignored.

"Master of the Veranda, it's truly incredible that you'd sell yourself out to demons! You've made yourself a public enemy to the human race. Friends, the remnants of the demon race are making a comeback, and our lives are on the line. Are you going to

sit still and wait to be slaughtered, or are you with me to kill the monster in front of us once and for all?!”

As an experienced and world-wise man, Imperial Prince Zhao knew how important it was for everyone to stand in solidarity in a time of trouble such as today. Their deaths were insignificant when compared to the range of devastation the Veranda master could unleash upon the rest of the world. He’d probably start with the royal family first after killing them all. Prince Zhao absolutely did not want that to happen.

The three sects’ personnel no longer seemed to care about the treasure any more. All of them gathered in front of the prince, making their thoughts known. “Your Highness, we shall weather this trouble together!”

“That’s right! A monster who’s sold himself to the demons deserves hostility from everyone!”

“As supporters of the royal family, we’re behind your demon-slaying efforts all the way!”

The determined attitude of the vast majority present reassured Prince Zhao a fair bit. There were so many emperor realm cultivators here. If everyone worked in unity, then they could overcome any challenge! Most people now stood by the prince. Only a hesitant few hadn’t yet made the decision. Jiang Chen was the defiant exception.

Ole Zhang sighed, his eyes turning towards the noticeable outlier. “Friend, I’m sure you’ve known the Veranda master’s defection to the demon race for a long time. Are you still willing to cooperate with him, knowing that? Right now, it doesn’t matter whether you killed Little Chen or not. We human cultivators should stick together and fight our common demon foe.”

The old man had a keen eye and a sensitive grasp on the situation. He had perceived that the young man here was perhaps more useful than everyone else combined. Though he didn’t know

where this ‘Little Chen’ impostor had come from, this stranger had just played a key part in ruining part of the Veranda master’s blood sacrifice. It was evident from that that the young man had a unique method of dealing with demons. Even the Veranda master was wary of him.

If a man like that wasn’t on their side… no, worse, if he was allowed to go to the Veranda master’s… there was no telling the consequences!

The prince harrumphed softly, but didn’t cut the old man off. He had noticed the same thing. This mysterious challenger was the key to victory today. Ensuring his neutrality was the bare minimum they needed to accomplish.

“Friend, this prince guarantees that if you stand with us, you will be absolved of anything you’ve done. I won’t press you on whether you killed Little Chen or not. It’s clear from the Veranda master’s betrayal of his race that he has no principles to speak of. It is dangerous to work with him. Perhaps he will start on you after he deals with us!”

“That’s right, friend. I think you should make a sound-minded decision. The demons’ malevolence has been infamous since ancient times. If you collaborate with them, you’ll be a criminal for all of history!”

“His Highness is right. Do you expect a man who conspires with demons to honor his word?”

Everyone knew that the Veranda master’s enmity had no solution. Since he’d submitted to the demon race, they could only be mortal enemies hereafter. But this enigmatic cultivator seemed to hold plenty of animosity for the Veranda master. Moreover, the latter exercised caution around him. There was every advantage to having a guy like that on their side.

If these people had been from literally anywhere else, Jiang Chen would’ve joined up without hesitation. However, Great Scarlet

Mid Region was an important exception. He hated and was wary of demons, but that didn't mean he could lay down his old grudges and work with anyone from that region. His heart wouldn't let him. He didn't care for it one bit.

Glancing emotionlessly at the prince, Jiang Chen's voice was as deadpan as his appearance. "Rather than sparing the time to worry about me, you should think how you're going to break through this formation. When the demon emperor wakes up, you're only going to be food for him. If you really are as noble as you say, then the best way to show it is to kill yourselves. Show your devotion to your race! Otherwise, you'll be shameful morsels of contribution towards the demon emperor's revival. You'll only be enabling the demon emperor with your cowardice and stupidity!"

Chapter 1159: Skyclearer Talisman

Jiang Chen's tone was taunting because he knew that these people would never commit suicide, even at death's door. They might say that they fought for the greater good of mankind, but that was just a meaningless motto . Some might not even resist temptation and would surrender to the demons when they were forced to choose between life or death.

Naturally, Jiang Chen's words resulted in much shock and hostility. The demon race might be detestable, but this young man and his provocative tone was completely unlikeable as well.

"Don't be stupid! Prince Zhao wants to recruit you because he thinks highly of your abilities. Do you really think we'll be dead just because you aren't on our side?"

"Yeah, your cultivation is weak and you don't look like a master. Why don't you take a look at yourself first before you run your mouth!"

Old Zhang let out a long sigh. His expression was both ugly and regretful, but he didn't try to persuade Jiang Chen any longer. He didn't know why the young man refused to join them despite the danger they were in. There had to be a reason behind the rejection, but Old Zhang wasn't equipped with the knowledge to guess it. Maybe this person was the same as the Veranda master. Maybe the Great Scarlet royal family had once offended him.

The Veranda master cackled oddly as he stared at Jiang Chen. "You have a sharp tongue alright, but do you really think you are different from them?"

Jiang Chen replied indifferently. "Even if I'm the same as them, it isn't beyond my ability to destroy your ritual sacrifice. The ritual hadn't begun when I left the altar. That means the demon emperor is still a ways from awakening. This is more than enough time for me to kill a lot of people."

The situation instantly turned into a standoff between three factions. The Veranda master and his demon backers represented one faction, Jiang Chen himself represented the second, and the rest of the people represented the third. However, those who represented the third faction might fall apart and flock to the Veranda master at any moment.

Surprisingly, the one thing the Veranda master was most afraid of was Jiang Chen taking too many lives before the ritual began. But on the other hand, he didn't believe that Jiang Chen was that capable, or that the others would let him slaughter them without resistance.

In addition, he had another trump card in the form of this bloody fog. The red colored mist was evaporated demonic clouds. Although it wasn't as corrosive as the demonic clouds, anyone exposed to the crimson mist for a prolonged period of time would eventually suffer the same effects. By the time they noticed it, it would already be too late.

This was why the Veranda master had dared show himself openly despite their numbers. He thought that victory was well within grasp already. He hadn't watched the battle between Jiang Chen and Sir Miao and naturally wasn't aware that Jiang Chen was an exception immune to the demonic clouds.

His mind flew rapidly through various thoughts. "Kid, I admit that you're devious, but you're nothing more but a piece of meat on the chopping block right now. Even if you succeed in causing some damage, you still won't be able to stop the demon emperor from rising. However... if you're sincere, I can consider giving you an opportunity to join us."

Expressions on Imperial Prince Zhao's side changed drastically when they heard this. They hadn't thought it possible for the two men to come to an agreement!

Old Zhang broke his silence and cried out, "Friend, even if you

refuse to stand with the prince, you absolutely mustn't join hands with the demon race!"

But Jiang Chen ignored him and answered with a smile, "Oh no, it's not you giving me an opportunity. This is a fair trade. Get it?"

"Fair trade? Do you really believe you are in a position to trade fairly with me?" The Veranda master declared arrogantly.

Jiang Chen was impressed. The Veranda master was a master actor alright. He knew that the Veranda master would never compromise, but was still playing along anyways to buy time and lull Jiang Chen into lowering his guard.Jiang Chen didn't expose the plot. "You may think so now, but the truth will quickly change your mind."

In truth, he was also buying time for himself. He wasn't unaware that the Veranda master's short term goal was to delay things as much as possible. The Veranda master's trump card was without a doubt the red mist around them. The others might not recognize it, but he did.

The bloody fog was the demonic clouds, but in a different form. The difference between the two was that the mist appeared harmless at first glance, but was surely just as corrosive because it was just another form. If the demonic cloud was a murder weapon, then the red mist was the pot that slowly cooked its prey alive. By the time the prey realized it was being cooked, it would already be too late. The Veranda master was buying time for his scheme to work, but Jiang Chen was doing the exact same thing.

For a time, the atmosphere felt absolutely oppressive. At this point, Jiang Chen could not be bothered to warn these people about the danger they were literally breathing in because they would all die. The only difference was whether they were sacrificed by the Veranda master of killed by him.

Time passed slowly.

Someone on Prince Zhao's side finally lost his cool as the minutes ticked by little by little. Patently, the cultivator with the poorest mental fortitude was the first one to break.

"Your Highness, we can't just keep waiting like this." Someone suggested.

Prince Zhao wasn't a fool. He also knew that certain death awaited them if they continued to do nothing.

"What do you think, Old Zhang?" Prince Zhao asked the elder next to him.

Old Zhang pondered for a moment before answering. "The Veranda master is certainly buying time for something. In my opinion, there is nothing worse than waiting until the demon emperor awakens. None of us will be able to escape when the worst happens."

"So you're suggesting that we break through this formation?" Prince Zhao asked.

"We have to. Even if we are to die in the process, it is still a better fate than being devoured by the demon emperor."

Old Zhang was admittedly one of the few people in this group who hadn't lost his conscience completely. However, it was only because the human race and demon race held deep prejudices against one another. There was no telling if he would do the same thing in a wholly different matter.

The three great sects also spoke up. "Imperial Prince Zhao, we have come to a decision. We agree that we must get out of this formation. Please give us the order."

"Yeah, please give us the order, Your Highness!"

The Veranda master sneered sinisterly. "You want to break out of this formation, don't you? But do you really think that this formation of infinite boundary is so easy to escape?"

He wasn't underestimating his opponents, he just knew that this formation was unbelievably powerful. Even a great emperor would be hard pressed to find any clues in here, much less these people. Moreover, the master knew these people very well. None of them were even qualified to find a corner of the formation, much less break out of it.

The Boundless Fog Formation wasn't qualify as a top rank killing formation, but it was a top rank trap formation. The formation itself hardly had much offensive power, but its ability to entrap people ranked amongst the best. As its name might suggest, the Boundless Fog Formation was an infinite world. There were mist everywhere, and it seemed there was no end in sight.

Of course, the sea of mist wasn't nearly as boundless as its name might suggest. It was just a spatial effect of the formation that made those trapped inside feel like the formation had no end.

Many years ago, there had been a great cultivator of the three realms who'd managed to refine an spatial art centered around his palm. As a result, he was able to toy with a great demon sage and literally prevent it from escaping his palm, no matter what the great demon sage tried.

The truth behind the great cultivator's infinitely vast palm technique was an extremely high level spatial manipulation technique. He had created a boundless space within a formation that tricked its prey into thinking that the world had no end. Had the great demon sage been able to find a flaw in the formation, the effect would've failed instantly.

This Boundless Fog Formation was undoubtedly incomparable to that great cultivator's technique. However, it did utilize some similar concepts.

Imperial Prince Zhao's people didn't think that deeply about things. They only knew that this was a fight for their lives, and that the price of failure was death. If they couldn't escape before

the demon emperor arrived, they wouldn't even be left with a corpse in the end.

The group split into four smaller groups under Prince Zhao's command. They set their sights in four different directions and did everything in their power to try and break through the formation. It was part of their agreement to work together no matter what obstacle they faced.

North, south, east and west were the four directions these four smaller groups charged towards wildly. A moment later, everyone suddenly sensed some enemies right ahead of them. They hurriedly raised their arms and attacked in full force.

Bang bang bang! Attacks clashed furiously against one another inside the crimson fog, followed by a series of dull groans.

"No, wait, I think they're our own people!"

"Ah? Is that Elder Gao?"

"Why did you attack without checking first, Elder Zhang?"

They yelled and hollered at each other. At this point, they'd all noticed that the 'enemies' were their own people. Somehow, the four groups had run into each other.

"How was this possible? We advanced down four different directions and moved in a straight line. None of us strayed off the right path either, so how on earth did we run into each other?"

Luckily for them, no one had died during the torrent of attacks. It was the best they could hope for in this situation. Prince Zhao's expression turned even uglier. Not only did this formation seemed to have no boundaries, they somehow ran into each other after progressing for some time. This was just too bizarre.

"Your Highness, this doesn't look good." Old Zhang looked very dejected. "This formation looks simple at first glance, but it employs a surprisingly high level spatial technique. If we can't find a flaw in this formation, then we will never be able to break out

with brute force."

Prince Zhao looked like he had suddenly figured out something. He nodded once, and an earthen brown, ancient talisman suddenly appeared in his palm.

"Ai, I suppose I have no choice but to use this ancient talisman."

Old Zhang was stunned when he saw the talisman. "Your Highness, is that the famed Skyclearer Talisman gifted to you by the royal forefather himself?"

The Skyclearer Talisman? Jiang Chen was a bit moved when he heard this. To his knowledge, the Skyclearer Talisman was an incredibly useful item.

More specifically, the Skyclearer Talisman was wonderfully good at breaking formations. As long as the formation in question wasn't of the unparalleled kind, it could discover and attack the eye of a formation immediately, thus breaking it. This talisman was without a doubt an ancient talisman. No current talisman makers would be able to create it.

Chapter 1160: Great Losses on Both Sides

Everyone's spirits lifted when Prince Zhao took out his Skyclearer Talisman. The mass of cultivators started gathering around the prince. Those from the three third rank sects, the rest from the fourth rank sects, and the royal representatives–all acted with one mind. Even the wandering cultivators began to edge closer. They wanted to ride the prince's coattails out of this mess.

His face black, the prince issued a command to Ole Zhang and those from the three third rank sects. "Cut down every man who showed hesitation. I'm not interested in taking those fence-sitters out with me."

As soon as Prince Zhao gave his orders, Ole Zhang and the experts from the third ranks sprang into motion. Like tigers hunting down sheep, they pounced upon the group of stragglers on the outside.

Their targets were utterly shocked. They never thought that the prince would attack them. The people who had showed hesitation were relatively few in number. They were either wandering cultivators or visitors from outside the region, possessing no advantage in numbers or raw strength. There was no time for them to react at all before several were cut down in the ferocious attack.

The fewer prey there was, the easier it was to clean them up. It didn't take long at all for the situation to devolve into a five-against-one or worse for the defending side. In only a few moments, those who had taken too long to consider where to stand were all cleaned out.

Jiang Chen watched them from the sidelines. When he saw the stirrings of internal strife, he cleared an even larger distance from the group. He wasn't scared of them turning on him, but a healthy caution was always advisable.

As expected, Imperial Prince Zhao turned his attention to Jiang

Chen shortly thereafter. His fierce gaze belied the murderous intent he had towards the person who'd kept singing a different tune.

Jiang Chen was impassive. He read the cruelty in the prince's eyes plainly. His sole response was to focus inwards, quieting his breath. Prince Zhao was made angrier by the young man's indifference. "Kill that brat as well."

"...my prince," Ole Zhang advised hesitantly. "Time is of the essence. We should break through this formation right away. When the demon emperor wakes up, it will be too late."

"If we all attack at once, we can take him out instantly!" the prince roared. "As long as he lives, my anger will not be abated."

Ole Zhang was at an impasse. He was a wily old man and instinctively sensed the difficulty in dealing with the mysterious young cultivator. The fence-sitters had been easy targets, but this youth was assuredly ten times harder... or more. The young cultivator's speed alone was unlike anything they could imitate. Plus, they were still within a dangerous formation. The longer they delayed, the riskier it was.

"Come on then, Prince Zhao, if you're looking for a fight," Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "But I can guarantee that you'll die before I do."

Imperial Prince Zhao could scarcely contain himself at the provocation. "Everybody, forward! Wipe him out! Anyone who does will receive a personally petitioned reward from the emperor!"

The master of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda had been observing the situation from the formation's exterior all this time. He'd braced himself when Prince Zhao produced his Skyclearer Talisman.

The corrosion from the fog required a little longer to affect its

targets. If Prince Zhao used the talisman right this moment, then the formation could very well be broken. His prey escaping was a tangible possibility. Though there were more powerful formations further out, the demon emperor would find a hard time finding his food after they departed this sea of mist.

After all, it was far more spacious outside these boundaries. For a recently-awakened demon emperor, it was a hundred times harder to hunt all of them down within such a vast territory, compared to simply plucking them out of this foggy ocean.

Most importantly, the Veranda master didn't want to fail the demon emperor multiple times. He wanted to maintain a good impression before his master. Their infighting was excellent news for him. If they fought a vicious battle here, the blood mist's corroding effects would be sped up significantly.

Once it fully took place on its unsuspecting victims, none of them would be able to leave any longer. Even if the formation were broken, they wouldn't be able to move at all. The demon emperor's food would be safe.

Thus, the Veranda master had no intention of interfering with the group's dissension. Though he thought the death of a couple of cultivators was unfortunate, it was no great loss compared to the remainder of Great Scarlet Mid Region's powerhouses. The ones left were more important.

Jiang Chen shared the same line of thought as the Veranda master. He was also waiting for the bloody mist's corrosion to take place. When Prince Zhao issued the command to attack him, the death knell had also tolled on everyone here.

Jiang Chen had no interest in engaging with the walking dead. Instead, he used his Kunpeng Meteoric Escape ability to run circles around them. Even Prince Zhao could not match Jiang Chen's speed, much less anyone else.

Despite their absolute advantage in numbers, they couldn't catch

up to Jiang Chen to attack him. In the sea of mists, it was very hard to keep up a persistent assault. Outside the formation, the Veranda watched on at Jiang Chen's ghostly speed with dropped jaw.

"Where did this kid come from? Why is his agility so absurd?" As a man who'd seen a great deal, the Veranda master was certain that he had never witnessed such a thing before. In fact, he hadn't heard of such skill being possible. "I'm glad that those dogs are eating each other. The fog will take care of them in their fatigue. The demon emperor will be pleased with the docility of his food!"

The Veranda master was the calmest one present. He could almost taste the victory to this spectacle.

Seeing that pursuing Jiang Chen was fruitless, Ole Zhang wanted to try dissuading the prince some more. But he swallowed the words on the tip of his tongue; Prince Zhao, red in the eyes, had joined the fray himself.

Ole Zhang knew the prince's temper well. Entering the melee personally meant that his anger had reached a boiling point. The only people that he would listen to now were the imperial family's ancestor and the emperor himself. Anyone else who tried would only further upset him.

Helpless against the predicament, the elder could only half-heartedly keep up the barrage. If it was up to him, he wouldn't waste another moment on this pointless endeavor. Each minute, each second, could mean the difference between life and death. Burning away precious opportunity like this was unwise.

Jiang Chen used no force at all. He relied only on his speed to play with the cultivators on his tail. Fighting several dozen cultivators head on was senseless and dumb. The scarlet fog did nothing to him whatsoever, but took an increasingly greater toll on the crowd behind him the more they used their cultivation.

Fifteen minutes wouldn't ordinarily be considered a long time,

but it was dragged out by the situation at hand. Despite pursuing Jiang Chen for that long, the group of cultivators behind him didn't touch a hair on the young man's body. Prince Zhao was enraged.

"Kid!" He hissed shrilly. "If you have a spine at all, then stop running! Is your toughness limited to your talk? Do you only know how to run, and not how to fight?"

"Is your head on right?" Jiang Chen jeered. "I'm alone, and you have a few dozen with you. You're calling that a real fight?"

"...kill him!" The prince grit his teeth.

It was at this moment that several experts from fourth rank sects began to shake. Their faces looked rather ill. "What's happening?" One of them shrieked suddenly.

"This isn't good. There's something wrong with my consciousness!"

"Why can't I use spirit energy?"

"Aah! Someone's poisoned me! My consciousness has been invaded as well!" One after another, cultivators began to report their indisposition.

Jiang Chen's heart shook. Finally, the poison's effects had begun to take place.

One, two, three. The cultivators dropped like flies, as if a plaguing wave had just passed through them. It spread to those from third rank sects, then the imperial representatives as well.

Ole Zhang looked extremely disquieted. "Your Highness, something's wrong. My consciousness has also been invaded by a strange force."

Prince Zhao harrumphed, but his face reddened as he was about to comment.

"How could this be?" He examined his own consciousness. There

was something terrifying within. Discovery of the oddity led to the discovery that he had no strength left whatsoever.

“This mist is toxic!” Ole Zhang was the first to make that observation.

Prince Zhao looked disgusted. He was rapidly being sapped of his strength. No matter how he pushed his hidden reservoirs, his body would not respond. He wanted to use the Skyclearer Talisman in his hand, but he couldn’t. The archaic talisman reacted to him not at all.

Prince Zhao’s face really and truly blanched this time. He knew that he was done for. A flash of regret passed through his mind. If he had listened to Ole Zhang’s advice, maybe… Too bad there was no medicine in the world for regret.

Seeing that the time had come, Jiang Chen feigned his own collapse as well, remembering to berate the prince as he did so. “Prince Zhao, you stupid idiot! You’re happy with a mutual loss, are you?”

“I thought you wanted to join up with the demons, kid?” The prince fired back. “How come you’re down too? Aren’t you some hot shot, eh? Why don’t you keep talking?! Keep talking!”

Jiang Chen was at a loss for words. Prince Zhao was a stubborn fool.

The Veranda master cackled when he saw the cultivators drop one by one. “Good, good, good. I didn’t expect things to go this smoothly. You fools! Fighting amongst yourselves brought you to your demise. Even the heavens have come to my aid.”

When Imperial Prince Zhao had taken out the Skyclearer Talisman, it had made the Veranda master rather wary. Therefore, he was very thankful for the prince’s incompetence. Without that specific imbecile, his plans wouldn’t have so easily come to fruition.

The Veranda master was in a really good mood. As reaper of the harvest, as a trapper collecting his spoils, he could finally enjoy toying with his prey. He shut off the formation, causing the crimson fog to disperse into nothingness.

It was no longer needed. Everyone here had already been poisoned and were essentially fish in a barrel. Even if the Veranda master stood around and did nothing, they wouldn’t have the strength to come kill him.

Chapter 1161: To Beat The Veranda Master At His Own Game

The Veranda master had dispelled the formation of his own accord for a clearer view of the ugly struggles of cultivators in their death throes. It was obvious that he hated the royal family quite a bit. His hate encompassed even the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region. And of course, he hated Jiang Chen, the unpredictable variable, immensely as well.

The perfect prey had fallen into his hands, so it would be a crying shame if he didn't fully enjoy and play with them after his success. He had spent many years preparing for the moment, and now was when he enjoyed his harvest! The moment the formation was dispelled, the Veranda master made a beeline for Imperial Prince Zhao with a taunting look. He stomped firmly on the prince's face twice.

"Imperial Prince Zhao, is it? Where's your cool act now, hmm? Why are you lying here like a dying dog? How does this feel?"

Prince Zhao had been a proud man his entire life and had never thought that he would succumb to a situation like this today. Flustered and exasperated as he was, there was nothing he could do about it.

"Kill me if you dare, Cui! My royal brother and forefather will absolutely take revenge for me, for you are the enemy of humanity the moment you submitted to the demons! Even if I were to die today, you will never get me to bow my head and make a fool out of myself!" Prince Zhao knew that it was pointless to beg for mercy, so he didn't even bother trying.

"Kill you? Such naivete." The Veranda master laughed heartily. "You can't die even if you want to now. Didn't that kid tell you all to commit suicide earlier? It might have sounded ridiculous, but it was actually the smartest choice. But it's too late now. Both life

and death are literally out of your reach, so just wait here like obedient dogs for the lord demon emperor to devour all of you, hahahaha! I'm sure it'll be the time of your lives!"

Prince Zhao cursed him. "What are you so happy for, Cui? No matter how happy you are, you'll never be able to change the fact that your daughter is the royal family's toy. Tell me, can you think of a single lover in your life that hasn't been taken and enjoyed by the royal family? Hahaha, so I may die today, but it's still worth everything you lost! Can you really wash that shame away even if you kill all of us, Cui?"

The Veranda master's face darkened. "Are you trying to get me to kill you? Dream on! Remember this well: I shall return ten times, a hundred times the shame you've inflicted upon me! I'll invade Great Scarlet and murder your forefather and your emperor. Then I'll rape every Yan woman. Once I'm done, I'll cast them on the streets so that every beggar in Great Scarlet Mid Region will get the chance to enjoy them! They'll provide pleasure until they die!"

Only the heavens knew how big a hatred the Veranda master harbored to say such a thing. All color drained from Prince Zhao's face. He knew that the Veranda master would absolutely do what he said if he really could replace the Yan family.

The Veranda master laughed out loud with great satisfaction when he saw that the ashen-faced Prince Zhao could no longer refute him. He left the prince and walked towards the others.

When the Veranda master stopped by Ole Zhang, a half smile danced across his lips. "My apologies, Old Zhang. I knew that you belong to the royal family. I recruited you as my escort to bring you into this trap. If you wish to blame someone, blame yourself for being as naive as you are at your age."

Ole Zhang responded calmly. "The victor is king, so you may say anything you wish since you've won. It is unfortunate that Prince Zhao didn't listen to me, or you may not have been the final

victor.”

The Veranda master laughed proudly. “The Yan family has always been a bunch of self-conceited bastards. Such is their fatal flaw.”

Ole Zhang couldn’t say anything at that. He sighed softly, shook his head, and fell silent.

The cultivators of the three great third rank sects turned their heads away and ignored the Veranda master when they saw him walking towards them.

However, the Veranda master wasn’t going to let them off. He taunted, “Not so high and mighty now, are you? Why so quiet, hmm? You’re cultivators of third rank sects, aren’t you? Your eyes normally grow on top of your heads, am I right? Look at you now!”

His audience wore ugly looks on their faces, but they were unable to say anything in response. They knew that nothing they said now could change their situation.

Someone in the fourth rank sect cried out. “Don’t kill me, master of the Veranda. I surrender! I’ve always admired the demons, so can you recommend me to the demon emperor? I would like to serve him.”

“Me too, please recommend us, master of the Veranda. We are willing to serve your every whim.”

The Veranda master smiled faintly. “It’s true that I am lacking in manpower right now, but even then you weak-minded people are beneath my attention.”

The Veranda master was even less interested in the fourth rank sects. His next target was Jiang Chen.

A gleeful victor’s smile on his face, the Veranda master walked towards Jiang Chen with unconcealed ridicule. “Boy, you were harder to deal with than that idiotic Prince Zhao. If you hadn’t ruined part of my plans, I might have wanted to keep you around.

Unfortunately, not only did you do exactly that, you even stole my woman…”

Jiang Chen snorted coldly. “Dog of the demon race, what are you so proud about?”

“Hahaha, the victor is king, and the loser is nothing. I’m the king, so why shouldn’t I be proud of myself? The demon race, the human race. Are they really all that important? In the martial dao world, the law of the jungle is the most important!”

“So, you mean to say that victory is in your grasp, is that it?” A hint of ridicule escaped the corners of Jiang Chen’s mouth.

“What , am I wrong?” The Veranda master countered with a cold snort.

Suddenly, Jiang Chen leapt from the ground, activating the formation disk in his hands. The moment he did so, the Ancient Slaughter Formation of Seven instantly wrapped around the Veranda master.

The sudden action stunned the Veranda master greatly. It was unfeasible to him that someone stripped of all fighting ability could summon such explosive strength without warning.

Long Xiaoxuan also acted when Jiang Chen activated the formation, trapping the Veranda master inside a dragon domain. Then, Jiang Chen fired the Featherflight Mirror at the Veranda master in succession and without mercy.

In just a breath’s time, the young man had executed three moves at once: the Ancient Slaughter Formation of Seven, the dragon domain, and the Featherflight Mirror.

All three techniques were entrapment moves.

As strong as the Veranda master might be, he was caught on the back foot after being caught completely off guard. Not reacting in time, the three successive moves had him completely trapped before he could recover his wits.

Long Xiaoxuan might have just entered emperor realm, but he was still a true dragon. As an initial emperor realm cultivator, he could fight an average high level emperor head on.

The Veranda master was just sixth level emperor realm. He cultivated the demonic arts, but Jiang Chen hadn't given him a chance to transform. As a mere human, the Veranda master couldn't struggle out of the shackles that held him in place.

Jiang Chen immediately formed the Vermillion Bird image and sent it flying towards the Veranda master. Long Xiaozuan also executed the Claw of Crushed Mountains and Rivers and swiped at the Veranda master's face.

The schemer cried out in pain when the attacks hit him. The dragon's attack hit the Veranda master in the head, exploding the latter like a crushed watermelon. The Veranda master barely managed to form a single thought of hatred before he was completely wiped off the face of the earth.

Those outside had no idea what was going on inside the Ancient Slaughter Formation of Seven. All they saw was the blurry outline of the formation. No one saw Jiang Chen and Long Xiaoxuan working together to kill the Veranda master in the blink of an eye.

They only knew that something had happened, and that the Veranda master seemed to have encountered a bit of trouble. Faint hope rose in everyone's hearts. Although they had been chasing Jiang Chen just now, they all hoped that Jiang Chen would be the victor instead of the Veranda master.

Long Xiaoxuan hid himself when the formation dissipated. A distant-looking Jiang Chen walked out of the air and stood before Imperial Prince Zhao and the others. The prince hadn't imagined that the young man would be the one to walk out of the fight instead of the Veranda master.

"Hmph. Have you come to ridicule me like that Cui, boy? Kill me if you want. I'll be a damned coward if I beg you during the

process!”

Jiang Chen smiled indifferently before ignoring the prince completely, dashing straight outside instead. Currently, the most pressing thought in his mind wasn’t the demon emperor, but the earth attribute treasure.

The Veranda master had done one good thing prior to his death, and that was to dispel the sea of fog so that he could taunt his enemies. As a result, Jiang Chen could observe everything around him with ease. He swore to find the treasure even if the demon emperor were to awaken from his slumber in the next instant.

They were still all underground. After expanding his consciousness to its fullest, Jiang Chen quickly found the place with the richest source of energy.

“This is it!” Jiang Chen’s eyes lit up. When his consciousness swept across this area, he discovered a pouring fountain of earth elemental energy.

Jiang Chen immediately summoned the Goldbiter Rats.

“Head down there and take a look, Ole Gold.”

The Rat King had no choice but to comply. Luckily, the pulse of the earth treasure wasn’t too powerful even though it was overflowing with energy. It didn’t take long for him to hop back up. “Sir Chen, there are actually several levels to this underground world. For example, there’s another space beneath here that enshrines a single pearl. All of the elemental energy we’re sensing comes from it.”

“Oh?” Jiang Chen’s eyes lit up. “Let’s head down and take a look then.”

He immediately went down to the floor below with the Rat King. There were many giant rock pillars inside this layer. They looked like pillars supporting this underground world and were quite fantastical.

An enormous rock sculpture of a giant stood at the center of the rock pillars. Surprisingly, the giant had only one eye. Its eyeball was none other than the pearl the Rat King had glimpsed. Even from afar, Jiang Chen found the giant incredibly imposing.

“Is this the pearl?” Jiang Chen looked contemplative for a moment. He first scanned his surroundings to make sure that these giant rocks wouldn’t suddenly come to life and attack them. Then, he summoned the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice for it to grab the pearl with its vines.

Chapter 1162: The Demon Emperor Awakens

With a casual sweep, Jiang Chen gathered the pearl into his hand. In the next moment, it was as if the underground world had its soul pulled out. The stone pillars became like paper, collapsing into heaps one by one. Cursing quietly, Jiang Chen immediately called to the Goldbiter Rat King.

“Ole Gold, we have to get out of here.”

The Rat King was unconcerned about this layer’s loss of structural integrity. “Don’t worry about it, Master Chen,” he slowly trotted. “Even if the sky falls, I can bring you out with no problem.”

The Rat King was scared of a great number of things, but the ground collapsing was not one of them. His race’s foremost talent was digging holes. No matter how deep a Goldbiter Rat was underground, a tunnel could be dug out for sure.

Jiang Chen didn’t treat it with the same levity. Though he wasn’t afraid of losing a clear way out, this underground was a strange and ominous place. It was a literal demon lair. If he unwisely attracted the demon emperor’s premature attention, it would be disastrous. He ascended to a layer above, which was also crumbling to dust with the same speed as everywhere else.

Cries of pain could be heard incessantly from Prince Zhao’s direction. They had been utterly consumed by the power of the bloody fog, and couldn’t lift a finger to resist their fate. Enormous boulders crashed down from above with alarming frequency, creating more splats of cultivator gore on the ground. Jiang Chen’s reappearance elicited relief from the remaining few, as if their savior had finally arrived.

“Save us, save us!” They called out in unison. “Friend, I am willing to pay you thirty million spirit stones if you take me with you!”

“Sir, we don’t have a life-and-death grudge between us. All of us can reward your kindness well!”

Imperial Prince Zhao harrumphed. He was unwilling to ask for help. He wasn’t going to get it anyways. After all, he had issued a kill command on the young man just moments prior. That alone was grounds for a deep grudge between them. How could he expect the other to save us?

Ole Zhang was far more practical. “Friend, I can speak for both of us. If you save the two of us, the royal family will reward you with one billion spirit stones as thanks.”

For the Great Scarlet Mid Region, one billion spirit stones was an insurmountable amount of wealth. But no matter how large that sum was, it was still less than what their lives was worth.

The prince didn’t blame the old man for deciding for him. In fact, he secretly felt that Ole Zhang should’ve named two or three instead. The prince wasn’t shameless enough to make the request, but he didn’t entirely oppose others doing so on his behalf. Deep down in his heart, he wanted very badly to live. As for the money, the royal family always had ways to make that up.

Jiang Chen harrumphed. The only one that he felt the slightest bit of empathy towards was Ole Zhang. He didn’t have any compassion for anyone else here.

“I thought you were the Great Scarlet Mid Region’s hotshots? Why are you afraid now? Giving up so soon?” He sauntered over, smiling, his voice filled with contempt.

“Friend, now isn’t the time to squabble,” Ole Zhang couldn’t resist interjecting. “We are in the wrong, yes. We can pay an additional billion on top of the previous promised, as a token of apology.”

Prince Zhao couldn’t resist his approval of the old man’s clever addition. Unfortunately for him, Jiang Chen didn’t seem to care.

“Whether you want to pay one or two billion, I’m afraid that you’ll meet the same fate here today. Death!”

Without saying another word, he used the Supernova Point in quick succession. Each point reaped a life, their owners popping like balloons under the pressure. Jiang Chen was exceptionally cruel with his attacks. He left no room for mercy. Nothing remained in the wake of his fingers’ passing. There wasn’t even a mote of dust left behind after his total eradication. This was the most fearsome thing about this technique. Anyone hit by it would explode like a supernova, becoming one with nothing in the process.

Jiang Chen’s incredible speed at killing off most of the group in an instant made Ole Zhang gasp. He couldn’t believe it. “You… you sold out to the demons as well?”

“Ole Zhang, you let me in,” Jiang Chen smiled coolly. “When the prince gave that order against me, you at least tried to do something. I can make an exception for you and let you go. Everyone else has to die.”

His hands did not lie idle as he said this. By now, essentially all of the Great Scarlet Mid Region’s experts were gone.

Imperial Prince Zhao watched Jiang Chen kill with the ease of butchering fowl. His absolute lack of sympathy was the last straw, cementing the thought that he wasn’t going to live today.

“The Great Scarlet Mid Region won’t let you off for this, kid!” Vengeful words, spoken with one’s dying breath, were the weakest of all.

Jiang Chen smiled coolly again. “Don’t worry. I’ll exact the same vengeance upon everyone else deserving in that region, too. I won’t act as the Veranda master against your women, of course, but your experts… well, they’ll join you before long.”

“You…” Prince Zhao was flabbergasted. The young man before

him suddenly seemed foreign. Who was he, and why was he so bitter against Great Scarlet Mid Region?

Jiang Chen summoned the Goldbiter Rat King forthwith. “Ole Gold, you go on ahead. Take Old Zhang out of here.”

Without another word, the Goldbiter Rat King did as he was told.

The prince’s face was ashen. He glared at Jiang Chen defiantly. “I can understand the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master’s enmity towards our house. But who are you? What did Great Scarlet ever do to you?”

“The Veranda master’s grudge is small fry compared to mine. When your region invaded Myriad Domain all those years ago, you were certainly more than happy to kill with smooth, steadfast strokes. With much more pleasure than I today, I’m sure. ” Jiang Chen’s tone was derisive.

“What?” Prince Zhao’s own voice froze. His eyes betrayed his incredulity. “You… are a remnant of Myriad Domain? Who… who could you…”

Jiang Chen’s smile was unchanging. “There’s no need for you to be concerned about that. Don’t worry, the royal family will join you on the path to oblivion quite soon. I won’t make you wait long for a family reunion.”

With another two points, he killed two of the last three people. Prince Zhao was the only one that remained now. His expression looked absolutely ghastly. “The Myriad Domain… Myriad Domain… who could’ve expected that a remnant of Myriad Domain would stir up… so much trouble…”

Snorting, Jiang Chen pointed at the prince to blow him up as well.

The antique Skyclearer Talisman fluttered into his hand. He put it, along with the storage rings of the dead, with his belongings. After scavenging the battlefield, he lazily began to depart upwards.

As he did so, a majestic voice mentally confronted him from within the chaos. “Who? Who is it that’s meddled in my business?”

Jiang Chen’s heart skipped a beat when he heard it. The will of the voice was filled with power and resentment.

“Has the demon emperor awakened?” A scary thought popped into his head. He felt cold sweat bead all over his body, and hurried in his escape. He broke out of the earth not long after and was met by a very anxious rodent.

“Master Chen, it seems… that the demon emperor awakened?”

The Rat King was cowardly by nature. Just being exposed to the will of the demon emperor caused him to shiver uncontrollably.

Jiang Chen looked serious. “Put yourself away, Ole Gold. Don’t worry. I have a plan to get out of here.”

Having plundered the orb at the source of the earth pulses, Jiang Chen had effectively disabled the outside formation. After making sure the Rat King was safely tucked in, he turned to Ole Zhang. “Go on ahead. If you see the Silversand Cavalier and others, you can leave with them.”

Ole Zhang was almost as white as the prince had been. “I’ve served the imperial family all my life, but you killed an imperial prince. Even if you let me go, how can I possibly live?”

“I spared you solely because of your previous attitude,” Jiang Chen waved a hand. “I’m not responsible for any suicidal tendencies you may have because of my other actions.”

The old man shook his head. After a long while, he began to drag his feet away with some difficulty. Jiang Chen hadn’t personally killed him, but it was impossible for him to leave alive like this. The young man was in no rush to leave himself, though. The demon emperor’s presence was terrifying, but he refused to be cowed by it.

The first step of the blood sacrifice had been completed when the demon emperor feasted upon those female cultivators, but the process had also been imperfect without Wei Xing'er. The demon emperor wasn't at the peak of his strength right now. He probably only had a third of his power available at most. In this state, the demon emperor was unlikely to be stronger than a human great emperor.

Therefore, Jiang Chen decided to stay for an opportunity to kill the demon emperor as well. It seemed futile to attempt to stop the demon race's renaissance. But he didn't want the demonic invasion to occur immediately.

Even though it was unlikely that a demon emperor at his peak would be able to destroy the entire human domain, the blood demons' bloodline was exceptionally infectious. If this demon emperor had just a bit of breathing room, he could grow an entire cult of blood demon loyalists in less than a decade.

There were countless human cultivators like the Veranda master or Sir Miao. The best solution was to nip the threat in the bud. Of course, Jiang Chen was aware of the difficulty of killing an ancient demon emperor even in a state of weakness. But he had plenty of aces up his sleeve.

Emperor Peafowl had given him the Imperial Advent Defense and Onslaught Talismans. Each was equivalent to borrowing a great emperor's defensive or offensive strength, respectively. Though one use lasted only about two hours, that was more than enough to do what he needed to do.

Both talismans had three uses before they were used up. Continuous usage demanded immense physical condition and exertion. The slightest indiscretion could lead to tremendous backlash. Typically, talismans like these weren't used consecutively.

Demon Emperor Bloodmalva, emperor of the blood demons, had

finally struggled free of his seal. Though the ritual to wake him had been somewhat flawed–notably, the crucial component Wei Xing'er had been missing–the demon emperor had successfully awakened nevertheless. However, he was surprised to find that the one who'd organized the sacrifice had disappeared. There was no response to his attempts at bloodline resonance. Where was the Veranda master?

Chapter 1163: Demon Emperor Bloodmalva

Demon Emperor Bloodmalva's sacrifice had lacked Wei Xing'er as a crucial component. Thus, he was only at roughly thirty percent of his full potential. But even a crippled demon emperor was still astonishingly mighty. The great emperor aura filled the interior of the mountain.

The Resplendent Emerald Veranda master's aura is nowhere to be found. Has he died?

Though the demon emperor had only been recently freed, his consciousness was perfectly clear. There was no way otherwise he could've convinced the Veranda master to join the blood demons, nor laid out this plot for his human agent over these several years.

Transforming himself into a bloody cloud, the demon emperor stormed from the altar to the dissipated fog formation. He arrived to the sight of utter ruin. His prepared food was long gone. The only thing that remained was a strong lingering scent of battle.

"Aaah!" Demon Emperor Bloodmalva knew that his plans had fallen awry. He was completely furious. He'd arranged such an intricate plot, only to have its fruit stolen from him at the last second! The imperfect blood sacrifice and the disappearance of his food further detracted from his awakening. Two mishaps in a row upset the demon emperor greatly.

"Was the Veranda master too unlucky after all? Was he insufficient to shoulder the burden of the demon race's destiny? It seems that I've picked the wrong man for the job." The demon emperor's eyes were rimmed with red. He wanted to kill someone. "Who is it? Who dared interfere with my great scheme?! I don't care who you are, I'll eat you alive when I find out!"

This series of disruptions so soon after his revival ignited his demonic malice. Like a crimson haze, a cloud of blood tore out of the area with almost impossible speed.

An immense demonic consciousness spread out instantly for a radius of several dozen miles, seeking out a possible culprit who was still around.

With the Veranda master's death, the demon emperor no longer had a source of information. But Demon Emperor Bloodmalva knew well that the disruptor for such a well-constructed plot was definitely still close by. It was obvious that the fighting within the formation had just ended moments prior. The lingering ripples of battle still clung to the air.

As soon as the demon emperor tore through the earth, Jiang Chen sensed the demonic aura approaching from a great distance. The young man was startled by its sheer intensity.

"Even a weakened demonic emperor has such impressive might! He truly is an emperor from the ancient past. If he's allowed to return to peak strength, who in Great Scarlet Mid Region, the Upper Eight Regions even, will be able to face him head on?"

Concerned, he began to think of a solution to the pressing problem before him. The selfish choice was to up and leave immediately. But he had to be more responsible than that. If he left now, the demon emperor would have more than enough time to recover and would surely leave Cloudshatter Mountain to wreak havoc in the wider world. There would be a massive loss of life then.

Even if a demonic invasion was inevitable, Jiang Chen wanted to delay that eventuality for as long as he could. Not a single region in the human domain had made sufficient preparations. He began to dash outwards without delay. He didn't have the luxury of time.

Now that the earth attribute orb was in his possession, the formation on the outside was rendered largely ineffective. Jiang Chen wanted a fight with the demon emperor to take place out of this strange area. It was unwise to fight on unplumbed enemy territory.

As he sped by in the air, he saw Ole Zhang slowly trudging in the same direction far below. Having been corroded by the blood mist, the old man had no strength to go any faster. He walked at a snail's pace. There was no way he could escape at his current pace.

Sighing softly, Jiang Chen dove down and picked the old man up. "Don't move," he growled. "I'll bring you out."

With his Kunpeng Meteoric Escape pushed to maximum speed, Jiang Chen was barely affected by his new burden. He pushed outwards once more with all the force he could muster.

On a mountain trail near the outer reaches of the mountains, Jiang Chen keenly spotted a wandering Silversand Cavalier.

"Sir Silversand, the demon emperor has awakened. You must leave Cloudshatter Mountain immediately!" He reminded aloud as soon as he saw the man.

The Silversand Cavalier was surprised by the sound of Jiang Chen's voice. He saw a bolt of lightning blitz outwards through the air.

"Friend," he shouted upwards, "how are things inside?"

"They're all dead. You better hurry up and leave. The demon emperor has descended upon the lands. If you don't, you'll just end up as food. He'll recover faster because of it." Jiang Chen knew that advice wasn't always enough to convince men like the Cavalier, but clear analysis usually did the trick.

Right on cue, the cavalier immediately looked apprehensive. The prospect of staying only to become food and strengthen the demons was thoroughly unattractive to him. Having witnessed Jiang Chen's incredible speed, he didn't dare defer his own departure.

"Friend, I thought there was a formation outside that restricted our movement?" He asked while running. "Can we really get out?"

"The formation should be gone now."

“Oh? The formation is gone? But then, if we leave now, what if the demon emperor leaves Cloudshatter Mountain? Won’t a lot of people die?” The cavalier had a stronger sense of racial responsibility than most.

Jiang Chen approved of this trait a great deal, but he wasn’t pleased with the comment’s timing. “If you’re not leaving, then you must be confident in your ability to defeat an ancient demon emperor, correct?”

The Silversand Cavalier blinked. Right, er, did he have that confidence? In his moment of hesitation, an inexorable tide of demonic aura came up behind them. It moved with such velocity and vehemence that the air visibly roiled.

Demon Emperor Bloodmalva’s ominous laughter could be heard within. “I knew there were some stragglers. So, you’re the culprits that ruined my plans?”

The demonic presence rushed in like water, crashing closer with vexing rapidity. Jiang Chen found the last part extremely surprising. Though the demonic emperor wasn’t necessarily moving faster than the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape, he wasn’t much slower either. However, it wasn’t a real comparison. Jiang Chen was at close to top speed, while the demonic emperor had regained maybe twenty to thirty percent of his strength.

This benchmark deepened Jiang Chen’s understanding of ancient demon emperors in general. If he pushed his Kunpeng Meteoric Escape to its maximum limits, he’d find it easy enough to outrun the demon emperor’s wrath. But the Silversand Cavalier couldn’t say the same.

The Cavalier wasn’t particularly slow, but the demon emperor blew him out of the water. The former moved at about half the speed of the latter. Thus, the Cavalier’s fate was all but sealed.

When the demon emperor inevitably caught him, he would be turned into nourishment in short order. Though a single third

level emperor realm wasn't near sufficient, it would still be an excellent snack. Any amount of strengthening in the demon emperor's power at this stage was terrifying to contemplate.

Jiang Chen was at his wit's end. He was caught between a rock and a hard place. After a few moments, he dipped downwards decisively after all. Tossing the old man in his hands to the Cavalier, he called out, "Take Ole Zhang away. I'll bring up the rear."

The Silversand Cavalier couldn't have imagined this kind of development in his wildest dreams. He instinctively caught Ole Zhang.

"What are you standing around for? Hurry up and go!" Jiang Chen glared at him angrily.

"If you're staying, then I will stay too. Us two together is better than you alone..." The cavalier stomped his foot.

"Stop wasting time. You'll just cause more trouble for me if you stay. What's with all the sentimentality, huh?" Jiang Chen admonished, rather angrily.

The cavalier made to speak some more, but decided against it after noticing Jiang Chen's increasingly darker expression. The young man spoke the truth.

"Alright," he nodded, "I'll take your kindness at face value, then. I will head for Great Scarlet Capital immediately. You must hold fast as much as you can. You're fast, so try to drag things out as much as possible. When more of us human experts can get here..."

"Get out!" Frowning, Jiang Chen loudly urged the other man away. His tone had become rather harsh. The Silversand Cavalier had a good heart, but now wasn't the time for small talk. A second lingered was a second gambled.

The Cavalier didn't dare venture another word. Old man in tow, he raced outwards without looking back.

Brows still furrowed, Jiang Chen chose not to run any more. Instead, he stood in place, staring at the direction from which he came. He activated his Imperial Advent Defense Talisman. The talisman shone with a blinding light that seeped into Jiang Chen's body.

In the next moment, an invisible shield sprang into being around the youth. The talisman produced an effect comparable to a great emperor's defense. It had a duration of two hours, and each possessed three charges. Jiang Chen's particular talisman had only two remaining.

Within another few breaths, a cloud of blood arrived within the mile. Transforming into a more physical form, Demon Emperor Bloodmalva skewered the young man opposite him with his gaze.

