

SOVEREIGN OF THE THREE REALMS

BOOK 12

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!

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English Translation by etvolare @ Wuxiaworld

Translation Edit by Aruthea, Crimsonguard, LemonPEEL, Studmonster, and Premonition @ Wuxiaworld

ePub conversion by Lisa Hayes @ Hasseno Blog

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Chapter 901: Annihilating the Purple Light Division

The head of Hidden Death flashed a ruthless smile. "We're only taking out some interest. Our biggest target is still that scoundrel, Jiang Chen. He killed a number of our members all those years ago, and now he has a worldwide bounty on his head. Maybe one day he'll flee back here. We should all keep our eyes peeled."

Eyes blazed everywhere in the peanut gallery. The very sound of Jiang Chen's name was enough to remind them of the associated princely sum promised by the Eternal Celestial Capital.

Elder Qiu spat hatefully as well, "That kid is Purple Sun Sect's mortal enemy! If we can catch him, we must take him to the Eternal Celestial Capital to receive our reward."

The Hidden Death head snickered in secret disdain. How idiotic. A reward from the Eternal Celestial Capital? Our Ninesuns Sky Sect has an internal bounty on that kid's head too, with the goods to match. Aside from the Ninesuns Sky Sect’s higher-ups, however, not many people knew about it. From a grunt’s perspective, the Eternal Celestial Capital was the issuer of Jiang Chen's bounty.

"We have to look into our recent mission to Skylaurel Kingdom. We of the Hidden Death emphasize efficiency. It's been quite a few days since we’ve received word from them. Send some more people to check on them." The head was evidently somewhat dissatisfied with his underlings' abilities.

Suddenly, faint laughter echoed through the air. "No need. They're not coming back."

The voice was extremely out of place. There had been no indication of its source prior to its emanation. Everyone present jumped in their seats.

"Who? Who is it?!"

"What... where?!"

Some felt like they were hallucinating. Was one of them intentionally being negative? But the voice had come from thin air, not from someone within the seated audience. The head of Hidden Death focused his eyes and deployed his consciousness to his surroundings. His expression grew very serious. “From where do you come, friend? Don’t you know that it’s proper to notify us ahead of time?”

“Ahead of time, huh?” The strange voice popped up again, this time from a different corner. “How could I make sure that you wouldn’t all run off somewhere if I did that?”

The constant changes to the voice’s apparent position made it seem like there was someone invisible in the air who kept moving from place to place. They traveled instantaneously, and it seemed as if they didn’t even exist. The head of Hidden Death was black with rage. “Who are you really? Why all this excessive mystery?”

“Ah, but I thought that was your sect’s specialty.” The voice reverberated throughout the grand hall, but nobody could pinpoint it’s exact location.

Even with his consciousness fully deployed, the division head didn’t have a clue as to where the voice was coming from. The situation was terrifying. Ever since he had lucked out with his sworn brother, the head of Hidden Death’s strength had grown in great strides. He’d gradually accumulated a newfound loftiness. He felt that he could take on any cultivator in the sixteen kingdoms alliance. Even outside of it, they still had the Ninesuns Sky Sect to back them up. His organization had been on a roll for the last few years, which took him from behind the scenes into the limelight. Understandably, his nature had changed drastically with this shift. He now found it intolerable to be toyed with on his own turf like this and seethed with anger.

“Since you’re playing such idle games with us, I assume you hold the Ninesuns Sky Sect in no regard whatsoever?” His higher-ups seemed to be the only thing still on the division head’s mind. It certainly did a good job calming down the others. The chaos in the room subsided a little.

“The Ninesuns Sky Sect? Funny you should say that. I hear that several of their best disciples have been cut down one after another, and that they’ve lost face numerous times to boot. Is that the sect you’re talking about?”

“How dare you!” Everyone else in the room jumped up at the insult.

“Such humiliating words to the great Sky Sect should be punished with death!”

“Division head, this person must die. We can’t let him escape!”

“That’s right! Such is the fate of anyone that dares insult the Sky Sect!”

The head of Hidden Death was a bit more clear-minded. He secretly fretted about the situation. Death? That was easy to say, but for whom would it be in the end? They couldn’t even catch this person’s shadow. “Calm down, everyone,” collecting himself, he gave appropriate orders. “Get in formation and be ready for the enemy.”

His subordinates moved in accordance to his command.