Jiang Chen stared back fearlessly. God's Eye working in tandem with his Evil Golden Eye, he confronted the demon emperor's look head on.

The demon emperor was enshrouded in a bloody haze. The body within was extremely burly and tall, and wore scarlet armor. There was a mark on the body's forehead, unique to the blood demons. It was a flame-shaped sign, diabolic in its fascination.

"You again?" Demon Emperor Bloodmalva dug into Jiang Chen with a fierce look. "I remember you. You've been to my altar! You stole a girl from me. You! You were the one that ruined my revival."

The demon emperor had still been within his seal then, but Jiang Chen's presence had made a strong impression. After all, the bloody formation around the altar had failed at trapping him. It was easy to remember someone so exceptional.

Chapter 1164: Defying the Demon Emperor

Jiang Chen wasn't surprised that the demon emperor had recognized him.

"You shouldn't have awakened. You escaped death during the ancient cataclysm, and should've been obediently stayed hidden in your seal. Why are you in such a hurry to die? We are no longer in the ancient times, and you no longer a demon emperor that can rampage through the lands!"

Emperor Bloodmalva smiled angrily. "Human brat, how dare you insult a demon emperor when you still reek of your mother's milk? You're merely a half-step emperor! I've slaughtered more half-step emperors than I could possibly count! Ignorant child, you should know better!"

Jiang Chen laughed coldly. "This half-step emperor shall be your maker. You've left your home and crossed countless planes just to die in a foreign land. Is that really worth it?"

The demon emperor was taken aback. "Brat! You know about the planes as well? When did the humans from the Divine Abyss Continent become so knowledgeable?!"

"Hmph! How could a foreign invader possibly know about the depths of our knowledge?" Jiang Chen answered mockingly.

The demon emperor suddenly flashed an odd smile and nodded. "Brat, you're clearly stalling for time! Sadly for you, whatever you have up your sleeves won't be effective against me. Killing you will only take a second. Your hard work thus far will be all for naught. You've single-handedly foiled my plans and ruined my feast! I have no choice but to have you as appetizer. Something tells me that your flesh will be tastier than those cows or lambs!"

Jiang Chen snorted coldly. "You want to feast on my flesh? At your current strength?"

The demon emperor burst into laughter. “You’re a mere half-step emperor! I could easily slaughter you with just a tenth of my power! Killing you will be as easy as squashing a bug!”

“You sure talk big.” Jiang Chen decided to stop stalling as the enemy had seen through his plans.

If an earth-shaking and tremendous fight was what the enemy wanted, then an earth-shaking and tremendous fight it would be. No one else was around. It was a good opportunity for him to flex his muscles.

Jiang Chen had fought many powerful experts ever since embarking on the path of martial dao, but not a single one was as frightening as the enemy he was currently facing. Fortunately, the demon emperor was still far from top shape and seemed to only possess a rough third of his true potential. If the opponent was in prime form, Jiang Chen would have no choice but to run. If his speed wasn’t enough, he might not even make it out alive.

He immediately drew out his strongest weapon, the Pentecolor Divine Sword. He wasn’t confident enough to take on his opponent without a weapon.

Demon Emperor Bloodmalva cackled oddly. An enormous wave of bloody mist suddenly shot forth. The demonic clouds were much more frightening when the demon emperor was wielding it. The clouds converged into an enormous vortex that sucked in all of the surrounding air.

Jiang Chen was dumbfounded. This must be a demon emperor’s unique domain power. He never thought that a domain formed out of demonic clouds could actually be so powerful.

He was nearly sucked in with his surprise and couldn’t believe his eyes. The demon emperor had dealt a strong attack right from the start! Fortunately, he was prepared for such an occasion. He executed the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape and turned into a bolt of lightning, piercing through the bloody vortex.

“Mm?” The demon emperor was mildly surprised. His demonic miasma was much weaker than what it could’ve been at his peak, but it was still an combination of his strength and domain power. It seemed powerful, but only contained a tenth of his true power. However, he didn’t think that it’d fail to restrict the young cultivator. He was rather taken aback by this.

Jiang Chen could feel cold sweat running down his back. He grabbed an Imperial Advent Onslaught Talisman and contemplated using it. The talisman was roughly equivalent to a great emperor’s attack power.

Using it was one of the best ways to exterminate the demon emperor, but activating both talismans at the same time would impose an enormous burden on his body. They were both extremely heaven-defying talismans. Even a single use meant a great amount of stress on the cultivator’s body.

Cultivators with insufficiently tempered bodies could even implode if they used talismans that were too strong. It was extremely dangerous act. Just one talisman was uncomfortable enough, so Jiang Chen wasn’t completely confident that his body could handle two. However, he knew very well that there was no going back. In order to deal lethal damage to the demon emperor, he’d have to rely on the Imperial Advent Onslaught Talisman.

And so, he stopped hesitating and immediately activated the talisman. A fierce and domineering beam of light poured out from Jiang Chen's body. His body was roiling with power. It almost felt like he was in a berserk mode. The talisman’s power flowed into Jiang Chen’s body and formed a link with his own energy.

The demon emperor furrowed his brows. “You’re using a strength enhancing talisman?”

He had been sealed for countless of years and thus knew nothing about the Imperial Advent Onslaught Talisman. However, he was certain that it was some kind of strength enhancing talisman.

“Hmph! A mere half-step emperor human dreams of defeating a demon emperor with just a strength enhancing scrap?” The emperor snorted coldly. He tightened his grip to materialized a crimson red blade in his hands. The blade was shaped like a curved moon and was wreathed with an eerie and terrifying aura. It projected a bloodthirsty and cruel presence of having devoured countless ferocious beasts.

“Brat, I’ll send you off with my Bloodmalva Demon Blade. Don’t worry, not a single drop of your blood will be wasted!” The demon emperor flashed a sinister smile. A scarlet tidal wave immediately crashed down on Jiang Chen.

The frightening blade shimmered a the blood-red cosmos. The blade strike felt like a ravenous beast prepared to ravish its prey. It was so brutal that it split the air in half and pierced through the void to appear right in front of Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen leaped and turned into a flash of light to avoid the sword strike. Even though he was armed with the dual talismans, he wasn’t willing to take the blade strike head on. The strike wasn’t just incredibly lethal, it was also immensely corrosive. This power was the blood demons’ most frightening ability. It could eat away a cultivator’s bloodline, weapons, pills, and many more. Almost nothing was immune to the power of corrosion.

The Pentecolor Divine Sword was legendary, but Jiang Chen wasn’t going to take any risks.

“Hmph! Your speed is impressive, but my blade will not be hindered by it! I’ll dice you into pieces!”

Another strike! This time, it descended as a powerful meteor and was accompanied by a torrent of blood that quickly formed a threatening vortex. The surrounding air was immediately drawn into it.

It was a strike that moved the heavens and shattered the earth, cleaving seas and mountains! The enormous vortex blotted out the

sun, sucking in the surrounding air in its vacuum. Jiang Chen was incredibly solemn when he experienced the momentum. Countless rays of blade qi abruptly shot out from the vortex and furiously laid siege to Jiang Chen like ghouls and ghosts that wouldn't be chased away.

Materialization of the blade stroke? Jiang Chen noticed the profoundness of the strike. He knew that he'd die a very gruesome death if he met it head on. That was tantamount to suicide.

He immediately took out the Featherflight Mirror and flashed it on the relentless blade qi. At the same time, he used an escape art and flung himself towards the outer regions of the vortex. Unfortunately, the restrictive power of the vortex was simply too intense. After multiple tries, he failed to pierce through the vortex even with the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape,

"Brat, do you really think that you can pierce through my ultimate sword intent with a simple escape art? You're too naive!" The demon emperor burst into an eccentric cackle.

Jiang Chen kept on trying, but the thick killing intent only became thicker as time went on. This surprised him greatly. He never imagined that his opponent's blade strike would contain such a profound formation. Blade and formation had merged into one.

The demonic miasma was truly a toy in the Veranda master's hands. Only the demon emperor is capable of harnessing its true might and frightening power. After a few more attempts, Jiang Chen realized that the vortex was regenerating too quickly for him to pierce through it with speed alone. Without wasting any more time, he grabbed the Pentecolor Divine Sword and chanted the incantation.

"The first strike shocks the heavens, the second strike moves the earth.

"The third splits the yin and yang, and the fourth encroaches on

the sky.

“The fifth condenses all five elements and coalesces thunder. Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords, pierce through the heavens!”

The Pentecolor Divine Sword drew in the five thunders of heaven and earth to form an ultimate thunderclap. Natural phenomena danced in the sky and condensed into incredibly frightening sword intent. Like a ferocious ancient beast freed from its cage, the sword intent immediately charged towards the demonic miasma.

Boom!

At the great emperor level, the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique was an unbelievably powerful technique. Even Emperor Peerless would struggle to receive the attack head on. Boundless sword light and thunderclaps merged to form the most powerful attack. Light erupted from the sword, narrowing into a small dot, and shot towards the miasma.

Boom!

A large hole appeared in the miasma. Jiang Chen immediately turned into a flash of light and flung himself through the hole.

“Well met!” The demon emperor was incredibly taken aback when Jiang Chen pierced through the clouds. However, a demon emperor wasn’t to be trifled with. Although he was surprised, a counter response was already at hand. With a palm strike, he slammed an enormous, red mountain shape down upon Jiang Chen’s head.

Chapter 1165: Ambush

A demon emperor who'd just regained roughly thirty percent of his strength was theoretically inferior to a human great emperor, but really wasn't as far as behind as the numbers might imply. An average peak ninth level emperor would be lucky to escape Demon Emperor Bloodmalva with the demon's current state, much less fight him head on.

But Jiang Chen wasn't afraid of the palm seal bearing down on him at all. Instead, he blurred into a beam of light with increased speed and dived at the ground even more quickly than before. He passed right through the ground in an instant.

"Useless effort!" Demon Emperor Bloodmalva proclaimed in a cold, indifferent voice, raising the his blade and slashing at the ground repeatedly like he was tilling the fields.

Crash! The giant rocks on the ground split apart like tofu beneath the Bloodmalva Demon Blade's assault. Deep ravines crisscrossed the ground.

"Hmm? He can dive this deep?" Emperor Bloodmalva sounded a little surprised. At this point, he was forced to admit that the young man was more capable than he'd initially imagined. Although the demon emperor had only executed a few moves, they were all unique techniques that he was reknowned for.

Of course, their strength were incomparable to when he was at his peak, but Emperor Bloodmalva had thought that victory was all but certain since his opponent was just a mere half-step emperor youngster.

And yet, reality was a cruel mistress. He was unable to defeat the young man despite using many moves. While it was true that that young man had empowered himself with a strengthening talisman, his continued existence still was unbelievable to the demon emperor.

After all, he was an ancient demon emperor! According to the Veranda master, the cultivators of the human race had become much weaker and more cowardly compared to the ancient times. Barely any ancient human cultivator had left legacies behind at all. Emperor Bloodmalva had been emboldened by this information. In the ancient times, he had been just an average general. He was too weak to qualify as a commander, much less a demon forefather.

At first, he'd thought about hiding himself even after returning to peak strength, but then the Veranda master had told him that there hadn't been an empyrean expert in the human domain for many years. In fact, the general populace believed that empyrean experts no longer existed in the human domain. All powerful empyrean experts had either been forced to depart to another plane due to the heavenly laws or had left for other mysterious lands.

This had greatly boosted Emperor Bloodmalva's confidence. It even made him scorn the human cultivators of current times. However, after he'd broken free, he discovered that he was unable to take down the very first human youngster he encountered despite using nearly every powerful skill in his arsenal. He began to begrudge the Veranda master.

Emperor Bloodmalva's murderous nature was fully provoked by Jiang Chen at this point. His blade strokes and blade qi nearly turned every inch of the floor upside down. But no matter how powerful his slashes were, he wasn't able to dig out Jiang Chen.

"Boy, I'll catch you and skin you alive even if you escape into heaven or hell!"

Now incredibly enraged, Emperor Bloodmalva transformed into a bloody cloud and charged into the ground. It was obvious that the demon emperor hated Jiang Chen so much that he was willing to go through any trouble to find the human.

Jiang Chen was currently very deep underground thanks to the

Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice. He knew that the demon emperor's consciousness was a high enough level that the demon could track Jiang Chen through lingering traces of presence. This was why Jiang Chen didn't plan on hiding. As for using the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice to fight Emperor Bloodmalva, the idea never crossed his mind.

At this level, there was almost nothing that the Lotus could do against the demon emperor unless the spirit creature broke through to great emperor realm. While the Imperial Advent Defense and Onslaught Talismans had enhanced Jiang Chen greatly, the same couldn't be said for the Lotus.

Jiang Chen calculated the elapsed time before suddenly activating the Ancient Crimson formation disk in his hand. Out of the ten great formations it could simulate, he immediately chose the Major Artifice Formation without much thought.

He didn't expect the formation to be able to contain the demon emperor at all. All he wanted was to restrict Emperor Bloodmalva for an instant, just enough for him to launch a single attack. Chances of success aside, it was something he had to try.

"Brother Long, don't reveal yourself just yet. Attack together with me when I give you the signal to. Everything hinges on this one attack!"

Jiang Chen knew that he was incapable of beating Emperor Bloodmalva even in the demon's limited state. The talismans were just temporary enhancements. He wasn't actually a great emperor, and the rest of his equipment weren't up to par either. He was strong, but his fighting prowess was ultimately incomparable to that of a true great emperor. The sheer gap in power meant that his chances were few from the start. It was exactly because that his chances were few and far inbetween that Jiang Chen wished to attempt an attack using the underground terrain.

Emperor Bloodmalva chased after the human murderously. The

demon emperor wasn't especially proficient at fighting underground, but he was powerful, angry, and confident in his abilities. That was why he chased Jiang Chen while throwing caution to the winds.

Jiang Chen activated the formation disk when he saw the rapidly approaching crimson cloud. The Major Artifice Formation instantly came to life. Emperor Bloodmalva's surroundings immediately changed.

"Hmm?" The demon emperor frowned slightly, but he quickly grasped what was going on. "A formation? Boy, you are but half-step emperor. Even if the talismans have enhanced you to the realm of great emperor, do you really think that you can trap me with a formation? You are far too naive!" The demon cackled gruesomely and swung the Bloodmalva Demon Blade. He was actually planning to slash through all obstacles with brute force.

His reputation was well deserved. His eyes were so keen that he was able to instantly discern that the formation was just an illusory formation used to confuse one's opponents.

The demon emperor waved his weapon and parted the air with terrifying blade qi, yelling, "These are all just fabricated lies! Destroy, destroy, destroy them all!"

The Major Artifice Formation was ten times stronger than the Minor Artifice Formation and more, but it was nothing more than a small trick in the ancient demon emperor's eyes. Of course, the formation was weak because Jiang Chen could only do so much with his current level of power. If it was commanded by a real great emperor expert, the effects would've been entirely different.

That being said, Jiang Chen had never planned to trap Emperor Bloodmalva with the formation in the first place.

The young man yelled when he saw the demon emperor waving his blade to cut through the formation. "Brother Long, now!"

Jiang Chen activated another formation, this time the Ancient Slaughter Formation of Seven. It was the same formation he'd used to ambush the Veranda master. He had arranged a formation within a formation. Everything had been set for this one attack, and now the time to do so had arrived.

Jiang Chen unleashed the golden body of demons and gods to the maximum and gathered countless flames of Prehistoric Flame Essence to summon the Vermillion Bird image. The attacks erupted towards the demon like a violent volcano.

Meanwhile, Long Xiaoxuan revealed himself in full draconic glory and brought his own domain to bear. He swiped repeatedly at the air and drew in the qi of five thunders to form a terrifying dragon seal of five thunders, sending it flying towards the demon emperor as well.

These two attacks were the strongest attacks Jiang Chen and Long Xiaoxuan could muster at their current level. Long Xiaoxuan had called upon his bloodline and entered a berserk mode, enhancing his attacks so that they rivaled that of a half-step great emperor's. Jiang Chen's Vermillion Bird image was also on par with a great emperor's attack as it was composed of Prehistoric Flame Essence and he himself was enhanced by the Imperial Advent Onslaught Talisman.Emperor Bloodmalva broke out in a in cold sweat as the combined attack hurtled at him. The Ancient Slaughter Formation of Seven had distracted him at the perfect moment, so by the time he reacted, the two attacks were already closing in on him. Panic finally dawned on the demon emperor's face as he swiftly summoned demonic clouds to form a line of defense around him.

However, the terrifying attack instantly tore through the makeshift defenses and barged straight at his chest. Emperor Bloodmalva raised his demonic blade defensively in front of him.

Bang!

The powerful attack sent him flying backwards. The collision was so powerful that it ignited countless shockwaves and literally tore a hole several kilometers wide in the underground world. His qi and blood roiled as he spat repeated mouthfuls of blood.

Jiang Chen hurriedly cried out to Long Xiaoxuan. “He’s hurt! Get him!”

Jiang Chen’s decisiveness had allowed him to seize an opportunity to hurt Emperor Bloodmalva. If they didn’t attack him now, they wouldn’t get a second chance to kill him.

Emperor Bloodmalva had never suffered such a terrible loss except at the hands of empyrean experts. For a time, he could hardly believe this was happening.

The demon emperor finally snapped out of his shock when he saw Jiang Chen and Long Xiaoxuan pouncing towards him. He understood that his life was literally on the line now. The attack earlier had completely crushed his courage, so he shrieked with no trace of imperial dignity left, turned into a bloody cloud, and fled madly towards the surface. Obviously, Emperor Bloodmalva was sounding the gong of retreat.

“Don’t let him escape!”

Jiang Chen and Long Xiaoxuan gave pursuit without hesitation, but the demon emperor’s speed was barely affected even though he’d just suffered an injury.

The trio quickly returned to the surface and Emperor Bloodmalva turned around back to the altar. It was obviously that he was planning to escape back into his old haunt. Jiang Chen and Long Xiaoxuan chased after him relentlessly. Jiang Chen knew that they wouldn’t be able to get another opportunity to kill the demon emperor if he was allowed to regain his full strength.

Forget Great Scarlet Mid Region, the entire human domain would be at risk if Emperor Bloodmalva managed to return to his

peak form. Jiang Chen might dislike Great Scarlet Mid Region, but he also knew that Emperor Bloodmalva's ambitions didn't encompass that region alone.

Meanwhile, the demon emperor was feeling a mixture of anger and shock after Jiang Chen and Long Xiaoxuan dealt him an injury. He never imagined that he would be hurt by a human, much less a half-step emperor youngling. It was unprecedented humiliation to say the least. Moreover, the human boy was accompanied by a dragon! The demon hadn't had the chance to catch a clear glimpse, but it really did look like a true dragon.

Chapter 1166: Charging Back to the Altar

Demon Emperor Bloodmalva wasn't scared of anything in the world. In particular, he tended to hold human cultivators in contempt. But now, before this particular human, he felt the slightest sliver of fear. It was because of none other than Long Xiaoxuan.

"Just where did this human cultivator come from? How did he manage to contract a true dragon as his battle-beast? The true dragons are a proud race. Why would one of them serve a mere human?" The demon emperor was thoroughly confused. Unfortunately, it was a bad time to grapple with philosophical problems such as this.

Breaking free from the chase was a top priority. A great demon emperor was being hunted down by a brat still stinking of his mother's milk! The demon was even as frightened as a stray dog. The very thought of it pained Emperor Bloodmalva's heart. It was so frustrating that he almost wanted to cough up blood.

Shame, aversion, dejection. A multitude of emotions hung upon his chest, pressing against it uncomfortably. Thankfully, the demon emperor was no slouch in terms of quickness. He reached the altar in no time at all. Getting there gave him a much needed boost in confidence.

Turning from bloody cloud into a streak of red light, he darted towards the center of the altar. This was the place where the blood sacrifice had been completed. Apart from Wei Xing'er, the eighty-one female cultivator girls had been sucked dry of their blood and essence. Their corpse-like bodies were laid out on the altar's smaller satellites.

Sitting down upon the main altar, Emperor Bloodmalva activated the formation embedded within. The eighty-one smaller altars began to turn gradually, spinning into orbit around the main one.

The bright mark on the demon emperor's forehead suddenly lit up. An unnatural ray of red light shot out towards the eighty-one smaller altars, like a candle lending its flame to a mass of peers.

All of the bodies upon the smaller altars trembled in synchronicity. All at once, they began to slowly crawl back up. But these young girls' faces were bloodless, their expressions stiff and numb. They were like actual corpses that had been reanimated, and that actually wasn't far from the truth. It was an oddly chilling sight.

The demon emperor's light produced similar marks upon the girls' foreheads, though their versions were a tad fainter.

"O demonic soldiers, heed my command! Battle preparations, for an enemy comes!" As he spoke, bloody demonic clouds began to roil around the altar once more. Crimson wisps began to coalesce into the girls' bodies.

There was more than enough bloody clouds to go around here. Being charged with demonic energies gave the cultivator girls newfound strength, and they moved with renewed speed. They brimmed with terrifying demonic aura and were creepily eerie. The once-pretty girls now looked more like female demons, and soulless ones, at that.

"Here we are, Brother Long. Be careful!" Jiang Chen and Long Xiaoxuan arrived only a few moments later.

A bizarre scene jumped into focus as soon as he descended into the subterranean structure. Jiang Chen frowned at the corpse desecration. "Evil must be purged. What has caused this perversion must die also!"

It was patently clear to him that the cultivator girls were no longer among the living. They emanated the same aura as the blood demons' demonic clouds. They had unquestionably become not only Emperor Bloodmalva's sacrifices, but his soldiers as well. This made him quite upset.

“The blood demons are truly the worst of their kind!” Jiang Chen declared angrily.

Emperor Bloodmalva was still somewhat pale. He sat upon the main altar, a flock of his girl soldiers all around him. Bloody haze from demonic clouds permeated the air. Furthermore, he had a formation to protect him. He felt much safer now. He glanced coldly sidelong at Jiang Chen, as if wanting to burn an image of the youth into his mind.

“I don’t care who you are, kid. The humiliation you brought me today will be visited tenfold upon you! Mark my words, that day will come.”

“Why wait?” Jiang Chen snickered. “Victory and defeat, life and death; everything will be decided by the end of today.”

“I admit that you have some skill,” the demon emperor replied coolly. “But you achieved what you did purely through ambush. When I have but half my strength, I’ll be able to kill you as easily as stepping on an ant.”

Emperor Bloodmalva was exaggerating things a little, but his claims weren’t entirely unfounded. He had suffered a loss today because of two reasons. One, he hadn’t recovered the bulk of his strength yet, and two, he’d been snuck up on. In a full-on fight, he absolutely did not believe that he would be wounded.

Regardless of those contributing factors, however, the demon emperor took to heart the unprecedented humiliation of being hurt. Thus, he hated Jiang Chen to the bone.

“Brother Long, back me up. I’ll try to break through the formation!”

Jiang Chen wasn’t scared of the demonic clouds. Though Long Xiaoxuan was a true dragon, he wasn’t necessarily immune to the corrosion from the same. It was better for Jiang Chen to do the work himself. A wounded demon emperor meant an even weaker

opponent. He wanted to strike before Bloodmalva had a solid handle on anything.

Without hesitation, he drew his Pentecolor Divine Swords. The beginnings of his Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique began to form.

Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords! That was one of the most lethal techniques of the Thunderclap Sword. Will brought into being a myriad of blades. A single sword was enough to lead them, and ten thousand moved with the unity of one. The swords gushed forth like an incessant flood.

The demonic clouds were quite potent defensively. But the Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords, bolstered by the Imperial Advent Onslaught Talisman, was even more jaw-droppingly powerful. The swords became countless streaks of light, pouring down from the heavens like a shower of stars.

Boom, boom, boom.

The formation around the altar was beginning to crack under the pressure of the unrelenting sword-strikes. Jiang Chen escalated the force of his assault by producing his Vermilion Bird image once more. He pressed down on the formation with the momentum of a volcanic eruption.

Boom, boom, boom!

Despite the duress it was receiving from Jiang Chen’s attacks, the formation just barely managed to maintain its integrity. Any crack that appeared was instantly filled by new haze. However, the speed of Jiang Chen’s attacks was noticeably faster than that of the crimson mist filling in formation cracks. Therefore, the formation swayed and seemed even more tenuous.

On the main altar, the demon emperor became more and more restless as the formation was subjected to increasing stress. Without his recent wound, he would’ve long leapt into action.

“Demonic soldiers, marshal yourselves. Attack that fool with all haste!”

The cultivator girls had become Demon Emperor Bloodmalva’s puppets. They jumped out at the demon emperor’s words, wrapping themselves in demonic clouds without hesitation, then assailed Jiang Chen without hesitation.

Snorting, Jiang Chen formed another sword seal, delivering a decisive strike at the girls. Their blood and essence sucked out by Demon Emperor Bloodmalva, the girls were no longer human. At best, they were walking zombies. Even if he did rescue them, he wouldn’t be able to restore their former selves.

In actuality, they were already dead. Their bodies had merely been taken advantage of by the blood demons’ secret arts, transformed into soldier puppets by demonic energy. These demonic soldiers were not to be underestimated. The transformation enhanced their fighting prowess to three to five times what it’d been. A combined strike from eighty of them had remarkable power.

Thankfully, Jiang Chen was never one to shy away from a good brawl. The Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords, for example, excelled at fighting a multitude of targets. Mobilizing the torrent once more, he ordered innumerable sword auras to deliver relentless cuts across the demonic soldiers.

Tss, tss, tss… The demonic girl-soldiers were sliced up as easily as bread.

Appalled at the loss of his troops, Demon Emperor Bloodmalva hastily directed the remainder to withdraw. Each returned to her own satellite altar. One skirmish had been enough to cut down more than a dozen of the soldiers. Only sixty-odd remained.

Jiang Chen was a little suspicious of the instruction to retreat. The demon emperor was neither kind nor sympathetic. He definitely had other ideas for these demonic girl-soldiers. Though

Jiang Chen presently had the advantage, he wasn't going to take the demon emperor so lightly.

He was perfectly aware that his opponent was a demon emperor. No matter that he had only twenty or thirty percent of his full power, Jiang Chen couldn't afford to dismiss him all the same. Given how long these demon emperors had lived for, none of them were lightweights.

A glimmer of hatred flashed through Demon Emperor Bloodmalva's eyes. He glared viciously at Jiang Chen. "You bastard whelp! Do you really intend on hounding me unto death?"

"You're the freak here, demon," Jiang Chen sneered. "Demons are like weeds. Any that are not completely uprooted will spiral into disaster for its surrounding environment."

The demon emperor broke into hideous laughter.

"How quaint! After a hundred thousand years, you humans are still as scared of us demons as ever, hahahaha. Kid, I haven't seen a human cultivator as talented as you even in ancient times. A man of your gifts should just join up with us, hmm? Don't you know that humans are a hopeless race? We demons, on the other hand, are exalted within the heavenly planes. The Divine Abyss Continent will fall into our hands sooner or later. Rather than futilely resisting, it's better for you to surrender outright. If you join our cause, then you'll be amply rewarded on the day of our dominance. I firmly believe that you're more suitable than the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master as one of us blood demons. Perhaps you'll even become our young lord one day, heir to the greatest dao..."

The demon emperor's speech was reasonably convincing. More remarkably, he resorted to solicitation without hesitation when he found that he was at a disadvantage.

However, giving Jiang Chen that spiel was like talking to a wall. Anyone on the Divine Abyss Continent could join up with the

demons, but it was flat-out impossible for Jiang Chen. Doing so would be an enormous loss of face. He was the son of the Celestial Emperor! He wouldn't know how to face his father if one day they came face to face again.

"Bloodmalva, the demons do very well within the heavenly planes, but they are hardly the only dominant race. Put away your ridiculous superiority complex. Do you think that everyone wants a demon bloodline?" Jiang Chen's tone was filled with derision.

Chapter 1167: Bloodline Reversion

The demon emperor's solicitation was just another tactic to stall for time. His eminence among his fellows came with uncanny astuteness and experience. The momentum of Jiang Chen's pursuit indicated that the young man hated demons' guts. There was zero chance that he would join up with any demon race.

Given the young man's breadth and depth of methods and tools, he had to be one of the humans' best geniuses. Though Emperor Bloodmalva didn't know Jiang Chen's particulars or any exact details about his background, there was no doubt that someone who had a true dragon as a companion was one of the luckiest few, even amongst geniuses.

A genius of his caliber had to die. Regardless of cost, regardless of price!

Jiang Chen wasn't aware of the demon emperor's two-faced behavior, that an evil heart was hidden behind the offer of allegiance.

Emperor Bloodmalva smiled sinisterly. "A demon bloodline reigns supreme above all. You dare to belittle us, puny human?"

"Reigns supreme?" Jiang Chen snickered. "Demons are just the heavenly planes' locusts. They bring destruction wherever they go. How many divine emperors are of the demon race, hmm?"

"You're just a mortal, kid! Don't make things up about the heavenly planes. So, you look down on our race's bloodline, hmm? Good, good, good! I'm going to teach you a lesson today, so that before you die, you'll know how powerful a demon bloodline truly is! You'll learn why it's unquestionably invincible!"

Jiang Chen's expression froze. He didn't know what the demon emperor was plotting, which made it all the more necessary to exercise caution. "Brother Long," he said to the dragon, "Hide

yourself first."

Long Xiaoxuan obeyed the advice wordlessly, turning into a mote of dust that clung to his friend. Counting the time, Jiang Chen noted that his two hours from the Defense and Onslaught Talismans were almost up. He needed to engage in the next few minutes. No matter what conspiracy the demon emperor was cooking up, he needed to deliver a lethal strike. He produced his magnetic golden mountain once more.

"Fall!" Jiang Chen smashed the hundred-yard-tall mountain into the formation.

Boom! Once, twice, thrice!

The mountain grew in might and stature with each consecutive smash. After fifteen or sixteen, the formation finally split open with a resounding crack. All of the demonic miasma was forced aside. Putting away the golden mountain, Jiang Chen produced his Pentecolor Divine Swords once more. He slashed towards Demon Emperor Bloodmalva in an arc of lightning. "Die!"

There was no fear on the demon emperor's face. Instead, he looked decidedly pleased. In the next instant, he pushed both hands outwards. A burst of bloodline presence shot out from each palm, inundating the space with frightening power.

The sixty-odd remaining demonic soldiers shook at the aura, as if they had truly come alive. In the next moment, they galvanized into frenzied action. Like human bombs, they charged at Jiang Chen with wanton disregard.

"Prepare to meet your demise, kid! Bloodline reversion, explode!"

Bang! Bang! Bang! The demonic soldiers cannonballed towards the youth, detonating their bodies as soon as they reached their target. The blast caused Jiang Chen's own blood to roil.

"Bloodline reversion?" Astonished, Jiang Chen suddenly remembered something. The blood demons had a devastating

secret art known as bloodline reversion. This was the action of returning the blood and essence they'd consumed and refined back to the original owners.

It sounded simple,, but the amount of power in the returned blood was ten or twenty times what the bodies could bear. The overflow naturally led to the puppets' detonation.

Of course, this was a painful process for the demon user as well. Especially on a large scale, it was tantamount to an almost suicidal attack. Emperor Bloodmalva had only done this because he was at his wit's end. He had been ambushed at thirty percent strength, and thus could only use a fraction of his cultivation.

If Jiang Chen was allowed to pierce his defenses unhindered, he would surely die. That was why he was willing to use bloodline reversion in an attempt to blow Jiang Chen to smithereens. The cost of a hundred years of cultivation barely mattered considering the gravity of the situation.

One or two detonations didn't have a lot of destructive power, but sixty-plus in tandem could wound even an empyrean cultivator. Receiving the brunt of the damage was mortal for a great emperor realm cultivator, not to mention anyone below that. Thus, the demon emperor adopted a victor's stance after deploying the technique. He knew that his victory was assured.

The brat was dead without a doubt!

Alas, his plan to return to the world was foiled with this development. Using bloodline reversion to detonate his puppets cost him more than a few decades of cultivation. He needed to turtle up and hide again for approximately the same. The prospect of being found out and hunted down by more human experts in his weakness was disastrous.

Bang, bang, bang, bang. The blast waves pressed inward, the ripples set on besieging Jiang Chen. The simultaneous discharge of sixty-odd girl puppets made the available window of reaction very

small.

The destructive energy swelled upon their target in an instant. Jiang Chen felt an unprecedented sense of danger because of it.

“This isn’t good! The collective energies of the blasts have gathered together and I’m their only outlet. If I take this hit, there won’t be much more left of me than a few particles of dust.”

There was no time to delay. Jiang Chen hastily grabbed his spacetime seal. It activated in a hair’s width of light, pulling him through the fabric of reality into nonexistence.

Boom!

The blast waves finally congregated at a single point, a space where the youth had been just a second prior. The aftershocks of the explosion shook the air for miles around, and the altar complex was instantly upended. A crater a few hundred yards deep was left where it had been. The subterranean levels, every building, and all the altars within had been annihilated by the blowout.

A crestfallen Emperor Bloodmalva crawled out from the crater, scanning the ruins. In theory, the blast should have eradicated all traces of the young man’s physical form, including any leftover limbs. The demon emperor licked away the blood at the corner of his mouth. He frowned as he continued to survey the wreckage, his heart doubtful.

“So… did that kid die or not?” He was unsure whether theory had transferred perfectly to reality. There wasn’t a good reason for the kid to not have died from his bloodline reversion technique…

But there hadn’t even been a scream. Moreover, there’d been a hair of light where the kid had been. However minuscule it had been… however imperceptible to physical eyes…

it induced in the demon emperor a sliver of uncertainty and discontent.

“If he didn’t die after that, then he is an opponent to be feared.”

The demon emperor muttered under his breath. Despite his past glory as a ruler of demons, he didn't have enough experience to say whether the young man was dead for sure. He'd left no traces behind in the crater. Oddly enough, not even his aura lingered.

"Very strange. Did he... maybe... did he really escape?" The more he thought about it, the more it discomfited him. He was the wrathful emperor of the blood demons, and fear and discomfort were emotions foreign to him. Indeed, any demon would find it unnatural to feel these. And yet, that didn't change the fact that he did feel them at the moment.

"Impossible, impossible... even if that kid had two more heads and four more arms, he wouldn't have been able to flee from such a deadly situation. If he fled in that thread of light, then I would have seen him. I didn't see any light escaping from the blast. Maybe I'm just overthinking things..." Demon Emperor Bloodmalva tried to convince himself.

After walking around the crater a long while, he finally shook his head in exasperation. "Never mind, this place has been totally destroyed. It seems that I must find a new lair elsewhere. If strong human cultivators showed up right now, I will surely die."

The demon emperor had been further weakened as a result of bloodline reversion. Even a high-level emperor realm cultivator could kill the current him. As long as they had a way to deal with his demonic clouds, of course.

The demon emperor knew that some had escaped from Cloudshatter Mountain. Those who had would surely spread the news about him. Therefore, this place was no longer safe. Demons were a tyrannical bunch, but they also exercised caution when necessary. Though the demon emperor was displeased about having to do so, he left without hesitation anyway.

As for Jiang Chen, he'd been been swept away by the spacetime seal he'd activated. The thread of light took him across space to

arrive at a new place. When he recovered from the shock of displacement, he noticed that his trip was already over.

“Young man, welcome to the second palace of the Six Palaces of Heritage, the Crimson Heavens Palace!”

Jiang Chen had scarcely steadied his step before a clear notification rang at his ear.

The Crimson Heavens Palace? The name shook him to the core. That was the name of the second palace? Back at the first palace, Master P’eng had spoken of a revered senior from the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect who resided within another of the six palaces.

Was this second palace where that senior was? He had an interesting relationship with this place, then. Most of brain was still stuck in the combat with Demon Emperor Bloodmalva. Only after hearing the message did he completely snap awake.

“Hmph, absent-mindedness is a sign of discourtesy. Is this the level of humans’ culture of martial dao these days? It’s been a long time since anyone has come to the Six Palaces of Heritage. That a person who does is so stupid is... disappointing.” The voice spoke with a serious, almost dark tone.

“Please do not misunderstand, senior,” Jiang Chen smiled wryly. “I was embroiled in a fierce battle with demons in which I was forced to use my spacetime seal to escape. I’m still trying to recover from the shock of that battle. Forgive my inattentiveness.”

“Demons? Has the demon race reappeared in the world once again?” The voice was surprised.

“Not on a large scale,” Jiang Chen sighed softly, “but demons everywhere are reawakening. Traces of their activities are becoming much more commonplace.”

Chapter 1168: Venerated Skysoarer

“The demon race, the demon race…” The muttering sounded extremely sad and hateful. The owner appeared to be fuming with rage behind gritted teeth.

Jiang Chen knew that practically all ancient experts hated the demon race. Even the ones who’d escaped to Myriad Abyss Island hated them. After all, the demons had forced them to leave their homeland. Because of the demons, they endured the unsightly label of a deserter and a never ending guilty conscience.

The demon race had terrorized all living beings, destroyed the human domain, damaged the spirit veins within, and consumed a large amount of resources. That was why the surviving ancient experts had no choice but to head for Myriad Abyss Island.

Jiang Chen didn’t interrupt him. He sat down cross legged and stayed silent. The earlier battle had sorely tested his strength and exhausted him greatly, especially because he’d activated both the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman and the Imperial Advent Onslaught Talisman at once. The pressure that he’d had to bear at mere half-step emperor was enormous to say the last. If he hadn’t cultivated the golden body of demons and gods, he would’ve been lucky not to be crushed outright by the combined pressure. At the very least, he would’ve suffered severe injuries.

The protector of Ancient Crimson Palace was taken aback by Jiang Chen’s actions. “Young man, I can see the lingering aura of powerful talisman around your body. Were you using some sort of unnaturally powerful talisman just now?”

Jiang Chen didn’t deny it. “Yes. I’m half-step emperor realm and used both the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman and the Imperial Advent Onslaught Talisman. As a result, I am deeply exhausted.”

“Half-step emperor realm?” The Ancient Crimson Palace protector seemed surprised. “You’re only a half-step emperor

realm cultivator, and you made it into the Six Palaces of Heritage?"

Jiang Chen nodded. "It's true that I'm not officially an emperor realm cultivator yet."

The protector looked even more surprised. "Incredible! To think that the next genius to enter the Six Palaces of Heritage tens of thousands of years later would be a mere half-step emperor!"

Jiang Chen wasn't sure how to answer. However, judging from the protector's tone, it didn't sound like he was complaining about Jiang Chen's low cultivation level.

"Young man, I believe you are in your twenties, aren't you? There were a lot of youngsters who reached emperor realm at your age in the ancient times as well. However, I can tell you for sure that you're at the very least as talented and intelligent as they were!" The Ancient Crimson Palace protector was sounding a little impressed by now.

In the ancient times, cultivation was never the first parameter to consider when a genius was selected. The most important was one's growth potential. With the current state of the martial dao world, it was incredibly rare to find someone who could cultivate to half-step emperor realm at Jiang Chen's age.

What was even better was that Jiang Chen had successfully challenged all nine Veluriyam Obelisks and obtained the right to enter the Six Palaces of Heritage. He'd even made it past the first palace's test. This last achievement was the one that surprised the protector the most.

"The fact that you had passed the test of the first palace is proof that you share an unseen bond with the Six Palaces of Heritage. My name is Skysoarer. I am the protector of the second palace, the Ancient Crimson Palace. Tell me your name, young man."

"This junior is named Jiang Chen." Jiang Chen hadn't concealed his identity when he entered the first palace and spoken to its

protector. Since the second palace was called the Ancient Crimson Palace, he had even less of a reason to conceal himself. After all, it could be said that both he and the protector of Ancient Crimson Palace shared common origins. “Very good, very good! Jiang Chen, please forgive my earlier misunderstanding. I must admit that it is truly rare to hear of a half-step emperor fighting a demon emperor and coming away unscathed. A genius like you is exactly what the Six Palaces of Heritage has been looking for all this time. That being said, I won’t give you preferential treatment just because I admire your talents. If you wish to pass through Ancient Crimson Palace and claim its inheritance in the process, you must go through three tests just like before.” Skysoarer didn’t hide his admiration for Jiang Chen at all. It was quite similar to Honored Master P’eng’s reaction.

Jiang Chen knew that the protectors had all been important figures during the ancient times. However, the creator of Veluriyam Pagoda had been stronger and more powerful than all of them. That was why he’d been able to coerce these important figures into guarding the Six Palaces of Heritage.

Who knew how many years it’d been since the ancient times? The protectors no doubt felt very lonely while they waited through an infinity of time. It had been at least tens of thousands of years since the last genius that entered the Six Palaces of Heritage.

So it was no wonder that the protectors were eager to meet every challenger who successfully made it into the Six Palaces of Heritage. As long as their attitudes weren’t too awful, the protectors almost always liked the challengers.

“Venerated Skysoarer, while I was exploring the Upper Eight Regions some time ago, I encountered a sect called the Celestial Cicada Court. They gave me a formation diagram that they’d claimed to inherit from the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect. If I may ask, are you…” Jiang Chen asked tentatively without reveal everything.

“What?” As he had expected, Skysoarer’s voice abruptly turned serious. “The Celestial Cicada Court? The Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect? Young man, where did you learn about the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect?”

Jiang Chen grew even more confident when he took note of the urgency and hastiness in the protector’s voice.

“The Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect is a great formation sect during ancient times. Although there are no written records left in the world, the name of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect is passed down verbally. I would occasionally hear of this sect being mentioned, and these days the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect is referred to quite often when the subject of ancient formation experts is brought up.”

What he said was actually less the truth and more flattery. There were very, very few ancient sects that managed to leave behind a legacy. The Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect couldn’t really be considered a top tier sect back in the ancient times. At best, they were half a rank below the top tier sects. Therefore, they weren’t particularly influential.

This was especially true after the ancient experts had migrated to Myriad Abyss Island. Their departure meant that a gap had formed in numerous human martial dao inheritances, resulting in the loss of many ancient inheritances.

The Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect had sealed off their entire sect when they met the demon race in battle, so they’d left behind practically no inheritances. Even if there had been, it was likely the work of other branches.

“Young man, did Honored Master P’eng teach you these words?” Skyddiver’s voice abruptly turned cold. Even his earlier admiration had thinned a little.

Jiang Chen understood that Skysoarer had misunderstood. But instead of explaining, he smiled. “You’ve misunderstood me,

senior. I just want to confirm if you hail from the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect."

"What if I am? What if I'm not?" Skysoarer sounded a little stiff.

"If you really are a senior in Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect, then there's something I would like to show you. If you aren't, then I would like to move on from this."

"What is it?" Skysoarer asked indifferently, "Show me."

Jiang Chen didn't hesitate. He opened his palm and revealed the Ancient Crimson Medallion he'd obtained from the sect's tower of inheritance.

"Please, have a look." Jiang Chen tossed the medallion into the air. An unnatural wind held it in midair.

Although Venerated Skysoarer couldn't move as he pleased, his consciousness enveloped the entire Ancient Crimson Palace. He was greatly stunned the second he saw the medallion.

"The Ancient Crimson Medallion?" Skysoarer cried out involuntarily. "Young man, where did you obtain this item?"

"I obtained it from the ruins of Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect at Mt. Rippling Mirage." Jiang Chen finally decided to let it all out.

"What?" The voice sounded shocked. "You... you entered Mt. Rippling Mirage? You found the ruins of the sect? Does that mean... does that mean you've obtained the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's legacy?"

Jiang Chen took out the Ancient Crimson formation disk and suspended it in midair for display.

"All three items of inheritances of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect yet exist. You can see I have the Ancient Crimson Medallion and the formation disk here. The formation flags aren't with me right now because I used them for some other purposes."

There were two sets of Ancient Crimson formation flags. The

secondary set had been used at the entrance of the desolate wildlands, and the primary used on the Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation he'd arranged at Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord residence.

Skysoarer couldn't quite control his emotions because he hadn't expect to be able to see his sect's keepsake after tens of thousands of years. He murmured, "It's true. It's actually true... To think that the sect would be able to see the light of day once more. Heavens bless the legacy of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect!"

Skysoarer remained agitated for a very long time before he recovered. "Young man, you said your name is Jiang Chen, am I right?"

"Yes, senior. This junior is named Jiang Chen."

"Oh no, no, no, you can't call me a senior. You are the holder of the Ancient Crimson Medallion, so that means you are the current sect head of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect. I may be an elder of the sect since ancient times, but all elders are required to serve the sect head. Therefore, I cannot possibly allow you to call me your senior!" Skysoarer sounded both serious and happy.

"Don't be nervous. Feel free to act as you like, sect head. You've successfully entered the forbidden ground of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect, passed through many tests and obtained our three great inheritances from the tower of inheritance. This means that your status was acknowledged by everyone in the sect since the experts crafted the tests together. Since you've passed through the tests, this means that you are the new sect head of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect!" Skysoarer's explanation rambled on non-stop, almost as if he was afraid that Jiang Chen would turn around and walk away.

To an ancient expert, there was nothing more reinvigorating than hearing news of their sect. Skysoarer had participated in the war against the demons and nearly all of his sect mates had

perished back then. However, the master of Veluriyam Pagoda had rescued him from the battlefield and brought him here.

When Skysoarer had first arrived at Veluriyam Pagoda, he'd been absolutely shattered. His sect had been destroyed, and his sect mates were dead. To a person who felt very strongly towards his sect, the blow felt that it would be the end of him. If the master of Veluriyam Pagoda hadn't tricked him, he might've committed suicide and joined his sect in death.

As the years passed, the infinite passage of time slowly eroded the pain in Skysoarer's heart and helped him get used to being a protector of Veluriyam Pagoda. However, his hatred towards the demon race burned as brightly as ever despite the sands of time. His longing for his sect hadn't changed either.

Today, Jiang Chen had appeared out of nowhere and brought him news of the sect. How could he not be overjoyed by this? If his impression of the young man before was mild admiration, it was now deepest affection after he learned that the young man had obtained the legacy of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect.

Chapter 1169: Breaking Through to Emperor Realm

Jiang Chen patiently recounted all that had taken place at the Mt. Rippling Mirage Pill Battles to the venerable master. After all was said and done, Venerated Skysoarer sighed. “I designed the formation outside Mt. Ripping Mirage. My first version was extremely difficult, but the sect head at the time advised me otherwise. If the formation outside is this hard, he said, then how can anyone have a chance at entering the restricted area?”

The exterior of Mt. Ripping Mirage, the ancient spirit herb garden, the sacred altar: all of these were an interconnected part of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect’s grounds. The caveat was obtaining the nameless saber first. The unassuming weapon was the real key to opening up the ruins. One would be lucky to get to the ancient spirit herb garden otherwise, with no possible entry into the sect’s ruins proper.

From Jiang Chen’s mouth, Venerated Skysoarer heard the entire story of how Jiang Chen had gotten his hands on the saber. It had been confiscated as part of a certain Hidden Dragon Trials examiner’s possessions back in the Eastern Kingdom.

Jiang Chen had taken it purely because he thought the saber was a nice weapon. He hadn’t dreamed that doing so would lead to the events that proceeded much later down the line. Fate and destiny were sometimes wondrous things.

Venerated Skysoarer grew emotional as he listened to Jiang Chen’s retelling, especially the details about several of the dangers he had fortunately evaded in the restricted area.

“Sect Head, the mechanisms I prepared target the hearts of men. If someone with ignoble morals entered the sect’s grounds, they would not be able to pass those tests. Our heritage is not meant for the villainous and vile. That you were able to obtain the

inheritance proves that you are deserving."

The venerable master became animated as the topic of conversation shifted. He asked incessantly about the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect, and Jiang Chen withheld nothing from the old man. When he had heard all, the venerable master sighed.

"Now that our sect can see the light of day again, I have no regrets. Sect Head, as a guardian of the Six Palaces of Heritage, I made a promise to the lord of the Veluriyam Pagoda. Therefore, I cannot cheat on your behalf. My apologies in advance."

"I'm not here to cheat," Jiang Chen smiled. "If I pass the challenges with such underhanded methods, what's the point of taking them in the first place?"

"That is so." The venerable master was even more certain that Jiang Chen was an upright man, worthy of shouldering the sect. "However, you should've seen them already back at the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's tower of inheritance. Though they've been scaled up several times in difficulty, it shouldn't be an arduous task for you."

Jiang Chen's jaw dropped. "Not the Minor Artifice Formation, Ancient Slaughter Formation of Seven, and the Great Dream of Spring and Autumn Formation?"

"The Minor Artifice Formation has been ranked up to Major Artifice, and Ancient Slaughter is at its highest difficulty. Similarly, the Great Dream formation has been increased greatly. But before you take the challenge, we have a great deal of information here available for your study. The time limit is three months."

Jiang Chen thought about it for a moment. "Venerable master, I'd like to solidify my cultivation a while before I take the challenge and break through to emperor realm."

"Of course, feel free."

The young man had had the opportunity to break through to emperor realm for a long time now, but he had intentionally held himself back. Now, after obtaining the earth attribute orb from Cloudshatter Mountain, Jiang Chen had a treasure from all five elements. He was finally ready to make the leap.

He took the orb out from his storage ring and couldn't help but relish the potent earthen aura that filled the air. The orb was extraordinary without a doubt. The tremendous power contained within its pulses and its sheer ability to sustain an entire subterranean realm were both clear indicators of that fact. The powerful formation it fueled in addition to that only cemented that conclusion.

The collapse of the realm at the orb's removal was a testament to its absurdity. The Crimson Heavens Palace was instantly enveloped by powerful earth energy when he took the orb out, filling the air.

"Hmm? Sect Head, the orb in your hand is... curiously exceptional." Even an ancient expert like Venerated Skysoarer was moved at the sight of Jiang Chen's treasure. After hearing the youth's retelling of how he'd procured it, the master gasped. "From what you say, Sect Head, this orb is the Earth Bodhisattva Orb, from the sect of the same name."

"The Earth Bodhisattva Orb?" Jiang Chen was surprised. "Is the, er, Earth Bodhisattva Sect an ancient sect as well?"

"Not just an ancient sect. One of the greatest and with a name for formations. Possibly stronger than the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect in some respects. They didn't surpass us in terms of technique or heritage, but their possession of this Earth Bodhisattva Orb gave them an edge over us."

"You are a blessed man, Sect Head," the venerable master sighed softly. "To receive the crowning treasure of the Earth Bodhisattva Sect... Hahaha, I remember their swaggering ways way back, and

how they used to call themselves the number one formation sect, but what now? Their treasure is in our sect head's hands! The ways of fate are strange indeed."

Jiang Chen savored the potent spirit energy from the orb. It certainly lived up to its outstanding reputation as a top ancient sect's paramount treasure. The formation that had harnessed the earth pulses was proof alone how terrifying the orb could be.

The Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect had a great deal of formation-related knowledge, but it lacked a sovereign treasure that it could call its own. With this orb in hand, even the weakest of formations could produce miraculous results.

The Earth Bodhisattva Sect had relied solely on the orb to push them into the ranks of the top sects in the ancient times. The orb had even been enough to shove the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect aside, a sect famous for its ingenuity in formations.

With the Earth Bodhisattva Orb, Jiang Chen now had all five elements at his disposal. For metal, he had his magnetic golden mountain; wood, his Taiyi Jade Vine; water and fire, his Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice; and now earth, his Earth Bodhisattva Orb.

When Jiang Chen had broken through to spirit realm all those years ago, he'd laid the foundation for this step by refining and consuming the Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill. This meant that his long-run potential far surpassed his peers'.

The Earth Bodhisattva Orb had been ownerless for countless years since time immemorial. This made Jiang Chen's refining process comparatively easier. He finished before long, claiming the orb as yet another one of his exclusive treasures. This now meant that Jiang Chen had finished every preparation for attuning his meridians to the five elements, thereby ascending them.

It was time for him to formally break through to emperor realm! Given Jiang Chen's amount of cultivation, he had been eligible for

emperor realm for at least several years now. Thus, this was more of a very natural upwards move.

All five elements rising within, Jiang Chen felt the streams of inner energy become a transformational cycle, radically reconstructing his spirit ocean with each pass. The binds of sage realm were easily ripped asunder, and checks and blocks broken effortlessly. The path of his entrance into emperor realm was clear.

For the average half-step emperor realm cultivator, the process of breaking through to emperor realm was intimidatingly arduous. However, Jiang Chen's own had no obstacles whatsoever. The brevity and ease with which he broke through was like a simple increase in power.

It was more dangerous to break through, the more advanced one was in cultivation. Often, heavenly wrath would be visited on someone who attempted to step from one realm into another. Most cultivators feared this wrath as a ferocious beast. Yet nothing of the sort had been visited upon the young man.

Rather, the final moment in Jiang Chen's breakthrough was accompanied by countless visions and marveling natural phenomena. Back when he broke through to origin realm, he had caused a similar display to occur at the Precious Tree Sect. The show was no less grand this time around, but it was muted to a certain extent by the Pagoda around it.

"It's been so many years... but, I'm emperor realm now!" Jiang Chen opened his eyes, shining with happiness. It couldn't be called a long-awaited development, exactly, but it was an important step on his martial dao journey.

It meant that he was almost at the pinnacle of the martial dao world of the Divine Abyss Continent! Any emperor realm cultivator was a force to be reckoned with here, and he had a wealth of tricks up his sleeves to back his cultivation up. Plus, he

was only twenty-something. He had a lot of room to grow.

Jiang Chen was in high spirits. He'd suffered a great deal after coming to this world, braving ordeal after ordeal. But he considered everything he'd been through worthwhile. Better to live a fulfilling life than to be unable to cultivate for eternity.

"Congratulations, Sect Head! You've managed to break through at such a remarkably young age. I've no doubt at all that you'll become a great emperor before you're sixty." The venerable master was just as pleased as his newfound peer.

Jiang Chen flashed him a smile. It had been a one-of-a-kind experience to break through inside the otherworldly Crimson Heavens Palace. He had found things both astonishing and intriguing. He spent another fortnight to solidify his progress and foundations.

"My level of cultivation is stable now, Venerated Skysoarer. Starting today, I'd like to put my all into challenging the palace's three trials."

"Good, good. Now that you are in emperor realm, Sect Head, the possibility of you passing is over ninety percent!" The venerable master replied, overjoyed.

Jiang Chen never did things carelessly. Though he knew ahead of time that he had taken the three trials before in another form, he didn't underestimate the coming task. He studied the materials in the Crimson Heavens Palace very carefully. Only after every potential problem and knowledge point was internalized did he actually begin the trials.

As the higher level versions of the formations in the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's tower of heritage, the trial formations shared many of the same principles of their lower level selves. Passing the trials turned out to be child's play. Jiang Chen perfectly completed all three in the span of two hours.

“Genius, a true genius!” The venerable master had nothing but praise to offer. “The Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect is fortunate indeed to have gained such a genius sect head. A renaissance for our sect is at hand!”

Venerated Skysoarer was utterly convinced by the young man’s skill. Despite knowing that Jiang Chen had tried these formations before, the flawlessness and ease with which the young sect head passed astonished him nevertheless.

Chapter 1170: Rewards of the Second Palace

Though the three tests were reasonably difficult, Jiang Chen completed them perfectly and effortlessly. Venerated Skysoarer found it hard to describe, but he felt that Jiang Chen had a confidence that belied his age. Not a blind assurance, but true, reliable confidence that was backed up by something substantial.

He seemed to have everything that he did planned out beforehand. It was an odd feeling. The young man was collected, certain, and in absolute control. Traits that, in all honesty, were completely inappropriate for someone of his age.

The venerable master mused that if he were to venture into the three formations himself, he wouldn't have been able to do a better job. In fact, he would probably lack in the treatment of certain details.

"Congratulations, Sect Head. You pass the three trials of the Crimson Heavens Palace!" Ever since entering the Veluriyam Pagoda as one of its guardians, Venerated Skysoarer had never been so happy as he was today.

His heart had been nothing short of bleak for the past hundred thousand years or so, but he now felt that everything had been worth it! The gloom in his heart was clear. With a sect head like this, how could the Crimson Heavens Sect not flourish? What was there to worry about regarding the sect's heritage?

Jiang Chen wasn't uncomfortable with the fact that the venerable master called him 'sect head'. He knew that as soon as he'd received the Crimson Heavens Medallion, he had a responsibility to act as the de facto leader of the sect. He had a responsibility, moreover, of sustaining the sect's lineage. This was one of his life principles.

"I was a bit lucky this time. If I hadn't obtained the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's heritage, then this palace would've been

significantly more difficult.” On this point, Jiang Chen was self-aware. Compared to the first palace, the second was unreasonably easy.

“It is your blessing and fortune alone, Sect Head.” The venerable master disagreed. “Any other genius would have much more trouble passing this palace’s test. I have a feeling that you’ll really be able to conquer all six of the palaces and become the new master of the Veluriyam Pagoda.”

“Ah, perhaps.” Jiang Chen sighed thoughtfully. “I hear that the six palaces sequentially increase in difficulty?”

Venerated Skysoarer nodded. “The first and second palace are about the same, though the latter is probably slightly harder than the former.”

“Starting from the third palace, the difficulty ramps up significantly. I don’t advise you to rush into it blindly until you’re advanced level emperor realm. Of course, you have the one chance at failure allotted to you for every palace. The fourth, like the second, is not much different from the third… but the fifth palace marks yet another harsh increase, as does the sixth. If you conquer the sixth palace, that means you’ve claimed complete mastery of the entire Six Palaces of Heritage. You’ll have a pretty good chance of becoming the new master of the Veluriyam Pagoda, and then receive all of the inheritances.”

The venerable master paused here a moment, sighing himself in turn. “In ancient times, the master of the Veluriyam Pagoda was one of the leaders of the human race. He possessed great knowledge and skill, and gave up all he had to preserve the human race in the wake of the demonic invasion. He burned away his lifespan to peer into the river of time, and built the Veluriyam Pagoda for the sole purpose of passing on the torch of humanity to a future generation. The greatness of the Pagoda master surpasses eras and years, but few know of his greatness. His noble intentions? Fewer still.”

Jiang Chen found this amazing. He had heard of the Pagoda master's great deeds from the mouths of both Masters P'eng and Skysoarer. Neither master seemed particularly willing in their custodial duties here, but they hadn't a single complaint against the Pagoda master.

Though Jiang Chen didn't know who the Pagoda master was yet or where the master was from, from what he knew so far, the mysterious man was someone he could hold a great deal of respect for. If a man could leave his enemies silent about his shortcomings, then he was truly great beyond compare. The more Jiang Chen heard, the more the Veluriyam Pagoda and its master garnered his interest.

"The Six Palaces of Heritage and the Veluriyam Pagoda." His eyes shone with a keen radiance. "I'll conquer the palaces step by step. There is none other worthy of being the Pagoda's new master!"

Jiang Chen had a feeling that amazing opportunity lay within. There was no greater on the Divine Abyss Continent, and it could easily match anything that Myriad Abyss Island had to offer. He was here already. Who else could rule the Pagoda better?

"Venerated Skysoarer." His expression became serious and honest. "I don't know who the Veluriyam Pagoda's master is yet, but the remarks from Master P'eng and yourself have decidedly piqued my interest in both him and his Pagoda. I will master the Pagoda and make it my own. You can count on it!"

"Hahaha, wonderful. A genius like you would shine brighter than the brightest of stars, Sect Head, even in ancient times. Furthermore, you have fortune on your side. I think you have more than a fair chance at taking the Pagoda as your own."

Having appreciated Jiang Chen from the start, the old master's impression was improved by the fact that Jiang Chen was also his sect head. These two points combined made Venerated Skysoarer more hopeful than ever that Jiang Chen would one day become the

Pagoda's master. It was normal for a man to have his biases. The venerable master was no different.

"You are granted to two rewards for conquering the Crimson Heavens Palace, Sect Head. Naturally, both are formation schematics. One is for the Great Dream of Spring and Autumn Formation, and the other, for the Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation."

Jiang Chen was no stranger to the former. It was a terrifyingly murderous formation, and anyone who couldn't pierce its mysteries was stuck in a deathtrap. However, this was his first time hearing of a Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation.

"Sect Head, I'm sure you know of the Great Dream formation already. I should remark, however, that if you have wood from the Divine Tree of Dreams, then the formation will be ten times as effective as it is normally."

"The Divine Tree of Dreams?" Jiang Chen remembered the first trial he had gone through in the sixteen kingdom alliance. It was during the trial of fortune that he'd seen a Divine Tree of Dreams.

"Yes. Aside from the formation itself, you will receive a set of flags fashioned from that kind of tree's wood. If you use the flags, even a great emperor realm cultivator will find it exceedingly troublesome to be ensnared by your formation. You'll have about a fifty percent chance of victory over them. If you are a great emperor yourself, you can kill fellow great emperors outright."

As an ancient formation sect, the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect had a tremendous amount of knowledge. The only reason for the Earth Bodhisattva Sect's dominance over it all those years ago was the Earth Bodhisattva Orb's power. In terms of formation-related skill alone, the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect reigned supreme.

"The Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation is a bitingly sharp formation in its lethality. If used together with the Great Dream formation, the duo becomes a fearsome combination. However,

usage of this excessively powerful formation is rather taxing on the consciousness. Moreover, it requires eighty-one flying swords forged from very specific materials. Compared to the Great Dream of Spring and Autumn Formation, this one is much harder to cultivate. Alas, neither do we have a set of flying swords for you."

Though the master of the Pagoda was fabulously wealthy and owned countless treasures, he didn't quite have everything on demand. In particular, the matching swords for this formation required several types of high-grade materials, as well as one of the very best blacksmiths at the pinnacle of his craft. It was impossible to get a full set in a short amount of time.

Jiang Chen found this a little lamentable, but wasn't overly disappointed. After all, his Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique did pretty well on double duty as a sword formation. The thunder and lightning in its blades was a veritable formation itself.

"Sect Head, the necessary materials for the matching swords should be at the back of the book. If you're lucky enough to get all of them one day to forge the swords, then you must practice the formation. Since the founding of our sect, not a single one of us has succeeded in cultivating the formation perfectly. However, there was once a noteworthy senior who used a simplified version of the formation to kill three cultivators the same level as him in a single stroke. It is optimistic to say that he managed to harness even a fifth of the formation's true strength."

"A fifth? Multiple cultivators the same level as him, you said?" Jiang Chen was mildly astonished. He noticed that the Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation was a powerful one, but he didn't expect it to be quite so effective.

After all, if a formation only had a fifth of its power, then it wouldn't do very much against real experts. That this formation could kill three cultivators of the same level at twenty percent of its full effectiveness was incredibly staggering. Despite the wealth

of experience from his previous life, Jiang Chen had very rarely heard of this kind of thing.

Looking over the sword formation's book of diagrams, Jiang Chen pondered it quite a while before putting it away.

"If I have the chance to, I'll definitely study the sword formation," he promised to the venerable master.

"Excellent." The venerable master was fired up by his commitment. "I'm looking forward to it."

After finishing the second palace, Jiang Chen had no intention of proceeding directly to the third. Just as Venerated Skysoarer had said, it was better to wait until advanced level emperor realm to try his luck there. Having entered the realm only a short while ago, he had a long way to go and so was in no hurry at all.

Knowing that Jiang Chen was about to depart soon, the venerable master was a bit sad. "Good luck and stay safe, Sect Head. Here is the spacetime seal for your safekeeping. When you next come into the Pagoda through the seal, you will be transported directly to the third palace. If we meet again, it will be when you've fully mastered the entire Veluriyam Pagoda."

The Veluriyam Pagoda had very strict rules. Jiang Chen could only return its guardians' freedom after he gained full control. This was the law laid down on the day the Pagoda had been built. No matter how badly Jiang Chen wanted to take out the two masters he'd met so far, it was unrealistic.

As Jiang Chen prepared to leave, a stray question suddenly came to mind. "Venerated Skysoarer, there's a formation called the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement. Do you know of it?"

Chapter 1171: The Only Hope Of The Human Race

The Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement? Venerated Skysoarer was taken aback. “Sect Head, why do you ask? How did you come by the name of the formation?”

“Does this mean that the formation is real?” Jiang Chen frowned slightly. He’d first heard about the formation from Mang Qi when he trained in the Eastern Kingdom’s Boundless Catacombs many years ago. After traveling to the sealed grounds in the desolate wildlands, he made another trip to the Boundless Catacombs for confirmation from Mang Qi. And now he wanted to see from the venerable master if Mang Qi’s words held any water.

“The formation…” The Venerated Skysoarer gave a long sigh. His tone became exceedingly complicated. “Sect Head, the story behind that formation is long and complicated.”

Jiang Chen didn’t care how long the tale might be. He needed to know.

“Venerated master, my fate is deeply entwined with the formation. Perhaps you can share the story with me?”

“I’ll gladly impart everything the sect head wishes to know.” The venerated master didn’t hide anything from Jiang Chen. He heaved a long sigh. “Actually, our sect was involved in the construction of the formation. Back then, a total of eight sects worked hand-in-hand to construct the formation. As one of the frontrunners, we were in charge of thirty percent of it.”

Jiang Chen wasn’t surprised that the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect had a hand in the creation of the formation. It was only natural that one of the strongest sects of the ancient age would participate in such a grand undertaking.

“However, the eight sects weren’t the only ones who participated

in this. Every single ancient great sect contributed to this grand endeavor. They provided us with the required spirit stones, tools, and many other resources. Everyone was united in our intention to make this formation the sole weapon to suppress the demons."

"Oh?" Jiang Chen raised a brow. He didn't expect there to be so much history behind the formation.

"I'm not exaggerating. Back then, the human race was one of the strongest throughout the Divine Abyss Continent. Resources were abundant. The demons would have never invaded human territory if otherwise. Because of that, we had to pay a great price during the invasion. The construction of the formation alone caused dozens of formation masters to die of exhaustion."

"Was it really that terrible?" Jiang Chen was taken aback. How would a single formation require so much?

"It was." Venerated Skysoarer was extremely solemn. "The Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement is the strongest and highest level formation throughout the Divine Abyss Continent. No sect could possibly construct it on their own, nor could they afford the resources needed to support it. Nobody would've died if given a decade to complete it, but three months was all we had."

Time was an extremely precious commodity during the invasion. A decade was simply too long. Every second wasted was a life lost and every single day was worth fighting for. One day was all it took for the war to shift sides.

Jiang Chen came to understand why so many formation masters had died of exhaustion. They'd taken only three months to complete a formation that would normally take ten years. Such urgency was unheard of in modern times. They'd traded their lives for its completion. He was struck by awe.

"Nine elders from our sect had lost their lives during the construction of the formation, including my own younger brother." Venerated Skysoarer lamented.

“The Earth Bodhisattva Sect, arguably the leading sect in formations at that time, had to sacrifice almost a dozen of their own as well. Many other sects were the same…” The venerated elder grew increasingly downcast as he spoke. “It’s a pity we underestimated how cunning the demons were in the end…

“After all the effort in setting up the formation, we waged what was supposed to be the decisive fight with the demons, but somehow, they saw through our plans. Contrary to our predictions, they didn’t send their main force into battle. Instead, they sent an army of puppets to fight us. They were mere slaves that the demons had acquired from other planes. They were forced into battle and didn’t put up a fight. They were nothing but scapegoats meant to be sent to their deaths in the stead of the demons!”

Skysoarer gritted his teeth. His hatred for the demons ran so deep that he wanted to rip them apart with his teeth. The story seemed to match with Mang Qi’s rendition. It seems Mang Qi wasn’t lying after all. Jiang Chen sighed deeply.

“Sect Head, the formation is one of the deepest scars in our hearts. We put in so much effort and paid such a great price, only to see it all go down the drain. We let down our brethren who sacrificed their lives for the formation. If the main forces of the demon race had been caught in it, our sacrifices in the following battles would’ve been much lighter. Because the formation failed to serve its purpose, a large majority of cultivation experts died in the gruesome battles that followed. Many powerful factions sacrificed everything for the sake of the greater good. Many great lives and treasures were lost.”

The Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement had been constructed as a weapon against the demons, yet it’d been used on nothing but scapegoats. If the main force of the demons had been captured by the formation, then the human race’s fortunes might not have declined so dramatically. The fates were incredibly cruel.

“Venerated master. Since the formation seized the wrong target, perhaps we can reactivate it and release the scapegoats to bolster our own army?” Jiang Chen probed.

“We considered the same thing back then, but the invasion was already in full swing. We couldn't spare any manpower to reactivate the formation. Moreover, there was no guarantee that the scapegoats would willingly join forces with us to fight against the demons if we freed them. They were under the demon's control after all.” Venerated Skysoarer had made a good point.

Jiang Chen nodded. “I understand. Doing so would be a big risk back then. However, I wonder if there is still a chance that we could reactivate the formation?”

He was an all-knowing expert in the art of formations, but he didn’t have a good grasp of the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement because he hadn’t encountered it in his previous life. Therefore, he wanted to learn more about it from the venerable master himself.

“The ancient age was almost two hundred thousand years ago. I can’t possibly know what state the formation is currently in without seeing it for myself. However, with what resources we have left in the human domain, it’s unlikely that we’d succeed in reactivating the formation. In terms of material resources, we might be able to gather enough to meet the requirement if we tried hard enough, but there simply isn’t enough manpower. Dozens of empyrean cultivators died of exhaustion during the construction of the formation, yet the human domain might not even have a single empyrean expert now! Reactivating it is clearly an empty dream!”

The venerable master’s conjecture was very reasonable, but Jiang Chen didn’t believe that it was an insurmountable problem.

“Venerated master, no matter how difficult it may seem, every possible path is worth exploring. If we somehow reactivate the formation, we could blockade the demon army at the desolate

wildlands and hinder their march into the human domain." Jiang Chen had done some research regarding human domain terrain.

The Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement was constructed with geography in mind and was located between demon territory and human domain as an invisible barrier. The demons would have no choice but to march around it. The vastness of the world meant that they'd have to travel up to ten times the distance to enter the human domain. This made their invasion significantly harder.

The longer the distance they had to cover, the more likely their army would be spread too thin. This too served as an advantage for the humans. The human leaders of the ancient times had been very meticulous in the placement of the formation. If Jiang Chen could somehow reactivate the formation, it would serve as the perfect barrier to keep the demons out. Unfortunately, the formation was simply too complex and high level. Reactivating it would be extremely difficult even for someone like him. The material and human resources needed was simply too colossal.

Fortunately, time was on his side. The demons were still rather dormant and their invasion likely a few decades away. The ancients had needed ten years to construct the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement at a sustainable pace. Perhaps taking five times as much time would be a sustainable pace for modern humans? After all, the ancients had to construct it from scratch, but all modern humans had to do was reactivate it.

The foundations of the formation were already laid. Reactivating it was significantly easier than constructing it from scratch. So although the task was incredibly daunting, it was still achievable

"Sect Head, do you really intend to reactivate the formation?" Venerated Skysoarer asked involuntarily when he saw how resolute Jiang Chen seemed.

"Venerated master, based on the current state of the human race,

if a demonic cataclysm occurred, what are the chances that we'd win?"

"None." The venerable master answered bluntly.

"What if we were to reactivate the formation?" Jiang Chen asked again.

"If you reactivate it..." The venerable master began to ponder deeply. "If you reactivate it, you'd block off the demons' path. The difficulty of their invasion would grow by several multitudes. If that happened, they might actually change their targets and invade another race instead."

Jiang Chen nodded. "In conclusion, the formation is the human race's only hope."

The venerable master sighed deeply. "Sect Head, I must remind you that it'll be a lot harder than you can imagine. The amount of resources needed is simply mind boggling. Moreover, the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect has only contributed thirty percent to its construction. The parts handled by the other sects are not recorded in our history. How will you reactivate the formation if you have no information about the other parts?"

Chapter 1172: Leaving Veluriyam Pagoda

There were a lot of issues on the table, including the ones listed by Venerated Skysoarer. If Jiang Chen wished to reactivate the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement, he would have to resolve them first.

“Venerable master, how many sects were involved in setting up the formation back then? Do you know their names?”

Venerated Skysoarer thought for a moment. “It’s probably impossible for you to find out anything about the sects now. However, there may be another way for you to proceed, Sect Head, one probably more workable than searching for needles in a haystack.”

“What is it?” Jiang Chen asked in a low tone.

“The arrangement of the formation involved a couple great human leaders, but the meetings were held in the Earth Bodhisattva Sect. Therefore, there very well may be records of the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement stored somewhere in the Earth Bodhisattva Sect.”

“The Earth Bodhisattva Sect?” Jiang Chen immediately thought of the Earth Bodhisattva Orb he’d acquired recently. Was Great Scarlet Mid Region under Earth Bodhisattva Sect rule back then?

He’d obtained the Earth Bodhisattva Orb from Cloudshatter Mountain, but the place didn’t look like an ancient sect ruin, not to mention that the demon race had chosen to build their base there. They wouldn’t be foolish enough to risk building a base right beneath the sect’s noses, and the sect wouldn’t be so friendly as to allow it.

“Venerable master, did the Earth Bodhisattva Sect… managed to preserve their legacy?” Jiang Chen asked curiously.

“Hmph.” Venerated Skysoarer’s tone suddenly took a strange

turn. It was a thoroughly disdainful sneer.

“Sect Head, I’ll admit that the Earth Bodhisattva Sect offered a lot of effort, resources and manpower to arrange the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement. You could even say that they were the main organizers. However…”

“Hmm?” Jiang Chen’s eyebrows furrowed. Was there another story behind this?

“Heh, in the end, the Earth Bodhisattva Sect was nothing but an upstart with no real foundation. After the demon race used scapegoats to trigger the formation early, that sect immediately gave up because they felt like their efforts had been wasted. Their members grew depressed and passive, believing that the human race’s fortunes were at an end. Panic, anxiety, fear reigned. In the end, the Earth Bodhisattva Sect decided to seal their doors and go into hiding.”

“What? How ludicrous! The entire sect decided to hide while the war was still ongoing?”

It wasn’t improbable that some experts had decided to silently sneak away to other places due to fear of impending death and the demons. But an entire sect? That seemed unimaginable.

“Incredible, isn’t it? But the Earth Bodhisattva Sect did just that. They ignored the rebukes of the human leaders and stuck to their plan. They sealed off their sect and vanished from the eyes of the world in the name of survival, making the best possible choice from their point of view.”

Jiang Chen was speechless. He had no doubt that the farce committed by what was essentially the number one formation sect at the time had dealt a huge blow to the morale of the human race. It was no wonder Venerated Skysoarer scorned the Earth Bodhisattva Sect. This was the root of it all.

While the Earth Bodhisattva Sect had made numerous

contributions in the war, they were deserters in the end. Naturally, this act earned the scorn of a righteous sect like the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect.

“Did the ancient leaders let them leave, just like that?” Jiang Chen found this incredulous.

“Hmph. What was the point of keeping them around if their hearts weren’t here anymore?” Venerated Skysoarer sounded extremely resentful. “Luckily for us, the human leaders took action before they ran off. They held a meeting and decided that while they couldn’t force the Earth Bodhisattva Sect to stay, they could confiscate the sect’s symbolic treasure, the Earth Bodhisattva Orb, as a punitive measure.

“This was the Earth Bodhisattva Sect’s punishment for deserting, and how you came into possession of the Earth Bodhisattva Orb, Sect Head.”

Jiang Chen had finally understood how it all had come to be. If the Orb had still been in the Earth Bodhisattva Sect’s possession, then he would’ve never gotten his ‘turn’.

“So, where did the Earth Bodhisattva Sect go after that?”

“No one knows. However, many angry human cultivators went to their headquarters and utterly trashed it, so it’s impossible for any of their sect ruins to exist in this world. If you want to find them, you must find where they went to first. Assuming that my deduction is right, I would say that they’ve probably left the human domain.”

“Could they have gone to Myriad Abyss Island?” Jiang Chen frowned. If the Earth Bodhisattva Sect wished to flee from the war, then Myriad Abyss Island was definitely the best destination.

“That’s highly probable.” Venerated Skysoarer sighed. “There were plenty of experts who chose to slink away with their tail between their legs, but to think that an entire sect would... In a

sense, you can say that they made history with their cowardice."

Jiang Chen felt contempt for the Earth Bodhisattva Sect as well, but currently he was more concerned if they truly possessed any records regarding the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement besides the ones owned by the Ancient Crimson Heaven Sect.

"Wait. I don't remember any such... records in the scriptures of our sect." This suddenly occurred to Jiang Chen.

"Hehe, the records in our possession are those of memorization instead of the written word. Allow me to recite them for you." It had been hundred thousands of years since Venerated Skysoarer had become the protector of Veluriyam Pagoda, but the information was so important that it remained firmly etched in his mind.

Jiang Chen didn't put on an aloof act and listened attentively. Truly, Venerated Skysoarer possessed both a great memory and great narration skills. A day later, Jiang Chen finally absorbed all of the essence of the formation held by the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect.

"Sect Head, I can see that you're determined to reactivate the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement. This is as far as I can help you. If you are able to control the entire Pagoda one day, you won't have to worry about the resources necessary to fuel the reactivation. The master built the place out of consideration for the preservation of legacies and inheritances. Therefore, he must've prepared many treasures you can't even imagine. If you can inherit the Veluriyam Pagoda, you'll become the indisputable leader of the human race!"

Jiang Chen didn't really care if he became the leader of the human race or not. His eyes were set at horizons beyond Divine Abyss Continent.

However, he also knew better than anyone that he couldn't

remain uninvolved in the upcoming war against the demon race. Even if he didn't want to be embroiled, the world didn't care for the wishes of a mere man. If he was eventually going to be dragged in, he might as well take the initiative and make preparations in advance. He had been human in his previous life too. He had absolutely no reason to ignore the human race in their time of great danger.

"Don't worry, venerable master. I will conquer the Veluriyam Pagoda." Jiang Chen promised with absolute certainty.

"Hahaha, I too am certain that you will, Sect Head! When that happens, all six protectors of the Six Palaces of Heritage will acknowledge you as our master and serve you for at least ten thousand years. Who knows, maybe the master of the Veluriyam Pagoda has prepared other pleasant surprises besides the Six Palaces of Heritage!"

The Veluriyam Pagoda was constructed on the basis of a long-term vision. It was a great feat of acute foresight by the maste. The human race had done all they could to fight against the demon race at the time, but it was also their responsibility to pave the way for the generations to come as well. Perhaps the Pagoda was the greatest thing they'd left behind for the future generations.

"Alright, while I would like very much to chat with you further, I'm sure that you have a lot of other things to do, Sect Head. Since you've conquered the Crimson Heavens Palace, would you like to leave first or challenge the third palace?" Venerated Skysoarer asked.

A challenger had two chances for every palace they challenged. It might not be a bad idea for Jiang Chen to challenge the third palace to get a feel of its difficulty, but he didn't want to waste his chance so easily. He had just ascended into emperor realm, and it was mentioned that the recommended cultivation level to challenge the third palace was advanced emperor realm. Although Jiang Chen wasn't inferior to an advanced emperor realm

cultivator, he felt that he might as well wait until he reached mid emperor realm before he challenged the third palace.

“Venerable master, it’s not possible to conquer the Six Palaces of Heritage in one go, so I’ll be heading out for now. As you say, the situation out there is complicated, and there are plenty of things waiting for my attention.”

“Alright. Please make sure to keep the spacetime seal safe, sect head.”

Every palace had its own corresponding spacetime seal. That was the only item that allowed Jiang Chen to enter the Six Palaces of Heritage from the outside world without having to go through the front gate of Veluriyam Pagoda and the nine Veluriyam Obelisks.

Jiang Chen was always reluctant to leave the palaces. Be it Honored Master P’eng or Venerated Skysoarer, he viewed them all as friends, despite their difference in age. He thought them as seniors whom he could confess many things to.

Still, he had to go when it was time to leave. The teleportation formation sent Jiang Chen straight to the perimeter. When the young man stepped out of the main pagoda, he discovered that Veluriyam Pagoda was wrapped in silence.

No one was allowed to approach this sacred land without permission, unless during the gathering. That was why Veluriyam Pagoda appeared quiet and unsullied at the moment

Jiang Chen didn’t linger around because he didn’t want anyone to notice his presence. He vanished after he walking out.

The streets of Veluriyam Capital was as bustling and lively as ever. Jiang Chen had disguised himself as another person, so no one noticed that he was the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He hadn’t left Veluriyam Capital for too long, but he could clearly sense an increased weight in the atmosphere after his return.

The oppressive gloom that had been gathering a while ago now felt so thick that it almost manifested as black clouds. An ordinary person might not be able to sense this, but someone as acute as Jiang Chen felt that he was literally suffocating.

“Is something really about to befall Veluriyam Capital?” Naturally, Jiang Chen hadn’t forgotten what Emperor Coiling Dragon had told him when he returned from Tilted Moon Region. At that time, the emperor had said that he could sense the undercurrents of a conspiracy within the walls of Veluriyam Capital. He was even afraid for Emperor Peafowl’s safety.

Jiang Chen had felt then that no one would dare attack someone as powerful as Emperor Peafowl. Even the few with some other thoughts wouldn’t dare make a move, much less incite a rebellion. However, judging from this oppressive atmosphere, it would seem that Emperor Coiling Dragon’s worries weren’t entirely unfounded.

Chapter 1173: A Great Hubbub In Front of Taiyuan Tower

Jiang Chen soon arrived at Taiyuan Tower on Vermillion Bird Avenue. Taiyuan Tower was co-owned by Jiang Chen and House Wei, where Taiyuan Lodge had been won it off the Majestic Clan in a bet.

Taiyuan Lodge was now occupied by the disciples of the Regal Pill Palace and a few of Jiang Chen's old brothers, such as Liu Wencai and Fatty Lu. Jiang Chen had set up Mu Gaoqi in the young lord residence instead of Taiyuan Lodge. Taiyuan Lodge was now managed by Elder Yun Nie, even though Shen Trifire was in charge in name.

Jiang Chen noticed an abnormality before he even arrived at Taiyuan Tower. Two incredibly lavish pill shops had been erected right beside it. Their signboards were magnificently huge, overshadowing Taiyuan Tower's. This development was startling. What on earth was going on? Which clueless bastard had erected two pill shops right beside Taiyuan Tower? Were they trying to court trouble?

It was widely held that Taiyuan Tower was the best pill shop in Veluriyam Capital. Shops within a 500 meter radius of it had seen a sharp decrease in customers ever since it opened. Opening another pill shop next to Taiyuan Tower was clearly suicide. But it was quite obvious that the owners of these shops weren't suicidal, just here to cause trouble. The shops flanked Taiyuan Tower, seeking to encircle the establishment. However, that wasn't all.

These shops were openly challenging Taiyuan Tower's authority. A pill dao master was giving a lecture on a stage in front of one of the shops, and an enormous audience standing around to listen.

Even though the crowd wasn't as large as the ones for Jiang Chen's lectures, the number of people present was still incredibly

significant. Taiyuan Tower's limelight was completely eclipsed by the large crowd. In fact, Taiyuan Tower seemed a little abandoned, especially when compared to the hustle and bustle of yesteryear.

Jiang Chen frowned slightly as he took this in from afar. He was extremely sensitive to such things and instinctively felt that something was amiss. By right, such a scene shouldn't be occurring with Taiyuan Tower's standing in the capital. Everyone knew that this establishment was backed by Pill King Zhen, the Sacred Peafowl Mountain, and even Emperor Peafowl. But these newcomers didn't hold back despite knowing Taiyuan Tower's background, which meant that they had powerful backers of their own as well.

Jiang Chen was infuriated. Taiyuan Tower had seen its fair share of troubles ever since it opened. He'd thought that the defeat of the Majestic Clan would bring an end to all of the troubles. It would seem that wasn't the case. But Jiang Chen wasn't someone who'd let anyone take a dump on his head. Though he was furious, he didn't allow rage to consume him. Instead, he walked up to the shop expressionlessly and listened to the lecture.

After a while, he noticed something peculiar about the contents of the lecture. Even though he didn't know the Capital's pill kings very well, he had a rough understanding of their proficiency in pill dao. The lecturer's foundation in pill dao far exceeded many old pill dao masters in the capital, but he was middle-aged at most. Yet despite his relatively young age, he was giving a pill dao lecture that contained incredibly advanced concepts.

Jiang Chen furrowed his brows. Where is this pill king from? His pill dao knowledge seems to be at the same level as Pill King Bu and Pill King Lu Feng, but he's clearly much younger than both of them.

He was very eloquent and wielded his silver tongue well. His lecture touched on a wide range of topics, yet was also incredibly profound and interesting. From time to time, the audience would

ask him questions and he would answer without breaking a sweat.

Jiang Chen was somewhat skeptical about the lecture's authenticity. The questions from the audience was very masterful and profound, yet the lecturer was able to answer them without any pause or hesitation. A great deal of knowledge was needed to do such a thing.

He quickly saw through their ruse. The audience asking the questions were definitely accomplices. They would exchanged glances with each other before asking a well-timed question.

A bystander often had a clearer view of the situation. From his point of view, Jiang Chen could immediately tell that the lecturer was working together with the questioners. The latter was nothing but hired muscle. The questions seemed incredibly profound and high level, but the answers had already been prepared beforehand. The answers were still incredibly detailed and comprehensive, but being prepared beforehand made everything meaningless.

As Jiang Chen continued to observe, he was even more certain of his findings. He grew increasingly disgusted as the pill king went on with his lecture. There seemed to be no end to his eloquent speeches.

Suddenly, he burst into a loud peal of laughter. This interruption was very jarring, as if thunder rumbling on a sunny day. It immediately disrupted the atmosphere around the shop. The guards standing on both sides of the stage immediately rushed towards Jiang Chen to maintain order.

"Where did this scumbag come from? How dare he disrupt the blessed lecture by laughing out loud? Is he looking for a beating?"

"Don't bother with words. Just kick him out!" These guards pounced at Jiang Chen like a pack of ferocious beasts.

Jiang Chen casually brandished his sleeves. A powerful emperor domain exploded forward and swept them off their feet. He smiled

coldly and looked sharply at the pill king. “Where did a fame-seeking troublemaker like you come from? Since when did we have someone like you in the capital?”

Jiang Chen wasn’t dense or slow. How could he not tell that the pill king and the pill shops were trying to oppose Taiyuan Tower, him, and Sacred Peafowl Mountain? He wasn’t going to be courteous to an enemy.

Likewise, the person on the stage wasn’t ignorant like a newly hatched bird. When he noticed that someone had come to provoke him, all he did was laugh coldly. “Men! There’s a troublemaker! Kick him off our premises!”

Jiang Chen cracked a cold and ruthless smile. Kick me out? With a flash of his figure, he leaped onto the stage and took a stance roughly four meters away from the pill king. Equipped with an emperor level Evil Golden Eye, he stared straight at the pill king and pinned him down.

“Kick me out? Pray tell, how are you going to do that?”

The pill king didn’t think that Jiang Chen would possess such incredible speed. The latter had appeared in front him in a blink of an eye! He was so dumbstruck that he could no longer form discernible words.

“Y-you… who are you? Why are you disrupting my lecture?”

“First of all, when did a pill king like you suddenly appear in Veluriyam Capital? I have no issues with your lecture, but you’re clearly answering questions that you and your accomplices have prepared beforehand! You're playing the crowd to gain game! I’ll not stand by idly after noticing such a thing!” Jiang Chen answered coldly.

“T-that’s a pack of lies!” Color immediately drained from that man’s face. Anxious and against a wall, he hurled abuse at Jiang Chen. “You slandering brat! You’re trying to ruin my reputation!

You must've be a hired grunt sent here by those that are afraid of my influence!"

He looked pointedly at Taiyuan Tower, clearly insinuating that Jiang Chen was sent by the competition to cause trouble.

"Everyone, this person with an unknown background has disrupted our lecture! What do you think we should do with this evil-doer?" The man suddenly yelled at the crowd. It was the best way to quickly raise controversy. The audience immediately began to raise a fuss.

"Brat! Who are you? How dare you stir up trouble?"

"How dare you interrupt our lecture? He's just trying to ruin everything on purpose!"

"Go away! Stop disrupting our lecture!"

"Yeah! Nobody cares who you are! If you truly possess skill and knowledge, you can conduct lectures of your own! We'll attend if you're good! Otherwise, scram! Stop monkeying around!"

The crowd was foaming at the teeth. Jiang Chen's sudden interruption was clearly unpopular. They genuinely believed that Jiang Chen was trying to disrupt their lecture and learning.

Humans were truly forgetful creatures. Many of the audience had attended Jiang Chen's lectures in front of Taiyuan Tower before. Like grass easily swayed by the breeze, they now attended a lecture from a pill shop clearly competing with Taiyuan Tower. It was as though the lectures they'd received from Taiyuan Tower had never even existed in the first place. They didn't seem to possess even an ounce of gratitude.

Jiang Chen sighed gently when he saw many familiar faces. He considered revealing his identity as Pill King Zhen, but it would be a little too self-depreciating. He was the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain after all. His social standing was leagues above anyone present. The pill shop might even use his identity to turn

the argument in their favor. If he won the argument, the crowd would find that it was a natural conclusion. However, the pill shop might use this fact to further promote their influence.

A pill battle with the world-famous Pill King Zhen was free marketing. Winning or losing would no longer matter. Therefore, Jiang Chen didn't lose his rational even though he was angry. He wasn't going to reveal his identity so that the other side could use it against him.

Jiang Chen was jeered from all directions. Ignoring the crowd, he glared at the pill king coldly and suddenly smiled bizarrely. "Fine. Since you claim that they're not your accomplices, let me dish out three questions. I'll admit defeat if you can answer even one. I'll offer you my sincerest apologies, compensation, and take myself out of your sight!"

Chapter 1174: Jiang Chen Prepares to Slap Face

The angrier Jiang Chen got, the calmer his heart became. His expression now was entirely impassive. The look with which he affixed the stranger pill king was filled with intimidating force, making the other man's eyes evasive.

"And who the hell are you? What right do you have to ask me questions?" The other man became restless and angry himself, raising his volume. "Come, someone, anyone! Throw this man out!"

The cultivators downstage all felt compelled to charge up, but a casual wave from Jiang Chen swept them aside. His emperor domain rippled outwards, repelling his would-be assailants.

Like a god amongst men, Jiang Chen stood with head held high on the stage, his eyes almost physically piercing into the other man's heart.

"Don't ask me who I am. If you really have the courage to answer questions from your audience, then there's no reason you should make an exception with me. If you don't, then what gives you the boldness to preach here in Vermilion Bird Avenue? Do you have an answer to that, hmm?" Jiang Chen's tone suddenly became serious.

The man wasn't entirely a quack. Quite the opposite, he had some talent in terms of pills. There was no reason that he'd be lecturing here otherwise. He had indeed arranged for specific questions beforehand. That was why he'd been able to answer them so smoothly and brilliantly.

But that didn't mean he wasn't a real expert. He had only done so in order to emphasize the mythology around him. He wanted to gain more fame than he truly deserved.

It was obvious that the tricks used here were old-hat. He had brought up a three-question round because he was confident that he knew much more than his adversary. He had plenty of ways to make the other guy look bad. The unfamiliar pill king recovered himself after a few moments of stupor. Jiang Chen's remarkable martial prowess made him think twice.

It's extremely likely that Taiyuan Tower sent this man. He is quite skilled in martial dao, so he can't be a pill dao expert as well. He's only here to stir up trouble. Is he demanding three questions to try to shock me into submission?

The lack of a response elicited a faint smile from Jiang Chen. He gave the audience a cupped fist salute. "Friends, I know that many of you are here to listen to pill dao lectures. But is it really good to listen to a fellow as fame-hungry as the one over there? How much knowledge and expertise does he really have? Do you want to listen to the words of a mere pretender?"

Most present were honest lecture-goers, but Jiang Chen's interruption brought a convincing argument to the front of their minds. The pill king's lectures were reasonably exciting to listen to, but if he didn't have the courage to answer some questions from a stray troublemaker, then the latter's claims might ring true after all. Were the questions rigged or not? The possibility that they were was a disappointing one indeed.

Whether in the martial or pill dao world, people were admired for having real talent and expertise. Faking beyond one's means made for a bad impression, even if one did have a modicum of skill to back it up.

Pill King Zhen had attracted so many people to his lectures because of his surpassing skill, tested time and again in the fire. His mastery of pill dao had been proven through countless endeavors. Alas, that pill king made appearances no longer in recent years. He was sorely missed by the public at large.

The two new pill stores opened near Taiyuan Tower hadn't been taken seriously at first, but the pill stores invited two pill kings day after day to come lecture. In the beginning, everyone was there for only the spectacle.

Very few were actually interested in the lectures themselves. But after watching the spectacle for a few days, the audience discovered that the two stranger pill kings talked about some pretty interesting things. Rumor spread of this, attracting more and more people to the daily event.

Though most supported Taiyuan Tower in the face of the obvious provocation from these two other pill stores, not everyone loved Jiang Chen's store. Because of differences in faction, a portion of people disliked Taiyuan Tower from the start. It could even be said that they had a lukewarm hatred for it.

No one from this group would oppose the two stores simply because of their provocation towards Taiyuan Tower. Out of the people in attendance from this group, many had also heard Jiang Chen's lectures years prior. However, they had zero loyalty to Taiyuan Tower. In fact, some privately wished that it would shut down.

Others had a more neutral stance. They were interested in purely the lectures. There was no reason for them to openly support either Taiyuan Tower or the two new stores. They were more than happy to reap much benefit as they could get out of the conflict.

The new lectures they had listened to just a few moments ago was a good example of that. Though the pill king's question and answer session had been staged, the lecture had included some quality content.

If the lectures were vapid and boring, they wouldn't have been able to attract nearly as many people. Though these pill kings' lectures were not as technical as Jiang Chen's had been, the latter hadn't lectured here for some time. The neutral lecture-goers

didn’t exactly have an option.

Many people began to raise their voices after hearing Jiang Chen’s words.

“Pill King Hong, even if that guy is just here to cause trouble, isn’t it normal for there to be discussions among pill dao peers? If he wants to ask you three questions, why not hear him out? If they’re well-asked, we’ll be happy to hear them too. This kind of contest is what pill dao is all about! Perhaps it’ll even become the talk of the town.”

“That’s right, Pill King Hong. Someone of your level shouldn’t be scared of three little questions. You wouldn’t have a problem with thirty of them! Isn’t that right, guys?”

“Exactly! Pill King Hong has showed us his richness of knowledge these past few days. His fame is not at all undeserved.”

“Pill King Hong, since this brazen troublemaker is here already, why not answer his three questions? Then you can make him kneel and beg for forgiveness before kicking him off stage. You’ll show us your skill in the process!”

No spectacle was too big for those who wanted a good show. The people here didn’t necessarily support the two new stores. They just saw nothing wrong with stoking the flames and watching the ensuing conflagration. Plus, if it really was a battle between two pill experts, then some pretty exciting sparks could fly. It would really be a worthy spectacle, then.

Did Taiyuan Tower send him? This was the question in everyone’s mind. Taiyuan Tower had ridden a heady tailwind for quite a few years now. Though Pill King Zhen wasn’t in the city presently, they still had other pill experts holding down the fort. Pill Kings Bu, Lu Feng, and Lin were all worthy contenders residing in the store.

All three were also Pill King Zhen’s disciples. Could they really

tolerate an open challenge in front of the Tower? It damaged both the store's face and reputation. Seeing someone come forward so diametrically opposed to the newcomers piqued the audience's interest.