“Friend, you can decide for yourself whether you’re our enemy or not. If you have a grudge with the Ninesuns Sky Sect, you should go to their headquarters instead. Why show off your power at one of their mere divisions?”

Though the tone of this statement was still somewhat hardened, it had softened considerably from before.

“Of course I’ll go to headquarters. But just as I said, I came here to collect advance interest.”

“What do you mean?” The head’s face froze.

“Nothing in particular. I’m sending you to the world beyond.” The voice was off-handed, almost casual, as if it were speaking ordinary words. However, the contents of his message made everyone’s hearts leap.

“How arrogant!” The division head took out a smooth, shiny mirror. It shined with an awe-inspiring light that flooded the corners of the room.

The voice laughed serenely, “You don’t need to go to such an extent. I’m over here.” As soon as the words were spoken, two figures appeared in the middle of the hall. One male and one female, both quite young. They stood with an odd listlessness, their faces impassive. For the division head, both faces were unfamiliar.

“Kill them both!” He let out a mad roar, heralding his subordinates’ charge.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. These clowns didn’t deserve to be killed by his lotus. He braced himself, and a magnetic force blasted in both directions. Immediately afterwards, his ginseng’s tentacles followed, spreading themselves every which way. The cultivators of the Purple Light Division weren’t nearly as strong as the wandering ones that had attacked Jiang Chen at Myriad Corpse Valley. Those guys had at least been in the origin realm, and some were even in the lower initial sage realm. But within this Purple Light Division, the only sage realm cultivator was the division head. The strongest people in the sect were a few weak origin realm cultivators, while the majority of the remaining cultivators were in the spirit realm.

Jiang Chen didn’t need to use any of his special methods, really. The core members of the division were crushed by the mint ginseng’s tentacles, exploding in clouds of blood and flesh.

“How can this be?” The absurdity of the scene clued the division

head in to the fact that the end had come. Along with a few other wily elders, he tried to walk towards the door. Unfortunately, they didn't get very far before they realized that they were stuck in a formation. There was no way out.

"Trying to leave?" Jiang Chen mocked.

The head of Hidden Death was white with sheer terror. The person before him was infinitely more fearsome than anyone else he'd ever seen. He couldn't possibly hope to bridge the gap between their strengths.

"Sir, sir... we can talk about it, can't we?" Even as a man of many experiences, the division head's teeth chattered.

Jiang Chen scanned his surroundings. Only the five or six strongest remained. "I don't think there's much to talk about." He said coolly.

The division head shivered. "Sir, are you not afraid of the Ninesuns Sky Sect's vengeance? You can't just go around destroying its divisions."

"Do you have memory problems? I thought I said that I would go to the Ninesuns Sky Sect later."

"If you have a score to settle with them, why take it out on us little ants?" The division head cried.

"Little ants?" Jiang Chen boomed with laughter. "Do you remember all the people you sent killers after? Or the number of people that Purple Sun slaughtered when they were in power?"

The few people that remained were all shocked by this announcement, including the division head.

"Who... who are you really?" Suddenly, the head realized, "You, you're that Jiang..."

Jiang Chen smiled faintly again. Grabbing the division head's neck with one hand, he stopped the man from speaking further.

“Die.” With his other, he killed the rest of the remaining, stunned men with a palm strike. He continued gripping the division head’s life in his hand. “You’re clever, but you got in way over your head when you first tried to lay a finger on me.”

The division head’s teeth clattered with fury. Everything about today had been too strange. They’d had so many years of smooth sailing, and they were about to do something big and climb even higher! But everything had come crashing down with this singular slap. The acute feeling of loss made him think it was a kind of nightmare instead. He was incredulous. But he didn’t beg for his life. He knew that he was dead without a doubt, so became fearless instead.

“Jiang Chen, you animal. You dare come back?” He shouted loudly. “Don’t be so full of yourself. The Sky Sect will tear you to shreds!”

“A pleasant thought. I doubt it’ll come to fruition, though.” Jiang Chen was perfectly relaxed. He smacked the division head into dust, then destroyed the entire hall with a few more. As for the underlings of the division, Jiang Chen didn’t need to tend to them himself. The Goldbiter Rats finished the job in a much better fashion than he would have.

After an hour, there was nothing left alive in the entire Purple Light Division’s headquarters. Jiang Chen’s heart was as calm and as undisturbed as a pool of water. He had no pity for a faction like the Purple Light Division. No matter whether it was Hidden Death or leftovers from the Purple Sun Sect, they were a scourge to the sixteen kingdoms alliance. It was a crime to leave anyone here alive. There was no guilt in killing them.