The lecturing pill king was precisely the 'Pill King Hong' that had been spoken of just now.

The commotion from the audience had stirred his heart. He gathered up all the strength in his entire body, tossing a thoughtful glance at Jiang Chen. Taking in a deep breath, he tried to rally his self-confidence. That person's eyes carries an unknown aura. He clearly has extraordinary origins. But I'm not scared of many in the realm of pill dao. I don't know where he's from, but I don't think it'll be easy for him to beat me with pill dao alone. If it's a battle of knowledge and foundations, I'll gladly engage him!

Having thought it out, the pill king cleared his throat. "Friends, the art of pill dao is recorded in innumerable texts and volumes. It is very difficult for someone to call themselves a master of all. I hope everyone understands this simple fact. If this person is intent on making some trouble for me, I can't help it if he simply picks three of the most difficult questions to ask me. If he wants me to answer three of his questions, that's perfectly fine. I'd like to make a reciprocal request as well. He has to answer three of mine first. My lecture time is valuable, and not everyone who comes onstage is qualified to ask me questions. If everyone does it, then what time will I have left for the actual lecture? If he answers my three questions, that proves he is worthy of asking me questions. If he can't, well, what's the point of wasting time on him then, right?"

Pill King Hong was a quick-witted man. His declaration was grounded in truth, and effectively defended himself as well as restoring some face. Even Jiang Chen found the response somewhat admirable. However, he had an easy counter for it.

"Are you looking for excuses for your inevitable failure? Someone of your caliber isn't worth my time to intentionally

harass. So, I have to answer three of your questions, is it? Your mimicry isn't bad. Well then, let's make it fairer. You can ask me a question, then I'll ask you one. We can take turns doing this for as long as you want. How does that sound?"

Pill King Hong had thought that his maneuver would easily get rid of the troublemaker. That his young opponent had taken it a step further had been entirely unexpected. He began to have doubts about the situation.

Who is this guy, and where is he from? Is he truly skilled in pill dao as well? He wouldn't dare to make that demand otherwise. A variety of thoughts and possibilities entered his mind. In his current spot, he couldn't afford to lose, so he had to pick his moves very carefully.

It was a perfect window for Jiang Chen to push his advantage: his opponent had fallen silent with uncertainty. There was every reason to strike while the iron was red-hot. "Let's avoid any appearance of impropriety, alright? I won't pick a subject that you can say you don't know much about. We'll talk about pill runes, the topic of your lecture. How does that sound?"

Runes that appeared on pills during the refining process were essentially miniature formations embedded within them. Formations that took on unique form as runes both consolidated the pill's medicinal properties and evoked the materials' potency to their fullest extent.

Ordinarily, etching runes into pills was a complicated matter. Ordinary pill masters could do no such thing. For example, Elder Yun Nie had been helpless before the Hexarune Black Dragon Pill all those years ago. Refining that pill only required the most fundamental of runic concepts, and was actually just a stepping-stone pill to others of the same type.

Though the elder hadn't quite reached pill king level, he was at least most of the way there. Given that even he found a

rudimentary pill rune difficult to handle, it was easy to see that pill runes were much harder than one would expect.

Pill runes, incidentally, had also been the subject of the lecture just now. The fact that Jiang Chen had instantly offered this concession made him a gentlemen in the eyes of others.

That was the subject of your lecture, right? You must be an expert in it, then. How can you slip out of answering questions on a supposedly mastered subject?

Chapter 1175: The Level of Jiang Chens Questions

Pill runes? Pill King Hong's eyes lit up. He was somewhat of an expert and definitely no slouch when it came to pill dao. Pill runes was actually a subject that he'd devoted the biggest chunk of his time and effort towards. It could be viewed as his home territory. There was nothing to be scared of here for the pill king.

"Pill runes? Are you sure?" Greatly emboldened by this turn of events, Pill King Hong finally began to calm down with confidence.

"Are you man enough? On with it." Jiang Chen snorted.

His irreverent attitude made Pill King Hong all the more incensed. "Fine, as you wish. We will each ask each other three questions on pill runes. However... if you lose, you have to tell everyone who sent you!"

"Who sent me?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "What, you're not worried that I'll just make something up?"

"Hmph, you'll have to back it up with an oath on your inner demons, of course. How would we guarantee your honesty otherwise?" Having home field advantage gave Pill King Hong more and more courage. He was supremely confident in his specialty.

"Alright. Let's take the oath, then." Jiang Chen was unmoved. "If I lose, I'll clearly and truthfully state who sent me. If I speak one word of falsehood, may my inner demons consume me on the spot." Having done his part, he looked to his opponent. "Now you."

Pill King Hong harrumphed, but followed suit. "if I lose, I will also..." He cut himself off, having remembered something suddenly.

"What? Cat got your tongue?" Jiang Chen snickered. "Guilty as

charged, I guess. You want me to make an oath, but you aren't brave enough to do the same yourself? You must come from pretty low origins, then. Can it be that you had certain ambitions in mind by coming here? If you aren't brave enough to make the oath, then we'll call the bet off. A craven snake like you should get out of this city as soon as possible!"

Veluriyam's young lord spoke with hostility. It was patently obvious that these people were here solely to sow discord. Lecturing in front of Taiyuan Tower's doors was a slap to the store's face, with the more sinister goal of replacing it in the public perception.

Though Taiyuan Tower occupied a reasonably lofty place in Veluriyam Capital, Jiang Chen didn't believe that it was important enough to become public enemy number one. He suspected that the plot against Taiyuan Tower was only the first step of the villain behind the curtain. A testing of the waters. Jiang Chen coolly locked eyes with Pill King Hong, not allowing the man another moment of evasiveness.

The pill king's face darkened. "What do I have to be scared of?"

"Good, good!" Jiang Chen roared with laughter. "Don't be so wishy-washy about it, then. Take the oath."

The onlookers were stirred up by the young man's words. Pill King Hong's lectures were quite nice, but if he was from an outside faction that had come to make trouble, then many here would think twice about supporting him.

If it was an internal struggle, they would remain neutral. But if was he a foreigner here to purposely throw them into turmoil? That was something that could not be accepted. His vague and faltering attitude made everyone all the more distrustful of him.

"Pill King Hong, if you're not a wuss, make your oath now!"

"That's right. No matter what, Veluriyam Capital isn't interested

in having pot-stirring foreigners on our soil."

"If you don't swear that oath, then you're a coward who's already confessed your guilt!"

Pill King Hong sneered. "I swear," he proclaimed loudly, "that if I lose, I'll definitely say who sent me. And if I don't deliver, let my inner demons consume me on the spot!"

Now that the oaths had been made, Jiang Chen returned to an easy smile. "Since you were so worried, I'll let you have the first question."

The pill king had expected to get into another red-faced argument about question priority. His opponent was being unexpectedly generous. Ordinarily, Pill King Hong wouldn't have cared less for this right. But the situation was somewhat strange, and though his opponent seemed rough around the edges, the pill king couldn't actually see through him. There was no reason for him to decline.

"Alright," he nodded emotionlessly. "I'll ask the first question."

There was a wave of booing from the crowd. The disappointment at Pill King Hong's lack of courtesy was evident. As a lecturing pill king, he should have been more gracious towards his challenger. What kind of behavior was accepting such a straightforwardly polite offer?

Pill King Hong didn't react to the heckling from the audience. Instead, he glanced coolly at Jiang Chen. "First question. There is a kind of pill named the Scarletrune Heartseal Pill. How many main materials are there and how many supplemental ingredients?"

"Is that one question or two?" Jiang Chen snickered.

"This is one kind of pill. The two are part of the same question. You can ask me in the same way, if you like." The young man's reaction assured Pill King Hong that he likely didn't know the answer. Plus, the pill king had many more questions of the same

kind. If he pulled out a few more of the same kind of question, his opponent was sure to fumble one.

The amount of knowledge involved in pill dao was immense. No mortal man could possibly fully grasp all of its intricacies. The worst result he could imagine was going even. That was, if both sides failed to answer the other's questions. As long as that happened, he had plenty of room to maneuver.

Jiang Chen nodded slightly, still aloof. He looked at Pill King Hong meaningfully. "The Scarletrune Heartseal Pill has no main or auxiliary ingredients. It has three ingredients only, all of them equally important."

With regards to pills, it was likely that all the pill masters in the world combined couldn't beat Jiang Chen's knowledge. After all, the level of pill dao research he had been exposed to in his previous life was far too many levels above their understanding.

Pill King Hong was astounded by the answer. His entire body shook with incomprehension and he couldn't speak for a long time. His expression belied his thoughts.

"So, what do you think? Are you satisfied with my answer?" Jiang Chen didn't allow his opponent to play dead.

Pill dao battles could not be fudged. Either the answer was true, or it was not. If Jiang Chen had the correct answer, Pill King Hong could not deny it despite any wishes to the contrary. If he did, and news of it got out, he would lose all credibility.

"I suppose that's good enough." The pill king tasted bitterness in his mouth. He looked defiantly at the youth. "Ask your question!"

The fact that his question had failed in stumping his opponent made Pill King Hong feel a bit uneasy. If he couldn't answer any of the questions he was about to be asked, then he would decisively be declared the loser. He had banked on his own questions being unanswerable as well, but that didn't seem to be working out.

Therefore, he no longer had the initiative. Even the possibility of getting a tie looked murkier by the minute. He could only desperately hope that he was able to answer the question about to be thrown at him.

His face full of smiles, Jiang Chen spoke with an indifferent tone. “My question is: there’s a pill called the Azurerune Brightmoon Pill. I’m not going to imitate you. In fact, let’s make this simple. What color is its main material? I can clearly tell you that it only has one. As long as you manage to guess its color, you’ll pass.”

To an outsider, the question almost sounded like a freebie. Right off the bat, it was made clear that there was only one main material, and the only answer needed was the color. Compared to the stringency and pitfalls with which Pill King Hong had crafted his question, this was a lot more straightforward and aboveboard.

The onlookers all clapped at the question’s announcement. Despite their bias against the guy who’d so disruptively interrupted their lecture midway, the proceeding events had changed their mind about him. In terms of gallantry, the new person far surpassed the pill king lecturer. Unlike his opponent’s, his question was sensible, possibly even benign.

Everyone looked at Pill King Hong interestedly, curious if he could pass the ball back by answering the question correctly. Beneath the veneer of simplicity was an elementary truth: it was impossible to answer if one hadn’t heard of the pill in the first place. This question tested one’s breadth of knowledge.

Pill King Hong looked grave. The Azurerune Brightmoon Pill? He searched his mental recesses for an answer, digging for a hint or trace of information about the pill. Alas, no matter how hard he wrung his brain out, there was nothing that came up about it whatsoever. He had never heard of the pill before today.

Though he hadn’t uttered a word yet, his cornered expression was enough to tell all. He couldn’t answer the question. There was

no need for Jiang Chen to tell the pill king to hurry up. Veluriyam's young lord only needed look nonchalantly, posturing that his opponent could have all the time in the world.

Seconds creeped into minutes. The watchful gaze of countless eyes put a mountain of pressure upon Pill King Hong. He knew that wordplay wouldn't solve the problem, but he was yet hoping for one of his well-hidden colleagues to sneak him a potential answer.

But though they were present in every corner, none of them did so in the end. They couldn't tell him something that they didn't know, either. The brusque challenger had mentioned nothing of the sort relating to any of his conspirators, apparently comfortable with the possibility of their assistance.

As time went on, it was the audience members who first lost their cool.

"Oi, can you answer the question or not? If not, then what's the point of playing silent? It's not exactly a complicated question that needs a long speech. You just have to name a color. Whether you can or cannot, there's no need for hesitation. Are you trying to stall for time?"

"Isn't that right? Wasting our time is the worst!" Condemnations were heard all around.

Chapter 1176: The Chasm Of Strength

The atmosphere had shifted before anyone realized. Jiang Chen's initial showing and disturbance had elicited general dislike because he'd interrupted the lecture. However, he was able to slowly change the crowd's opinion of him. His performance, bearing, and presence far exceeded Pill King Hong's. Moreover, Jiang Chen's statements were extremely inflammatory. It didn't take long before everyone started thinking that Pill King Hong was an agent of a foreign power here to cause trouble in Veluriyam Capital. As a result, even those who had a favorable impression of Pill King Hong couldn't curb the beginnings of doubt.

The strong performance that the pill king had projected was being ever whittled away in the face of Jiang Chen's domineering presence. The lofty image he had strived to build in the people's hearts slowly crumbled. Folks were more afraid of comparisons than running into someone who knew their true worth. Not only did Jiang Chen's success made him look utterly wretched, he wasn't able to answer the young man's question despite delaying for a long time. It lowered the public's favorable impression of him even more.

Pill King Hong was stuck between a rock and a hard place. The question sounded simple, but it didn't matter because he had no idea what the pill was. Do I really have to make a blind guess? After being urged to answer by countless voices, Pill King Hong gritted his teeth and stared at Jiang Chen. "The color of the Azurerune Brightmoon Pill is azure!"

Jiang Chen broke out in peals of laughter. "Did you say that just because the word 'azure' is in its name?"

"Just tell us if azure is the answer." Pill King Hong didn't want to debate.

Jiang Chen shook his head and smiled leisurely. "You'll never get

it right if you guess blindly. At any rate, allow me to reveal the answer. The color of the Azurerune Brightmoon Pill is pink because its main ingredient is the Brightmoon Flower. The 'azure rune' in its name refers to a particular pill rune, not its color."

Pill King Hong nearly collapsed on the ground when he heard this. It was all just a misdirection! The term "azurerune" had nothing to do with color at all. Loud cheers broke out from all around them. The crowd felt that they had learned something new.

Surprisingly, Pill King Hong didn't doubt Jiang Chen's claims. Instead, he glared angrily before declaring, "Just you wait. The second question I'm going to ask is a lot more difficult. There's no way you can get the correct answer. I will even the points with this next round!"

The young man chuckled. "Even if you manage to best me this round, you still have to answer my questions correctly in order to turn the situation around. Otherwise, you'll always be a point behind me."

Jiang Chen had already won the first round, so Pill King Hong would definitely bring out his most difficult questions. Still, Jiang Chen feared no one when it came to pill dao.

"Hmph, don't get too full of yourself. I'll win the next round." Pill King Hong sounded incredibly certain, but also sounded like he was encouraging himself.

"Shoot." Jiang Chen couldn't be bothered to waste further breath on him.

"Listen well to this next question. Legends speak of a pill called the Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill. How many runes are contained within this pill?"

The Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill? Jiang Chen was slightly surprised. This was a heavenly level pill! He didn't think that there

was anyone in the Divine Abyss Continent who'd ever heard of this pill.

Back when Regal Pill Palace still existed, Elder Yun Nie had spent countless effort to refine the Hexarune Black Dragon Pill. It was a pill that increased one's chances of breaking through to the sage realm. Jiang Chen had handled the bottleneck the elder was stuck in.

The source of inspiration for the Hexarune Black Dragon Pill was in fact the Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill. However, the Hexarune Black Dragon Pill was a lot simpler to refine. It was a simpler version that required a tenth or less skill. Still, the Hexarune Black Dragon Pill was a very attractive pill to a sage realm cultivator.

When it came to the Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill, Jiang Chen didn't think that a pill of that level was common in the Divine Abyss Continent, even during the ancient times. Therefore, he was quite surprised when Pill King Hong brought it up in a question. While he himself was extremely familiar with the Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill, he hadn't thought that anyone else on the Divine Abyss Continent would know of it.

Jiang Chen smiled. "The Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill is a legendary pill. The Hexarune Black Dragon Pill that exists in the pill market right now is in fact a simplified, low-end version of the pill. So I must ask: do you actually know the answer yourself? What if your knowledge is some random information you acquired from unofficial records?"

Pill King Hong actually felt encouraged when he heard Jiang Chen seemingly refusing to answer his question. The young man must be dilly dallying so much because he didn't have an answer! He wouldn't have wasted so much breath on such useless words otherwise.

"Hmph, I learned of the pill from an ancient scripture. The

scripture is of very authentic origin, so the pill wouldn't have been recorded if it wasn't real. Why wouldn't I know about it?"

Jiang Chen nodded as he examined Pill King Hong calmly. He smiled. "The Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill is a priceless pill. Some pill masters have never even heard about its name. Your wealth of experience surprises me. To think that you've heard of the pill!"

"Hmph! Are you going to answer the question or not?" Pill King Hong was displeased.

"The Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill has eighty one horizontal runes, eighty one vertical runes, and six thousand, five hundred and sixty one intersecting runes in total," Jiang Chen answered smilingly. "My answer is absolutely correct. If it's identical to your answer, then I congratulate you for reading it from a correct source. If not, I must ask you this instead: what kind of trash pill did you mistake as the Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill?"

Pill King Hong was completely stunned. He never thought that his opponent would be able to answer such an unusual question. The Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill was something he'd seen by chance from a one and only existing copy of an ancient scripture. He never expected to run into an opponent who also knew the ingredients of the Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill. How would Jiang Chen be as informed as he was otherwise?

For a time, Pill King Hong was terribly worried and anxious. His expression betrayed his inner thoughts entirely.

Jiang Chen immediately knew that the pill king knew of the real thing, given the latter's expression. That being said, knowing and refining it were two different things. Even if the Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill was recorded and introduced in the ancient scripture, its refinement method likely wasn't mentioned anywhere.

Therefore, Pill King Hong knew that the pill existed, but that was

as far as the extent of his knowledge went. He wouldn't have a clue on how to refine the Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill and didn't have the skills to either.

Jiang Chen asked leisurely, "I wonder if your answer is identical to mine?"

Pill King Hong was ashen-faced. He wanted to deny it, but couldn't because it was part of the gamble. If he lied, the oath he swore would take effect.

"Hmph, lucky bastard. Your blind guess is correct, I suppose!" Although the pill king was almost shell-shocked to the point where he wanted to retreat, he still put on a mask of false bravado.

Jiang Chen didn't try to explain himself after his opponent refused to give ground. He smiled instead. "Even if it was a blind guess, it's still my luck. I easily 'guessed' the answer to your question correctly, but you failed to guess the answer to mine. What does this mean? It means that you are lacking in both skill and luck."

His words caused Pill King Hong's complexion to flush red and white.

Jiang Chen spoke indifferently. "Alright, my second question. If you still can't answer this, then there's no need to move on to the third question."

He had already won the first round, so of course there was no need for another round if he won again.

Pill King Hong couldn't stop his heart from pounding faster. He wasn't a man who couldn't take a loss, but the consequences of losing this round were larger than he could handle. He might actually be in grave trouble this time. Still, he had no choice but to see things through. He snorted coldly. "Shoot. I don't believe you'll have another question that I can't answer!"

Jiang Chen smiled coolly in response. "My second question isn't

complicated either. How many pill runes are there in the Connation Fireflow Pill."

The Connation Fireflow Pill was also a pill that Jiang Chen had learned of in his past life. Although the pill didn't have the word "rune" in its name, it was still one of the many formation style pills out there.

Pill King Hong's brain buzzed with panic. He'd never heard the name before! He would've remembered such a uniquely named pill if he had read it somewhere. Sweat beaded the pill king's forehead. The Connation Fireflow Pill? What was with this weird name?

The pill king couldn't help but ask, "Are you really sure this pill has to do with pill runes? How can it be when it doesn't have the word "rune" in its name? Are you really sure it belongs to this faction?"

Jiang Chen showed a hint of playfulness on his face and started jeering in earnest.

"Now your ignorance is completely exposed. It's true that "rune" isn't part of its name, but it still has to do with pill runes. If you're looking for something to blame for your loss, look to your shallow knowledge, experience, and foundation. I'll give you one last chance to answer my question? If you don't, it means that you've lost twice in a row and consequently the bet as well."

Pill King Hong instantly turned deathly pale and morose. Was he going to give up just like this? Was he going to admit defeat and surrender the name of the mastermind who'd sent him?

He didn't want to!

Chapter 1177: Sudden Changes

The audience was extremely disappointed with Pill King Hong. He was fumbling for words and no longer showing the same charisma he had during the lecture. The discrepancy between then and now was simply too big. The small group that defended him previously finally began to waver.

Jiang Chen flashed a piercing glare at Pill King Hong. “You’re making the audience wait. Can’t you be a little more straightforward?”

His aura was incredibly domineering, making Pill King Hong cower in defeat. The audience grew more and more disappointed with the pill king as time went on.

“Either you know or you don’t! Why are you stalling for time?”

“He probably doesn’t know the answer! If he did, he would’ve answered already!”

“Hmph! It seems he’s really just a fame seeker!”

“Does he really think that he’s qualified to give us lectures? Piss off!”

The audience was easily swayed. Most of them began to side with Jiang Chen and booed Pill King Hong after seeing the great contrast between the two.

Color had drained from the pill king’s face, making him as as white as a ghost. How was he supposed to answer when he hadn’t even heard of the pill? Guess blindly again? The odds for the previous question was much higher because it was related to color, but this one really would be a shot in the dark.

Jiang Chen suddenly turned when the pill king was incapable of producing an answer. “You lose by default if you don’t answer my question. Stop wasting time and tell me who’s the perpetrator behind all of this.”

Pill King Hong made one last desperate attempt. “Who says that I’m going to lose by default? The pill has seventy two runes in total!”

A mocking look appeared on Jiang Chen’s face. “As expected, you’re guessing blindly again. Brat, the Connation Fireflow Pill has eight hundred runes in total! How can it be a mere seventy two runes?”

Pill King Hong was aghast. He knew that he’d lost.

“I’m not going to force you. You may choose to lie or hold your tongue. That is, if you don’t mind being consumed by your inner demons.” Jiang Chen was calm and composed. Everything was going according to his calculations.

“Tell us! Tell us!”

“Don’t be a sore loser!”

“You must be hesitating because you have a guilty conscience!”

Cultivators in the martial dao world were blind followers of the strong. Many of them had stood on Pill King Hong’s side just moments ago. They were so impressed by the contents of his lecture and believed that Taiyuan Tower was afraid to confront him even though he was conducting a lecture right in front of their doorstep.

This gave rise to a misunderstanding that Pill King Hong was superior to Taiyuan Tower. But now, reality dawned when Jiang Chen confronted Pill King Hong. The pill king was nothing but a fluke/ Their respect and admiration for the pill king instantly turned into rage and anger. It felt that they’d been betrayed.

“Liar!”

“An outside faction must’ve sent him!”

“Hmph! Taiyuan Tower isn’t afraid of them! They just can’t be bothered to deal with these clowns!”

“That’s what I believe too! Taiyuan Tower is Pill King Zhen’s legacy! A man of his noble stature would never stoop to confront a minor character like this pill king!”

“He must’ve gone overboard with his arrogance, so much so that Taiyuan Tower could no longer stand it and randomly chose a pill dao expert to confront him!”

Pill King Hong was awash with regret. He’d always been a careful and meticulous person, but he caved and fallen prey to Jiang Chen’s provocation. Since he’d lost the bet, his inner demons would consume him whole if he didn’t disclose his background and the person giving him orders.

He was aware that he was merely a chess piece. If he erred, the entire plan would come tumbling down and he’d be condemned. Even if he escaped his inner demons, nothing good could possibly await him in the future. He was stuck in between a rock and a hard place. He wanted to run away, but his inner demons could consume him at any moment if he escaped without saying anything.

Jiang Chen seemed to have read Pill King Hong’s mind. He stared at the pill king deeply, as though he was scouring the pill king’s very soul.

“Regardless of your choice, I’ll find out the truth in the end. If you choose not to speak, your inner demons will surely consume you whole. If you tell me everything, you’ll at least have some breathing room for now.” Jiang Chen urged the pill king on patiently. He knew exactly what the latter was worried about.

“If I say anything, I’ll surely die…” the pill king murmured.

“Hmph! The choice is in your hands. If you reveal everything, Veluriyam Capital might actually protect you. After all, we have so much more intelligence to extract from you.”

The pill king began to waver. His struggle was written all over his

face. Jiang Chen's suggestion had truly struck him in the heart. With the capital's protection, revealing the truth might not actually be a bad idea after all.

"Speak. I guarantee, as long as you speak the tru-..." Halfway through his sentence, Jiang Chen suddenly felt an indescribable sense of danger and instinctively executed the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape. He turned into a beam of light and flung himself away from the stage.

In the next instant, a hail of arrows descended like a swarm of locusts on the stage from all four directions. These were no ordinary arrows. The barrage of arrows had a strong piercing ability covered every inch of air in the surroundings. An explosion was accompanied by a blood-curdling scream.

Countless arrows pierced through the pill king's flesh, instantly pulverizing his body into bloody mist. Not a single piece of his body remained after the attack ceased. He'd been erased in a gory mist.

Dead man tell no tales!

The audience was in a frenzy. Nobody knew where the arrows had come from, but all of them instantly realized that the pill king had been silenced! There was no other explanation. Since the pill king was about to reveal everything, the assassin had no choice but to unleash a frightening attack on him before the damage was done. He didn't just plan on killing Pill King Hong. He was aiming for Jiang Chen too.

Fortunately, Jiang Chen's reaction was almost instant. He was extremely sensitive to danger after cultivating the Psychic's Head. Despite his lightning quick reaction, he barely evaded the barrage of arrows in time. There had been simply no way he could take Pill King Hong with him.

Landing at a corner of the street, Jiang Chen immediately brought his consciousness and Kunpeng Meteoric Escape to bear

and searched the area for the sign of the assassin.

Unfortunately, no matter how hard he searched, he couldn't locate the source of the attack.

It seemed like it'd appeared out of thin air and immediately disappeared without a trace after a singular hit.

It was a frighteningly powerful assassination method. The assassin was extremely skilled and blended into the crowd immediately afterward. The audience numbered in the tens of thousands, so any one of them could be the culprit. In fact, the assassin may not even be present anymore.

No ordinary person could launch such a powerful attack in such a short time. It wasn't just incredibly powerful, but stealthy as well.

Jiang Chen couldn't find any leads after scouring the area. He returned to the stage and stared at the bloody stains with furrowed his brows. He'd returned to the scene of the death to find some clues, but there was nothing there. Pill King Hong hadn't even left behind a storage ring. The enemy had been incredibly meticulous.

"Damn it!" Having acquired nothing after the search, Jiang Chen realized that he'd gotten entangled with a frighteningly powerful enemy.

Pill King Hong's background was still unknown, but his abilities and knowledge weren't faked. Even though he couldn't possibly compete with Jiang Chen, his pill dao knowledge definitely rivalled Pill King Lu Feng and Pill King Bu's.

With his talent, he should be a very highly regarded individual, or he would never have been chosen as the lecturer to rival Taiyuan Tower. However, even a character like him was sacrificed without second thought!

The enemy was extremely ruthless, which made Jiang Chen very wary. Enemies that remain hidden in the shadows were incredibly frightening. This one was very well hidden and was incredibly

ruthless as well. They didn't even hesitate before killing someone as great as a pill king. They were willing to sacrifice any chess piece if the situation called for it.

Jiang Chen swept his gaze across the audience. He was sure that Pill King Hong's accomplices were amongst them. Unfortunately, no matter how astute his vision was, he couldn't immediately identify them under such conditions.

The dead couldn't speak.

The pill king's death had left him at a dead end.

He leapt off the stage and immediately headed to the pill shop that was erected beside Taiyuan Tower. No matter what, the pill king represented this pill shop. In order to learn more about his enemy, confronting the shop directly wasn't exactly a bad idea. Since he hadn't reverted to his original identity yet, he had no reason to hesitate.

"Get your boss out here! I want to see him!" He yelled as soon as he marched into the shop.

He had no reason to be courteous. If he was Pill King Zhen, he probably couldn't act as brazenly as this. But since he was currently disguised, nobody knew who he was. If that was the case, he might as well over do it. He could be as brazen as he wished!

Chapter 1178: Might As Well Fight My Way In

“Who do you think you are, how dare you…” A guard cultivator rushed over and attempted to grab Jiang Chen’s collar.

Jiang Chen narrowed his eyes, drew his arm back, and swung forward with a fierce slap.

“Out of my way!”

The slap was so violent that the peak sage realm cultivator flew backwards, like a child who’d just learned how to walk.

“Someone’s causing trouble!”

“An enemy’s attacking!”

“Notify the supervisor immediately! An enemy’s attacking us!”

Jiang Chen had steeled his heart to raise an enormous ruckus, so he wasn’t holding back at all. He fought his way in like he was possessed by a demon god. He didn’t use any other attack. Every time a foolish cultivator made their way towards him, he simply slapped them into oblivion and moved onto the next target. Although his slaps appeared casual and simple, it was an attack that combined both his knowledge and power to make them very difficult to dodge.

Jiang Chen literally slapped his way into the shop. None of the guards could take more than a single slap. It almost seemed that his palm was imbued with some sort of magic that ensured he never missed.

That being said, it didn’t take long before some real resistance showed up. A few emperor realm cultivators flew out from the inner courtyard and surrounded him tightly. An advanced emperor realm old man seemed to be the leader of the group.

“What are you doing, sir? We just opened our humble shop not

long ago and you've arrived to cause trouble already? Don't you think you're a little too hasty?"

"Yes, Elder Mo is right. Our shop is new and we haven't made enemies with everyone. You're obviously here to cause trouble, so are you bold enough to tell us your name?"

"Yeah, or are you so cowardly that you won't even reveal your identity after attacking us? We know that you're the one who tricked Pill King Hong into a bet and forced him to his death!"

Jiang Chen wasn't sure how to react to this. Pill King Hong had obviously been killed by his own people, but now they were shifting all of the blame onto him instead. This barbaric logic both incited and amused him.

"Hah! You guys know better than anyone how and why Pill King Hong was killed." Jiang Chen thought it beneath him to rise to the provocation. "Tell your boss to come out right now. Pill King Hong is your man and he died without honoring his bet. Naturally, I've come to seek answers from you lot."

"Enough is enough, boy!" The advanced emperor realm old man uttered angrily. "Pill King Hong may be a member of our shop, but he is just a wandering cultivator we hired as a guest pill king. You already forced him to his death, so what else do you want with us?"

Thorough disassociation of responsibility! These people were obviously very familiar with twisting things around.

"Wandering cultivator? Guest pill king?"

Jiang Chen sneered. "If he really is just a wandering cultivator, why was he afraid to reveal the power behind him? Don't tell me that there's nothing else going on around here!"

"You can take it or leave it. Not only did you force our guest pill king to his death, but you even came to make trouble. I don't care who you are, but you absolutely must stay and explain yourself!"

The old man's suddenly turned forceful and determined, as if he'd just received an order. It was so obvious that even Jiang Chen could sense it. Smiling coldly, the young man brandished his sleeves and charged straight towards the old man.

The old man grew angry when he saw Jiang Chen act so impudently, as if they were nothing but decoration. "Rein in your arrogance, boy!"

Jiang Chen snorted coldly. "I'm just this arrogant!"

Since he was now emperor realm, he was absolutely confident in his abilities to fight advanced emperor realm cultivators head on. Moreover, his wealth of trump cards gave him further assurance since he could escape any time he wished.

As fists and legs clashed against one another, turbulent shockwaves knocked over the surrounding cabinets. Luckily for the shop, the internal structures were all protected with formations, or the terrifying shockwaves would've turned them to dust. Still, it didn't matter if there were protective formations all over the shop because Jiang Chen was planning to wreak complete havoc. That was why his attacks were big, wide, and extremely destructive.

The old man was the only cultivator who could fight Jiang Chen head on. The remaining four initial emperor realm cultivators who tried to support their colleague found themselves extremely pressured by the youth's formidable combat abilities.

Jiang Chen pushed his palms forwards and fired out a modified version of the Vermillion Bird image like he was a volcano. Although the image wasn't as strong as it would be with the Vermillion Bird's bloodline, Jiang Chen's image was made up of prehistoric flames and contained the essence of prehistoric fire.

As the burning heat waves rolled towards the enemy, the cultivators was greeted with heat beyond belief. They felt as if every bit of water inside their body was being absorbed or

evaporated at an incredible pace. Color drained from their faces. They felt that they would be turned into dried husks at any second.

“Something’s not right with that fire. Retreat!” Although the old man didn’t know what that attack was, he could sense the terrific fire spirit energy radiating from it. Naturally, he was aware of just how deadly it was. This flame had to be a heavenly flame, or was very close to being one.

An expert who possessed a heavenly flame would be very welcome in the martial dao world no matter where they went. There were very, very few lucky stars out there who could tame a heavenly flame.

By the time they noticed something amiss and tried to retreat, Jiang Chen had thrown yet another modified Vermillion Bird image their way. Made of prehistoric flame essence, the image made everyone turn white in fear. They’d never thought that there would be someone who’d dare attack them in their own territory, completely unafraid of retribution.

Just how confident and powerful must he be to do this?

Jiang Chen’s killing intent rose sharply as he manipulated the image to corner and reduce the amount of space his enemies had available. Besides that, he also secretly sent Long Xiaoxuan out to aid him at an opportune moment. The Goldbiter Rats had been sent out a long while ago and were furiously digging beneath the shop. The Rat King had left to escort Hu Xing’er, but the Goldbiter Rats were so numerous right now that a group of talented rats had been chosen to lead during his absence. This group had been chosen after a careful selection process, and had further evolved their bloodlines some time ago thanks to receiving the wood spirit spring from Jiang Chen. This had earned great respect for Jiang Chen from the leaders of the younger rat generation. Just like the Rat King, they all executed his orders faithfully.

Suddenly, the group of cultivators felt the ground beneath them

give in. A big hole appeared beneath someone's feet, the precursor to more and more holes appearing. The holes reached down to the water line, with air bubbles rising to their surface. Jiang Chen knew that it was the work of the Goldbiter Rats.

The young man had always been an expert in chaotic battles. He immediately urged the Vermillion Bird images to swallow the three initial emperor realm cultivators before they could recover from their surprise and establish a firm footing.

A series of bloodcurdling screams later, there was nothing left of the three cultivators but ash.

Jiang Chen was destructive, but the Goldbiter Rats didn't lag behind either. They chewed the entire shop into a hollow shell in a short amount of time, collapsing everything like they were made of paper."Brother Long, work with me!" Jiang Chen suddenly cried out, prompting Long Xiaoxuan to activate his dragon domain and press down on the old man. A dragon domain was extremely frightening. It was a real dragon forcefield, far, far stronger than an emperor domain.

If Long Xiaoxuan had reached proper heights in his cultivation, his domain could paralyze the old man and turn him as weak as a baby. But even so, it was still enough to make the old man panic when he suddenly sensed the pressure bearing down from behind him.

Naturally, Jiang Chen wasn't going to pass up such a golden opportunity. He activated a trap formation to confine the old man inside. At this point, the young man had more than fulfilled his kill quota. He needed a live captive, and the old man looked like an authoritative figure in this shop. He had to be important personnel even if he wasn't the mastermind. By taking him captive, Jiang Chen might be able to pry out some useful information.

Jiang Chen knew that there was a devious plot going on around, one that might very well be targeted at Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

It was so obvious that he could've figured it out with his toes.

It was blatantly apparent that the establishment of these shops and the daily lectures of the pill kings was their first move to sound out Veluriyam Capital's reaction. One might say that the enemy had been too successful in their attempt. They'd met no resistance whatsoever, and everything went by so smoothly that they grew careless in the end. Jiang Chen's sudden appearance completely disrupted their tempo. He had destroyed a link in the enemy's chain of plans.

The old man held back against the two domains for a moment, but soon realized with despair that his resistance was completely futile. The realization terrified him beyond words because he'd initially thought that the task of capturing Jiang Chen would be a piece of cake. He truly regretted his earlier decision and underestimating his enemy now.

The two domains working in parallel quickly destroyed the old man's last bit of resistance. Jiang Chen tapped every vital spot on the old man's body and to completely seal off his movements. The young man's motions were so practiced that they stunned the old man beyond words. Now that Jiang Chen had a captive, there was no reason for him to stay here any longer. He summoned the Golbiter Rats and Long Xiaoxuan to his side before vanishing in a flash of light.

Chapter 1179: Emperor Peafowl is Dead?

Jiang Chen activated the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape and disappeared after a flash. The pill shop had brazenly opened business at that location because they were backed by someone very powerful. Had he lingered, he would've been swarmed by even more powerful reinforcements. Since he was alone, he couldn't afford to wait for their backup to arrive. He knew his limits and decided to call it quits after abducting one of their men.

After such a huge ruckus, the enemy's morale would definitely be affected.

It didn't take long before Jiang Chen arrived at the Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He didn't need to worry about any pursuers because of the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape's unparalleled speed. After entering the faction's territory, he kept an extremely low profile and returned to his residence.

The atmosphere in Sacred Peafowl Mountain was also a little tense. Huang'er was elated when she learned of Jiang Chen's return, but the he didn't want to alert the others about his return.

"Huang'er, don't tell anyone that I've returned."

She nodded and didn't ask why.

"Brother Chen, how was your trip to Great Scarlet? Did you rescue Miss Wei?" Huang'er had also been there when Jiang Chen had previously travelled to the region. It was how she'd gotten to know Wei Xing'er. In fact, rescuing Wei Xing'er was her idea.

Jiang Chen naturally wouldn't hide anything from her. "Wei Xing'er's rescue was a success. Hasn't she arrived at the capital yet?"

The Goldbiter Rat King had been told to bring her back to the capital. It'd been some time and they should've arrived by now.

Huang'er shook her head. "The situation in Veluriyam Capital

has been rather grim lately. The borders are tightly locked down. Chances are, Wei Xing'er is also held up at the border. Brother Chen, how did you come back? Don't you know about the ongoing situation in the capital?"

Jiang Chen felt a bit awkward. The method in which he returned was rather unusual.

"I entered the Veluriyam Pagoda and exited from there. The current situation in Veluriyam Capital is rather complicated? What's going on?" Jiang Chen frowned.

Huang'er seemed rather downcast. She threw a glance at Jiang Chen and sighed softly. "Right after you left, a rumor began to spread that Emperor Peafowl had been ambushed by demons and has passed away. So far, there has been no confirmation as to the authenticity of the rumor, but it quickly gained momentum. The situation in the capital has been extremely strange ever since the rumors began to spread."

An ugly expression flashed across Jiang Chen's face. Emperor Peafowl was ambushed by demons and has passed away?

Impossible. Jiang Chen found that very hard to believe. First of all, the emperor possessed various skills and arts that guaranteed his longevity. He also radiated an aura that couldn't be easily found in other great emperors. A person with such great fortune would never die that easily. However, there could be no smoke without fire. There must be some truth behind the rumors.

Huang'er gently held onto Jiang Chen's hands. "Brother Chen, stay calm. Emperor Peafowl isn't the sort of character to die so easily."

"You're right. The emperor possesses a large arsenal of skills and arts. The demons are powerful, but the cataclysm hasn't begun yet. The average, run-of-the-mill demons can't possibly do him any harm." Jiang Chen had also fought his fair share of demons. Even Demon Emperor Bloodmalva wouldn't be able to take down

Emperor Peafowl. Unless the demon emperor was at peak condition, he'd eat a great loss at the hands of Emperor Peafowl. In fact, he might not even have the opportunity to escape.

Great emperors were aplenty, but there was a great discrepancy in strength amongst them. Emperor Peafowl was without doubt the strongest great emperor in the human domain. Jiang Chen didn't believe that the demons could easily defeat someone as powerful as him. Thus, the rumor was mostly likely a lie.

However, who exactly was spreading these false rumors? Why would they spread such a blatant lie without any solid proof? Emperor Peafowl would surely retaliate in kind when he came back.

"By the way, Emperor Void and Emperor Coiling Dragon both came to visit when you weren't around." Huang'er mentioned.

Emperor Void was Emperor Peafowl's sworn ally. Amongst the seven initial great emperors, he was the only one who'd sworn allegiance to Emperor Peafowl. The latter had single handedly propelled him to where he was today. And because of that, he was always viewed as Emperor Peafowl's right-hand man.

Emperor Coiling Dragon was also Emperor Peafowl's trusted subordinate. One could safely assume that they were both on the same boat as Emperor Peafowl and were on Sacred Peafowl Mountain's side. Their visit definitely had something to do with the rumors.

Emperor Peafowl was the holder of Veluriyam Capital's fate. They needed to get their heads around the issue no matter what. Regardless of whether he was dead or alive, they needed to come up with a plan to stifle the rumors, or something bad could actually happen.

Jiang Chen pondered for a moment. "Other than the rumors, has there been anything else significant in Veluriyam Capital lately?"

"Well, Emperor Shura has officially announced Li Jiancheng as his true heir and successor."

"Oh? Li Jiancheng?" Jiang Chen remembered the genius from the Martial Pagoda Battles.

Li Jiancheng stood head and shoulders above the other true disciples of the seven great emperors, save for young lord Fan, who was better than him in every single way. The others simply had no right to be mentioned under the same breath as Li Jiancheng. His martial dao path was extremely domineering and tyrannical.

After young lord Fan's passing, he was widely regarded as the strongest amongst the younger generation. However, ever since Jiang Chen had been declared heir to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, his status as number one genius was once again under siege.

During the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering, Jiang Chen had stopped at number eight in the Ranking of Young Lords due to his initial starting rank. Many outsiders believed that Jiang Chen was actually capable of challenging Li Jiancheng for the champion seat.

When Jiang Chen was declared young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain after the ranking battles, the outside world largely viewed it as a warning from Emperor Peafowl to Emperor Shura. Even though young lord Fan had fallen, the Sacred Peafowl Mountain's rule over Veluriyam Capital wouldn't cease.

It wasn't an official declration, but anyone with a pair of eyes could see that Emperor Peafowl's arrangement was a slap to Emperor Shura's face. Emperor Shura's faction could stop dreaming. The capital's future lord would still come from the Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

This angered Emperor Shura's faction greatly. The obstruction of the emperor's plans left a bitter taste in their mouths. The sudden appearance of young lord Zhen also incensed Li Jiancheng.

His anger had triggered a large advancement in his martial dao

and helped him break through to second level emperor realm. It'd been a sensational topic in the capital when it happened.

Emperor Shura took advantage of the situation by officially declaring Li Jiancheng the sole heir of his faction and widely propagated the news throughout Veluriyam Capital. The emperor's influence over the capital kept growing ever since.

Due the ambiguity of Emperor Peafowl's status, the four monarchs of Sacred Peafowl Mountain had lost much of their authority. The sacred mountain's rule was in jeopardy. The lack of a leader had cast the Sacred Peafowl Mountain into a very tricky situation.

Emperor Peafowl was nowhere to be found and young lord Zhen hadn't been showing his face either. Everyone couldn't help but wonder where the two had gone to. Were the rumors regarding the emperor's death true?

The factions in Veluriyam Capital were extremely conflicted. They hoped that Emperor Peafowl was fine, but in case something really had happened, they needed to elect a new ruler to take charge of the capital. A snake couldn't be without its head, and likewise, the capital can't be without a leader.

Slowly but surely, support for Emperor Shura began to grow. Over time, his influence had consolidated into something that could no longer be ignored.

Of course, there was no lack of wise people in the capital. Many suspected that the rumors of Emperor Peafowl's death was a lie meant to destabilize the capital and cause inner conflict. These wise men believed that stifling the rumors should come first, not supporting Emperor Shura's rise to power. Some even believed that this was all a ruse by Emperor Shura and his allies, that they'd conjured lies and spread rumors to legitimately consolidate Emperor Shura's rule.

Many had grown used to being under Emperor Peafowl's rule and

trusted only Emperor Peafowl. They believed that he was the only one with the ability to rule the capital. Emperor Shura was a good substitute in terms of strength and might, but he lacked the charisma and presence needed to grasp the hearts of the people.

There were many who stood by this view, but Emperor Shura's supporters grew louder and louder with every passing day. The citizens were afraid. They needed a powerful ruler to reassure them and calm their nerves. If Emperor Peafowl was really no longer alive, the next best choice would be Emperor Shura.

Chapter 1180: Deeply Rooted Conflict

Huang'er was a meticulously-minded girl. Though she'd exclusive remained within the young lord's residence, she had an acute grasp on all the goings-on within Veluriyam Capital. Her analysis was clear to every detail. Her systematic overview of the city's specifics revealed everything to Jiang Chen. The young man's brows furrowed after hearing his female companion's retelling of recent events.

"That explains why other pill stores have opened up near Taiyuan Tower. This is obviously a pointed attempt at inciting a response from us." It was as if Jiang Chen's eyes had been opened.

Even if the pill stores had not been set up by Emperor Shura's direct instructions, they were definitely related to that particular emperor.

"Brother Chen, I have to take partial responsibility for it having gotten so out of hand. Taiyuan Tower asked us for help many times. Pill King Bu, Pill King Lu Feng, Lin Yanyu, and Mu Gaoqi all requested to be sent to the store's aid. I made the decision to force them to stay."

Though she appeared gentle and quiet, Huang'er had a certain presence when conducting affairs that made it hard for people to question her decisions. Pill Kings Lu Feng and Bu were both relatively unruly men, but even they dared not misbehave in front of the girl.

Huang'er's unwillingness to let them out translated to their staying put here, despite a bellyful of complaints. Jiang Chen knew that Huang'er had to have a reason for doing what she did.

"Huang'er, are you worried that there's a conspiracy involved?"

Huang'er nodded. "Brother Chen, things have become much more muddled here in Veluriyam Capital after rumor of Emperor

Peafowl's fall got out. Many ensuing events seem to be closely related to this. That's why I think Taiyuan Tower's plea for help and the unwarranted appearances of those new pill stores were both tentative measures. They seem to want a reaction out of us so that they can string us along. That's why I thought staying put was the best course of action."

The girl had incredible composure despite her youth. She could easily keep her cool in the heat of the moment, unlike Pill King Lu Feng and the rest. No amount of blood rushing to her head could sway her. If their unknown adversaries were brave enough to open pill stores right beside Taiyuan Tower, then they had something strong enough to back them up.

Jiang Chen had first-hand experience of Pill King Hong's expertise. In terms of pure skill, the pill king was not at all inferior to Pill King Lu Feng and the rest. Though Mu Gaoqi and Lin Yanyu were remarkably talented, they were still young. Given enough time, they would definitely surpass Pill King Hong, but they were not currently able to compete with him.

Moreover, the pill king was probably the mastermind's first step. In that case, more powerful moves were almost certainly ready to ensue. After extended deliberation, Huang'er had settled on not sending anyone after all.

Even Emperor Peerless, Madame Yun, and the Geng brothers were asked to stay within the residence. They didn't take a single step out of it. As Jiang Chen's cultivation partner and a girl of exceptional talent and manners herself, Huang'er was trusted and respected by all. Her usual grace lent more than sufficient gravity to her claims. Therefore, the emperor himself was the staunchest supporter of her decision.

Given this fact, no one else had a word to speak on the matter. After all, none of them truly believed themselves smarter than Miss Huang'er. When the young lord had departed his residence, he'd entrusted every affair, great and small, to the girl. What did

that mean?

It showed exactly how much the young lord valued her. She was the young lord's representative, and acted with the full force of his will and authority.

That she never used it to make any demands of anybody was already an extraneous kindness. Instead, she patiently spent the time to explain to everyone the external situation, possibilities, and outcomes. Her attempt at diplomatic resolution of the crisis had worked out in the end. Her conclusions were consented to by all. Huang'er had an inborn charisma that lent her significant advantage in this area.

The analysis he had heard just now impressed Jiang Chen as well. "Well done. Staying put was the best course of action. My heart is relieved by your presence, Huang'er."

The girl smiled gently. Acknowledgement from her beloved was what made her painstaking care and effort worthwhile. She considered his recognition to be a hundred times more important than any praise.

"I can only do a few trifling things for you, Brother Chen. The situation in Veluriyam Capital is very delicate right now, and any move slightly off could cause a huge shakeup of things. There needs to be a decisive breakthrough somehow, or this will never clear up."

"A decisive breakthrough?" Jiang Chen sounded a bit conflicted. "Can Veluriyam Capital not avoid infighting after all?"

Though he was depressed, he knew that great strife had lied in wait beneath the city's surface for a long time now. It could even be said that Emperor Peafowl had fostered it through overindulgence. The emperor had his own reasons for doing so. He'd wanted to tap into Emperor Shura's potential to help the other man grow to a level sufficient to rule the capital. If that had occurred, Emperor Peafowl would've been perfectly happy with

handing over power.

But when test after test yielded similar results, he came to the conclusion that Emperor Shura lacked something at the end of the day, whether in terms of strength and resolution.

Jiang Chen's appearance was the other emperor's nail in the coffin. Unfortunately, though Emperor Shura's potential and charisma hadn't met Emperor Peafowl's expectations, his ambition and appetite for power now more than exceeded his station.

This was the source of the animosity between the Shura and Sacred Peafowl Mountain faction. The complicated stage currently within Veluriyam was merely an extension and eruption of this problem.

"Ah, Your Majesty..." Jiang Chen murmured, laughing with helplessness. "Did you leave this issue intentionally for me as a test, or... are you really in trouble elsewhere?"He knew Emperor Peafowl was a sage who sometimes did inexplicable and enigmatic things. Perhaps he had set this stage himself.

Of course, there was another possible alternative. Perhaps Emperor Peafowl really was in trouble. Maybe... Emperor Shura's faction was even the culprit?

Emperor Coiling Dragon had mentioned this hypothetical when Jiang Chen had returned from the Tilted Moon Region. There was more. The emperor had mentioned that not long after Emperor Peafowl's departure that Emperor Shura and Emperor Skysplitter had also taken trips away from the city.

Everything about these present conditions oozed strangeness. It was no wonder Emperor Coiling Dragon was being so paranoid.

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. After mulling it over, he realized that he couldn't do very much at the moment. Sacred Peafowl Mountain's current level of strength didn't allow for a sortie against Emperor Shura. Furthermore, infighting did not fit the

city's tradition. Emperor Peafowl, for one, would be extremely displeased to see such a thing.

If the emperor was the one who'd left things as they were now purposefully as a puzzle, Jiang Chen could readily admit that it was extremely difficult for him to solve it. If not, if the emperor had truly encountered trouble, or had even died, then Sacred Peafowl Mountain was in much direr straits.

If Emperor Shura had verification that Sacred Peafowl Mountain's leader was no more, he would surely be impatient enough to move against the faction. If that was the case, then what Jiang Chen did as Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord was key.

A single misstep could lead to his infamy or death. It was down to a struggle of raw power. Jiang Chen honestly believed that if given the chance, someone as wolfish as Emperor Shura wouldn't hesitate to eliminate him.

Emperor Shura wasn't like Emperor Peafowl. Once in power, he didn't have the tolerance to allow any potential competitors to thrive and flourish. This was character that Emperor Peafowl alone possessed, partially because the emperor stood at a much, much higher place than his fellows.

"Miss Huang'er, the four monarchs are waiting for an audience outside." A servant suddenly entered with a report.

Huang'er traded a look with her beloved. Jiang Chen nodded in permission. "Go ahead and meet them. See what their attitude is like."

Though Jiang Chen was acquainted with the monarchs, he didn't know the extent to which they supported his rule. From another perspective, his appearance indirectly restricted their own possibilities. Without him, they might perhaps have been able to rise higher. Jiang Chen's ascendance into the inheritance of Sacred Peafowl Mountain meant that any possibility of one of them commanding the faction was once again out of the question.

Everyone in the world of martial dao had their own aspirations, and the four monarchs were no exception. They had been wholeheartedly loyal to Emperor Peafowl, but would they be the same way to a different, much younger master?

That was hard to say. Therefore, he wanted to take the opportunity to gauge Sacred Peafowl Mountain's internals as well.

Huang'er quickly invited the monarchs into the residence.

As the one who had interacted with Jiang Chen the most, Cloudsoar Monarch was the first to speak. "Miss Huang'er, where has young lord Zhen gone to again these days? Do you have news of him?"

"Young lord Zhen is behaving most inappropriately. His Majesty's absence from Sacred Peafowl Mountain means that the young lord should not be out and about so often. The mountain needs a master over its affairs." It was a female voice who uttered this complaint.

Having hidden himself, Jiang Chen nevertheless recognized that it was Plumscore Monarch, the only woman of the four. There had to be an important matter for the four of them to come together like this.

Chapter 1181: A General Summons

Jiang Chen had interacted with this woman before. At the time, he had visited Plumscore Retreat and met a young girl called “Nian’er”. The girl had left a deep impression on him even to this day. He didn’t know why, but she felt naturally familiar to him. It was an extremely peculiar feeling. It was why Jiang Chen immediately recalled his trip to Plumscore Retreat after he heard the monarch’s cool voice.

Huang’er smiled when she heard Plumscore Monarch’s complaint. “You are right, Plumscore Monarch. However, young lord Zhen rose to fame at a young age, so his foundation is still weak. He travels here and there to solidify his foundations and proclaim to the entire human domain that a person like him exists in Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Speaking of which, didn’t young lord Zhen spread his fame throughout the northern human domain and humiliate Pillfire City when he visited Tilted Moon Region some time ago?”

Huang’er disliked speaking in a hasty and harsh manner. Even when she was defending a point, she would respond logically and unhurriedly while remaining utterly calm. Her noble bearing was extraordinary and something unable to be learned. It was a natural quality she was born with.

Plumscore Monarch was still slightly unhappy. “I’m not saying he can’t go anywhere he wants. He’s the young lord, and his feet are his. Naturally, he has the right to go wherever he wants to. However, he has to have a sense of priority. Veluriyam Capital is in a tumultuous state at the moment and we need him here in order to set things right. Should we consider the possibility that he’s evading his responsibilities if he doesn’t return soon?”

Chronobalance Monarch chuckled. “Relax, relax, sister. Even I’m aware that our young lord isn’t a person like this. If he was afraid of the responsibility, he wouldn’t have volunteered himself during

the pill battle against Pill King Ji Lang. Everything's that happened during after the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering is also proof that he's a responsible man."

Plumscore Monarch snorted coldly. In truth she agreed with Chronobalance Monarch, but she was a hot-tempered woman and was also holding a grudge. The complaints had spilled out because she couldn't hold them back any longer.

Huang'er had a solid grasp of Plumscore Monarch's behavior herself, so she smiled instead of growing angry. "It's true that things are a bit strange right now, but the sky hasn't fallen in yet, has it?"

Plumscore Monarch's lips moved wordlessly and her expression conveyed her distress clearly. In the end, she simply let out a long sigh and fumed silently.

Suddenly, Wildfox Monarch broke his long silence and spoke with a feminine tone. "We're all very impressed with your ability to manage the young lord residence, Miss Huang'er. However, I don't quite agree with your words. It'll be too late when the sky really falls on our heads. Veluriyam Capital has remained as stable as it was was because Emperor Peafowl was around. But now that he isn't, if another person is to take over, the young lord and Sacred Peafowl Mountain will certainly become the first to fall in the line of fire."

It was no false warning. Although Wildfox Monarch hadn't pointed fingers at Emperor Shura directly, the meaning behind his words was quite clear. Young lord Zhen would be the first to be targeted once Emperor Shura gained control of Veluriyam Capital. The young lord was the only threat to Emperor Shura because Emperor Peafowl's arrangements indicated a clear preference for the young lord to rule.

Huang'er remained as calm as ever. "The young lord residence is new and few in terms of manpower. However, I hardly think that

just anyone can take us apart."

There was a natural bearing and confidence in Huang'er's tone that made people trust her without question.

However, Cloudsoar Monarch sighed quietly. "Miss Huang'er, if the times are still the same as before, we wouldn't have arrived here together. The situation is much different this time."

"How so?" Huang'er smiled.

"Emperor Shura has successfully convinced the other great emperors to issue a general summons. This means that the thirteen great nations and eight hundred cities under Veluriyam Capital rule will arrive in half a month to discuss major events and the future of Veluriyam Capital." Cloudsoar Monarch sounded very conflicted. "The fact that the general summons was issued means that Emperor Shura has made all necessary preparations. The only thing left now is the final declaration."

"Do you mean that Emperor Shura is planning to announce himself as the new ruler of Veluriyam Capital?"

"He doesn't even have to. All he needs to do is manipulate the event, and people will automatically nominate him to be the new ruler of Veluriyam Capital. When that happens..." Cloudsoar Monarch was very grave.

"If all thirteen kings, eight hundred city lords, and various feudal vassals are to support him, Emperor Peafowl will literally become the only person who can overturn everything. Otherwise... it will be too late even if young lord Zhen returns." Cloudsoar Monarch decided to lay everything out.

Plumscore Monarch also added, "Miss Huang'er, I've always had a quick temper, but I've never look down on capable people either. Young lord Zhen is one such person, and I have high expectations of him. The situation is rather precarious right now, so if the young lord can come home to turn the tides and resolve our

current crisis, I will swear to support him unswervingly. I'll fight anyone who dares challenge his rule to the death!"

She stood and looked at the other three monarchs. "Now, I have something else to do. Please continue the conversation without me."

Plumscore Monarch was as cold and proud as a lone plum in winter. A winter plum chooses to blossom only during winter and feels that it's beneath its stature to compete with the brightness of other flowers in the spring. Plumscore Monarch was a slightly anti-social person, but her promises carried enormous weight.

The other three monarchs didn't seem to be surprised by her sudden departure at all. They were very familiar with how she was.

Chronobalance Monarch also added, "Miss Huang'er, I am but a uncouth man. As Plumscore Monarch had said earlier, I will serve young lord Zhen unequivocally if he is able to resolve this crisis. Even if something really has happened to Emperor Peafowl, I will still support the young lord with all I have."

Wildfox Monarch sighed. "I am so too. When the tree falls, the monkey scatter. None of us wishes to see the long, glorious legacy of Sacred Peafowl Mountain vanish into nothingness."

In general, the four monarchs were of the same opinion. They were slightly disappointed at first that Emperor Peafowl had not selected a successor from within Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Later on, after witnessing Jiang Chen's outstanding talents, they'd swallowed their discomfort and accepted his rise to power with an open heart. After all, Emperor Peafowl had never once groomed them as his successor. Most of the time, they played the role of a ruler's assistant.

As members of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, they naturally didn't want Emperor Shura to rise to power. Their preference wasn't the only thing that was at stake here. Their lives were as well.

Emperor Shura cultivated the dao of Shura, so he was by nature a ruthless and cruel man. If he grasped power, he would assuredly start off his rule by eliminating his competition. Sacred Peafowl Mountain would become his target, and young lord Zhen the very first person he sent to the gallows. The four monarchs would undoubtedly fall under his wrath as well. That was why they were as concerned as they were.

Huang'er pondered for a moment. "I hear that the general summons of Veluriyam Capital can only be issued with the Progenitor Feather Medallion and the Progeny Feather Medallion, isn't that right?"

Cloudsoar Monarch sighed quietly. "There is an exception to every rule. The seven great emperors of Veluriyam Capital have a different agreement where if four out of seven great emperors agree to issue the general summons, it can be done. The vassals must respond to the order issued, or they will be branded traitors."

Huang'er was an outsider, so naturally she didn't know about this clause. She finally understood how this came to be after listening to Cloudsoar Monarch's explanation.

"Do you mean that four of the great emperors have agreed to issue the general summons?"

"It's not just four, actually. Everyone except Emperor Void and Emperor Coiling Dragon has agreed to this." Cloudsoar Monarch sounded a little depressed.

"I'm not surprised to hear Emperor Vastsea's agreement since he's a diehard supporter of Emperor Shura. But Emperor Petalpluck is a man who cares little for fame and profit and normally stays away from power struggles. Also, I remember that Emperor Mountaincrush's relationship with Emperor Shura is ordinary at best. Why would he ever agree to this? Emperor Skysplitter is the second most inexperienced great emperor of Veluriyam Capital after Emperor Coiling Dragon. Did Emperor

Shura persuade him too?" Huang'er knew a little about the great emperors of Veluriyam Capital.

"No one here knew exactly what kind of internal agreement they've arrived at, but the important thing is that five great emperors have agreed to issue the general summons. I saw it with my own eyes and confirmed that the signatures of all five great emperors are present."

Emperor Peafowl's strength and vision were very great. He far surpassed the other great emperors. However, he wasn't without his flaws. His methods were never too forceful, or to put it in a different way, he was a gentleman who never demanded by force.

It wasn't that Emperor Peafowl was incapable of doing so, just that he didn't want to do it. He didn't want his forcefulness to stunt the growth of the other great emperors. In reality, he had been planning to choose one of the seven great emperors the successor of Veluriyam Capital. That was another reason why he never applied too much force when ruling.

Unfortunately, his fairness had indirectly nurtured their tempers. Had Emperor Peafowl really tried to cement his individual authority, these great emperors might not have dared to act as impudently as they did. This applied even to Emperor Shura.

Cloudsoar Monarch sighed again. "Miss Huang'er, the situation is precarious right now. If you can contact young lord Zhen, you must tell him to make preparations as soon as possible. We don't have much time left. At best, we have a month, and at worst we only have half a month. Once the Vassal Meeting begins, a new ruler will be chosen. It will be too late to turn things around then."

They had said all that needed to be said, so Cloudsoar Monarch and the other two rose to their feet and left soon after.

Watching the deeply worried monarchs depart, Jiang Chen strode out from his hiding spot with a very complicated look. He knew that a storm was about to strike Veluriyam Capital, and that

his real test had finally arrived. Emperor Shura had already drawn his sword. It was time that Jiang Chen show his mettle as well.

Chapter 1182: The Two Great Emperors

The four monarchs had scarcely left before two emperors came to the young lord's residence. It was Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void. The situation in Veluriyam had made these two slightly restless as well.

"Miss Huang'er, please excuse our uninvited arrivals. Didn't young lord Zhen return home recently? Has he gone into seclusion or departed once more?" As someone who knew Jiang Chen quite well, Emperor Coiling Dragon found no need to hold his tongue.

Huang'er smiled slightly. "Your Majesties, please come with me."

Exchanging a look, the two emperors followed the girl inside. They came to a quiet place in a few moments.

"Your Majesties, how have you been?" Emerging from the shadows, Jiang Chen smiled with genuine affection.

"There you are, kiddo! I didn't expect you to be home." Emperor Coiling Dragon was stunned for only a second before he broke into a smile as well.

It was the same for Emperor Void, though his typically stoic expression showed only muted joy.

"To tell you the truth, I haven't been back long at all. I don't know very much about the happenings in the city recently, so it's not a good time for me to walk about in public." Jiang Chen was entirely truthful.

"Hmm, quite so. It is good for you to be cautious." Emperor Coiling Dragon looked meaningfully about the young lord's residence. "If my eyes don't fail me, you've laid a very potent defensive formation around this place, correct?"

Jiang Chen half-smiled in tacit agreement. "You talked to me the last time I came back. I was worried, so I set up this formation as a precaution."

“How well does it perform?” asked the emperor.

“Once it’s fully activated, even two or three great emperors working in conjunction would have some difficulty breaking through.”

“Oh?” Emperor Coiling Dragon’s eyes lit up. “Is the formation that sturdy?”

Jiang Chen nodded. “As long as the flow of energy to the formation is uninterrupted, there should be little problems with the barrier. It can withstand the attacks of multiple great emperors working together.”

Emperor Void’s eyes glittered as well. “To think that there was a formation as powerful as this… Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s caches of knowledge are truly deep.”

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, but didn’t explain further. The formation wasn't Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s, but rather one of the ten formations of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect. In actuality, the Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation was only the formation’s first form. Its more advanced version was the Hundred Sparks Petalstorm Formation, a true empyrean rank formation that was several dozen times stronger than the Nine Sparks version.

The Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation had already cost Jiang Chen quite a pretty stone. There was no question that the Hundred Sparks one would be exponentially more expensive. Jiang Chen didn't have nearly enough money to set up something of that scale.

Emperor Coiling Dragon slapped his thigh. “No wonder the young lord’s residence has remained so impassive for so long. You have this ridiculously strong trump card up your sleeve! Alright, alright. Daoist Void, it seems that we’re standing here worrying about nothing, hahaha. Perhaps our young lord Zhen of Sacred Peafowl Mountain already has a plan fully fleshed out.”

A glint of fire flashed across Emperor Void’s own eyes. He stared

at Jiang Chen, his voice low. “Young lord Zhen, Emperor Shura found us a few days ago to demand that we send out the summons so that a discussion on the future of Veluriyam Capital can be held. Daoist Coiling Dragon and I vehemently opposed it, but... having received the support of the four other emperors, Emperor Shura was able to send it off without obstacle. The Vassal Meeting will take place in another half-month.”

The tradition of the Vassal Meeting had always been present here in the city. When Emperor Peafowl had been around, he rarely ordered one to be held without grave occasion. Sometimes, one wouldn’t be held in over several centuries.

After all, Veluriyam Capital held monstrously expansive territories, containing a daunting plethora of factions and sides. There were thirteen great nations alone, with just one of them equalling the size of the entire sixteen kingdom alliance. Besides these thirteen nations were eight hundred cities of varying sizes, each with their own dedicated regions. All in all, the capital had holdings easily more than ten times that of the Myriad Domain. It was a humongous undertaking to summon everyone.

Additionally, the vassal medallions issued by the capital were different from the ones distributed to the dukes of the Eastern Kingdom. Anyone who received one here was a veritable giant in their local sphere, certainly noteworthy even if they came to the capital itself.

The kings of the thirteen nations naturally possessed the most important versions. The lords of the eight hundred cities were similarly eligible for the medallions, being handed ones of different ranks according to their strength.

Still, even the lowliest of medallions earned one remarkable honor and prestige. When the ruler of Veluriyam Capital sent out a summons, they all had the privilege and mandate to come together to discuss the affairs of the state. This was a duty that nobody could shirk.

Anyone who didn't come at the call of the medallions was branded as a traitor, and subject to punishment from the city's great emperors or even their peers.

Emperor Peafowl wasn't a man that enjoyed belaboring his people. During his rule, he never sent out the summons unless there was something vitally important. A meeting was never convened otherwise. Because the Vassal Meeting was so rarely held, it became a festive event whenever it did occur. There was greater jubilation than even the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering.

"I've heard about the Vassal Meeting already," mused Jiang Chen. "I'm just curious what gives Emperor Shura the confidence to convene it in the first place? Why is he so sure that His Majesty Peafowl won't come back for it?"

This was a mystifying fact for Jiang Chen and the two emperors alike.

"There are growing rumors in Veluriyam Capital that His Majesty was ganged up on by a group of demon experts and died in the aftermath." Emperor Coiling Dragon sounded frustrated. "Emperor Void and I have been trying to suppress these rumors in secret, but the person who is spreading them clearly has a more sinister purpose in mind. He has used a variety of channels to spread them everywhere across the city and its lands. The people are thoroughly afraid... creating a perfect opportunity to convene the Vassal Meeting."

"Emperor Shura is no longer content to hide his activities." Emperor Void was none too pleased, either.

Emperor Coiling Dragon looked fiercely at the young lord. "Young lord Zhen," encouraged the emperor, "we cannot investigate the safety of Emperor Peafowl at the moment. But Emperor Shura cannot be allowed to rule over Veluriyam Capital. I say this not because we are jealous, but rather because both Daoist Void and I know that once the city is in his hands, it will be unable

to maintain its present glory. In fact, it is quite likely that it will head down a slippery slope of decline."

The emperors' judgments were both affected by Emperor Peafowl's impression of their ambitious peer.

Emperor Peafowl had considered simply allowing Emperor Shura to succeed him, but abandoned that idea in the end. At the end of the day, Emperor Shura was just not up to the task.

Jiang Chen nodded slightly. "Emperor Peafowl has mentioned that to me as well. Shura wants to call for the Vassal Meeting solely because he's jumping at the chance to take the city."

"We must foil his plans. Otherwise, there'll be no room for us to exist here," Emperor Coiling Dragon declared rather sternly.

"You are the current heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, young lord Zhen. Since Emperor Peafowl isn't around, you must take up his mantle and decide. I've come to an agreement with Daoist Coiling Dragon already that we'll stand by Sacred Peafowl Mountain no matter what. However, this is what we don't know: how much resolution do you have? Do you have the courage and assurance to see the struggle with Emperor Shura to the end?" Emperor Void was keenly interested in the young man's answers.

If Jiang Chen himself had no spirit, then no amount of support from the Emperor Void and Coiling Dragon meant anything.

Jiang Chen calmly returned their gaze. "I have an agreement with His Majesty. No matter what, Veluriyam Capital must not fall into another's hands. So don't worry. As long as I am still here, Emperor Shura will not have the city."

The emperors traded a look, mutual relief evident in their eyes.

"Good. Now that we've heard those words from you, we'll win this fight even if we have to lay down our lives."

"Daoist Coiling Dragon is right. Sacred Peafowl Mountain has ruled Veluriyam Capital for the past three thousand years. We

don’t know whether Emperor Peafowl has fallen yet, but even assuming the worst, Sacred Peafowl Mountain won’t fall into obscurity with you around.”

Both emperors trusted Jiang Chen implicitly. They saw undeniable talent and ability in the youth. This insight was the most important reason for their continued loyalty. Their typically congenial relationship with the faction was a strong contributing factor, but Jiang Chen’s future abilities was more crucial.

“Young lord Zhen, our forces are still somewhat weak with only two emperors’ support. If you can win the allegiance of Emperor Petalpluck, Emperor Shura will almost certainly be shut out of the picture.”

“Emperor Petalpluck?” Jiang Chen frowned, remembering the low-key emperor who maintained neutrality.

That emperor’s heritage was Buddhist in nature, requiring peace, serenity, and detachment from the world. This made Jiang Chen all the more perplexed. If Emperor Petalpluck was so detached, why would he decide to cast his vote for Emperor Shura? How had Emperor Shura convinced this relatively indifferent emperor?

Among the seven emperors remaining in the city, all five besides Coiling Dragon and Void had shown support for the convention of the Vassal Meeting. That meant that the supposedly aloof Emperor Petalpluck had taken a side in the end.

“Young lord Zhen, we’ve visited Emperor Petalpluck in private as well. He says that his choice was based on concern for the city’s future prospects. If you can persuade him with a show of your talent and ability, I think it’s quite possible that he’d be amenable to switching sides instead.” Emperor Void evaluated in a low voice.

Chapter 1183: Jiang Chens Worries

“Persuade him?”

Frankly, Jiang Chen’s understanding of Emperor Petalpluck was pretty much close to zero. This was a great emperor who normally kept apart from worldly affairs, so he shouldn’t have chosen a side at a critical moment like this. However, it was also a fact that Emperor Petalpluck had agreed to attend Emperor Shura’s Vassal Meeting while glorifying it as an act for the greater good.

In reality however, Veluriyam Capital’s future would’ve been better if nothing had changed. It wouldn’t have fallen into disorder as quickly if the general summons hadn’t been issued. But now, all kinds of conflicts had arisen and changed the direction Veluriyam Capital was heading towards.

“Yes, persuade him and Emperor Mountaincrush as well. Emperor Mountaincrush was forced into supporting the Vassal Meeting because he couldn’t withstand the combined pressure of Emperor Shura and Emperor Vastsea. His relationship with Emperor Shura is average at best, so it’s impossible that he would support this willingly. Emperor Shura and Emperor Vastsea aren’t alone now as even Emperor Skysplitter has joined their side. They now stand as a united front.”

The power structure of Veluriyam Capital’s great emperors was shifting from complex to increasing clarity. Emperor Shura, Emperor Vastsea, and Emperor Skysplitter had formed an alliance while Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void were allied with Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Had Emperor Peafowl been still around, he wouldn’t even need an ally to get himself out of this predicament. He could’ve easily crushed any opposing force who stood in his way.

But after the rumors that Emperor Peafowl had been lost to the demon race had spread, the situation in the capital suddenly

became uncertain. Worse, Emperor Petapluck and Emperor Mountaincrush had temporarily foregone their neutrality and chosen to support the Vassal Meeting, whatever their reason might be.

Although they still couldn't be considered as allies of Emperor Shura, the scales were slowly tipping in the enemy's favor. It was now up to Sacred Peafowl Mountain to counter the momentum. If they played their cards right, they could overturn the tides. But if they played their cards wrong, then Sacred Peafowl Mountain would lose all influence and become Emperor Shura's next target for elimination. Reality was truly a cruel mistress.

Jiang Chen pondered for a moment before sighing softly. He responded in a serious voice, "Their alliance is not my greatest worry."

"What is then?" Emperor Void and Emperor Coiling Dragon were both puzzled.

"Why is Emperor Shura so confident? How did he dare issue the general summons? Isn't he afraid of maddening Emperor Peafowl? And does Emperor Shura know something? Or does he know where Emperor Peafowl is right now?"

"Young lord Zhen, you mean?" Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void's expressions instantly turned ugly.

They had run through all the worst case scenarios before. They just weren't willing to accept it in any capacity, even now. After all, Emperor Peafowl was invincible to them. They didn't believe that Emperor Shura had the ability to kill Emperor Peafowl.

In fact, the three enemy great emperors shouldn't be able to defeat Emperor Peafowl even in tandem, not to mention that Emperor Vastsea hadn't left Veluriyam Capital all this time.

While it was true that Emperor Shura and Emperor Vastsea had made brief trips out of Veluriyam Capital one after another, it was

impossible that they could defeat Emperor Peafowl, much less silence him before the great emperor could send word of his demise. No matter how they looked at it, it was just plain impossible.

Still, they couldn't help but be worried for Emperor Peafowl. It was also undeniable that the great emperor had left for a very long time without a single word. If Emperor Peafowl really was safe and sound, would he really allow Emperor Shura to do as he pleased and wreak havoc in Veluriyam Capital?

Jiang Chen frowned. "I believe that Emperor Peafowl is still alive. At the very least, I don't believe that Emperor Shura can cause his demise. He simply doesn't have the power to do so, even if every great emperor in Veluriyam Capital were to attack Emperor Peafowl together. He may have been defeated, but there's just no way he would die."

Jiang Chen was at least certain about this. He had given Emperor Peafowl a drop of Kunpeng blood,which happened to be extremely compatible with Emperor Peafowl.

If Emperor Peafowl had refined the blood, his strength would've increased by leaps and bounds. It wouldn't be a surprise if he instantly broke free of the shackles of a great emperor and ascended to the empyrean realm.

After all, the great emperor had detected the laws of the world and felt the beckoning of the empyrean plane a long time ago. If he hadn't suppressed that calling, he might have ascended already.

With the assimilation of the Kunpeng bloodline into his bloodline, Emperor Peafowl would assuredly be equipped to break through. So how could a half-step empyrean cultivator possibly be killed by a couple great emperors?

While Jiang Chen was extremely confident in Emperor Peafowl's abilities, there was one last nagging worry left in his mind. He was worried that Emperor Shura might collude with external forces.

He originally hadn't thought that Emperor Shura would fall so far no matter how much he coveted power and position.

But after Jiang Chen returned to Veluriyam Capital and saw that pill store right next to Taiyuan Tower, he was no longer certain that Emperor Shura would preserve his bottom line. At the very least, Jiang Chen didn't think that Pill King Hong belonged to Emperor Shura.

Emperor Shura's faction had far more shallow pill dao foundations than Sacred Peafowl Mountain, so there was no way they could've nurtured someone like that. Moreover, Pill King Hong didn't carry himself in the way of Emperor Shura's faction at all.

Jiang Chen strongly suspected that Pill King Hong hailed from a foreign power. That was why he'd made a bet with Pill King Hong and forced the poor fellow to jump into his trap. He had wanted to figure out a true identity.

Unfortunately, he hadn't expected his opponent to be so shameless as to kill their own men. Bonds and ties hadn't come into consideration at all. The fact that this enemy would eliminate witnesses so ruthlessly worried Jiang Chen even more so. No matter who his opponent might be, it was enough to make his blood run cold. Would an enemy who could kill even their own man show any mercy?

"Young lord Zhen, if you don't believe that the combined force of every great emperor in Veluriyam Capital is enough to kill Emperor Peafowl, then what exactly concerns you?"

"I'm worried that Emperor Shura might've colluded with foreign powers." Jiang Chen finally voiced his doubts.

"What?" Emperor Coiling Dragon jumped to his feet. "He colluded with foreign powers? He... Does he have no morals at all?"

Emperor Void's expression also changed drastically. "Colluding with foreign powers? If that really is the case, he will be condemned as a traitor! It's true that we have done all kinds of things for power since ancient times, but we've never colluded with a foreign power. Veluriyam Capital has its own pride, and we've always dealt with our internal issues ourselves. Emperor Shura can't possibly be foolish enough to break this ancient rule no matter how bold he is, can he? Assuming that he did collude with another foreign power, how on earth does he plans to obtain the support and acknowledgement of everyone in Veluriyam Capital?"

Jiang Chen sighed. "I wish that I've made an error in judgment as well, but my words aren't just empty accusations. I believe that both of you have heard about about the incident of Vermillion Bird Avenue some time ago, correct?"

"You mean that store that opened right next to Taiyuan Tower?"

"Mm, that's the one." Jiang Chen nodded. The pill king who gave lectures there possessed a deep foundation. It's extremely unlikely that he's a member of Veluriyam Capital."

"A pill king who doesn't belong to Veluriyam Capital, able to open a pill store in the most prosperous street that is Vermillion Bird Avenue, and give a lecture without care? That is indeed suspicious."

Jiang Chen's words caused the two great emperors to form ugly expressions on their faces. Emperor Coiling Dragon muttered angrily, "Now that you mention it, it's strange that that has happened. The pill factions of Vermillion Bird Avenue are normally very xenophobic. That pill store must wield incredible power and foundation to open right next to Taiyuan Tower in challenge."

"Before I came, I received a secret report saying that someone had caused a stir at that store. That lecturing Pill King Hong was then killed on the spot by an unknown power. Following that, an

uninvited guest entered the store and caused quite the disturbance."

Jiang Chen responded indifferently, "I'll be honest. I was that uninvited guest."

"Ah?" Both Emperor Void and Emperor Coiling Dragon stared at him with stunned looks. "W-was it really you?"

Jiang Chen nodded. "I have proof. Please come with me."

He led the two great emperors into a private room. The door slid open automatically to reveal the high rank emperor realm old man whom Jiang Chen had captured. Right now, the old fellow was sealed from head to toe and curled up in a ball at the corner of the room. He looked as sorry as a dead dog.

"This old man is in charge of that store. I captured him and brought him here. Do any of you recognize him?"

Emperor Void and Emperor Coiling Dragon studied the old man's features for a long time. They finally shook their heads. "He looks like a stranger to me."

"Then he probably isn't a Veluriyam denizen. Still, this old man seems to be quite powerful." Emperor Void looked a little surprised.

"He's a high rank emperor cultivator. I caught him by surprise." Jiang Chen didn't try to hide anything.

"You? You caught a high rank emperor cultivator?" Emperor Coiling Dragon's eyes widened with astonishment. He couldn't help but examine Jiang Chen anew.

Of course, he was aware that Jiang Chen was an unbelievable genius who was equally monstrous in both pill dao and martial dao. However, it was still rather shocking that he was able to capture a high rank emperor cultivator alive. If the captor was themselves, great emperors, then it would be a piece of cake. But Jiang Chen... what was his cultivation level again?

Jiang Chen had performed exceptionally during the Genius Ranking battles of the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering, but he was currently at best a half-step emperor cultivator. Even if he had power beyond his apparent realm, an initial emperor cultivator should be his limit.

But he had captured a high rank emperor cultivator alive. What the hell was going on here? For a moment, the two great emperors felt like they needed a couple more brain cells to comprehend this unbelievable twist.

“Gentlemen, if either one of you can pry his background out of his mouth, we will practically be one step away from the truth.” Jiang Chen smiled.

Emperor Coiling Dragon nodded before looking at Emperor Void. “Daoist Void, you are more familiar with interrogation than I, aren’t you?”

Emperor Void nodded darkly. “Leave it to me. I’ll get something useful out of his mouth no matter how tough he might be!”

Chapter 1184: The Frightening Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation

Roughly two hours later, Emperor Void walked out of the secret room with a complicated expression.

Emperor Coiling Dragon was first to greet him. “Daoist Void, how was it? Did he speak?”

Emperor Void nodded, but his face was still as grim as ever. “He spoke. There’s no way he wouldn’t yield to my interrogation techniques.”

“Who is he? What’s his background?” Emperor Coiling Dragon asked in rapid succession.

Emperor Void flashed a complicated look at Jiang Chen. “Young lord Zhen, Daoist Coiling Dragon, that person... is from Pillfire City.”

“What?!” The news caught Jiang Chen and Emperor Coiling Dragon by surprise.

“Pillfire City?” Jiang Chen was extremely dumbfounded. “Emperor Void, did he really say that he’s from Pillfire City?”

“Yes. I could also tell that he wasn’t lying. With my specialized interrogation technique, I can immediately tell if he’s lying or not.”

“Pillfire City...” Jiang Chen flashed a complicated look and suddenly raised his eyebrow out of suspicion. “Did he also mention Emperor Shura?”

Emperor Void sighed with a shake of his head. “He didn’t mention anything about Emperor Shura. He claims that he was sent to our city by his superiors on a mission. The one who gave him the mission was a high ranking executive in Pillfire City. He knows nothing about the co-conspirators, and if they have

anything to do with anyone from our capital."

"Does this really mean that he's unaffiliated with Emperor Shura?" Emperor Coiling Dragon was feeling rather conflicted.

Both emperors looked at Jiang Chen with complicated expressions.

The situation in Veluriyam Capital was truly concerning. If Emperor Shura was trying for a coup, they had ways to deal with him, but they'd have to tread carefully if Pillfire City was the one pulling strings from behind the scene.

If Emperor Shura was colluding with Pillfire City, things would be a lot more difficult. As the saying went, a thief from home is much harder to fend off than an outsider. However, the prisoner had declared that he was unaffiliated with the great emperor. Did Emperor Shura really have nothing to do with this, or did the captive just didn't know better?

Both scenarios were completely plausible.

The first scenario would be a lot easier to handle. But if it was the second, things would be extremely complicated. Outside influence was always the scariest thing during an internal conflict. It was an enormous hidden danger that could cause Veluriyam Capital to collapse.

Pillfire City was filled with unbridled ambition and viewed themselves as the leader of the Upper Eight Regions. They'd been pressuring Veluriyam Capital for a long time with their influence. Veluriyam Capital would be in jeopardy if they'd infiltrated the capital and was cooperating with Emperor Shura. With their appetite and ambition, they'd surely swallow the entire capital whole and take complete control over it.

Jiang Chen had to investigate this thoroughly if Pillfire City was involved

"Gentlemen, we must attend to this matter immediately. Since

we can no longer stop the Vassal Meeting, we'll have to come up with a counterplan. You may leave the planning to me.

At the end of the day, Jiang Chen wasn't afraid of Emperor Shura. The only reason he hadn't taken the Shura faction head-on was because he didn't want the capital to fall into internal conflict. Since the emperor was already acting on his ambitions, Jiang Chen would no longer keep the peace.

"Daoist Void, for some reason, seeing young lord Zhen being this confident puts me at ease!" Emperor Coiling Dragon exclaimed with a laugh.

He knew Jiang Chen better than Emperor Void and often interacted with the young lord. Jiang Chen had also saved his life. His support for the young lord came from the bottom of his heart.

Emperor Void laughed in response. "Pill King Zhen has created many miracles in our capital over the years and this incident will no exception!"

They were both wise and accomplished experts. Since they'd found a direction, they no longer had to fret over the matter. In the worst case scenario, the two sides would just erupt in civil war. Even if they couldn't beat Emperor Shura's faction outright, in combining both their armies with the Sacred Peafowl Mountain's army, they could at least put up a good fight. Would true men be afraid of a battle or two?

Jiang Chen didn't immediately reveal himself after the two great emperors left. Instead, he cultivated in the young lord residence for a few days and completely ignored the situation outside.

During his trip to the Great Scarlet Mid Region, he hadn't just rescued Wei Xing'er, but also obtained an extremely important treasure, the Earth Bodhisattva Orb. Jiang Chen had learned about the orb's origin from the Venerated Skysoarer. It was a signature treasure from the Earth Bodhisattva Sect, a sect unrivalled in formations during the ancient age.

After refining the orb, Jiang Chen could sense that his earth attribute cultivation had improved by leaps and bounds. However, he didn't gloat over his improvement. He'd refined the orb, yes, but he hadn't even unearthed a tiny sliver of its potential.

He'd experienced the might of the orb first-hand when he was at Cloudshatter Mountain. Even an advanced cultivator like Jiang Chen was afraid of its frightening pulses. One could only imagine how powerful it could be when its true potential was unleashed. It fact, its potential wasn't in the least bit inferior to the magnetic golden mountain. The power that the magnetic golden mountain possessed was frighteningly powerful, and so were the Lord of the Golden Seal's attacks. It was a treasure with limitless value.

Jiang Chen also hypothesized that the magnetic golden mountain was also a signature treasure from an ancient sect. It was the only way to explain the depth of its potential. However, it was merely a hypothesis and would likely remain that way for a long time as he didn't have a way to prove yet.

Since the magnetic golden mountain had been found in sixteen kingdom alliance territory, itself a cataclysmic warzone in the ancient times, there was a high chance that it was actually an ancient treasure. It was impossible that the alliance could wield such a powerful treasure with its current foundation.

Regardless of their origins, the fact remained that Jiang Chen was still unable to unleash both of the treasure's full potential. Since the orb originated from the Earth Bodhisattva Sect, the orb's greatest strength was in the construction of formations.

Jiang Chen didn't possess any of the sect's formation heritage, but that didn't matter as he had the inheritance from the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect. The orb wasn't only limited to compatibility with the formations from the Earth Bodhisattva Sect.

Since the Earth Bodhisattva Orb is an earth attribute treasure,

what formation would best complement it? Jiang Chen pondered deeply.

“Maybe the Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation?” It was the first formation that came to his mind. It was the most powerful formation in his current arsenal, but it wasn’t too compatible with the orb.

“Or the Great Dream of Spring and Autumn Formation?” This formation was somewhat compatible with the orb, but it was merely a restrictive formation. It would gain some potency if combined with the orb, but it wasn’t something to write home about.

“Hmm... the Minor Artifice Formation, the Major Artifice Formation, and the Ancient Slaughter Formation of Seven are also very useful formations, but they’re not quite compatible with the orb either...” He was flipping through the various formations in his head. Suddenly, he recalled the last formation that Venerated Skysoarer had given him.

“The Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation... is a slaughtering formation that seals off an area to form a domain. Combining it with the orb would make the formation effective both above and below ground. It would be a formation without flaws! Mm... if I also incorporate the magnetic golden mountain into it, the formation will likely become much stronger as well...”

Jiang Chen’s mind began to churn with excitement. He wasn’t a martial dao hatchling. On the contrary, his mind was filled with all kinds of knowledge. He could come up concepts just by coming through the knowledge in his mind.

He was extremely excited after forming his theories and could see how incredibly heaven-defying the formation would be after incorporating both the Earth Bodhisattva Orb and the magnetic golden mountain.

“The orb can seal the surface and earth, obliterating all with its

pulse, while the magnetic golden mountain seals the surrounding air with its frightening magnetic field. Meanwhile, the Heavenly Chalice Formation forms a vortex to rip everything apart! It's the perfect combination!"

The more Jiang Chen thought about it, the more excited he became. He took out the Heavenly Chalice Formation diagram and studied it meticulously.

"The formation requires eighty-one flying swords which must all be forged with True Heavensfall Iron. Even one sword would be hard to come by, let alone eighty-one."

The rest of the requirements were doable. The only issue was that the materials required for the flying swords were extremely hard to come by.

"Tsk tsk. This formation is truly extraordinary." The more Jiang Chen studied it, the more impressed he became.

"If I have those flying swords in my possession and use them with the Heavenly Chalice Formation, I can fight toe-to-toe with peak level emperors! If I combine it with the magnetic golden mountain and the Earth Bodhisattva Orb, killing one wouldn't be impossible!" Jiang Chen was feverish with excitement.

He possessed trump cards that could kill a peak level emperor, but the trump cards came from his equipment and not his own skill, and could only be used a limited number of times. By mastering the sword formation, he could finally achieve such feats with his own abilities. It was more reliable to use his own abilities to slaughter his enemies.

"True Heavensfall Iron... It seems that finding it will be my next goal. After forging the flying swords, I will gain another trump card. The sword formation will also become more powerful as I get stronger. The formation is truly extraordinary!" Jiang Chen was now completely fired up.

Chapter 1185: Jiang Chen Prepares For Battle

Jiang Chen didn't have the requisite flying swords for the Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation. However, the other formation that he'd received from the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect was available for refinement. The Great Dream of Spring and Autumn Formation was a deadly one.

Having braved the formation twice, Jiang Chen had firsthand experience of its power. Plus, Venerated Skysoarer hadn't given him just the formation's diagrams, but a set of flags made from Divine Trees of Dreams with which to create the foundation. Wood from that type of tree was one of the best materials for the Great Dream of Spring and Autumn Formation.

Three more days passed before Jiang Chen finally exited his closed door cultivation. His first order of business after doing so was to summon the four monarchs.

The quartet had remained at Sacred Peafowl Mountain ever since their last visit. The situation in Veluriyam Capital put them at considerable unease. Though they'd previously not entirely been satisfied with the young lord, they were acutely excited at his new summons.

"You're finally, finally back, young lord!" Cloudsoar Monarch was moved by the mere sight of the youth.

"Come, everyone. Let's sit down before we talk," waved Jiang Chen. His laid-back demeanor was infectious, cooling down the four's emotions somewhat. "I know the gist of what's happened in Veluriyam Capital."

Jiang Chen was very upfront. "Emperor Shura and his minions are showing their true colors. They have declared war on Sacred Peafowl Mountain. The anxiety on your faces is likely because of

this.”

Cloudsoar Monarch inclined his head. “So you knew already, young lord. We…”

“Young lord, if you’ve summoned us when you know already, you must already have a plan, correct?” Plumscore Monarch cut him off.

“It’d be a pretty incredible claim if I say I have a perfect plan. It’d also be an irresponsible and unrealistic statement. But, I can clearly tell you that as long as we stay calm, no faction will be able to wrest control from us.” Jiang Chen’s eyes were placid as he looked towards the four monarchs. “I summoned the four of you to judge the strength of your resolve and see how determined you are to defend Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s glory.”

There was assessment in his gaze as he brushed it across the monarchs’ faces. Jiang Chen wasn’t afraid of Emperor Shura, nor was he worried he would lose control of the situation in the capital. However, one had to put one’s house in order before tending to external affairs. He had to at least know whether the four monarchs would back him fully. The alternative was failure at a key moment.

Plumscore Monarch harrumphed. “We were all cultivated personally by Emperor Peafowl. Our lives were dedicated to Sacred Peafowl Mountain a long time ago. What can we be scared of? We will stop at nothing to defend this place!”

“That’s right, young lord. There is no need to probe us. Heaven and earth can bear witness to our loyalty to Sacred Peafowl Mountain.” Cloudsoar Monarch chimed in as well.

Jiang Chen nodded slightly. “I’m not concerned about your loyalty,” mused the youth. “I simply wanted to ask whether that loyalty extends to me. This is extremely important. If all of you decide to act against me, I cannot give you any guarantee whether Sacred Peafowl Mountain will survive this incident.”

There was no time to beat around the bush and Jiang Chen cut straight to the chase. The question was the heart of the matter. The four monarchs looked at each other, uncertainty reflected in their eyes. To tell the truth, none of them suspected each other's loyalties to Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

But how loyal were they to its current young lord? They had to probe their own hearts for this answer. It wasn't that they were opposed to young lord Zhen. Quite the opposite, they all felt quite supportive. However, deep down, their concern of whether he could take command of these turbulent circumstances was very real. No matter Jiang Chen's excellence prior to this point, his youth could not be denied.

To the four monarchs, he was not yet mature enough to lead Sacred Peafowl Mountain's counterattack against the likes of Emperor Shura. But the young man's eyes keenly pursued their own. The four monarchs all felt the pressure on them.

"Please, my friends. Speak your minds," Jiang Chen said coolly.

Suddenly, Cloudsoar Monarch lost his evasiveness. His eyes gained a new clarity. "Young lord Zhen!" he shouted, "Emperor Peafowl was the one who made you young lord. I still remember him talking to me about the decision. Since you are the young lord, we will absolutely support you with all of our strengths. As long as you do not retreat, we'll be behind you every step of the way."

"Quite so, those words exactly!" Chronobalance Monarch clamored. "We'll be behind you every step of the way."

Wildfox Monarch chuckled. "We only have one hope in this eleventh hour, and that is that you don't let us down. Don't be frightened into fleeing the scene and leaving a mess behind."

Plumscore Monarch was uncharacteristically silent, but her eyes said everything.

Jiang Chen smiled serenely. "Do I look like a coward to you?

“If I’m brave enough to venture the depths of Pillfire City, what reason do I have to retreat in home territory?”

Jiang Chen’s acts in Pillfire City and the Tilted Moon Region had spread far and wide. The Great Yu Skysword Sect’s intentional embellishment of the events had informed the entirety of the Upper Eight Regions that young master Shao Yuan and Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s young lord Zhen were the same.

The news brought honor to the four monarchs’ faces. After all, their young lord’s increasing fame meant the same for them as well. And as young lord Zhen’s reputation grew, so did Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s. A strong reputation helped to solidify the faction’s control over Veluriyam Capital.

They had been quite pleased until the abrupt change in the city’s circumstances, and specifically the rumors about Emperor Peafowl’s downfall. The appearance of this piece of hearsay took Veluriyam Capital for a sharp nosedive.

Gossip was a potent tool. It alone was sufficient to rewrite the structure of the capital. Within the storm, Emperor Shura’s faction began to rear its ugly head, taking general initiative and ownership bit by bit into their hands.

As for Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Emperor Peafowl’s disappearance and young lord Zhen’s inaction amplified suspicions about it from the outside. Because the problem was allowed to fester, the four monarchs gradually became discontent with Jiang Chen. Under these circumstances, they thought that Jiang Chen had the duty to show himself as Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s young lord.

Unfortunately, the young man in question had been in the Great Scarlet Mid Region’s Cloudshatter Mountain at the time. Immediately after that, he had been sucked into the Veluriyam Pagoda. He had known nothing about what was going on. Thank heavens that he had been able to show up at the last minute.

Whether the four monarchs actually believed Jiang Chen, they had no choice but to stand staunchly behind him.

If even they doubted young lord Zhen, how could Sacred Peafowl Mountain instill confidence in the capital's other factions? How would it continue to hold the reins?

"Young lord, things have been quite awful lately. We've been worried sick about your apparent absence. In light of that, there may have been a few misunderstandings. Please don't dwell on that," explained Cloudsoar.

"Not at all. I had some serious matters to attend to recently, and I didn't expect this sudden storm to descend. But I suppose that's good in a way. Emperor Shura has restrained himself for an astoundingly long time, and this ticking liability is finally about to blow up. Better now than later, hmm?"

"Better?" Plumscore sounded displeased. "If you underestimate Emperor Shura, young lord, then I can already predict your abject failure in the Vassal Meeting soon after... perhaps even your widespread infamy!"

Plumscore Monarch was an ill-tempered woman. Aside from Emperor Peafowl, she showed decorum to no one. Jiang Chen was too youthful to have fully won over this monarch, despite his repeated shows of mastery.

"Young lord, Plumscore is well known for her directness and attitude. Please be generous towards her. However, she's not wrong. Emperor Shura is an ambitious villain and cannot be underestimated," urged Cloudsoar.

"It's not just Emperor Shura you have to worry about. Emperor Vastsea and Skysplitter have allied themselves with Emperor Shura. I hear that even the normally neutral Emperor Petalpluck and Mountaincrush have been convinced. There is a momentum in Veluriyam that gives off the feeling that Emperor Shura is going to inherit the throne."