News of the slaughter went out of the sixteen kingdoms alliance a few days later—the Ninesuns Sky Sect’s Purple Light Division had been utterly wiped out a few days ago. Nothing was left alive on the mountain that served as its headquarters. Even the plant life and spirit vein had been destroyed. All of their foundations had

been removed for good, and there was no possibility of rebuilding.

It took even longer for this news to reach the Ninesuns Sky Sect. The entire sect was aghast. Although the Purple Light Division had only been a very small division amongst countless of others, this sort of outright annihilation was a slap in the face to them. It was an enormous challenge and provocation. The sect immediately sent out numerous inspectors in droves to the Myriad Domain for a detailed investigation. However, all of this would only occur a month later.

Chapter 902: The Generation Binding Curse, Resolved

The Ninesuns Sky Sect was both shocked and furious, but it wasn't like these series of events were all considered bad news to them. The sect had been trying to find a good excuse to invade the Myriad Domain for quite some time. Today, they finally had that justifiable excuse. The destruction of the Purple Light Division was a tiny blemish in the overall scheme of things—it didn't affect the Ninesuns Sky Sect's core strength at all.

Despite their initial anger, the senior executives of the Ninesuns Sky Sect were secretly bursting with joy when they sent out large groups of inspectors into the Myriad Domain. The current Myriad Domain was a mess that was being controlled by the Eternal Celestial Capital and the Great Scarlet Mid Region. This outcome displeased the Sky Sect greatly. After all, they had made their own plans for the Myriad Domain a long time ago. Unfortunately for them, their schemes weren't as great as the Eternal Celestial Capital's. In the end, a large majority of the Myriad Domain had fallen into the Eternal Celestial Capital and Great Scarlet Mid Region's grasp. To say that the Ninesuns Sky Sect's share was small was an understatement. So how could the sect possibly be satisfied by this outcome?

……

Setting aside the Myriad Domain that was about to be embroiled in chaos once more, Jiang Chen was currently more anxious about trying to cure Huang'er of the Generation Binding Curse, three thousand meters below the ground of a secluded area in Swordland Region. He had obtained the Requiem Wood, and only one piece of it was needed to cure the Generation Binding Curse. The Requiem Wood was the best item for purifying one's soul and nurturing one's mind. It was often used for such purposes, even in the

heavenly planes.

However, the Requiem Wood that existed in the heavenly planes were much older and of higher quality than the ones in the Divine Abyss Continent. But of course, the Requiem Wood that he currently possessed was still enough to cure Huang'er's Generation Binding Curse. Although the treatment process wasn't particularly complicated, it would take a very long time to complete. According to Jiang Chen's calculations, it would take at least three to five months to cure Huang'er completely.

If the treatment really did take that long, then he might not be able to make it back for the Veluriyam Pagoda opening ceremony. With that being said, the first battle that would take place during the ceremony was the pill battle. Jiang Chen no longer had anything he wanted to attain from pill dao. Thus, the pill battles of the Veluriyam Pagoda didn't interest him all that much. After all, he was the absolute authority in Veluriyam Capital's pill dao scene. He was so great that even Sacred Peafowl Mountain had to rely on him to fight against Pillfire City. Considering how famous 'Pill King Zhen' was right now, there was no longer any need for him to prove his worth. In fact, he suspected that not even Emperor Peafowl himself was expecting him to participate in this particular battle.

The treatment process was very long, but Jiang Chen went through the entire process with extreme caution. He forbade himself from making even the slightest mistake. In reality, he had to bear a little bit of risk as well to do away with the Generation Binding Curse, as this curse was extremely potent. But he had his past life's experiences to guide him, and he was well-versed in the characteristics of the Generation Binding Curse. Therefore, the treatment process proceeded relatively smoothly.

After injecting the Requiem Wood's essence into Huang'er's consciousness, Jiang Chen used his own consciousness to force the Generation Binding Curse against the Requiem Wood's power. The

curse was slowly but surely purified like silk being drawn from woven cocoons. This was a blood curse, and thus was extremely powerful. However, everything in this world has an accompanying weakness, and the Requiem Wood was the item that could counter and purify this particular curse. Three months later, when the final trace of the Generation Binding Curse was purified by the Requiem Wood, Jiang Chen finally let out a long sigh of relief.

“It is done.” Jiang Chen’s eyes were bloodshot and very tired. He had been working continuously for the past few months, and the task had been exhausting for him, even with his level of consciousness.