“Ah, if only Emperor Peafowl were here. Emperor Shura wouldn’t have dared to stir anything up in the first place!”

Jiang Chen understood the four monarchs’ dismay, but he didn’t accept it a bit. His face darkened. “Friends, I hear zero confidence in your collective tones. Is your show of support just a facade? Do you not have the courage in your heart of hearts to stand against Emperor Shura?”

His own tone was harsh and candid and the young lord’s rebuke rang loud and clear. The four monarchs were momentarily lost for words.

“Excuse us, young lord. We’re simply dejected because of His Majesty Peafowl’s absolute silence,” Cloudsoar Monarch sweated.

“Emperor Peafowl is busy with greater things right now. This city and region is no longer his center of attention. Besides, if Emperor Shura really had the ability to rule Veluriyam Capital, Emperor Peafowl would have been more than happy to pass it to him. What would be the point of all this power-hungry scheming?” Snickering, Jiang Chen continued. “Why has Emperor Shura never received Emperor Peafowl’s approval? There’s only one reason, because he does not qualify!

“What does that mean? He has neither the strength nor the charisma, nor any other characteristic required of a great ruler. That’s why he’s destined, this time as every time, to just waste his time!”

Though the four monarchs didn’t know where Jiang Chen’s confidence had come from, his speech reassured them.

“Young lord Zhen, did Emperor Peafowl give you a plan when he left?”

“That’s right, perhaps Emperor Peafowl predicted Emperor Shura’s betrayal?”

“Yes, everything should be easy with a plan from His Majesty. No

matter how much Emperor Shura prances around, we will prevail in the end.”

However, Jiang Chen’s only response was to shake his head. “His Majesty didn’t give me a plan. What he did give me was a line of thought.”

This wasn’t a flat-out lie.

Chapter 1186: Tales of Heroes

Emperor Peafowl had indeed given Jiang Chen a line of thought and even predicted Emperor Shura's eventual breaking with Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Not wishing for this day to actually come, he had advised Jiang Chen to garner the support of the other great emperors. The young man had worked to this end by visiting them rather frequently, but his shallow foundations and preoccupation with rescuing both his father and Wei Xing'er had put a temporary damper on that goal.

He hadn't expected the situation in Veluriyam Capital to deteriorate so rapidly, and so soon. The suddenness of the drastic change left Jiang Chen feeling slightly unprepared.

"Friends, His Majesty entrusted a grave responsibility to me. Success or failure, it is my duty to see this through. Don't be too worried. Sacred Peafowl Mountain has ruled Veluriyam Capital for three thousand years, and its fortunes will not disappear overnight. Those who aren't fated to rule will be left with nothing, despite all their \scheming." Jiang Chen's words were uniquely infectious, giving the four monarchs some peace of mind.

"You all are Sacred Peafowl Mountain's fundamental pillars. Whether it will hold together through this trouble is up to you. Though I am the young lord, I am also relatively inexperienced. Only through your unwavering loyalty can Sacred Peafowl Mountain remain a fortress of iron. Otherwise, I will be able to accomplish nothing without your comprehensive support."

Plumscore spoke up. "His Majesty was born with wisdom. Everyone that he had an eye on has proven themselves in time. There must've been a reason that he made you young lord, and so my words are just as before. As long as you have the responsibility and the bearing for it, I will be behind you every step of the way. Let the heavens decide the rest."

“My thoughts exactly,” agreed Chronobalance.

The eagerness in Cloudsoar Monarch’s eyes was palpable. “Young lord, His Majesty has spoken to me of many things about you in the past. I firmly believe that you will be able to lead Sacred Peafowl Mountain to prosperity. His Majesty has even prophesied that you will be able to bring this city to greater peaks of fortune than he did, all those years ago.”

Wildfox Monarch blinked, glancing towards his fellow. “Did His Majesty really say such a thing?”

Everyone knew that Cloudsoar was the emperor’s closest confidante. That was why he was the steward of Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

“I hadn’t mentioned it before,” sighed Cloudsoar, “because of my own uncertainties about the matter. But the Vassal Meeting is one of the best proving grounds for verifying whether His Majesty had spoken truly.”

Though the other three monarchs all displayed varying degrees of shock, they nodded at Cloudsoar’s follow-up statement.

“If that is His Majesty’s prediction, then it gives us all the more confidence.”

“Quite. Under these circumstances, we must support young lord Zhen with all of our strength. We will fight Shura’s faction to the bitter end!”

Only after renewed declarations of fealty did the monarchs depart. However, Plumscore Monarch returned halfway.

Jiang Chen was surprised to see her do so. “Plumscore Monarch, do you have something else to talk about alone?”

“Young lord, do you remember your visit to Plumscore Retreat?” The monarch’s expression was as frigid as ever. It was one of her unique characteristics.

Of course Jiang Chen remembered his trip. He'd visited after the Ranking of Young Lords, before his ordeals in the Veluriyam Pagoda.

"Yes, I do." A slight smile hung on his face.

"The things I said to you back then still apply now. I've seen your accomplishments here in the capital, but don't think they can be counted as particularly magnificent feats. Certainly not enough to elevate you to a heroic status. But if you can pass this trial ahead of you, if you can save the day despite the odds against us... then I shall defer to you without fail for the rest of my life."

Plumscore Monarch had indeed talked to Jiang Chen about this a few years ago. She naturally appreciated his acts in Veluriyam Capital, but was of the opinion that only in a time of dire crisis could one's ability and nature truly be discerned. "Young lord, whether you will be able to shoulder responsibility in times of hardship–this, and only this, will decide your future level of achievement."

Jiang Chen broke out into laughter, then nodded. "I remember your words still. The Vassal Meeting seems rather more interesting now."

There was no lack of challenges in the world of martial dao. For the present young lord of Veluriyam, the Vassal Meeting was one such experience. Since his arrival in this new world, he had encountered many challenges big and small. In terms of danger, his recent fight against Demon Emperor Bloodmalva had been fraught with it, though victory for that was purely decided with martial dao.

In terms of overall difficulty, the amount in this challenge was unprecedented for him. A first.

Martial dao was not the only deciding factor here. It was even more so wit and intellect, and personal charisma on top of that. Perhaps it could be classified as a clash of fortunes. Would

Emperor Shura's faction seize the day? Or would Emperor Peafowl's forces hold fast? That was the answer lying behind the curtain of the Vassal Meeting.

Plumscore Monarch scrutinized Jiang Chen carefully before nodding once more. "Do you remember the girl you met when you came to my retreat, young lord?" It was a sudden change of subject.

"Nian'er?" The adorable little girl's figure popped into Jiang Chen's head. She had been as delicate and charming as porcelain. Thinking of her warmed his heart. Because of his strong impression, her name rolled off his tongue in an instant.

Jiang Chen's emotion elicited a rare tinge of warmth on Plumscore Monarch's face as well. "Yes, Nian'er. She's been asking for you for quite a while. There are sometimes strange and invisible ties that form between the unlikeliest of people. My Plumscore Retreat has housed a plethora of people, and Nian'er's seen no shortage of outsiders, but you're the only one that she keeps on her mind. She's always talking about your good points, young lord."

Images of the kind, innocent little girl filled his thoughts. Her expressive eyes, her snow-white outfit...

Jiang Chen swelled up with affection.

"Nian'er has heard of your name, young lord Zhen. She knows your exploits here in Veluriyam. You're her hero and one of the greatest of this city, in fact."

Jiang Chen laughed in spite himself. He knew he had a lot of fans in the city, but he hadn't expected the girl to be one of them. It had been so long since the time they'd met, and she wasn't even ten, yet...

His heart felt a bit peculiar.

"Is Nian'er still at your Plumscore Retreat?" He recalled that the

girl was the daughter of Emperor Peafowl's foster daughter, Miss Dan'er.

"Emperor Peafowl asked me to instruct her. Alas, my unexceptional skills are wasting her talents somewhat." Plumscore Monarch paused, squinting at Jiang Chen again meaningfully. "Young lord, I simply wanted to tell you that Nian'er sees you as her hero. I hope that you don't let her down during this Vassal Meeting.

"Plus, you have supporters in great numbers here in Veluriyam Capital. The hearts of the people are a useful resource. Since this is such an important time, maybe you should take a few walks. The kings and lords who are participating in the Vassal Meeting should be arriving soon, and you would do well to win at least some of them over.

"And now, I must take my leave," said the monarch with a cupped fist salute. She drifted off without further ceremony.

Jiang Chen didn't know what to feel as he watched Plumscore Monarch's figure disappear in the distance. He hadn't expected the typically frosty Plumscore Monarch to talk to him alone like she had just now. For someone as distant as her, the comments had been nothing short of heartfelt. That was an extraordinarily rare occurrence for her.

The hearts of the people are a resource? Admittedly, the monarch had a very good point. The vassals from Veluriyam's territories were almost upon them. If he remained within the young lord residence all this time, they would likely have a poor opinion of him. Either they would think he was a coward that shied away from the grand occasion, or that he was a haughty youth who thought he was above the rest of them.

A proper leader must garner the love of his followers. The young man found nothing wrong about this axiom.

Why had his father in the previous life been able to sit so securely

on his throne as a Divine Emperor? His father hadn't been simply competent. He had also maintained a strong grasp over the hearts of his subjects. They were bought, quashed, appeased, and intimidated in various ways.

Grace and authority had played equal part in maintaining his rule. Both the light rain of generosity and the thunderous storm of punishment were necessary. In this way, the rebellious were daunted and the loyal, rewarded.

"Brother Chen, Plumscore Monarch's advice is very reasonable," said Huang'er suddenly, who had been silent up until now.

"Our minds are one, Huang'er. I was thinking about it as well." Jiang Chen laughed. "I hadn't paid much attention to such details in the past, but our viewpoint is different now. They must be given serious consideration."

Because Jiang Chen had not been Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord in the past, he had only passively bought the hearts of others. Historically, his actions had only done so as an added benefit. However, he was now a holder of power. As a young lord, he had to do things that he previously hadn't cared for.

"You already have a starting point for it, Brother Chen. Veluriyam Capital's peoples are disturbed in large part due to the circulating rumors. If you can step forward, a large portion of them will be rendered ineffective." Though Huang'er had a serene nature, she saw problems from a vantage point that was often higher than most others. She had a clear view of the majority of affairs.

Chapter 1187: The Chance to Reach Empyrean Realm

“Haha, you’ve finally showed up, brother. I would’ve gone to look for you if you were absent any longer!” Emperor Peerless laughed heartily when he saw Jiang Chen. It was obvious that the great emperor and his wife were having a good time in the young lord residence. Thanks to the Pinecrane Pill and the baptism of the wood spirit spring, Madame Yun was approaching full recovery.

Both Emperor Peerless and Madame Yun appreciated these blissful, carefree days. The madame had been injured almost the moment they fell in love, and it had been the heaviest burden they’d borne for the longest time. Emperor Peerless had to depart very often in search for a cure. As a result, they spent more time apart than together.

But after so many years of travel and hardships, Madame Yun’s injuries were now finally healed. That was why Emperor Peerless felt extreme gratitude towards Jiang Chen. The couple were loyal people who greatly valued the ties of friendship, and Jiang Chen had done them an enormous favor. They also rather liked Veluriyam Capital. Given that the three had been close for a while, the couple were beginning to feel like settling here.

“Old Brother Mo, your wife has essentially made a full recovery. From hereon, the two of you can be the happy couple you’ve always wanted to be.”

“Hehe, it’s all thanks to you, brother. I can’t even imagine how I should repay you. I’ll set aside the niceties. I hear that Veluriyam Capital’s current situation is souring and someone’s trying to challenge your authority. Is that true?” Mo Wushuang asked in a low tone.

Jiang Chen had known it’d be impossible to hide this matter from someone like Emperor Peerless. He sighed quietly. “Well,

they can try. In the end, they're nothing more than insignificant clowns."

"Very good! I like your confidence. If these words were to come from anyone else, I would've thought they were being insufferably arrogant. But you? You definitely have the right to say such a thing." Emperor Peerless praised. "I haven't met Emperor Shura myself, but rumors of him have reached my ears. His martial dao strength is beyond questionable, but his breadth of mind, bearing, choice of methods and charisma are far inferior to Emperor Peafowl. I believe that your ceiling of potential is far, far higher than even Emperor Peafowl's. If Veluriyam Capital's citizens aren't completely foolish, they should know to choose you as their ruler instead of this Emperor Shura!"

Madame Yun agreed deeply. "Emperor Shura is the kind of expert that every great force in the Upper Eight Regions possess. There really isn't anything special about him. Emperor Peafowl is the reason why Veluriyam Capital is one of the most prominent powers of the Upper Eight Region, not him."

This was something obvious even to an outsider. At best, Emperor Shura was the third great emperor of Veluriyam Capital. Emperor Petalpluck sat ahead of him as the second, but the emperor was low-key and seldom became involved in these conflicts. That was why Emperor Shura was the more famous one. However, to outsiders, Veluriyam Capital's rise to prominence was all thanks to the extraordinary Emperor Peafowl. Without him, Veluriyam Capital would be no better than a first rank sect.

"Brother, I believe your sister-in-law's suggestion isn't bad. Every vassal of Veluriyam Capital will be at the meeting. You may be the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but your roots are ultimately shallow compared to others. The best thing you can do during a time like this is to visit others and garner some support. In fact, you should do something big and let everyone know that your status wasn't gifted, but earned."

“You’re very right, Old Brother Mo.” Jiang Chen acknowledged.

“Haha, considering the disorder that’s plaguing Veluriyam Capital right now, I’m quite worried that someone wishes to harm you, so I’m going to stay close and be your bodyguard for a while. Ah Yun, you’re fine with this, right? Hahaha!” Emperor Peerless laughed.

Madame Yun responded seriously. “But of course. I would’ve advised you to do this even if you didn’t ask, my beloved. Our brother is at a critical moment in his life. If you don’t help him now, when will it ever be the right time?”

Jiang Chen was very touched by Madame Yun’s breadth of mind. He hadn’t saved her life with reciprocation in mind, but was grateful that she was doing so. He couldn’t deny that the presence of a great emperor would make things a lot more convenient.

“Let’s grab the Geng brothers as well.” Emperor Peerless laughed. “They’re both my sworn brothers, and they’ve been very impressed by you thus far.”

“I shan’t pretend that this isn’t exactly what I hoped for.” Jiang Chen was overjoyed to hear this.

The Geng brothers were extremely powerful. They might not be great emperors yet, but they were at least as strong as the four great monarchs.

With Emperor Peerless, the four great monarchs, and the Geng brothers by his side, his faction now boasted formidable strength. This was even before mentioning Emperor Void, Emperor Coiling Dragon and their many powerful subordinates.

“Brother…” Emperor Peerless pondered for a moment before starting, “Forgive me for saying this, but there have been a lot of rumors in Veluriyam Capital as of late. Emperor Peafowl’s whereabouts is what worries me the most right now.”

“What is on your mind, elder brother?” Jiang Chen looked over.

“Alive or not, I’m almost certain that Emperor Peafowl has run into some trouble. There’s no explaining Emperor Shura’s sudden gall to spread such heinous rumors otherwise. I’m worried that… do you think that another power might be interfering with Veluriyam Capital’s internal strife?”

As a great emperor, Emperor Peerless’ instincts were incredibly accurate. Jiang Chen’s face hardened with gravity, and the young man sighed quietly after a long time. “I’ll be frank, Old Brother Mo. The same possibility has crossed my mind. A few days ago, after just returning from my journey, I discovered a new pill store right next to Taiyuan Tower. As it turned out, it actually belongs to Pillfire City. To this day, I can’t ascertain if Pillfire City was taking advantage of our moment of weakness of their own accord, or if Emperor Shura was the one who’s led the wolf into our city.”

“Pillfire City?” Emperor Peerless arched an eyebrow in response.

Madame Yun’s gentle expression also became clouded with some complications. Obviously, the name “Pillfire City” was something neither the great emperor nor his wife were keen to hear as Emperor Pillzenith was the source of Madame Yun’s injuries.

That emperor had been a thorn in Emperor Peerless and Madame Yun’s side for the longest time. Countless geniuses had sought to win her affection when the madame was young, but her heart belonged to Emperor Peerless alone. What was supposed to be a beautiful love became muddied when Emperor Pillzenith decided to fight for Madame Yun’s affection too.

In the end, the two great emperors fought a decisive duel and Emperor Peerless had come out just a little short. In a moment of danger, it was Madame Yun who jumped in and took a blow meant for Emperor Peerless. That was how she came by the long term injury.

When the battle was over, Emperor Pillzenith was furious, incensed, regretful, and apologetic for what he had done. That was

why he'd never really stopped Emperor Peerless from entering Pillfire City in search for a cure. But it wasn't that he didn't want to strike down Emperor Peerless. He was more afraid that he would damage his reputation and inspire Madame Yun's eternal hatred after the act.

Jiang Chen also hated Pillfire City to the bone. He had crossed paths with the faction before, and had recently discovered that they were the ones behind the disorder of Veluriyam Capital. This was something the young man absolutely couldn't allow. Veluriyam Capital was his domain and Taiyuan Tower was his private property. Anyone who attacked Taiyuan Tower was attacking him as well.

"Brother, are you sure Pillfire City is the culprit behind this?" Emperor Peerless asked gravely.

"I interrogated someone to get this information. I am absolutely certain that it is them."

"Mm. If Emperor Shura really did lure the wolf into his own city, then I must say that he is far dumber than I imagined. Gratitude means nothing to Pillfire City. I guarantee he will regret his decision down the line if he really is the one behind all this." Emperor Peerless uttered angrily with impatience.

Madame Yun quietly hugged Emperor Peerless' arm. "Calm down, darling Mo. Our wise younger brother is an exceptional genius. He doesn't fear even Pillfire City. Do you forget that he's soundly defeated Pill King Ji Lang twice already?"

Emperor Peerless laughed loudly with a slap of the table. "That's right, Pill King Ji Lang was supposedly the number one successor of Pillfire City, but even he's suffered defeat twice at the hands of our wise brother. This means that the next generation of Veluriyam Capital is far superior to Pillfire City's!"

Jiang Chen smiled before his eyes suddenly colored with seriousness. He looked at Emperor Peerless. "Old Brother Mo,

would you like an opportunity to utterly crush Emperor Pillzenith?"

"Oh? Please elaborate." Emperor Peerless' eyes lit up. Other than healing Madame Yun, crushing Emperor Pillzenith was practically his greatest wish over the years.

Although his wife was now fully recovered, the humiliation of defeat at the hands of Emperor Pillzenith hadn't passed at all. Emperor Peerless was willing to accept any price in exchange for crushing Emperor Pillzenith.

"Brother, are you sure you're not just teasing me?" Emperor Peerless asked with a wry smile.

Jiang Chen shook his head. "I do not make empty promises. However, this must remain a top secret."

Emperor Peerless slapped his chest. "Brother, you should know what kind of person I am. If you can fulfill this wish of mine, I swear to obey your orders for the rest of my life. I won't even frown if you want Yun'er and I to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain!"

Jiang Chen smiled easily. "Brother, I know you're comfortable leading a free, wandering life, so I wouldn't impose on you with such a request. However, you and I are kindred spirits. I'm sure I'll be uneasy if I don't gift you this opportunity."

"Oh?" Emperor Peerless' chest tightened when he discovered that Jiang Chen didn't seem to be joking. "Brother, please don't leave me hanging any longer. You know I'm an impatient person."

Jiang Chen nodded. "Old Brother Mo, Madame Yun. This matter is of the utmost importance. All I ask is for this to remain a secret, because a leak will put Old Brother Mo in grave danger."

Madame Yun covered her mouth after a soft cry. This time, she couldn't help but stare at Jiang Chen with eyes clouded by doubt and worry. She couldn't keep calm at the thought of danger to Emperor Peerless' life.

“Brother. Do I look like someone who’s afraid of danger? What kind of danger do you think I haven’t encountered yet after wandering the world for so many years?” Emperor Peerless sounded nonchalant however. It was obvious he didn’t take Jiang Chen’s warning too seriously.

The young man shook his head. “It’s different this time. If news of this is leaked, you may be hunted by every great emperor in the entire world.”

“It’s that serious?” Emperor Peerless goggled at Jiang Chen.

“Mm. It may even be worse than that, honestly.” Jiang Chen opened his palm and revealed an intricate bottle. “Brother Mo, this bottle contains a drop of blood of the ancient kun’peng. Once you’ve refined it, you will be gifted an empyrean opportunity. In the future, it will guarantee your ascension to empyrean realm, and if you’re lucky, you may surpass even that.”

Emperor Peerless trembled all over like a bolt of lightning had struck. Madame Yun’s face had turned completely white too. They were both flabbergasted by Jiang Chen’s gift.

Chapter 1188: Gifting the Kunpeng Bloodline

“Empyrean? Are you certain that I can ascend to the empyrean realm?” When it came to such an important subject, even a man as great as Emperor Peerless was rendered a weak mortal. His voice trembled with anticipation.

In comparison, Jiang Chen was the image of calmness. “You’re talented enough to become a great emperor as a wandering cultivator, Old Brother Mo. Breaking through to empyrean realm should be no problem at all.”

“This… this bloodline’s power! Is something like this allowed to exist?” Emperor Peerless was still doubtful. Not that he didn’t trust Jiang Chen, but the prospect was a little too shocking for him to take in at once.

“The world of martial dao has things much more amazing than this,” smiled Jiang Chen. “Empyrean bloodlines were relatively commonplace in ancient times, no?”

“The ancient times are just that, ancient,” murmured Emperor Peerless. “We live in the present era, where not even a tenth of the heritages from back then have been passed down. The human domain right now can’t rival even a tenth of the ancient times in resources and manpower. I’ve traveled the human domain for a long time, but I’ve never heard of any empyrean experts anywhere.”

Having recovered from her shock, Madame Yun spoke up as well. “Wise younger brother, is it really possible to assimilate the empyrean bloodline? Can Brother Mo’s mortal body really endure its stresses?”

“Don’t worry, sister-in-law,” laughed Jiang Chen. “If my brother couldn’t, why would I give it to him so recklessly? The strength of this bloodline lies in its infinite potential. Old Brother Mo is a great emperor, but an advanced emperor realm cultivator would have a

reasonable chance at using it just as well. It would be quite a bit more dangerous for them, of course, but it is possible. As for a great emperor as vigorous as old brother here, he should have almost zero risk."

"So there's a risk, after all?" As someone who'd been badly injured for a number of years, Madame Yun was more cautious than most.

"What are you worrying about, Ah Yun? Do you think my brother would hurt me?" Emperor Peerless's eyes glittered with enthusiasm. He rubbed his hands incessantly, breaking out into embarrassed laughter. "Actually, I was thinking your present to me is somewhat undeserving. Receiving something so precious out of the blue is... well, you know, it flusters me a little. There's so many other great emperors here in Veluriyam Capital..."

"I know there are many great emperors here in Veluriyam Capital, old brother, but not everyone is compatible with the kunpeng bloodline. Speed is already your strong suit, and you don't currently have any bloodlines that conflict. That's why this bloodline is most appropriate for you."

Jiang Chen had also considered giving the kunpeng bloodline to Emperor Coiling Dragon or Emperor Void. But after careful contemplation, he thought that it wasn't a good idea for the time being.

Of the three drops of kunpeng blood, one had been given to Emperor Peafowl. He was the man most compatible with the bloodline. Deliberation caused Jiang Chen to gift the second to Emperor Peerless. Recruiting a wandering great emperor to his side meant a wealth of hidden benefits, given the man's prominence in the wandering cultivator community.

As for the third, Jiang Chen hadn't yet settled on the best recipient for it. Emperor Coiling Dragon definitely didn't need it. The Coiling Dragon Clan possessed a true dragon bloodline

already, the only problem being its excessive dilution. That was why Jiang Chen had given the true dragon blood to young master Ji San. Having assimilated the true dragon blood, his friend's new potential in martial dao was nothing short of monstrous.

"Little brother," Emperor Peerless's eyes shone with a keen light. He stared at Jiang Chen with great sincerity. "You're giving me a tremendous opportunity that I cannot honestly refuse. I would like to ask you one thing only. Once you've given me the kunpeng blood, what will you do for yourself?"

If Jiang Chen had been unwilling to use the only drop of kunpeng blood on himself, then Emperor Peerless couldn't accept it no matter his personal eagerness. This was a principle that he lived by.

"Don't worry about me, Old Brother Mo," smiled Jiang Chen. "Why would I give this drop of kunpeng blood to you if I didn't have something of my own?"

"Oh? Are you saying that you have an opportunity to break through to empyrean realm as well?" Emperor Peerless's eyes became even brighter.

Jiang Chen decided not to hold back. The old emperor was an intimate friend and they needed a morale boost. "Even if I don't use the kunpeng blood, there is no question that I will become an empyrean cultivator one day," declared Jiang Chen confidently.

"Well said!"

Emperor Peerless slapped his thigh, roaring with laughter. "Worthy words from my equally worthy brother. That's the confidence I like to hear!"

Jiang Chen's poise had won him over.

"To dwell further on this would be duplicitous of me. I'll take the kunpeng bloodline, and with it, a record of your great kindness." The rims of the emperor's eyes reddened in passion.

For the past several millennia, everyone in the human domain knew that emperor realm was about the highest extents that cultivation could reach. Occasionally, news of time-worn great emperors' disappearances would arise. According to rumor, they had ascended to empyrean and gone elsewhere. However, Emperor Peerless didn't personally know whether there were empyrean experts in the world. In fact, he had no idea whether he could break through at all.

After all, he was just a wandering cultivator, not a member of a sprawling faction. Experts who were part of the strongest sects often contained reclusive great emperors who would eventually leave clues about empyrean realm behind them.

Emperor Peerless had no way of obtaining anything of the sort. An opportunity from Jiang Chen to ascend to empyrean realm was something he simply could not refuse. Deep down, he didn't want to.

"Old Brother Mo, there's no need for such talk between us brothers. When you become an empyrean expert one day, I too will bask in shared honor."

"May things turn out just as you say," chuckled the emperor.

Walking over with a serious stride, Madame Yun gave Jiang Chen a formal curtsy. "Good brother, I would like to genuinely thank you. Brother Mo making the acquaintance of a brother like you is one of the greatest blessings in his life."

"You are too kind, sister-in-law. I'm not deserving of such lofty praise. In terms of blessings, you should be counted far greater than me. Isn't that right, Old Brother Mo?"

"Slick words from a slick fellow," chortled Emperor Peerless. "Still, meeting a brother as noble as you has definitely made my life worthwhile."

"Then you should devote yourselves even more to our good

brother's affairs," Madame Yun followed seamlessly.

"Hey! I've always been devoted," objected the emperor, rather innocently.

Jiang Chen hadn't worried about Mo Wushuang's lack of devotion even without the gift, but with it, there was no doubt that the old emperor would become even closer to him.

……

Within Emperor Shura's retreat, there was a different sight.

"Fellow daoist, the first wave of vassals for the meeting should reach the capital around tomorrow." Emperor Vastsea was one of Emperor Shura's staunchest allies.

"Very good." Emperor Shura inclined his head. His recent high spirits were written on his face. There was no hint of the depression from before.

The past few years had gone very poorly for the emperor. The Majestic Clan that he'd relied so heavily upon had been randomly arbitrarily taken out, the entire clan sentenced to death. At the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering, several of his most intimate disciples had been outshone in the trials. Though the rankings that they'd ended with had been spectacularly high, others had stolen all of their thunder in the nine obelisks' test.

Most importantly, the outside world had all guessed that Emperor Peafowl would slowly transition him in as the next ruler of Veluriyam Capital after young lord Fan's death. But out of the blue came a young lord Zhen, who was made heir almost on the spot, extinguishing his ambitions in an instant.

All of his loss had been due to one person: young lord Zhen!

That young man's abrupt rise into the spotlight had caused Emperor Shura and his faction to meet with a string of bad luck. Thankfully, all that was in the past now. Emperor Shura was ready to turn the tides. The Vassal Meeting was going to be the moment

that he would obtain full formal control over the city!

“Vastsea, is there any recent news from Sacred Peafowl Mountain?” The emperor turned his head, glancing askance at his junior peer.

“Heh, the Sacred Peafowl Mountain has mostly kept its head down. Taiyuan Tower being suppressed didn’t get anyone from them to come out. I think that young lord Zhen is either afraid or absent,” chuckled Vastsea.

“Absent?” Emperor Shura furrowed his brow. He was disappointed rather than pleased that the young lord wasn’t around.

Without him, the emperor wasn’t able to straightforwardly secure authority over the city. After all, Emperor Peafowl still ruled over Veluriyam Capital in name. In his absence, young lord Zhen would be the most proper successor.

If Emperor Shura wanted to seize the throne, the easiest way to do so would be for him to show his dominance over young lord Zhen in every respect. There could be no complaints from the other party then. But, if young lord Zhen wasn’t around, then there was a flaw in his takeover.

It was possible for young lord Zhen to one day overthrow him upon the former’s return. With the Progeny Feather Medallion in hand, Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s heir could convene a Vassal Meeting just as easily as he had.

“It doesn’t matter whether he’s here, fellow daoist. We will absolutely seize control of Veluriyam Capital this time. What will the current Sacred Peafowl Mountain fight you with?” Emperor Vastsea was much more optimistic.

“Vastsea, you’ve done a great deal for me in this. When my seat on the throne is secure, the spot of the second great emperor will be yours,” promised Emperor Shura.

A spark of enthusiasm flashed across Emperor Vastsea's eyes. "I'm just worried that Emperor Petalpluck won't agree to it."

He was ignoring Sacred Peafowl Mountain entirely.

"When we have absolute command over the situation here, none of this will be a problem." Emperor Shura waved a hand. "Right, did you happen to find any clues about what happened at that pill store last time?"

The mention of the incident troubled Emperor Vastsea. "Not yet. The person involved came and went with equal speed. He left no clues at all. Fellow daoist, do you think there will be any aftershocks from it?"

"Sigh. Pillfire City sent the people involved with the store. They haven't made any demands of me yet, but I'm concerned that there'll be problems down the line." Emperor Shura frowned.

Chapter 1189: The Vassal Meeting

The convention of the Vassal Meeting livened up Veluriyam Capital significantly. Because of the arrival of kings and lords from everywhere, the city bustled with activity. Thirteen great nations, eight hundred cities, and all their associated retinues... all in all, a hundred thousand newcomers were slated to arrive.

Veluriyam Capital had no problem housing an additional hundred thousand. In fact, it could do so rather easily. Each vassal had his own background and patron. From them, Emperor Peafowl had personally cultivated at least a third. These people bore tremendous goodwill towards Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Because Emperor Peafowl had always been the foremost great emperor of Veluriyam for as long as anyone could remember, the kings and lords made visiting Sacred Peafowl Mountain the first order of their affairs upon arrival.

They had all heard about the rumors, of course. The vassals owing their positions to the emperor especially wanted to find out more once they were there. However, they heard another piece of news as soon as they entered the city's gates. Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord Zhen was in residence at Vermilion Bird Avenue's Taiyuan Tower.

"Has everyone heard? Young lord Zhen is back!"

"What? Weren't there rumors that young lord Zhen disappeared as well? Is he back, then?"

"Yes. The young lord has also announced that Emperor Peafowl isn't lost."

"Fantastic news! I mean, who under the heavens can kill an expert like Emperor Peafowl? I never believed the idle gossip about his death!"

"Exactly so. Only with Emperor Peafowl around can Veluriyam

Capital maintain stability. No one can replace a man of his greatness in our great capital!”

“Shh, brother. You can’t say that too loudly around here. Don’t risk angering the wrong people.”

“Hmph, I’m not scared of anybody. Emperor Peafowl is the only one I’ll recognize. Even if he’s not around any more, I’d rather support young lord Zhen.”

“But… young lord Zhen is still young.”

“So what if he is? Youth isn’t correlated with ambition. Young lord Zhen has done many amazing things despite his age. Meanwhile, some people have lived several thousand years without doing much. How has Veluriyam Capital benefited? Can you give me some examples?”

These words were pointed directly at Emperor Shura’s lack of contribution towards the city. To be fair to the man, the emperor had lived beneath Emperor Peafowl’s shadow for a long time. He had done his share of work for the city’s benefit, but Emperor Peafowl’s own radiance dwarfed them into insignificance. It was quite likely that his influence over Veluriyam Capital couldn’t match young lord Zhen’s, despite the young man’s very recent ascension to prominence.

“Eh. You can’t talk like that. If tragedy really has befallen Emperor Peafowl, then the city needs someone to take the reins. Young lord Zhen is extremely young, after all. He would have trouble maintaining unity. How would he be able to shoulder the burden of running the entire Veluriyam Capital?”

“So what if he’s young? Everyone is young once. Even Emperor Peafowl at his age would have a hard time being compared to our current young lord. As long as he has appropriate advisors, he’ll have a good grasp of things within a hundred years.”

“But can Veluriyam Capital wait that long? The Upper Eight

Regions has some cutthroat competition. If you show the tiniest bit of indiscretion, you could be very well be consumed. Plus, a few centuries of transition with Emperor Shura could do the city some good. When young lord Zhen really grows up, it's quite possible the rule will return to him."

"That's absurd. Would you want to give up the throne once you've gotten a taste of power? Would anyone abdicate willingly?"

"So according to you, an internal struggle here in the capital is inevitable?"

"That depends on whether certain people can control their ambitions. At the heart of it, Veluriyam Capital belongs to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. That's been the tradition here for three thousand years."

There was plenty of chaotic discussion in the streets. Some supported young lord Zhen, others, Emperor Shura. The vassals who'd been hand-picked by Emperor Peafowl felt a certain degree of increased assurance when they heard about young lord Zhen's presence in Taiyuan Tower.

Their journey had been filled with worries. Just like everyone else, they'd heard of the rumor about Emperor Peafowl's fall and young lord Zhen's absence from the city. Such words were deeply unsettling to them. Clearly, the Vassal Meeting was being convened so that Emperor Shura could seize power.

Since they had been chosen by Emperor Peafowl personally, they were quite loyal to the man. None of them was willing to see Emperor Shura in power. Once that happened, they would be removed sooner or later as loyalists to the previous ruler. This wasn't paranoid conjecture, but grim certainty. Therefore, they were extremely unhappy about the prospect of someone different at the helm.

But what did their feelings matter, in the absence of both Sacred Peafowl Mountain's emperor and young lord? Without someone in

their corner, they had no room to speak up even if they wanted to voice their opposition.

Young lord Zhen's return to the city bolstered their gloomy spirits. Though they wanted Emperor Peafowl more, his designated heir wasn't a bad second option. The young lord's renown in the city rivaled any of the titled great emperors. In fact, he had likely done more notable things for the city than most of them. His battle with Pill King Ji Lang alone gave him irreplaceable prestige. As it should, given the unprecedented nature of the victory.

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Within Taiyuan Tower, Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void handed Jiang Chen a list of names.

"Young lord Zhen, this list should be comprehensive for the most part. There may be one or two omissions, but not more than that. Everyone here was hand-picked by Emperor Peafowl to their positions. There is no way they would support Emperor Shura."

"But even so, we must take care that he does not win them over." Emperor Void piped up afterwards.

"Oh, there's no doubt that he's going to try. But people look out for their self-interests and those that convert will be relatively few. Plus, Emperor Peafowl has always had a keen eye for men of quality." Emperor Coiling Dragon laughed.

Jiang Chen glanced at the paper. It was a lengthy list of roughly three hundred names long.

"His Majesty promoted based solely on merit. There's no incompetence mixed in," Cloudsoar Monarch cut in.

"Of course. I trust His Majesty implicitly. Still, anyone that turns to Emperor Shura under the current climate is understandable." Jiang Chen placed the list down slowly; he heard the beginnings of a report from outside. "Young lord, the king of Bluesky Nation is

asking for an audience."

Bluesky Nation? The young man recalled at once his trip to the Prancing Horse Inn. He'd also been to the nation's capital, Goldtower City. In fact, he had invaded the nation's royal palace.

"Granted."

The king of Bluesky Nation strode inside, an entourage of six trailing behind him. Four of them were guardsmen, but Jiang Chen was familiar with the remaining two. One was the nation's crown prince, and the other, his tutor.

Walking behind his father, the crown prince appeared mildly embarrassed. Clearly, he was reminded of certain past events as well. His thoughts ran uncomfortably around.

"Greetings to young lord Zhen. I am Li Chunyu, the king of Bluesky Nation. Here is my son, Li Mai." Bluesky's king bore himself in a remarkably kingly manner.

His son came forward at his father's introduction, respectfully saluting to Jiang Chen. "My humble greetings, young lord Zhen."

The young man addressed laughed in response, rather cheerfully. "How have you been, Crown Prince Li Mai?"

Li Mai was stunned by the reaction. "Young lord, you…"

"I was busy with other affairs on my visit to Bluesky Nation," smiled Jiang Chen. "It was somewhat disrespectful of me not to have visited its king."

As the nation's king, Li Chunyu knew a great deal about the goings-on of his demesne. Of course he was informed about Jiang Chen's visit to both Goldtower City and his palace. However, as long as the young man didn't mention it himself, he couldn't either as a member of a subject nation. But, since Jiang Chen was the one who had broached the subject, there was nothing more to worry about.

“My son made a few remarks about your visit, young lord. It is we who must apologize for our insufficient graciousness. We hear stories almost daily about your exploits back home in Bluesky Nation. Your incredible dual masteries of both pill and martial dao is unrivaled. Even the insufferably proud Pillfire City has suffered numerous defeats at your hand. My son still regales me about seeing your marvelous pill dao skills in person.”

“You are too kind, my good king. Back then, I mentioned that Taiyuan Tower would be able to supply Bluesky Nation with Tiger Eruption Pills. How is that going? Were you able to receive the pills alright?” Jiang Chen asked.

“Ah, yes, yes. We received the pills, no problem,” replied the king hurriedly. “There have been several shipments of them already. That aside... ever since he saw your pill artistry, young lord, my son has dwelled on it day and night. That’s why he absolutely begged me to take him along for the Vassal Meeting–so that he could meet you again.”

Prince Li Mai welled up with devotion. “Young lord Zhen, I’m from a small-time place. In Goldtower City, the best pill masters we have are pill kings barely over the threshold of high rank. I... I wanted to beseech you to allow me to stay here in Taiyuan Tower. I would be happy just to work as an apprentice!”

As a youth engrossed in pill dao, Li Mai wholeheartedly worshiped young lord Zhen.

“What do you think, King Li?” Jiang Chen glanced at the young man’s father.

“If you will have him, young lord,” answered the king. “It would be his greatest honor, a once-in-a-lifetime blessing. He should consider himself truly lucky to be allowed to stay.”

“You two are father and son, alright,” the young lord chuckled. “The words that come from your lips are equally sweet. I have observed Li Mai’s enthusiasm about pill dao. It’s rare for a large

nation's crown prince to refine pills in the royal palace. If he is sure about his decision, then he may stay. I will teach him myself if I have the time, and my best disciples can take my place otherwise. Do not worry, Your Majesty. Sacred Peafowl Mountain will return to you a pill expert of a prince!"

This wasn't idle boasting on Jiang Chen's part. He was a veritable miracle worker when it came to pill dao. Plus, it wasn't like Li Mai was dull or untalented. As the crown prince, he was both gifted and resourceful–certainly more than a match for the typical scion of a great clan.

Chapter 1190: The Shocking Appearance of the Pinecrane Pill

As king of Bluesky Nation, Li Chunyu naturally didn't lack perception or wits. Taiyuan Tower and Sacred Peafowl Mountain might seem closely related, but their differences couldn't be bigger. They'd asked for an apprenticeship for Li Mai at Taiyuan Tower, but young lord Zhen promised that the Sacred Peafowl Mountain would train the prince into a pill dao extraordinaire instead.

Young lord Zhen was expressing his fullest sincerity in offering to develop Li Mai's talents using Sacred Peafowl Mountain's resources, instead of abandoning the crown prince at Taiyuan Tower. Taiyuan Tower was very excellent, but it was merely a pill shop in the end. Even though young lord Zhen was closely associated with the shop, it'd been a while since he even set foot in its premises.

Being invited to Sacred Peafowl Mountain was a completely different ballgame. Li Mai would receive personal pointers from young lord Zhen and be taught by the young lord's true disciples! The royal duo were very aware who the young lord's true disciples were. Pill King Bu and Pill King Lu Feng were some of the best ninth rank pill kings in Veluriyam Capital. The young Lin Yanyu was rumored to be an extremely talented pill dao genius as well. Li Mai would never be mediocre if he could learn from these elites.

"Young lord Zhen, the kindness you've shown to us is undeserved. The Li clan of Bluesky Nation swears completely allegiance and fealty to you. Emperor Peafowl raised me into my power, and now you've done the same for my son. Even if our bones are ground into dust, the Li Clan solemnly swears to repay this debt of gratitude!"

This was a proclamation of his allegiance to Jiang Chen. The

Bluesky Nation was ranked top three amongst Veluriyam Capital's thirteen nations. Guarding the capital's borders, they were one of the most influential nations.

Emperor Void broke his silence with a laugh. "Brother Chunyu, I knew that Daoist Peafowl helped you into power. You've done well over the years. My brother's efforts hadn't been in vain."

Li Chunyu naturally recognized Emperor Void. "I'm ashamed. There's plenty I have to improve on."

Emperor Coiling Dragon laughed. "Us old fools no longer have any pointers to give, but the things Prince Li Mai can learn from young lord Zhen will be useful for the rest of his life. I'm not exaggerating one bit. To be frank, the reason I'm still alive and well today is all thanks to the young lord."

When Emperor Coiling Dragon was still a great clan lord, he'd exhausted his lifespan and was on the verge of death. Many speculated that the Coiling Dragon Clan's days were numbered. Even the emperor himself had lost hope and had begun to pave the way for the clan's future generations.

However, young lord Zhen's sudden appearance had changed his fate forever. Thus, his loyalty to the Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Jiang Chen was unrivalled. He hadn't told a single soul about the incident, but he could no longer contain the impulse anymore.

The crowd stared at him curiously, to which he responded by giving Jiang Chen a cupped fist salute.

"Young lord Zhen, there are some matters which you've ordered me not to disclose, but I believe there's no longer a need to hide it. Everyone, my lifespan once neared its end and I was on the verge of cultivation dissipation. However, young lord Zhen suddenly appeared out of nowhere and extended my life by a few more years with a secret art. After some fortuitous encounters, I finally obtained some exotic spirit herbs and treasures that further extended my lifespan and gave me a chance to break through the

great emperor realm. The young lord gave me a new lease in life. Without him, I'd be a bag of buried bones right now and wouldn't be here talking to all of you."

It was the first time Emperor Void had heard of this as well.

"Daoist Coiling Dragon, I hadn't known." Emperor Void was extremely flabbergasted. "Does young lord Zhen truly possess a lifespan extending art?"

Jiang Chen laughed. "It was a secret art that I received during a fortuitous encounter. It can only extend one's life by a few years. Didn't you hear what Emperor Coiling Dragon said? His lifespan was only further extended due to exotic spirit herbs and treasures."

He was wondering if he should tell everyone about the Pinecrane Pill. There wasn't much of a reason to keep it a secret any longer. In fact, revealing it to everyone might even benefit him. Every bit of fame was incredibly important right now.

Emperor Void displayed great interest. "Such treasures are as scarce as a hen's teeth! Brother Coiling Dragon, forgive me if I overstep my boundaries, but what exactly is this treasure that can extend one's lifespan?"

Rare treasures that extended one's lifespan really did exist and could be found on every plane. Such spirit herbs were actually a common sight in the heavenly planes. For example, a bite of a fruit from the Heavenly Peach Tree that took three thousand years to bloom, three thousand years to bear fruit, and three more thousand years to ripen would yield tens of thousands more years of life.

Another exotic herb called the Ginseng Fruit would also yield similar results. These kinds of treasures were less common in the secular world, but they definitely existed.

At the same time, they were a lot less effective and often yielded

only dozens or hundreds of years worth of lifespan. It was practically impossible to find one that could yield five hundred more years, which was why Emperor Void was so excited.

Emperor Coiling Dragon glanced at Jiang Chen and laughed. “It’s better if we leave this topic for the future.”

Without Jiang Chen’s consent, the emperor would never tell a soul about the pill. He’d solemnly promised to keep it a secret after all. The emperor was clearly trying to improve Jiang Chen’s prestige.

“Actually, it’s not an exotic herb or treasure. I’ve merely refined two treasures into a pill that extends one’s life.” Jiang Chen said with a smile.

“A pill? The Longevity Pill?” Emperor Void asked curiously.

“No, not the Longevity Pill.” Jiang Chen shook his head. “That pill is only suitable for sage realm cultivators. The pill I’m talking about is called the Pinecrane Pill. It’s only suitable for emperor realm cultivators. Great emperors may consume it too, but its effects will be greatly reduced.

The Pinecrane Pill! The name of the pill left a deep impression in Emperor Void’s heart. The convoy of six from Bluesky Nation were completely flabbergasted by the conversation and remained slack jawed for the longest time.

“There’s actually such a miraculous pill in this world?” Li Chunyu murmured. “Young lord Zhen’s talent in pill dao truly knows no bounds! You’re a pill savant indeed!”

A look of worship flashed across Li Mai’s face. He was practically taking Jiang Chen for a god.

Li Chunyu glanced at his subordinates sternly. “Everything you hear today must remain in this room! You’re not to spread news of this to anyone! Understood?!”

He was being extremely cautious, but since Jiang Chen had

talked about the Pinecrane Pill, that meant the young lord no longer cared if it was publicly known. There was no longer a need to keep it a secret.

He'd also gifted it to Third Master Jing and Gu Xintang at the Tilted Moon Region. Attempting to keep the pill a secret under such circumstances was a little counterintuitive. Jiang Chen smiled. "King Chunyu, you needn't be so nervous. It doesn't matter if news of it spreads."

It was merely the name of the pill anyways. Even if the ingredient list were to spread, not every Wang, Chen, and Lin could actually refine such a pill. It took a great amount of knowledge to actually achieve such a feat.

"The Pinecrane... Pill. That's wonderful!" Emperor Void slapped his thigh. "Isn't the pill an enormous asset to Sacred Peafowl Mountain?"

Emperor Void was very farsighted. He believed that the Pinecrane Pill would be a huge asset to the sacred mountain. Those who planned on joining Emperor Shura's side would definitely have to think twice now. Were they really going to choose Emperor Shura over a pill dao savant like young lord Zhen? What could the emperor possibly bring to the table for Veluriyam Capital?

Young lord Zhen's miraculous achievements were proof of what he could bring to the capital. He was the capital's only hope of ever defeating Pillfire City and becoming the foremost pill dao faction in the Upper Eight Regions.

Emperor Shura was strong, but he was rather mediocre when compared to the rest of the Upper Eight Regions. He wasn't an overwhelmingly powerful individual like Emperor Peafowl.

There was a scale in everyone's hearts that they were using to weigh the pros and cons.

Emperor Coiling Dragon slapped his thighs with elation. “That's right! Why didn't I think of that sooner? Daoist Void, why don't we immediately spread news about the Pinecrane Pill?”

Emperor Void smiled. “As we should.”

Emperor Peerless had sat beside Jiang Chen throughout the ordeal without saying a word. As a guest and Jiang Chen's bodyguard, he didn't want to stand out. But he couldn't help but speak out after hearing the exchange between the other two great emperors. “Fellow daoists, do you mind if I add a word or two?”

Emperor Peerless was widely revered throughout the Upper Eight Regions. He wasn't on the same level as Emperor Peafowl or Emperor Pill Zenith yet, but he definitely belonged in the upper echelon.

Emperor Void and Emperor Coiling Dragon was more than glad to have him as Jiang Chen's guest and bodyguard and naturally wouldn't stop him from speaking.

“Absolutely! We wait with bated breath!” Emperor Coiling Dragon broke into a hearty laugh.

“Brother Mo, please speak your mind.” Emperor Void nodded.

Emperor Peerless nodded without any reserve. “Maybe you've heard about me before. My cultivation isn't exceptional, but I have ambitions of my own. So why do I willingly serve as younger brother Zhen’s guest?”

Why?

Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void were incredibly curious, but not as much as King Li Chunyu. They'd heard some rumors, but the actual facts had eluded them. Since Emperor Peerless had volunteered to talk about it, they would naturally listen with ears wide open.

“The reason is very simple. Not only has young lord Zhen saved my life, but also my dao partner as well. I owe him two lives. The

very thing that saved my dao partner was the Pinecrane Pill. I saw the pill work its magic with my very own eyes. Many in the Upper Eight Regions should know about my dao partner's injuries. I believe that everyone also knows I scoured the region for a thousand years to find a cure. And now, my dao partner is now fully cured without any side effects. Isn't the Pinecrane Pill simply miraculous?"

The Pinecrane Pill saved the life of Emperor Peerless' dao partner?

The crowd could no longer keep their calm. They figured that there was a reason behind Emperor Peerless' complete devotion to young lord Zhen, but they were still surprised by the truth.

Chapter 1191: Emperor Peafowls Whereabouts

The atmosphere suddenly froze. A long moment later, Emperor Void finally let out a long sigh.

“Unimaginable, truly unimaginable! To think that Pill King Zhen’s pill dao fortunes are this extraordinary. Everyone in Veluriyam Capital would be blind to give up such a genius. Alright, I will support young lord Zhen for as long as I, Void, am still in Veluriyam Capital. No one, whatever their ambitions may be, shall harm young lord Zhen while I still draw breath.”

Emperor Void had finally voiced his official support.

“Hehe, you’re not going to count the Coiling Dragon faction out, are you?” Emperor Coiling Dragon declared heroically. “Maybe there are others who thought that we’re supporting him out of either selfishness or past favors, but they don’t know that our decision is made out of consideration for Veluriyam Capital’s future as well. I’ve always believed that Veluriyam Capital will be brought to greater heights in young lord Zhen’s hands. This is also something Emperor Peafowl himself declared back when he was around.”

“That’s right. Who else but young lord Zhen could win such praise from Emperor Peafowl?” Emperor Void also nodded.

Of course, the king of Bluesky Nation was aware that their show was meant for him.

“Your Majesties, Chunyu may be weak, but I also know the saying that one should repay a favor many times over. I owe both Emperor Peafowl and young lord Zhen many favors, so of course I and Bluesky Nation swear to defend the orthodoxy of Sacred Peafowl Mountain to the very end!”

Emperor Peerless chuckled. “Well, I owe young lord Zhen my

life, twice over. Of course I'm going to support him with all I've got."

The four monarchs also seized the opportunity to declare, "We, the four monarchs, swear to defend Sacred Peafowl Mountain's honor and young lord Zhen's position to our deaths!"

They were beyond words right now. They were no fools; they knew what the Pinecrane Pill represented.

The human heart could be a very materialistic thing sometimes. Prior fame and contribution became quite flimsy when viewed through the lens of reality and one's own interest. Many might admire young lord Zhen deeply and be sympathetic to his plight out of everything he'd done, but when push came to shove, they might not necessarily support him.

After all, any normal person would choose to support a great emperor who had made his name for the past thousand years over a new young lord. Such was reality. A great emperor's strength and power were his dominant advantage.

However, "profit" was equally present in the world, and it was just as decisive as the other factors. It might not be possible to equate Pinecrane Pills with actual profit just yet, but who wouldn't want such an amazing pill for themselves?

Right now, they had to choose a side. If they chose to join Emperor Shura and offended young lord Zhen as a result, they wouldn't be able to change their minds later. It would be a pipe dream to think that young lord Zhen would give them a Pinecrane Pill in any capacity after that.

The four monarchs were careful thinkers. It didn't take them long to realize that the Pinecrane Pill commanded tremendous strategic value in the upcoming Vassal Meeting.

At the beginning, they'd thought that young lord Zhen only had a ten to twenty percent chance to beat Emperor Shura in the

upcoming Vassal Meeting. But after the Pinecrane Pill was factored into the equation, his chances of winning had ballooned to at least thirty to forty percent. It delighted them just thinking about it.

“A few vassals have arrived and are requesting to see you, young lord.”

“The vassals of the Seven Southern Cities have requested to see you, young lord.”

“Young lord…”

All of the kings and city lords would be arriving in a few days’ time. Naturally, those who came to them first were those who had been personally promoted by Emperor Peafowl. As the line of visitors streamed continuously into the store, Taiyuan Tower’s atmosphere grew lively. The four monarchs felt warmth grow in their hearts as they watched the stream of vassals coming to pay homage. They berated themselves for underestimating Emperor Peafowl and young lord Zhen’s charisma.

A long time ago, Emperor Peafowl had gone against many opposing voices and promoted these people to importance. Naturally, they hadn’t forgotten the kindness the great emperor showed them. As the saying went, strong winds prove resilient grass, and troubled times identify faithful ministers.

Those who had rushed over to visit young lord Zhen were reliable. Of course, it was entirely possible that there might be a spy or two in this crowd who had secretly joined Emperor Shura’s side. They were here to spy and report back to the great emperor everything they knew, and it was impossible for the four monarchs to identify them. Still, the vast majority of the visitors had to be Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s supporters.

Taiyuan Tower had made all sorts of preparations and had no problems welcoming the guests. Moreover, Emperor Coiling Dragon had opened his former residence to the public so as to add to the accomodations. All of this was sending a clear message that

Sacred Peafowl Mountain didn't plan to give up just like that.

Of course, news of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's popularity had reached Emperor Shura's ears at first light.

"A lot of people rushed to meet young lord Zhen, you say?" Emperor Shura looked a little displeased. "They have no understanding of the times, I see."

Emperor Shura had greeted, hinted and even openly invited all these people to join him. Unfortunately, very few had actually accepted the olive branch he offered.

Traitors were few in the world of martial dao. Most hadn't forgotten their pride as a cultivator, and they weren't stupid either. They couldn't tell if the olive branch Emperor Shura offered them was just a temporary measure. What if he turned against them after he came into a position of power? It was something they couldn't simply overlook.

Emperor Vastsea sneered. "These people were all done a favor by Emperor Peafowl in the past. According to my calculation, they number less than a third of the total, after deducting those we managed to pull to our side. Therefore, they are utterly incapable of overcoming you, brother."

Emperor Shura snorted coldly. "Veluriyam Capital stinks too much of a certain person right now. If we don't cleanse this city of his mark, we will never be able to break out of our shell and breathe some fresh air."

Naturally, the person Emperor Shura was referring to was Emperor Peafowl. He was right too. Emperor Peafowl's image in Veluriyam Capital was too strong. The great emperor's handiwork could be seen almost everywhere in the city. Emperor Shura had encountered a lot of friction when he attempted to spread his fame and power. Even he admitted that Emperor Peafowl was a tall mountain to overcome.

“He’s not coming back though, hahaha!” Emperor Vastsea looked and sounded very pleased as he said this.

“Mm.” Emperor Shura nodded. “All in all, we executed this rather cleanly. Had we failed, we would’ve had to live under his shadow for the rest of our lives.”

“Are you absolutely certain he’s not coming back, brother daoist? There is no room for carelessness here.” Emperor Vastsea still sounded a little uncertain.

“There were a lot of experts who contributed in the ambush. There will be no problems.” A trace of ruthlessness flashed through Emperor Shura’s eyes.

“But no one saw his corpse, did they?” Although Emperor Vastsea was full of hatred when Emperor Peafowl was brought up, it wasn’t without a trace of fear.

“He was attacked by multiple great emperors and had to escape with severe wounds. Unfortunately for him, the place he chose to escape to was the desolate wildlands. Do you think he can come out of there alive with his level of injuries?” Emperor Shura responded coldly.

“I wouldn’t worry if he was anyone else, but he’s Emperor Peafowl… I don’t know why, but I can’t help but feel unsettled for some reason.”“What are you worried about? Emperor Pillzenith told me personally that even he wouldn’t have been able to recover from those kind of wounds unless a pill emperor healed him on the spot. Even then, his chances of surviving was only one in a hundred, not to mention that he fled into the land of sealed demons. He may be powerful, but do you really think he’s more powerful than Emperor Pillzenith?” Emperor Shura asked coldly.

“I think… they’re at about the same level, aren’t they?”

“Even if they are, Emperor Pillzenith himself said that he wouldn’t be able to recover from those wounds. Do you think that

he's better than Emperor Pillzenith in terms of pill dao? There's no doubt who's the inferior one in this regard!"

"Then I guess he really isn't coming back." Emperor Vastsea slowly relaxed. "Still, I think we should visit the desolate wildlands when the time is right. I would much prefer confirm this with my own eyes."

But Emperor Shura waved his hands. "There's no need. Even if he does manage to return from that place, there's no way he can recover from his wounds, and his cultivation would've fallen off greatly. Even better, he has nothing that could prove our involvement in this matter. Do you think the people would still obey his every whim if he becomes much weaker?"

The strong was king in the martial dao world.

No matter how powerful Emperor Peafowl used to be, it was law that he had to give up his position if his cultivation weakened. There was no such thing as a middle ground here. Maybe the populace would still respect a weakened Emperor Peafowl like they used to in the past, but they would never entrust their lives to him.

Emperor Vastsea began to chuckle. "Then all is well. The way you put it, I'm actually looking forward to him returning, brother."

"Why?" Emperor Shura frowned.

"Just think. What does it mean if his cultivation declines greatly? He will be a tiger without claws or teeth! I so want to see his sorry look!" For whatever reason, Emperor Vastsea seemed to hate Emperor Peafowl to the bone. Maybe it was because the latter's presence had prevented him from exercising his ambitions].

"Hehe, I understand what you mean, but it's not going to be easy in Veluriyam Capital. He is prestigious. We may be able to strip him of his position, but the people of Veluriyam Capital won't allow us to ridicule him."

“Hehe, of course I’m not going to do that in front of everyone. Still, I want to see him in tatters and low spirits. Say, what was the that poison Emperor Pillzenith used? How powerful it must be to prevent Emperor Peafowl’s cultivation from recovering!”

“This isn’t something you and I should worry about.” Emperor Shura said coldly. He truly didn’t want to discuss Emperor Pillzenith in any capacity because he was worried over whether his decision to ally with his enemy was correct or not. Emperor Peafowl had been eliminated from the board, but if Emperor Pillzenith decided to make a move and plunge his hands into Veluriyam Capital, he would be hardly be able to mount a resistance.

There was a saying called “to quench one’s thirst with blood”. His current situation was similar to that. He was so thirsty he couldn’t stop himself from drinking poison to quench it.

“Your Majesty, the vassals have all been settled accordingly. Everyone is gathered in one place and are waiting for you to see them.” Another reported to Emperor Shura.

Chapter 1192: Jiang Chens Allies

Emperor Shura had made many preparations over the years for taking over the throne. The waylaying of Emperor Peafowl was without question, the most important. Aside from this, he had also expended a significant amount of effort on buying the hearts of the capital's vassals. The ones waiting here for his reception today comprised of almost half of the total. This was a concerningly large portion.

Only a short while ago, Emperor Shura was still only Veluriyam's third emperor in name. Above him wasn't only the lofty Emperor Peafowl, but Emperor Petalpluck as well. To have gathered almost half the city's vassals to his side was an alarming accomplishment, the greatest guarantee for his work.

If he expended just a bit more effort, he would surely be able to win a few more over. Then, it wouldn't matter if the rest remained neutral. As long as the number of vassals supporting him exceeded those that did Sacred Peafowl Mountain, he could rightfully become the foremost emperor of Veluriyam Capital. The sovereign throne would be finally his.

The news of the numerous visitors at Emperor Shura's side travelled quickly to Taiyuan Tower and into Jiang Chen's ears. It was the last three days before the Vassal Meeting formally began. Competition for people was growing all the fiercer.

"Young lord, those people are merely attempting to curry favor. I don't think that all of them are particularly loyal to Emperor Shura. He has grasped less than half of the vassals after exhausting his methods. That alone shows the extent of general dislike of him. If Emperor Peafowl were still here, who of the roughly nine hundred vassals would dare misbehave? Would they disagree about anything he did?"

"That's right, young lord Zhen. Emperor Shura's forces look

intimidating, but it also exposes his lack of control over them. His roots are too shallow in the end."

"If we can win over all the neutral ones, perhaps we will surpass Emperor Shura in terms of popular support." There was a plethora of different voices, but most supported the idea of Jiang Chen competing with Emperor Shura for support.

The young lord of Veluriyam waved his hands, smiling. "Everyone, we can't begin competing so openly for vassals before the gathering has even begun. Besides, a battle of words at the beginning is unavoidable."

"I suppose that's true. I don't believe Emperor Shura is eloquent enough to beat young lord Zhen," grinned Emperor Coiling Dragon.

Emperor Void nodded. "Of course, we cannot ignore the other emperors' attitudes either. Young lord, the vassals are spread out widely over the entire city for the time being, but I think we should try to sway the hearts of the other emperors."

"I'm not worried about the emperors or the vassals," interjected Emperor Peerless suddenly. "I'm much more concerned about the possibility of Emperor Shura's collusion with outsiders. If that happens, then the situation will shift in very unexpected ways."

Colluding with external enemies was a very sensitive matter. Still, Emperor Peerless had stoically laid the subject out on the table.

Emperor Coiling Dragon nodded in agreement. "We cannot eliminate the possibility. We must prepare for this with certain countermeasures."

"What do you think, young lord?" asked Emperor Void.

Jiang Chen inclined his head. "I've considered it just like everyone else. A few days ago, I extended invitations to the Great Yu Skysword Sect and the Celestial Cicada Court to join us at the

Vassal Meeting as observers. I am uncertain whether the Court will come, since I've received no certain reply, but there should be no problem with the Great Yu Skysword Sect. I think the two Han sect heads should be arriving quite soon."

The two Han brothers from the Skysword Sect respected Jiang Chen immensely. They had offered immense sums to Jiang Chen to try to get him to become their guest pill emperor. The layer of amiability meant that there was no reason they wouldn't endorse Jiang Chen at such an occasion.

Jiang Chen wasn't stubborn and inflexible. He was almost certain that Emperor Shura had invited outside help. If he made no preparations whatsoever to counter that, he would be in a very passive situation. Alas, he had limited connections here in the Upper Eight Regions. He could only think of the Great Yu Skysword Sect and the Celestial Cicada Court.

Though he'd completed a formation mission for the latter party, it was up in the air whether they would return the favor. He'd used some tricks to help his cause, of course. In his message, he had made many allusions to the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's formation records in order to draw their interest.

When completing their mission, Jiang Chen had speculated whether the Celestial Cicada Court was vaguely related to the ancient sect. He'd mentioned it to Venerated Skysoarer during his time in the Veluriyam Pagoda. The old man's response had been that he should pay some attention to the sect. If a connection did exist, then it would be beneficial to reach out to them.

Jiang Chen had set the bait. Whether the Celestial Cicada Court was willing to take it, and thereby participate in Veluriyam Capital's internal feud, was wholly up to them.

The Great Yu Skysword Sect and the Celestial Cicada Court were both first rank sects in the Upper Eight Regions, and each respectively ruled over one of the regions. Their prominence was

uncontestable.

Though Jiang Chen had a sister, Xu Qingxuan, over at the Tilted Moon Region as the Moon God Sect's holy maiden, he couldn't extend an invitation to her faction. The Tilted Moon Region was a bit closer to Pillfire City. More importantly, Xu Qingxuan was only a holy maiden, not the sect's main head quite yet. Announcing a relationship now would only put her in a dilemma.

Therefore, Jiang Chen refrained from inviting anyone from there in the first place. They wouldn't answer his call in the first place, and anyone who did come would work actively against him.

Just as the Great Yu Skysword Sect was being discussed, there was a secret report that made its way in. Their timing of arrival was almost devilish.

"Young lord, the two sect heads from the Great Yu Skysword Sect have entered the city already. Should we give them a high-profile welcome, or keep them well-hidden for now?"

"Well-hidden for now," commanded Jiang Chen. "If Emperor Shura's side doesn't bring out external help, we don't need to play our card."

No matter what, having an external faction work on one's behalf was a little disgraceful. The Han brothers were only intended to serve as an additional guarantee.

The last few vassals trickled in during the last three days. Veluriyam Capital's atmosphere and situation became heavier and heavier. The occasional skirmish carried the scent of violence far and wide.

Fortunately, Jiang Chen was serious about this potential problem throughout the period. He sent the Peafowl Guard on patrol in the streets. Because Sacred Peafowl Mountain was still nominally the ruler of the city, even Emperor Shura's Guard had to yield to the Peafowl Guard.

It was too key of a time to introduce unnecessary problems. Emperor Shura was in no rush for these last few days, and instructed the Shura Guard to lay low for a while. They were instructed to stay close to the ground and avoid causing any incidents, especially with the Peafowl Guard. Any gossip right now was unwanted.

……

“Hey, did you hear?”

“What?”

“I hear there’s yet another huge piece of news from Sacred Peafowl Mountain.”

“What news?”

“Do you really not know? There’s a miracle pill called the Pinecrane Pill. It allows emperor realm cultivators to live a thousand years longer. It even works to a certain extent on great emperors!”

“How can this be? That sounds pretty baseless.” Some didn't believe what the news.

“Hmph, Sacred Peafowl Mountain has a very trustworthy reputation. They never spread fake news.”

“Perhaps it’s not from them, though. Maybe their supporters did it with ulterior motives.”

“Nonsense. What do you mean, ulterior motives? I heard that Taiyuan Tower was where it was first announced, and young lord Zhen personally confirmed it.”

“Personally confirmed? Did you hear that with your own ears or see it with your own eyes?”

“I’m not interested in wasting time arguing. For once, this rumor is backed by cold, hard truth. There’s a mountain of evidence.”

“What mountain of evidence?”

“Don’t you know about Emperor Coiling Dragon? You should still remember the Coiling Dragon Clan crisis, right? The clan lord was almost at the end of his mortal life, and was very close to having his cultivation dissipate. I think everyone in the city knew about it at the time, no?”

“What? What are you trying to say?”

“You still don’t understand? How did the lord of the Coiling Dragon Clan go from the edge of dissipation to a seat among the other great emperors? He used young lord Zhen’s Pinecrane Pill! The young lord first lengthened his life by a few years using a secret art, then learned and refined a masterful pill recipe. With something as peerless as the Pinecrane Pill, the Coiling Dragon Clan lord received another thousand years of life. His body improved, he was finally able to break through his mortal and cultivation limits to ascend as a great emperor!” The person who had related the story told it with a certain animation, as if he’d seen everything himself.

“Tsk tsk, it almost sounds real. But do you think such a thing is actually possible? An emperor realm cultivator living another thousand years? You make it sound as easy as eating and breathing! Then according to you, nobody would die of old age in the world of martial dao. If you use your brain to think about it for a bit, then you’ll come to a more reasonable conclusion!”

“What are you talking about? Are you saying I don’t have a brain?”

“Do you think you do?”

“My brain is much better than yours, you fool. You’re amazingly ignorant, but still pretend you’re all that. Hmph, don’t forget where the Longevity Pill came from. Before that came out, there was no pill that could extend the lives of sage realm cultivators. But what about now, hmm?”

“The Longevity Pill is its own thing. Sage realm cultivators are

plentiful in the human domain. There's nothing wondrous about that."

"You just don't believe in young lord Zhen, at the end of the day. It doesn't matter whether you do or not, though. His accomplishments are plain for all to see. Who defeated Pill King Ji Lang from Pillfire City? Who healed the Moon God Precious Tree in the Tilted Moon Region? Who comprehended all nine Veluriyam Obelisks within the Pagoda?" The speaker was clearly a diehard fan of Jiang Chen's. He rattled off a strong of the youth's works almost effortlessly.

Similar arguments were taking place everywhere in the city.

News about the Pinecrane Pill spread further and further in an inexorable tide. Within a day, everyone and everything in the city knew about this shocking piece of information. Even some who weren't the city's subjects had gotten wind of it.

Chapter 1193: External Forces

"What? The Pinecrane Pill?" In a secret chamber somewhere in Veluriyam Capital, Emperor Pillzenith was completely astounded by the news. He'd been involved in Veluriyam Capital's internal strife from the very beginning. Before this, he'd never have thought that Emperor Shura would voluntarily invite him to join forces against Emperor Peafowl. He simply couldn't believe that Emperor Shura could be this dumb.

In fact, he'd even suspected at first that this was a ruse by Emperor Peafowl to lure him out of Pillfire City. But after a long and thorough observation, he realized that this wasn't a setup after all. Emperor Shura really had been dropped on the head when he was a child. It was risky cavorting with the enemy, but he didn't mind taking advantage of the situation.

And so, they began to collaborate with each other. Not only that, Emperor Shura had also reached out to Eternal Celestial Capital. The three factions had joined forces against Emperor Peafowl.

Of course, the one who contributed the most was still Emperor Pillzenith. He'd taken the most powerful poison available in Pillfire City and resorted to all kinds of underhanded methods to defeat Emperor Peafowl. Even though there was no corpse, Emperor Pillzenith was absolutely certain that Emperor Peafowl was dead. Pill dao giants like him had complete faith in their poisons.

He firmly believed that Emperor Peafowl was dead. With that, his next target was Pill King Zhen. In Emperor Pillzenith's opinion, Pill King Zhen was much more annoying to deal with than Emperor Peafowl. The emperor was incredibly strong and Veluriyam Capital had flourished under his rule, but the capital was still only at the same level as Pillfire City.

Veluriyam Capital's pill dao foundation was only a fifth of Pillfire

City’s. They posed as no threat in that particular field. Unfortunately, that was ancient history now. Things were completely different with young lord Zhen’s appearance in Veluriyam Capital.

The young lord had completely slaughtered Pill King Ji Lang in the duel over the Longevity Pill. Moreover, he’d even pretended to be a pill king from Myriad Abyss Island and slipped into the city to join the Bounty Arena, completely dominating every pill king in the city.

But that wasn’t even the worst of it. When Pill King Ji Lang was driven to his wit’s end over the Moon God Precious Tree, the young lord had swooped in and solved the issue with a few words. The pill king had indisputably lost to the young lord yet again. It was an enormous blow to the proud and lofty city.

Emperor Pillzenith was concealing himself within Veluriyam Capital to help push Emperor Shura to the throne while looking for a chance to get rid of Pill King Zhen. Swallowing Veluriyam Capital whole wasn’t as easy as it seemed. Emperor Pillzenith had an enormous appetite, but not even his gluttony would induce him to do such a thing. After all, both territories were on opposite ends of the region. To swallow the capital whole, he’d have to traverse through the entire Upper Eight Regions.

Even if his appetite was really that voracious, it was unlikely that he’d be daring enough to do such a thing as the masses would be completely livid over his actions. If any of the other factions grew furious over his ambitions, they might suddenly see him as a threat and join forces to obliterate his faction. If he wanted to meddle in Veluriyam Capital’s matters, he’d have to do so from the shadows.

Besides, so long as the capital was in Emperor Shura’s hands, it would sooner or later decline into a second rate faction even without any meddling from Emperor Pillzenith. They'd no longer be on the same level as Pillfire City then. But of course, the prerequisite was that Pill King Zhen had to die and Sacred Peafowl

Mountain destroyed. It was hard to predict what could happen as long as Pill King Zhen was alive.

For some reason, Emperor Pillzenith was deathly afraid of the young pill king. The mysterious youth seemed to be capable of making the impossible, possible. Thus, his great reaction couldn't be faulted when he heard about the Pinecrane Pill. It was yet another thorn in his side.

"How on earth does he have so much knowledge? Is there no end to what he knows!?" Emperor Pillzenith exclaimed with frustration. It went without saying that Pill King Zhen had something to do the Pinecrane Pill.

"Your Majesty, we're in deep trouble if the pill is truly as miraculous as the rumors. With the pill, Veluriyam Capital could definitely deal a lethal blow to our city!"

This was no exaggeration.

The Longevity Pill's impact was negligible as it was only meant for the lowly sage ream cultivators. Their numbers were aplenty, but not a single one of them could dictate the human domain's future. However, the Pinecrane Pill worked on emperors and for some extent, great emperors! This was earth shattering news!

Equipped with unparalleled strength, this level of cultivators was the demographic that could steer the human domain's future. If everyone in this demographic flocked towards the Sacred Peafowl Mountain and formed a long term relationship to get their hands on the pill, the faction would surely expand and grow at an astounding speed!

Ten years... one hundred years... five hundred years... With the passage of time, the mountain would surely catch up to Pillfire City in pill dao.

The thought of that happening sent a cold chill down Emperor Pillzenith's spine. He'd only felt some embarrassment and rage

from loss of face after Pill King Ji Lang had lost to Pill King Zhen twice. But after learning about the Pinecrane Pill, he felt threatened as he foresaw complete and utter peril.

“The art of refining the Pinecrane Pill was said to have been passed down to Pill King Zhen from a master of unknown origins. When he was in our city, he claimed that he was from the Myriad Abyss Island. Perhaps his master is truly an empyrean pill saint from that island?”

One couldn’t blame Emperor Pillzenith for running to such conclusions. Even though he was one of the titans of the pill dao world, he couldn’t help but feel a little worthless in the face of Jiang Chen’s seemingly boundless pill dao knowledge. In fact, he’d even begun to feel ashamed of himself.

This cannot do. I must get my hands on Pill King Zhen. He’s practically an inexhaustible source of pill dao knowledge. Emperor Pillzenith was determined. If I can’t get my hands on him, then I must make sure that he dies. Sooner or later, he’ll definitely become a mortal enemy of my Pillfire City.

Emperor Pillzenith was scared. He never imagined that someone would one day threaten the very foundations of Pillfire City. He realized that city wasn’t as indestructible as he first thought. He only had that misconception because no one with the skills to challenge it had ever appeared, until now. Pill King Zhen obviously possessed that level of skill and potential.

……

The Holy Emperor of the Eternal Celestial Capital was also in the capital. A few of its holy kings met up with their emperor.

“Saint Holy King Mu, did you hear about the Pinecrane Pill during your stay in the capital?”

“No, Your Majesty. I’ve only heard about the Longevity Pill. Could this be a hoax from Sacred Peafowl Mountain?”

“This subordinate believes that it’s a hoax too. The Longevity Pill is already beyond imagination. No matter how I look at it, the Pinecrane Pill just doesn’t seem realistic.”

The holy emperor snorted. “The world is huge and full of wonders. Just a few years ago, no one thought that the Longevity Pill could possibly be real, but now everyone has accepted it as the norm. While it may be true that we haven’t seen the Pinecrane Pill in person yet, the Coiling Dragon clan lord’s story does seem plausible if you actually think about it.”

Saint Holy King Mu was caught by surprise. “Your Majesty, do you truly believe that the Pinecrane Pill is real?”

“It’s impossible to know whether it’s real or a hoax, but the Coiling Dragon clan lord’s sudden transcendance from cultivation dissipation to great emperor realm is worth a look.”

“Your Majesty speaks wisely. Perhaps the Pinecrane Pill is actually real as Pill King Zhen does seem capable of everything.”

“Pill King Zhen…” The Holy Emperor furrowed his brows. “Are you still unable to tell if that brat has anything to do with Jiang Chen yet?”

“But Your Majesty, he’s the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain… we did have an opportunity to find out the truth, but Emperor Peafowl interrupted us. Our hands are tied in the capital…”

A look of fear surfaced briefly on the Holy Emperor’s face when he heard Emperor Peafowl’s name. Even though he was the lord of a first rank sect, he was nowhere near Emperor Peafowl in terms of strength and fame. The latter was the ruler of Veluriyam Capital. Everyone knew that the capital held enough heritage to rival at least two or three first rank sects!

It was the reason why he feared Emperor Peafowl so much. Fortunately, the ruler of Veluriyam Capital was long gone and

would never come back. The Holy Emperor's ambitions began to run wild. The Eternal Celestial Capital's territory was rather near to Veluriyam Capital. Without Emperor Peafowl, Veluriyam's terrority would soon be nibbled away by nearby factions.

Perhaps the Eternal Celestial Capital could also have a piece of the pie!

It was why they agreed to help Emperor Shura kill Emperor Peafowl in the first place. Everything had been done in the name of profit. After hearing about the Pinecrane Pill, the Holy Emperor's heart began to fill with greed again.

Last time, the Eternal Celestial Capital was able to get their hands on the Longevity Pill, but the Sacred Peafowl Mountain had taken it right from their hands. The faction's hate for Veluriyam Capital had grown exponentially ever since that incident. How could the Holy Emperor let this chance slip by?

The Longevity Pill was already incredibly enticing. The Pinecrane Pill however, was at least a hundred times more appealing! It'd be impossible for the Holy Emperor to not be moved by it.

"Your Majesty, if the Pinecrane Pill is real, we must get our hands on part of that pie. Pillfire City will not sit idly by. We need to make our move as soon as possible. Even if we can't have it for ourselves, we must talk to Pillfire City and make sure that we get a cut of the profits too."

These men had set their eyes on the Pinecrane Pill.

Chapter 1194: The Celestial Cicada Court

If news about the Pinecrane Pill got out, all eyes would be on him. Jiang Chen had naturally already prepared for this consequence. The Pinecrane Pill was also a piece of bait. He wanted to see how many large fish he could catch with.

How many factions with ulterior motives were hiding in Veluriyam Capital?

In fact, though revealing the pill had been somewhat involuntary, doing so was also quite clever. It was possible that cracks might develop in Emperor Shura's alliance with his external help if they squabbled over it. It wasn't that part that was clever, however.

Of the eight titled emperors currently residing within Veluriyam Capital, Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void naturally supported Sacred Peafowl Mountain. The two neutral parties, Emperor Petalpluck and Mountaincrush, were shocked by the rumors about the Pinecrane Pill. They both attempted to verify its veracity. Having been convinced of it, their hearts were greatly disturbed by the new discovery.

"Young lord Zhen... young lord Zhen..." The usually forthright Emperor Mountaincrush was heavily conflicted. "I know what's right and wrong, but Emperor Shura went too far this time. If I didn't have my own difficulties, there's no way I would have agreed to his convening the Vassal Meeting... ah..."

On the other hand, Emperor Petalpluck remained relatively calm.

The rumors about the Pinecrane Pill continued to fester. Though Emperor Shura was incensed by the new development, he didn't have a good counter to Sacred Peafowl Mountain's temporary advantage. On the other hand, Jiang Chen had no follow-ups either.

Time passed very quickly. Soon enough, there was only one day remaining before the Vassal Meeting. Gazing to the southeast, the young lord of Veluriyam sighed softly. “So, the Celestial Cicada Court isn’t coming after all?”

Deep down, he’d been somewhat expectant. Since he had already decided to invite external factions, two was definitely better than one. As he lost himself in idle speculation, an abrupt secret report arrived.

“Young lord, the Celestial Cicada Court’s foremost sect head has arrived. She has a vice sect head in tow, as well as a group of her most loyal subordinates. They’re already at Vermilion Bird Street. Shall we lead them to Taiyuan Tower, or is Taiyuan Lodge better?”

“Taiyuan Lodge is fine.” That the Court had arrived on the last day before the Vassal Meeting was wholly unexpected. Still, Jiang Chen was pleased. “It seems that my lure was effective enough, haha!”

The Celestial Cicada Court’s willingness to come meant that they were very interested in what he’d mentioned in his letter. As long as that was the case, Jiang Chen was absolutely certain about his ability to draw them close.

An appropriate secret room was swiftly prepared for the meeting. The Court evidently attached a great deal of importance to this event; their main sect head, Su Huanzhen, personally led the expedition. Accompanying her was Sect Head Xia, who had first met Jiang Chen back in Pillfire City.

Su Huanzhen was the most senior sect head, but Sect Head Xia was the most junior vice sect head. Besides the two sect heads, there were a few young genius disciples along for the trip as well. It was the cream of the sect’s crop.

“Young lord Zhen. Should I call you Pill King Zhen, hmm? Or would Sir Shao be better, perhaps?” After both guest and host were seated, Sect Head Xia opened with an amused expression.

“Anything you like, Sect Head Xia,” chuckled Jiang Chen. “Thank you for gracing us with your radiant presence.”

In terms of seniority, Su Huanzhen was the same generation as Emperor Peafowl. In fact, they’d been involved in a brief liaison when they were younger, but things hadn’t worked out in the end. Naturally, Emperor Peafowl had mentioned nothing of the sort to Jiang Chen. Su Huanzhen, however, hadn’t forgotten entirely about that portion of the past.

Her emotions had become complicated ever since stepping inside Veluriyam Capital territory. Jiang Chen’s sentence snapped her awake, returning her to a sect leader’s composure.

“Young lord Zhen, I’ve heard stories of your fame even in the southeast. Truly, the younger generation surpasses the older, and the pupil surpasses his master. You haven’t made your way into the world for more than a decade, yet you’re already as well-known as Emperor Peafowl. I’m quite impressed.”

Her words were largely a token of nicety, not meant to be taken entirely seriously. “That is praise much too high for me. You make me blush, Sect Head Su,” grinned Jiang Chen.

“You know how direct of a person I am, young lord Zhen, so let’s cut to the chase.” Sect Head Xia smiled as well. “You sent me a letter about some formation diagrams, yes? You said that they were quite relevant to the Celestial Cicada Court’s origins. Is that correct?”

Jiang Chen immediately presented her with a scroll. “Please take a look, Sect Head Xia.”

Opening the scroll, the junior sect head didn’t look at it straightaway. Instead, she passed it to Su Huanzhen. “Senior Sect Head, you should look over it first.”

Respecting seniority was important, especially in public.

Su Huanzhen opened up the scroll. One look instantly

magnetized her eyes to the writings within. She seemed entirely glued to them. Her expression elicited Sect Head Xia's own curiosity. She began to peruse the scroll from the side as well. Her reaction was exactly the same as the more senior sect head's.

The two were unsatiated even when they reached the end of the scroll and started over from the beginning. They did so five times in total before they put the scroll away carefully and set it off to the side with reluctance. Their expressions were an interesting study now.

"Well?" Jiang Chen asked merrily, a composed smile playing around his lips.

"Young lord Zhen, where did you get this formation scroll?" Su Huanzhen asked forthrightly.

There was no use in a formation diagram by itself. Without the foundations of the formation or further content, the most they could tell was that this formation was tremendous, but had no idea how to set it up.

But one thing was certain, and that was the formation was the same style as the ones of their sect. They shared the same heritage, and the one within the scroll surpassed the Celestial Cicada Court's own in terms of both rank and content.

"Last time at Pillfire City, I heard you talk about the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect," said Sect Head Xia. "Those four words are also mentioned in our sect's ancient writings, but there's no clear indication that our Court is descended from one of their branches."

Su Huanzhen nodded as well. "If I may ask, young lord Zhen. Are you and the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect related in some way? How else can you draw such detailed diagrams?"

As a real expert, she perceived that the diagrams hadn't been made up on the spot to trick them. A great deal of mystery was

contained within those diagrams, deep knowledge that was difficult to decipher.

“One guess is enough for you to discern the truth, Sect Head Su,” laughed Jiang Chen. “As expected of the leader of a prominent sect.”

“Young lord Zhen, are you really related to the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect?” Su Huanzhen’s expression became rather serious. “Does that mean that you share a common origin with the Celestial Cicada Court as well?”

“That depends on what you think, Sect Head.”

Whether there was a connection or not depended on whether the Celestial Cicada Court recognized the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect as its ancestor. More importantly, did it want to identify with its ancient forebear?

Su Huanzhen exchanged a sober glance with Sect Head Xia. “Over the generations of the Celestial Cicada Court’s heritage, our writings have mentioned the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect more than once. However, our descent from that sect has never been stated in no uncertain terms. At this time, I cannot make a decision about the restoration of our proper ancestry.”

Jiang Chen completely understood the caution. Without overwhelming evidence, it was indiscreet and inappropriate to declare ancestry so arbitrarily. The Celestial Cicada Court was a first rank sect. If it affiliated itself carelessly and the decision turned out to be incorrect, then the sect would look quite foolish.

Moreover, foolishness was the least of their concerns. If there was a certain mastermind with ulterior motives who was trying to steal away the Celestial Cicada Court’s foundations, there would be a bigger problem.

Therefore, the sect heads could not stomach the prospect of identifying with an ancestor so quickly. Regardless of what they

thought about its veracity and unmistakability, they could not afford to make rash decisions. Moreover, the sheer amount of time that had passed between the ancient times and present day was more than enough to erode the closeness associated with ancestry.

There was no reason for them to deny it outright, or do so at any time with any amount of vehemence. The Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect was one of the greatest formation sects in the ancient times. The diagrams provided by young lord Zhen were also definitely profound, unmatched by anything that the Celestial Cicada Court had. There was cause for a great deal of internal struggle.

Tapping his index and middle fingers against the surface of the table, Jiang Chen was contemplative for a while.

“Young lord Zhen, your formation diagrams have inspired the Celestial Cicada Court a great deal.” Sect Head Xia was the first to break the silence. “More than worthy of us having made this trip, at any rate. Despite our distance to the capital, we’ve heard of the housekeeping problems you’re having at the moment. Even without any benefit from you, we would still unconditionally support Sacred Peafowl Mountain without hesitation. Your faction has ruled Veluriyam Capital for several thousand years. That’s a situation that we’re not interested in seeing a change to.”

The Celestial Cicada Court was situated in the southeast of the Upper Eight Regions, and Veluriyam Capital, the southern region. The two factions could be said to be relatively similar. In fact, they had quite a bit of adjoining territory.

Though they had superior strength compared to their neighbor, Veluriyam Capital had never invaded a single inch of the Celestial Cicada Court’s territory. It was true for all of their adjacent factions, in fact. At minimum, the Court and Veluriyam Capital were on fairly good terms.

Jiang Chen was mildly surprised by this. They would support

Sacred Peafowl Mountain unconditionally, without any benefit? Was that merely a courtesy?

“You shouldn’t consider our words idle wind, young lord Zhen. Our foremost Sect Head Su here has some past history with Emperor Peafowl–a friendship of sorts, even. You probably just don’t know about it,” smiled Sect Head Xia.

Past history? An old friendship? Jiang Chen was more interested in striking a deal. It was an age-old truth that relationships were often maintained at the cost of money. With the discussion at this point, could he really withhold the diagrams from them?

Chapter 1195: The Vassal Meeting

Thankfully, the diagrams that Jiang Chen drew were mostly second-rate formations. He had only drawn one of the ten great formations belonging to the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect.

Su Huanzhen had an exceptionally keen eye. She picked out the latter formation out of the rest with only a single glance, impressed with its clear superiority over the rest. At once, she knew she wanted that formation most of all.

“Sect Head Su, Sect Head Xia. I didn’t draw these formations to tantalize you.” Because they’d said they would unconditionally support Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Jiang Chen had to return the favor.

Su Zhenhuan was pleased with this comment. “Are you really going to teach the Celestial Cicada Court all of these formations, young lord Zhen?”

“Sacred Peafowl Mountain doesn’t have much need of them. However, they are nothing short of treasures for the Celestial Cicada Court. Given that, why shouldn’t I teach them to you?” Jiang Chen spoke only his honest mind.

Regardless of whether the Celestial Cicada Court admitted to it or not, it was definitely connected to the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect of yore. It was fine that they didn’t accept it yet. Jiang Chen had plenty of time and ways to slowly acclimate them to the truth. He had his medallion as a last resort, but he wasn’t interested in scaring the Court. There was no need to go down that path.

Identifying with one’s ancestors needed to be a consensual thing. Otherwise, the people forced in question wouldn’t necessarily be convinced even if one brought out the associated records. Candidly handing the diagrams to Su Huanzhen and Sect Head Xia, Jiang Chen patiently explained to them the meanings and intents inherent in the formations.

This surprised both of the two women. After his tutorial, their previously prepared haggling was all but useless.

“Young lord Zhen, your frankness and readiness deserves reciprocation. Though we at the Celestial Cicada Court mostly have women at our helms, we will not be outshone by the valor of men. If you need us any time during the Vassal Meeting, just say the word. We are not officially allies of Veluriyam Capital, but our years of being neighbors have acclimated us to the peace. There’s no reason for us to sit out for either public or personal reasons in the city’s affairs,” Su Huanzhen declared seriously.

“Plus,” giggled Sect Head Xia, “we’ve always admired Emperor Peafowl’s exemplary conduct. Isn’t that right, Big Sister Su?”

The last part was a bit tongue-in-cheek, but Jiang Chen was oblivious to it. “Such charitable treatment from you two sect heads deserves my sincerity. If I’m in trouble, I absolutely won’t hesitate to call.”

He was pleased with how a few formations had been enough to deepen his relationship with the Celestial Cicada Court. With both the Court and the Great Yu Skysword Sect at his side, his number of allies was slowly increasing. The Upper Eight Regions was a complicated place, but the support of two first rank sects beefed up Jiang Chen’s confidence considerably.

……

The universally-awaited Vassal Meeting had finally arrived and was being held in the large square before the Veluriyam Pagoda.

Emperor Peafowl’s absence lent a rather strange air to this particular Vassal Meeting atmosphere. Of course, Sacred Peafowl Mountain still sat unquestioned at the master’s seat. There was no need for pleasantries from Jiang Chen now. He was the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain and deserved this place. The Vassal Meeting was targeting him and his position. Continuing to remain affable was a sign of brain damage.

For whatever reason, Emperor Petalpluck's faction conceded their second seat to Emperor Shura. There wasn't even a superficial refusal from the latter. The emperor and his entourage took the offered place without a shred of deference.

The remainder of the emperors seated themselves as follows: Emperor Petalpluck, third seat. Emperor Vastsea, fourth seat. Emperor Mountaincrush, fifth seat. Emperor Void, sixth seat. Emperor Skysplitter, seventh seat. Emperor Coiling Dragon, eighth seat. The vassals arranged themselves below according to their own rank. For them, the process was equally orderly. There was no debate whatsoever about who should go where.

Cloak-and-dagger activities aside, the power structure in the city hadn't changed yet. Everything had to be as they were before, or one would risk leaving an opening available for criticism. Naturally, there was seating for guests as well. A cursory scan was enough to reveal to Jiang Chen the presence of Emperor Pillzenith. He was seated in the most prominent position in the guest area.

The young man's face darkened immediately. He'd guessed that Emperor Shura would invite a snake in a long time ago, but actual proof of it still angered still. How could the emperor conspire with Pillfire City?

Who under the heavens didn't know that Pillfire City was Veluriyam Capital's mortal enemy? Wasn't allowing one's enemy in tantamount to playing with fire? Jiang Chen directed an impassive gaze towards Emperor Shura. The emperor smiled unassumingly back, but locked eyes with the youth in a show of power.

"Shameless." The young lord moved his lips, but said nothing aloud.

Unfortunately for Emperor Shura, the movements alone were enough for him to decipher what Jiang Chen was saying. He furrowed his brow, projecting a frigid, murderous gaze. It was

almost as if he wanted to dismember Jiang Chen with his look alone.

Chuckling, Emperor Vastsea abruptly stood up. “Everyone, the Vassal Meeting is a…”

“Shut up!” Emperor Coiling Dragon shouted without warning. He spared Emperor Vastsea no courtesy, glaring at the man with displeasure. “Emperor Vastsea, you’ve tenured here in Veluriyam Capital for a long time. Shouldn’t you understand the rules here? Wait your turn to speak.”

In his haste, Emperor Vastsea had gotten carried away. He had no words with which to vent his anger at Emperor Coiling Dragon’s reproach. The other emperor was right. It wasn’t appropriate for him to speak.

Why had he done so without thinking? Tossing Emperor Coiling Dragon a hateful stare, Emperor Vastsea glowered. “I only wanted to make it easier for Emperor Shura to start his speech. Given that Daoist Peafowl isn’t here, Daoist Shura rightfully deserves the first word as the most senior. Moreover, he was the one that called for the Vassal Meeting in the first place. Isn’t that right, everyone?”

The speech both covered up his embarrassment and brought Emperor Shura to the forefront. It ignored Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s presence entirely.

Emperor Void was the one to step in this time. “You’re being rather funny today, Vastsea,” he sneered. “Even if Emperor Peafowl is busy and absent, Sacred Peafowl Mountain is still in attendance. Their people sit at the head seat. The ruler of Veluriyam Capital has not yet changed, hmm? Why have you taken away Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s right to speak?”

Once again, every bit of the accusation was true. Emperor Vastsea was quite embarrassed. Chuckling, Emperor Shura signaled to his ally. “Brother Vastsea, please take a seat. Actually, the primary reason that we’re here today is to talk about Daoist Peafowl. I

think it's absolutely right that Sacred Peafowl Mountain puts a word in. Young lord Zhen, some concerning rumors have surfaced recently. The question I want to ask is very simple: do you know where Daoist Peafowl is?"

It was an attempt to stop Jiang Chen before he even set off. Emperor Shura knew the answer to his own question better than anyone else. Smiling faintly, Jiang Chen showed no reaction whatsoever. Instead, he stood up and brandished a medallion high in the air.

"Everyone, this is the Progeny Feather Medallion. His Majesty Peafowl passed it onto me so that I may inherit Veluriyam Capital at a crucial time. I know of His Majesty's whereabouts. Several years ago, Emperor Peafowl told me that he had begun to comprehend the laws of heaven and earth. He was already half-step empyrean realm back then, and was at the threshold of breaking through. Therefore, His Majesty has vanished for one purpose, that of venturing into the great realm beyond!"

Breaking through to empyrean realm? The news was incredibly momentous. It deafened and stunned all who heard it. To... empyrean realm?

That was absolutely unheard of. The human domain hadn't had an empyrean expert in countless years. Emperor Peafowl was breaking through? So all the rumors about his fall were false?

Emperor Pillzenith frowned in the guest area when he heard Jiang Chen's words. He gave the young lord a few extra glances, snickering to himself. "This Zhen kid is quite the slippery eel. He is very dishonest. A bare-faced lie like that comes quite easily to him, and his delivery is flawless. For the average person who's not in the know, it is very hard to suspect anything from his words."

Emperor Shura was unhappy. He hated the fact that he couldn't declare the truth. He was the best witness that Emperor Peafowl had in fact, died.

“Young lord Zhen, has Daoist Peafowl really broken through to empyrean realm? Why haven’t I heard of something that amazing from him personally?” The antagonistic emperor feigned confusion.

“You know as well as I that His Majesty prefers humility and privacy. Plus, a breakthrough to empyrean realm requires almost divine inspiration. How can the heavenly secrets be divulged to mortal men?”

“How do you know about it, then?” Emperor Shura pressed frostily.

“I am his personally designated young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Obviously, he had to tell me the truth in the process of passing on his rulership.”

All three of Jiang Chen’s friendly titled emperors found this pretentious explanation superbly amusing. Even they were convinced to a slight degree that Emperor Peafowl had perhaps indeed left to break through to empyrean realm.

“Young lord Zhen,” growled Emperor Shura. “Everyone here hopes wishes that what you say is true. But according to my detailed investigation, Emperor Peafowl is embroiled in great trouble.”

“Do you have any proof?” Jiang Chen retorted coolly.

The emperor braced himself, but his mouth showed no signs of slowing down. “I used a secret art that only great emperors can use,” he said, “and tried to contact Emperor Peafowl. There has been no reply. That’s my proof.”

Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void had used this art as well, so what Emperor Shura had said was reasonable enough.

“You tried to reach him during such a key time? He’s trying to reach break through to empyrean realm! Aren’t you just causing more trouble for him?” Jiang Chen snorted. He was stirring up the

pot with everything he had. The situation called for it.

“Young lord Zhen. With how much you’re trying to cover up Emperor Peafowl’s whereabouts, I’m beginning to suspect your motives!” Emperor Shura suddenly lashed out.

Chapter 1196: Im Not Planning to Give You A Chance

Jiang Chen didn't think that Emperor Shura would turn around and try to implicate him.

Emperor Vastsea also stood up. "Everyone, all I want to ask is this. Where was young lord Zhen when Emperor Peafowl went missing?

"I'm sure that everyone here is also curious as to where our famous and ingenious young lord Zhen hails from. Sacred Peafowl Mountain seems to have never taken in a disciple like young lord Zhen, hmm? So how did he suddenly appear and become young lord? Aren't we all a little surprised by his appearance?" Emperor Vastsea suddenly turned on Jiang Chen.

Emperor Coiling Dragon was certainly not going to take this lying down. He shot to his feet and roared, "Young lord Zhen is the successor Emperor Peafowl raised in secret. He and young lord Fan were like light and shadow. This is something a trusted aide of Emperor Peafowl such as I was aware of a long time ago. But you, an outsider to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, are worrying about our internal matters? Why don't you find something else better to do with your time, you old codger?"

"That's right, young lord Zhen is the successor that His Majesty secretly cultivated. In the end, his fortunes outstripped young lord Fan's. This is something all four of us monarchs are aware about." This time, the one who stood up in defense of Jiang Chen was Cloudsoar Monarch.

Emperor Vastsea sneered disdainfully. "Who gave you the right to speak, little cultivator? This is a discussion between great emperors!"

Cloudsoar Monarch responded neither obsequiously nor

superciliously, “When it comes to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, yes, I’m more qualified to speak than you are.”

Emperor Vastsea’s face darkened. “How dare you! A little emperor dares rebuke a great emperor and yell during the Vassal Meeting?!”

Plumscore Monarch sneered before Cloudsoar Monarch could speak. “Oh, stop trying to frighten people with your cultivation already. I only have one question to ask. Did you ever dare raise your voice against me when Emperor Peafowl was present? Look at how fast you’ve changed your tone after the emperor is temporarily away? Can I rightfully call you a bully?”

The Vassal Meeting had just begun, and sparks of conflict were already flying all over the place. No side was willing to yield a single step to the other.

Emperor Shura suddenly waved his hand and stopped Emperor Vastsea from speaking. He stared deeply at Jiang Chen. “Young lord Zhen, I’m going to ask this again. Why have you done everything in your power to conceal Daoist Peafowl’s whereabouts? What are your true motives?”

Jiang Chen answered disdainfully. “I have a better question. How exactly do you know that Emperor Peafowl is dead? Did you see it with your own eyes, or did you kill him with your bare hands? Should I interpret these rumors as something you’ve intentionally spread to further your purposes?”

“Slander!” Emperor Shura retorted expressionlessly.

“The heavens watch our every move.” Jiang Chen pointed at his heart, and then up towards the sky. “I know what you think, and you know what you did, Emperor Shura. I can swear a heavenly oath right now and clear my name, but do you dare? If you dare swear a heavenly oath right now and prove that Emperor Peafowl’s current whereabouts have nothing to do with you, I will immediately declare Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s withdrawal from

Veluriyam Capital and turn over authority to you completely."

Jiang Chen couldn't be bothered to waste any breath on these people. He cut straight to the heart of the matter. At this point, he was certain that Emperor Peafowl's disappearance absolutely had something to do with Emperor Shura. Even if the ermpror wasn't a direct participant of the ambush, he must have participated in the plan.

Emperor Shura looked disdainful as he spoke in an indifferent tone. "You are truly a child. There would be no conflicts in this world if everything is decided by swearing a heavenly oath. All I can say is that you're really behaving inappropriately. I have no idea how someone like you is qualified to be the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain."

Jiang Chen laughed. "Emperor Shura, you can't hide the fact that you're guilty no matter how hard you try to change the topic. You're a man who doesn't dare bear the consequences of your actions. Emperor Peafowl once told me that he was waiting for you to rebel against him and declare that you want to succeed him. However, you never dared ventured even a squeak when you were in his presence. No wonder he said that you have the ambition, but not the courage, and that's putting it nicely. In my opinion, you are nothing but a coward. The truth is that you dare not even make a simple oath! What else does it prove except that you're a coward?"

Emperor Skysplitter suddenly broke his silence. "Young lord Zhen, why don't we forget about these rumors. If you want to talk about rumors, we even heard that you're of demonic bloodline and that the demons sent you to spy on Veluriyam Capital. They say that you're the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain because you charmed Emperor Peafowl with your demonic powers. Are you asking us to verify these claims by making you swear a heavenly oath? How childish would the world be!"

Jiang Chen smiled. "I can swear the oath right now if you wish."

“How absurd!” Emperor Skysplitter said disdainfully, “Here’s some advice, young lord Zhen. This is the Vassal Meeting. The more childish you act, the more unreliable people will think you are.”

Although Emperor Skysplitter’s words were meant to save Emperor Shura from his predicament, they did make a little bit of sense.

“Emperor Petalpluck, Emperor Mountaincrush, what do you both think?” Emperor Skysplitter asked smilingly.

Emperor Petalpluck sighed quietly. “These rumors are all so fantastic. Personally, I believe that it was spread with malicious intent to fracture the trust between us and start a civil war in Veluriyam Capital. Therefore, I suggest that we don’t bring up these groundless rumors any longer. What we should do now is to solve the problems of Veluriyam Capital.”

“I agree with Daoist Petalpluck’s suggestion. We need to steady morale. Arguing will only make the situation worse.” Emperor Mountaincrush also expressed his opinion.

Emperor Shura cupped his hands. “You are well known for your noble character and unquestionable integrity, Daoist Petalpluck. How do you think we should strengthen morale?”

“A sun must hang in the sky, just as there must be a ruler in a country. Veluriyam Capital is unsteady right now is because we lack a central pillar,” Emperor Petalpluck expressed his opinion straightforwardly. “Therefore, I suggest that we elect a pillar to steady the situation until Daoist Peafowl returns. No matter where he’s gone, we can return power to him once he comes back. But if he doesn’t, then the temporary ruler shall become the permanent ruler of Veluriyam Capital.”

Emperor Vastsea chuckled. “Alright. In that case, so who do you think is currently the most suitable ruler, Daoist Petalpluck?”

“That’s up to everyone to decide.” Emperor Petalpluck didn’t take up the cue that Emperor Vastsea had prepared. The latter was displeased and cursed silently.

“I recommend Daoist Shura to rule Veluriyam Capital. To begin with, his prestige is second only to Emperor Peafowl. If he’s given the chance to train and prove himself, he will not be subpar to Emperor Peafowl!” Emperor Vastsea declared loudly.

Emperor Skysplitter also nodded. “No matter how you look at it, Daoist Shura is the best and most acceptable candidate for now. I would recommend him as well.”

Emperor Void sneered. “Recommendation? What recommendation? Of course the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain is to rule Veluriyam Capital in the absence of Emperor Peafowl. Or did you think that young lord Zhen’s Progeny Feather Medallion is mere decoration? I may be a foolish man, but even I know that young lord Zhen and the Progeny Feather Medallion are both the gifts of Emperor Peafowl to Veluriyam Capital. They are the representation of his will!”

“Daoist Void is right. Nothing cannot be done without following the rules. If anyone can change the rules as they please, then why can’t I rule Veluriyam Capital tomorrow after you rule it today? Veluriyam Capital has stood for many years not because it is sustained by the ambitions of a few, but because everyone obeys the rules. If we lose even this bit of principle, then we will be Veluriyam Capital no longer.” Emperor Coiling Dragon commanded great eloquence. Both he and Emperor Void made it clear that they supported Sacred Peafowl Mountain and young lord Zhen.

The standoff was two on two right now. This outcome wasn’t beyond anyone’s expectations.

Now it was Emperor Petalpluck and Emperor Mountaincrush’s turn to vote. There was no need to ask Emperor Shura or Pill King

Zhen's opinion because they were the candidates. Of course they would support themselves.

"Daoist Petalpluck and Mountaincrush, you two will choose a side, won't you?" Emperor Vastsea asked plaintively. He was obviously trying to coerce the two great emperors into making a decision.

Emperor Petalpluck smiled. "Young lord Zhen represents Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but Daoist Shura is more experienced. This is a difficult choice, so I shall abstain from voting."

Emperor Mountaincrush hurriedly followed up with, "This is a difficult decision to make, so I'm going to abstain as well. Why don't we let the vassals who should be our temporary ruler?"

In the end, Emperor Mountaincrush didn't want to be an accomplice to the devil. He didn't want vote for Emperor Shura.

Emperor Shura's face darkened. He shot Emperor Mountaincrush a meaningful and chilling glance. They were at an impasse. However, the answer would be clear if the nine hundred or so vassals were to make their votes. Emperor Shura stared at Jiang Chen. "I'll give you a fair chance to compete, young lord Zhen, just so that no one accuses me of bullying juniors."

Jiang Chen taunted. "You got that reversed, old man. I'm the one who's giving you a fair chance. Just in case you've forgotten, you're just the third greatest great emperor of Veluriyam Capital. Honestly, how on earth did you get the idea that you're the one who's giving me a fair chance?"

It was a vicious counter, but the worst was yet to come.

"I'm the holder of the Progeny Feather Medallion, so I can call for a Vassal Meeting whenever I want to. Meanwhile, you have to do everything in your power and use every trick in the book to just manage to get every great emperor to agree. What you need all the strength in your body, down to your littlest pinky, to achieve is

something I can do with the raise of a palm. Now tell me, who do you think is giving his competitor a fair chance?" Jiang Chen sneered.

Emperor Shura wasn't a match for Jiang Chen in terms of verbal sparring, so he wasn't able to think of anything to retaliate. But Jiang Chen wasn't done yet. "By the way, all I'm trying to say is that I'm not planning on giving you a chance."

Emperor Shura's face turned cold, and Emperor Vastsea's eyes glinted with murder. This brat is making fun of us!

Chapter 1197: Strong Animosity

“Young lord Zhen, don’t be mistaken. The Vassal Meeting has been convened to discuss the future of our capital. It’s not a place for you to swagger about!” Emperor Vastsea had finally had enough.

Jiang Chen smiled mockingly. “Unlike you, I have no need to throw my weight around. I’m only saying all this out of the consideration for the capital. Emperor Peafowl has already declared that Emperor Shura isn’t suitable to rule. Out of my respect for Emperor Peafowl and consideration for the capital’s future, I have to carry out my duties as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain.”

“Hmph! You can twist his words however your like! Without any proof, who’d believe you? I can also say that Emperor Peafowl has decided to make Daoist Shura his successor!” Emperor Vastsea was also very good with words.

“Without proof?” Jiang Chen sniffed coldly and continued in charged tones. Emperor Peafowl had indeed said those words, but he really did have no proof. “You’ve also claimed without any proof that Emperor Peafowl has fallen, conjured blatant lies, tarnished my background, and assembled the Vassal Meeting. What a wonderful show of hypocrisy!”

Emperor Shura answered blandly. “Young lord Zhen, we’re not lacking proof. We’ve launched an investigation and found out that there’s a great chance that Daoist Peafowl is dead with his disappearance. Even if he’s still alive, rumors of his death are enough to instill fear and anxiety in our citizens. Our capital needs a new ruler and I was elected by everyone as a potential candidate. My actions are lawful and honorable. How can you claim that I’m trying to seize the throne?”

“Lawful and honorable?” Jiang Chan burst into a cold laughter.

“I suppose it’s lawful and honorable to hire Pillfire City to assist you in your plans as well?”

Emperor Shura’s expressions darkened as he shifted his gaze towards the crowd. “Young lord Zhen, don’t mouth groundless rumors. Emperor Pillzenith is merely passing by our capital and came to visit when he heard about the Vassal Meeting. He’s a guest and should be treated as one. We may have some differences, but mortal enemies we aren’t. Why can’t a citizen of Pillfire City visit our capital? Didn’t you just recently slip into their territory while concealing your identity?”

Emperor Shura was also very gifted with words. Over at a guest box seat, Emperor Pillzenith burst into laughter. “Everyone, I have no interest in participating in your squabbles. Daoist Peafowl and I have known each other for a long time. He once told me that Emperor Shura is the only qualified successor if he wasn’t around one day. These were his exact words, and I believe that it’s right that I tell everyone this.”

As expected, Emperor Pillzenith was on Emperor Shura’s side.

Han Qianzhan, the sect head of the Skysword Sect, snorted. “That’s odd, I’ve known Emperor Peafowl for a long time too, but he told me that he was fostering young lord Zhen to become his successor and the next ruler of Veluriyam Capital. Daoist Pillzenith, perhaps the Emperor Peafowl that you and I speak of are not the same person?”

It was an impasse between the main opponents. It was time for the helpers to take the field. Emperor Shura had Emperor Pillzenith on his side, while young lord Zhen had Sect Head Han Qianzhan.

In terms of jianghu ranking, Emperor Pillzenith was ahead of Han Qianzhan. However, the latter was still the sect head of a first rank sect. Surrounded by his men, his presence didn’t seem any bit weaker than Emperor Pillzenith’s.

The Holy Emperor of Eternal Celestial Capital joined the conversation. “Daoist Han, I’ve never even heard about your relationship with Daoist Peafowl. Are you making this up?”

Su Huanzhen of the Celestial Cicada Court responded coldly. “When did the Eternal Celestial Capital suddenly gain so much interest in Veluriyam Capital’s matters? When it comes to knowing Emperor Peafowl, I think no one knows him better than me. Based on my knowledge, the emperor did bestow young lord Zhen his position so that he can carry on Emperor Peafowl’s legacy. Of this, I can guarantee with my life!”

The Eternal Celestial Capital and The Celestial Cicada Court were both first rank sects. All who previously spoke were incredibly influential people in the Upper Eight Regions. Yet, they’d all convened at Veluriyam Capital to engage in a battle of words.

Emperor Void yelled. “The older generation knows that Sect Head Su and Daoist Peafowl have some history together. Daoist Peafowl has always viewed Sect Head Su as his soulmate. Her words definitely hold more weight than these outsiders!”

Su Huanzhen and Emperor Peafowl had almost become dao partners, once upon a time. If not for an unforeseen circumstance, they would’ve become lovebirds.

Emperor Pillzenith and the Holy Emperor were the outside factions supporting Emperor Shura, while the Sacred Peafowl Mountain had the outside support from the sect head of the Skysword Sect and Celestial Cicada Court. The two sides were once again equally matched. Perhaps the capital’s future really did lay in the hands of the vassals?

Emperor Shura glared at Jiang Chen disparagingly.

“Young lord Zhen, you’re a smart man. This matter must be resolved today as a country can’t be without a leader. You may leave if you’re afraid. The capital doesn’t need cowards!” His animosity for Jiang Chen was clear. He too, was good at making

unfounded accusations. Jiang Chen had previously called him a coward and he'd returned the accusation in kind.

Jiang Chen laughed coldly. "Emperor Shura, I'm afraid you're the only coward here. Do you know that you had a very good chance of becoming the next ruler of Veluriyam Capital? It's unfortunate that you were too much of a coward in front of Emperor Peafowl. Timid like a cat, you couldn't even show an ounce of ferocity. You were already given a chance, but you threw it away. Do you really think that a person like you is deserving to be the ruler?"

Emperor Shura's expression darkened. He knew very well that Jiang Chen's words were true. Emperor Peafowl had indeed dropped a few such hints after young lord Fan's death, but he didn't go through with his decision for some reason.

Perhaps I was really too docile and meek in front of Emperor Peafowl? Jiang Chen's words struck Emperor Shura's sore spot.

"Do you truly believe that your cynical remarks can make my dao heart waver?" Emperor Shura snorted coldly. "Save your breath!"

"You must be mistaken. Why would I want to make your dao heart waver? Do you think that you have one? Would a person with a dao heart cavort with the enemy and harm his own brethren?" Jiang Chen laughed mockingly. "Stop trying to feign ignorance. Let me ask you one thing, how are you going to face Emperor Peafowl when he comes back one day?"

Emperor Shura was enraged. He didn't know why young lord Zhen was so certain that he was the one who'd harm Emperor Peafowl. Was it because of a hunch? If so, young lord Zhen was truly overstepping his boundaries.

Emperor Peafowl is never coming back! He screamed internally. But on the surface, he maintained a wise ruler facade. "I'd be more than happy if Emperor Peafowl returns. Naturally, I'll return power back to him."

Jiang Chen responded with a hearty laugh. “You speak as if the capital is already yours!”

“Do you think you're able to stop me?” Emperor Shura said nonchalantly. “It was only in the recent decade that you became famous, but I’ve been renowned for more than three thousand years. A mere half-step emperor like you wishes to go against a great emperor like me? In terms of connections and fame…”

“Connections and fame my ass!” Jiang Chen didn’t hold himself back. “You’re nowhere even near as qualified as Emperor Petalpluck in terms of seniority! Your martial prowess doesn’t even stand out among the great emperors! Your reputation and your connections? Absolutely foul smelling as well! Your contributions to Veluriyam Capital? Nothing to write home about! You’ve been here for thousands of years, but what have you contributed to the capital? The biggest stir you’ve ever caused is probably today’s rigged vassal meeting!”

“That’s right!” Emperor Coiling Dragon clapped his hands in agreement. “One cannot defend a nation with only wit or win over the citizens with only brawn. Your past conducts are terrible and your contributions almost zero. A person like you actually wants to rule the capital? Everyone, will you really allow a person with no contributions like him to become the ruler of our beloved capital? He has the ability to contribute, but what has he ever done? He's lived under Emperor Peafowl’s shadow for so long because he’s lazy and cowardly. He only takes care of his own interest and hasn’t bled a single drop of blood in service to our capital! If he becomes the lord, I can’t help but be skeptical if he can truly lead us out of a difficult situation whenever it arises!”

One’s contribution to the capital was truly an important criteria. Emperor Peafowl’s position in the capital was so stable because everyone could see the blood and sweat that he’d contributed. His strength was also something that known to all.

Since all pretense and cordiality had been already shed, Emperor

Coiling Dragon no longer held back. His argument won the hearts of many. Emperor Shura's personality was indeed too cold, lofty, and very unapproachable.

He was the opposite of Emperor Peafowl. If the citizens of Veluriyam Capital were to receive unfair treatment outside, Emperor Peafowl would definitely exact some justice for his citizens as a form of consolation. The people couldn't sense the same about Emperor Shura.

"Take a look at Pill King Zhen for comparison. It hasn't been long since he became famous, but he's always been working hard for the sake of our capital. He's helped us retain the Longevity Pill, defeat the overweening Pillfire City, and founded Taiyuan Tower and Taiyuan Lodge, which has given countless lectures over the years. His every action inspires all of us. Young folks now aspire to comprehend all nine Veluriyam Obelisks like him. He's still very young, but he's already emperor realm. For all we know, he might become a great emperor within the century! How many geniuses have we ever seen that can do such a thing?" Emperor Coiling Dragon unloaded his thoughts in one go. Every single word he uttered was truthful and well-grounded.

Chapter 1198: An Election?

Emperor Coiling Dragon's words actually resonated with a lot of people. Emperor Shura had some fame in Veluriyam Capital, but no one other than his supporters felt much goodwill towards him.

Emperor Shura's subordinates were extremely domineering. For example, the late Majestic Clan had committed many crimes in Veluriyam Capital and rode roughshod over the general populace. The Shura Guard was highly disliked by the people as well.

In comparison, Sacred Peafowl Mountain's reputation was infinitely better than Shura Retreat's. Emperor Peafowl's individual charisma was one reason, but the Peafowl Guard of Sacred Peafowl Mountain was also beloved. At the very least, they almost never interfered with worldly conflicts unless exceptional circumstances were involved.

Frankly, there weren't actually many willing to see Emperor Shura on the throne. If they had to pick one reason, it would be because the great emperor never made any contributions to the people. Nearly all of his fame had come from the power struggles within Veluriyam Capital's own four walls.

There were some who claimed that Emperor Shura was selfish, while others who said that Emperor Peafowl was so high up the totem pole that Emperor Shura was never given an opportunity to prove himself. Whatever the reason, the fact remained that Emperor Shura hadn't done anything for the people of Veluriyam Capital. It might be a little excessive to say that he was a ruler who couldn't subdue his people with either virtue or strength, but it wouldn't be a false statement either.

Compared to the other great emperors, his martial strength was indeed slightly ahead of them. However, his victory wasn't certain if his opponent was Emperor Petalpluck, the second great emperor of Veluriyam Capital. The two great emperors never really clashed

against one another because Emperor Petalpluck was innately indifferent about fame or gain.

Of course, if Emperor Peafowl was still around, no one would even consider Emperor Shura as a viable candidate. But everyone in Veluriyam Capital felt worried after the rumors of Emperor Peafowl's demise were spread. Emperor Shura seized upon this to make a play for power. Although he was utterly incomparable to Emperor Peafowl, the same couldn't be said when his opponent was young lord Zhen.

As the representative of the young generation of Veluriyam Capital, young lord Zhen was quite beloved by the people. Although he had only just risen to fame, everyone could see what he done for Veluriyam Capital. Excluding all other achievements, his victory over Pill King Ji Lang alone was enough to win everyone's respect and admiration. It was a massive achievement that Emperor Shura failed to accomplish despite three thousand years.

Young lord Zhen had also passed the nine Veluriyam Obelisks after entering the Veluriyam Pagoda later on. After that, he'd travelled to Pillfire City and taken their pill dao scene by the storm in the Bounty Arena. Finally, he unwittingly defeated Pill King Ji Lang again by solving the crisis of the Moon God Sect.

Every bit of detail pointed towards young lord Zhen being a real, top class genius in both pill dao and martial dao. If a genius like this was allowed to develop and inherit Emperor Peafowl's seat, no one doubted that he could stand equal to or even surpass the great emperor.

Emperor Peafowl had made many outstanding contributions to Veluriyam Capital in the past three thousand years. He'd also clashed against some of the first rank sects of the Upper Eight Regions. The great emperor's beyond powerful might allowed him to firmly occupy the position of strength and mightily defend the Veluriyam Capital when it was challenged time and time again.

In reality however, Veluriyam Capital had always been inferior compared to Pillfire City. The two were located at the poles of the Upper Eight Regions, and they'd never engaged each other in any large scale martial conflicts. However, the two factions had clashed against each other many times in terms of pill dao. As the biggest pill dao faction of southern Upper Eight Regions, Veluriyam Capital had great influence in its own territory and surrounding regions.

But their influence had been on the decline for the past couple thousand years. Although Veluriyam Capital could still influence the regions around it, when it came to pill dao, the factions further away from them would rather seek out Pillfire City even if the former was closer.

Veluriyam Capital was fine in most aspects, but Emperor Peafowl was unable to make any progress in terms of pill dao no matter how many countermeasures he employed to combat this trend.

In terms of pill dao, the gap between Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City had never stopped increasing. Emperor Peafowl had always been troubled by this and he'd tried many things, such as cultivating a group of pill kings in Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He had also established Vermillion Bird Avenue with the express purpose of nurturing pill dao factions and encouraging other factions to come and contribute to the development of pill dao.Although these measures had caused a pill dao craze for a time, Veluriyam Capital's roots were ultimately too shallow. Moreover, an exceptionally brilliant genius hadn't appeared in Veluriyam Capital until recently. Jiang Chen's appearance was a powerful ray of light cutting right through the infinite darkness that had enshrouded Veluriyam Capital. He also injected an unprecedented amount of life to Veluriyam Capital's pill dao.

The battle for the Longevity Pill was especially important. In the name of Pill King Zhen, Jiang Chen had defeated Pill King Ji Lang of Pillfire City and created a milestone in Veluriyam Capital

history.

After that battle, Veluriyam Capital's pill dao scene grew more lively than before. They weren't losing to Pillfire City at every turn either. That was why young lord Zhen was practically an idol to the people of Veluriyam Capital, second only to Emperor Peafowl. Some people even thought that young lord Zhen would surpass Emperor Peafowl and become the number one idol.

Emperor Coiling Dragon's words won a tidal wave of applause from the crowd.

To Emperor Vastsea though, the claps sounded so unpleasant that he had to yell, "Coiling Dragon, everyone knows that you're a former subordinate of Sacred Peafowl Mountain! It would be stranger still if you didn't try to whitewash Sacred Peafowl Mountain's image. But no matter what you say, you cannot change the fact that young lord Zhen is still far inferior to Daoist Shura!"

Emperor Coiling Dragon sneered. "How so?"

Emperor Vastsea snorted disdainfully. "How is Emperor Shura inferior to a boy who's still wet behind the ears? In terms martial strength? His prestige? Or his experience?"

"Hahaha..." Emperor Coiling Dragon couldn't help but laugh loudly. "Oh Vastsea, I see that you're declining over time instead of improving. Martial strength? Aren't you ashamed of comparing a thirty year old genius to a three thousand year old great emperor? As for prestige, I truly don't believe that Emperor Shura is more popular than young lord Zhen right now. As for experience, why make the futile comparison between Shura Retreat and Sacred Peafowl Mountain?"

"We are comparing Daoist Shura and young lord Zhen right now! Don't try to change the subject!"

"Hah, are you telling me that Emperor Shura plans to rule Veluriyam Capital himself? Doesn't he need Shura Retreat's aid?"

Emperor Coiling Dragon countered sneeringly.

Although Emperor Vastsea knew that Emperor Coiling Dragon's words were all sophistry, he actually couldn't retort against the latest statement.

"Alright, enough. There will never be a conclusion if you two keep arguing like this. This relates to Veluriyam Capital, so of course the people will be the ones to decide their ruler. Let us all who are present decide the future of Veluriyam Capital." Emperor Petalpluck finally broke his silence.

The second great emperor didn't involve himself in such matters, but he wasn't without influence and persuasion.

Emperor Vastsea agreed loudly. "Daoist Petalpluck is right! This relates to Veluriyam Capital, so the people of Veluriyam Capital will be the ones who decide their ruler. They will tell us if Daoist Shura is the most suitable candidate!"

Emperor Vastsea spoke in a way that hinted at closeness between him and Emperor Petalpluck, as if the latter was on Emperor Shura's side.

Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void shot Emperor Petalpluck a meaningful glance, but the calm, natural smile on the second great emperor's face didn't fade away. He didn't care that the two emperors were glaring at him viciously.

"What do you think, Daoist Mountaincrush?" From the side, Emperor Skysplitter suddenly asked.

He wanted to stay neutral until the end, so he was slightly displeased when he heard Emperor Skysplitter's question. A moment of thought later, he finally responded, "In that case, let us hold an election. Whoever has the majority vote wins."

Since most of the great emperors agreed that they should hold an election with the vassals as voters, Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void could no longer go against the tide. When they shot

Jiang Chen a helpless glance, the young man smiled. “Since this is everyone’s wish, then we shall have an election. It is a fair way to choose the next ruler of Veluriyam Capital.”

Jiang Chen looked at the vassals below him with a gentle look. “Everyone, I’m going to say this again. All the rumors you hear about Emperor Peafowl is false. I guarantee that it is only a matter of time before Emperor Peafowl returns to us. You have nothing to worry about!”

Even now, Jiang Chen didn’t believe that Emperor Peafowl was dead. No matter how confident Emperor Shura and his gang might be, he refused to believe that someone as great as Emperor Peafowl would die with a whimper like this.

Emperor Vastsea snorted coldly. “Young lord Zhen, maybe you should keep your mouth shut since the vassals will be voting later. Are you trying to win some sympathy votes?”

Jiang Chen sneered. “If that’s the case, don’t you think you should shut up as well? This doesn’t have anything to do with you, unless you’re planning to participate as a candidate?”

His words weren’t excessive, but Emperor Vastsea’s face turned completely red when he heard this. Emperor Coiling Dragon laughed loudly in response. “Well said! You’re so involved that an outsider would mistake you as a candidate, Vastsea!”

Emperor Vastsea’s complexion didn’t look good. It was an incredibly embarrassing moment for him. Emperor Shura chose this moment to speak up. “Daoist Vast is my brother. His will represents mine too.”

Emperor Coiling Dragon shrugged. “He still doesn’t have the right to tell young lord Zhen to shut up even if represents you, does he? That was a complete disregard of the hierarchy just now. Are we throwing away all the rules of Veluriyam Capital just because Emperor Peafowl was gone for several months? Are we at a point where Sacred Peafowl Mountain can be humiliated anytime

you wish?”

Emperor Coiling Dragon was blatantly trying to draw sympathy votes for Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Emperor Shura said coldly. “Speaking of the hierarchy, you’ve just ascended recently, haven’t you? Did that factor into your actions just now when you were criticizing me?”

“I’m just telling the truth as it is. Or are you saying that you can’t even handle the truth right now? ‘Brother’, you really need to broaden your mind a little. Back when Emperor Peafowl was still around, he could handle anything thrown at him.”

Emperor Shura nearly exploded when he heard this.

Chapter 1199: Deciding on the Solution

Every blow struck Emperor Shura and his allies in their weak spots, making them both upset and powerless. However, the emperor managed to kept his cool. He knew that he had no chance of gaining a lead in further debate with Emperor Coiling Dragon.

Both Emperor Coiling Dragon and young lord Zhen were both eloquent men. If they were allowed to continue their grandstanding, they would only end up converting more and more people. He would end up with an even greater disadvantage than he had now.

“Daoist Petalpluck, we must come to a decision. The eight hundred vassals are all here. Why don’t you preside over the proceedings?” Emperor Shura turned to his more neutral fellow.

Emperor Petalpluck smiled slightly, inclining his head in turn to the Emperor Coiling Dragon and Vastsea. “Gentlemen, now is not the time for an emotional dispute. The recent chaos in Veluriyam Capital requires resolution. A nation should not be long without a leader. For the people to be satisfied and placated, we must always have a ruler at the helm.”

“That’s right. Anyone who tries to act up again is an enemy of the public peace. Clearly, it would be against the city’s interests and improvement!” Emperor Vastsea quickly followed up with this lofty label.

Jiang Chen waved to the two friendly emperors, signaling an end to the argument. “Emperor Petalpluck is correct. A nation should not be long without a leader. I can refrain from opposing to the events today, but I must say something harsh ahead of time.”

“Please do, young lord Zhen,” smiled Emperor Petalpluck.

“When His Majesty Peafowl returns, the throne must be returned to him,” stated Jiang Chen flatly. “Does anyone oppose this

motion?”

The serene emperor pondered this a moment, then nodded. “I do not at all. Daoist Peafowl is the best ruler we’ve had in a long time and certainly the most suited to lead.” Saying this, he turned to Emperor Shura. “What do you think, Daoist Shura?”

The man harrumphed. “If Daoist Peafowl comes back, then there’s no contest. Of course the throne should be returned.”

“I feel the same way,” smiled Emperor Skysplitter.

Since Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void belonged on Emperor Peafowl’s side in the first place, there was no reason for them to oppose, either.

“While we’re at this point,” Emperor Vastsea cut in suddenly. “I’d like to be upfront about something else as well. If Emperor Peafowl comes back, I hope that Sacred Peafowl Mountain will not suppress the vassals that vote for Emperor Shura today. Doing so would be taking revenge!”

Emperor Vastsea was quite sure that Emperor Peafowl would not return. He was saying this to accomplish two goals. One, to alleviate the worries of those who’d agreed to side with Emperor Shura, and two, to win free goodwill from the audience. It was essentially a clever pretense.

As expected, many vassals were reassured upon hearing his words. A current of warmth ran through their hearts. Emperor Vastsea cared a lot about their feelings, after all!

Jiang Chen saw through the tirade effortlessly. He knew that the emperor was gesturing to gain popularity. Smiling faintly, he maintained the same confident expression that he had adopted since the beginning of the meeting.

“Emperor Vastsea, you speak as if you’re not acquainted with Emperor Peafowl at all. Do you not understand the type of person he is? If Emperor Peafowl was the sort of man to hold vendettas,

then Emperor Shura wouldn't even be standing here to challenge him in absentia. To put it more plainly, Emperor Peafowl isn't scared of anyone who's able to rise up and surpass him.

"On the contrary, he's concerned that no one will be able to take up his mantle when he's gone. Do you think that he has any attachment to worldly power? He gained knowledge of more potent and fundamental truths about heaven and earth a long time ago. He could ascend to empyrean realm at any time. He sees things from a much higher point than everyone else. To be quite honest, you sound like you're putting him in your–I daresay much smaller–shoes."

His tranquil demeanor won him a fair bit of approval in his own right. Even those who disliked him had to admit that he was showing stellar decorum. This was a young man of considerable wit and temperament. Any other youth would be scared out of their own minds by the sole fact of having to sit beside seven titled emperors, much less be able to compete with Emperor Shura. But there was no hint of fear or nervousness in Jiang Chen.

The calmness he exhibited alone was enough to classify him as an extraordinary character. It was an old saying that the young shouldn't be bullied just for their lack of experience or resources. Many wavering vassals began to consider things anew.

A few others, previously already leaning towards Emperor Shura, were also shaken. There was an impenetrable aura of greatness on Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord. It was a feeling that forced every onlooker not to ignore him, and seemed to say, 'let anyone who does taste the consequences'!

Emperor Petalpluck chose this moment to chuckle. "Any move that we great emperors make will affect the grand scheme of things here in the city. Thus, I advise that all of us refrain from voting. No matter whose side we take, voting will only lay down the seeds of future strife. There is everything to lose and nothing to gain by doing so."

“What, are we titled emperors not to vote? How does that work?” Emperor Vastsea was shocked.

“Daoist Petalpluck has a very good point. The actions of we titled emperors have too much influence upon the rest. It would not do for cracks to develop between us at this juncture. If Veluriyam Capital sees civil unrest and a subsequent weakening, then we will all go down in history as criminals.” Emperor Mountaincrush was clearly more than willing to abstain.

Deep down, he wanted to support Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but Emperor Shura’s pressing demands had compelled him to acquiesce. Because of this, he was very conflicted. If he could abstain, then there was no longer anything to worry about.

“I have no objection to that.” Upon seeing Emperor Petalpluck and Mountaincrush declare their stances, Emperor Coiling Dragon hurried to agree.

There was no reason at all for him to object. The two neutral emperors’ solidarity only reinforced his statement. He had originally been anxious about their potential support for Emperor Shura, which would render young lord Zhen in a dangerous position.

Emperor Void inclined his head as well. “Daoist Petalpluck is a true voice of reason. We may have a few minor disagreements from time to time, but us titled emperors should maintain a good rapport.”

Now that four titled emperors had voted on the resolution, the opinions of the three remaining emperors on Shura’s side no longer mattered. The minority had to obey the majority.

“Let it be so, then. We great emperors shall refrain from voting,” Emperor Shura affirmed indifferently. He had said those words unwillingly, but appearances were important to maintain. Otherwise, his intentions would be far too brazen to stomach.

“Hold on,” Jiang Chen grinned.

“Hmm?” All eyes gathered on him.

The young man had turned toward Emperor Petalpluck in the interim. “I was feeling that something felt out of place, and I finally realize what it is. Why are the candidates only me and Emperor Shura? In theory, Emperor Petalpluck is the second-ranked great emperor in Veluriyam Capital. If there’s only two candidates, shouldn’t the second be ahead of the third?”

Everyone knew how disinterested Emperor Petalpluck was in power and fame. That was why he had been automatically ignored. The interjection from Jiang Chen, however, made it seem like something was genuinely awry. That’s right! Why was the second-ranked emperor being put below the third?

Jiang Chen hadn’t expected his ploy to push Emperor Petalpluck forward. He had only done so in order to cause Emperor Shura a bit of extra embarrassment, as well as douse his flames of arrogance.

Emperor Vastsea was the first to lose his cool. “Daoist Petalpluck is a sage above the problems of the world! His outstanding integrity tipped him off about Emperor Shura’s wisdom and heroism. He knows when to step aside, unlike a certain ignorant youngster. It’s important for people to know what their limits are!”

“Emperor Vastsea, I wonder what you were doing when you were my age?” smiled Jiang Chen serenely.

“Well said!” Emperor Coiling Dragon clapped cheerfully. “You were still living under the protection of your seniors, eh, Vastsea? My guess can’t be far off the mark. What right do you have to criticize young lord Zhen? He has only been famous for a handful of years, yet he’s made more contributions than you, a great emperor of over a thousand. You’re very brave to talk about people’s limits, hmm? I wonder where your courage comes from?

Were you the one that defeated Pill King Ji Lang?”

Once again, Emperor Vastsea was at a loss for words.

“Alright, alright. Enough is enough. I can smell the gunpowder in the air already.” Chuckling, Emperor Petalpluck came forward to mediate. “There’s no need to argue. I’m pleased that you think so highly of this old man, young lord Zhen. However, my nature has always been a placid one. I don’t have the heart needed to rule over Veluriyam Capital. I see great determination and diligence in Emperor Shura, and remarkable youthful flair in young lord Zhen. One is experienced, the other energetic. You two are the best candidates. For the sake of this city, I will stand and bear witness.”

Emperor Petalpluck’s announcement nipped the impending conflagration in the bud. Despite that, Emperor Shura’s hatred for Jiang Chen only grew stronger. Before now, he’d mostly hated Emperor Peafowl for not passing on the throne to him. But now, ever since he’d ambushed the senior emperor, his next obstacle was this young lord Zhen!

I’ll let you run amok for a few more days, kid. When I hold the reins, you’ll be the first person I get rid of! The emperor gnashed his teeth internally with frustration.

Emperor Petalpluck turned to the eight hundred vassals. “Everyone, I’m sure you know why we’ve convened this Vassal Meeting. The waters of Veluriyam Capital are too turbulent at present. We need a proper helmsman to navigate them, a captain that can grasp the situation firmly. Even if the job opening is only temporary, we still require someone to fill it. Is the diligent Emperor Shura more suitable? Or the energetic young lord Zhen? The choice is yours. Remember, this isn’t a game. Please carefully consider the question and vote in who you think is the most appropriate. Very likely, it will decide what path the city walks down.”

“Why vote? We’d rather have the strongest rule. We’ll pick

who's stronger!" A vassal shouted from below.

"That's right, Emperor Shura is the strongest after Emperor Peafowl. Of course he should lead. Young lord Zhen? We have more than enough geniuses to go around. We can discuss him after he becomes a great emperor!" As soon as Emperor Petalpluck finished speaking, a large swathe of Shura supporters began to clamor in disagreement.

Chapter 1200: Jiang Chens Presence

Since there were supporters for Emperor Shura, there were naturally ones for Sacred Peafowl Mountain and young lord Zhen. They too joined the fray as more and more people raised their voices.

“Ridiculous! Sacred Peafowl Mountain should rule Veluriyam Capital. That’s how it has been for generation after generation. Anyone from any other faction should be considered an usurper!”

“We support young lord Zhen! He’s still young, but his potential and ability have both proven that he more than qualifies as the right successor!”

“I support young lord Zhen as well. He’s achieved so many amazing things in so few years. We’re willing to wait a hundred years for him. If that’s not enough, three to five hundred more years are fine too. In the long term, Veluriyam Capital needs a genius like young lord Zhen!”

“Absolutely. Emperor Shura has proven himself most fitting in the role of a lieutenant or third-in-line. As a proper leader? I feel like he’s missing presence and heart.”

There was utter anarchy in the crowd. So many vassals were present that no one felt obliged to hold their tongue. The two blocs instantly engaged each other in a war of words.

With Sacred Peafowl Mountain, there was a group of fiercely loyal subjects even with Emperor Peafowl’s absence. For the most part, they were composed of people who’d been raised up personally by the emperor. His favor to them could not be ignored.

Whether Emperor Peafowl was here or elsewhere, they saw Sacred Peafowl Mountain as their patron. As long as the mountain stood, their positions were safe. If it lost power, their own would go with it sooner or later. Despite Emperor Shura’s intimations

about withholding future retaliation, most of the vassals didn't believe a word of it. There was absolutely no cause for them to support him, no matter how many messengers he sent.

Firstly, Emperor Shura was not the most tolerant sort of individual. Secondly, Emperor Peafowl was the one who had promoted them through the ranks. Emotionally speaking, they couldn't just turn on Sacred Peafowl Mountain at the drop of a hat. Finally, nobody knew whether Emperor Peafowl had actually died or not.

He'd ruled Veluriyam Capital for three thousand years, after all. In the eyes of the city's vassals, Emperor Peafowl had long since become an invincible legend. The very thought of him succumbing so randomly was beyond incredible. Thus, even the few who were wavering slightly felt that it was no better than nourishing a viper in one's bosom if they supported Emperor Shura at this point.

Supporting Emperor Shura was unlikely to yield particularly good results for them down the line. On the off chance that Emperor Peafowl made a triumphant return, they would be condemned by both sides. They'd be the definition of ingrates and traitors then.

With any amount of consideration, it wasn't difficult to realize that they had Sacred Peafowl Mountain's mark on them already. They were destined to be in the same boat as their backer.

Betraying Sacred Peafowl Mountain was tantamount to throwing their entire future away, regardless of who won in the end. The quarreling continued. Neither faction yielded to the other.

Jiang Chen cast a detached look over the crowd. There was no shortage of Shura supporters. It seemed that he had bought more than his fair share of friends over the years. Perhaps Emperor Peafowl always knew. It was simply that he didn't care about it, given his aloof position.

Emperor Shura's cronies aside, there were plenty of Sacred

Peafowl Mountain loyalists as well.

“Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s three-thousand-year rule of the city is paying off. Their roots here are profoundly deep. Even though gossip is flying all over the place, there has been no large-scale defection. Living proof of Emperor Peafowl’s charisma, too, I think.”

It was an easy observation that many of Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s original vassals clearly supported their place of allegiance. Jiang Chen was secretly pleased by this. He didn’t have much of a connection with those people. If Emperor Peafowl really had fallen, it was understandable that their devotions would end with their master’s departure.

But the vassals had not abandoned Sacred Peafowl Mountain. They remained quite staunch in their loyalty. Jiang Chen was touched by the gesture. He was resolved all the more to strive for the city’s rule with Emperor Shura, no matter how difficult it proved in the end.

Jiang Chen was well aware that it would be a colossally strenuous task to overcome the ambitious second-in-command, given the limitation of his current position and resources. Nevertheless, he was obligated to give it his all. For these sincere supporters, if nothing else.

Ah, Your Majesty. You have really given me a hard nut to crack this time. The thought of the wise ruler brought a wry smile to Jiang Chen’s face. Even in this time of trouble, he was concerned about the older man’s safety.

“Quiet down, please!” Emperor Petalpluck motioned downwards with both hands. His great emperor presence filled the space, suppressing the cacophony of noise to a minimum.

“What is the meaning of this hubbub?” Emperor Petalpluck didn’t usually get angry, but he was not to be ignored when he did. “The decision has already been made. You have a single chance to

vote for whoever you support. Remember, you're vassals of Veluriyam Capital first and foremost. You should consider the city's well-being rather than engage in pointless argument. "No matter who wins in the end, Veluriyam Capital cannot be allowed to torn asunder. Otherwise, it would be better not to have the vote at all!"

Emperor Petalpluck put a lot of weight in his words. He gazed thoughtfully toward Emperor Shura and Jiang Chen. "I have a piece of advice for the two of you. Whether it is Sacred Peafowl Mountain or the Shura Retreat that wins, I hope that you will be mindful of the bigger picture. You must accept the results of this election; the loser should not cause trouble for the winner. Any separatism will be stamped out with great severity!"

The kindly emperor felt deeply indeed about Veluriyam Capital. His words were far harsher than was typical for him.

"Don't worry, Daoist Petalpluck," smiled Emperor Shura faintly. "I've worked diligently and without complain for countless years here in Veluriyam Capital. Have I done anything to either Daoist Peafowl or you, even though you two are ranked above me? What wrongdoing am I guilty of?

"The past is the past," retorted Emperor Petalpluck. "I want a promise for the future."

"You don't need to worry," Emperor Shura declared emotionlessly. "I did not convene this Vassal Meeting out of a desire for personal gain, but for the sake of this great city. If everyone chooses young lord Zhen over me, and if the young lord really can lead Veluriyam Capital to greater glory, then I don't mind serving as his trustworthy assistant."

There was plenty of applause at his ceremonious words. Emperors Vastsea and Skysplitter both nodded, apparently impressed by the speech. They were the first to clap.

All eyes were on Jiang Chen, clearly interested in his response. A

smile as gentle as the spring breeze hung perpetually upon the young man's face.

"Emperor Peafowl has always told me that I should view problems holistically. If Sacred Peafowl Mountain no longer holds the grace of fate, then I have no objections whatsoever. Emperor Peafowl has never taught me to turn against my allies. But, I have to say this ahead of time: I will certainly investigate His Majesty's whereabouts. If his disappearance has to do with anyone in this city, I will make the person responsible pay ten times over. He will perish, and his heritage with it!" Jiang Chen smiled serenely, his eyes turning to his rival candidate. "What do you think, Emperor Shura?"

The emperor was unruffled. "Exactly what I wanted to say. I likewise hope that you have a clear conscience, young lord Zhen!"

There was a rage-fueled fire in Emperor Shura's heart. How could he not have noticed that Jiang Chen was alluding to a connection between him and Emperor Peafowl's disappearance? Though he was actually responsible for it, he was still infuriated at such a bold-faced accusation. It felt as bad as being framed. Worse, maybe. Despite being the culprit, he had to bluff a righteous appearance. It was necessary to fire back a counter-accusation.

Jiang Chen harrumphed. "I owe Emperor Peafowl a great debt of gratitude, and my conscience is as clear as a mirrored pool. There is nothing I've kept hidden from daylight. Let the heavens bear witness to your deeds as well as mine. I swear that I have never done, and will never do, anything detrimental to His Majesty or his interests. If I break this oath, let me be destroyed by divine punishment on the spot!"

Such a transparent oath rendered everyone who'd been incited by Emperor Shura's words entirely speechless. There were people that suspected Jiang Chen's origins, of course. There was even the rare rumor that he was a double agent from the demons, here to haunt Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Veluriyam Capital.

Jiang Chen had heard no shortage of them in his time. That was why he had made this oath to heaven and earth. Its weight killed off any potential malicious rumors, both past and future.

“I’d like to know whether you’re brave enough to make the same kind of oath, Emperor Shura.” It was a sudden interjection from Emperor Coiling Dragon, standing coolly to the side.

There was a brief, awkward silence. Emperor Petalpluck glanced at Emperor Shura, only to see Emperor Mountaincrush doing the same. In fact, all eyes had turned to Emperor Shura.

“I never make pointless oaths because of baseless rumors,” Emperor Shura responded matter-of-factly. “Why would I need one if my conscience is clear?”

His words weren’t as assertive as Jiang Chen’s had been, but they had a legitimacy that made them difficult to criticize.

“Your conscience is clear, hmm?” Emperor Coiling Dragon snickered.

Emperor Petalpluck probed Emperor Shura with a thoughtful look. “Alright. Information about Emperor Peafowl will surface eventually, I’m sure. Now, let us begin the election of Veluriyam Capital’s temporary ruler.” His tone was carefully indifferent.

“What’s the ‘temporary’ part for?” Emperor Vastsea was taken aback

“Emperor Peafowl’s current whereabouts are unknown. Of course the ruler we’re electing now is temporary. If he doesn’t return in another decade or two, we can safely take away the ‘temporary’ part away then. There’s nothing wrong with a transition period.”

“I quite agree, Daoist Petalpluck,” Emperor Void hastily concurred. “A temporary leader is all that we need. Otherwise, it will be an affront to everyone involved upon Emperor Peafowl’s return.”

Emperor Coiling Dragon nodded. “That’s the right of it. We’re only sure that Emperor Peafowl is absent without leave. Anyone that fancies full rule of the city is attempting an insurrection.”

“Let it be temporary, then,” said Emperor Mountaincrush. “The change has my full support.”

The great emperors not allied with Shura had all spoken their minds.

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