Conversely, Huang’er felt much better and more relaxed than ever before. The darkness that had constantly overshadowed her consciousness had finally disappeared entirely. As she basked in a new degree of comfort that only normal people had the privilege of enjoying, Huang’er felt her eyes turn misty despite her tranquil temperament. She hugged Jiang Chen tightly in her arms, wanting to never let go of him. Right now, the only thought running through her mind was that this man was her sky, her earth, and her everything. She was deeply pained to see the extent that Jiang Chen had pushed himself for her sake.

“Brother Chen, knowing you is my life’s greatest happiness.” Huang’er murmured softly like she was in a dream. As she watched Jiang Chen sleeping soundly in her arms, she gently pressed a kiss onto his forehead with reddened cheeks. Her eyes were overflowing with infinite love. Huang’er was born with a tranquil disposition, and no young man had ever managed to leave a deep impression in her mind. But this man—she would give up even her life in order to protect him.

Jiang Chen’s spirit was fully replenished after he spent roughly four full days in recovery. Only now did he have the time to thoroughly inspect the rewards he’d procured. From the battle against Lu Shinan, he had obtained a big cauldron that would serve

as a good piece of defense equipment. The eight statues that had formerly belonged to the Prince of Shangping were extraordinary as well. The only regret he had regarding this haul was that the formation disk was missing. Lu Shinan had a bit more good loot on him and a shocking amount of wealth. Naturally, they were all under Jiang Chen's possession now.

Jiang Chen had also obtained a batch of sky rank spirit herbs from the Wood Demons. They were all genuine sky rank spirit herbs. He had obtained at least a dozen or so sky rank spirit herbs during this trip. Therefore, he currently possessed almost twenty sky rank spirit herbs. It was definitely a shocking amount of spirit herbs. Presently, only a handful of great emperors were wealthier than him. Of course, the greatest reward of this trip had been the improvement in his cultivation. Jiang Chen had already noticed that he was only a thin margin away from reaching the sixth level sage realm.

Taking advantage of this short gap, he shot through this boundary and completed his ascension smoothly. Jiang Chen wasn't satisfied with just advancing a single level, however. After his ascent, he consumed a Sage Smile Pill and continued to cultivate. The Sage Smile Pill had been a gift by the Coiling Dragon clan lord, and it allowed a sage realm cultivator to unconditionally gain an entire cultivation level.

Jiang Chen hadn't used it earlier because he had wanted to reserve it for this exact moment. In this way, he could ascend into the seventh level sage realm and immediately become a sky sage realm expert. Once he completed his ascension into the sky sage realm, his combat strength and cultivation would increase dramatically.

Jiang Chen had used a total of three months to cure Huang'er of her Generation Binding Curse. He'd completed it ahead of schedule. However, it took him more than a month to ascend to the seventh level sage realm. When he reached the sky sage realm

and felt an infinite amount of energy surging within his body, he felt truly great.

“I’ve finally reached the sky sage realm!” Jiang Chen’s eyes sparkled with joy. His cultivation had never stopped rising since the day he started cultivating, and now he had finally reached the sky sage realm. He was confident now that he could fight against an ordinary emperor realm expert even without his equipment.

But Jiang Chen didn’t grow lax just because he had broken through. Making good use of the momentum from his ascension, he began practicing the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique. He had been preparing himself for this sword technique since a long time ago, and now his rapport with the Pentecolor Divine Swords was almost perfect. He truly possessed the necessary qualification to cultivate this sword technique. The technique had gone through countless evolutions from complexity to simplicity, and vice versa. It was full of variations.

Naturally, Jiang Chen couldn’t master the sword technique in a single day. He had to start practicing from the most basic move. The Pentecolor Divine Swords had also been modified many times and possessed great power. Even a simple move could cause a large amount of destruction and upheaval.

The first move of the sword technique was called ‘Worldshaker’. The Pentecolor Divine Swords contained the True Law of Five Thunders. When it was executed, it killed with the force of the move coupled with the might and sound of thunder. It took Jiang Chen half a month to finally comprehend the essence of this first move. Out of sudden interest, he executed the move and discovered that he had accidentally shorn an entire mountain peak in half.

“Congratulations, Brother Chen! This sword technique is absolutely extraordinary.” Huang’er was no fool, and she too was astonished by the power behind the sword technique.

Jiang Chen chuckled, “I still may not be a match for you if you were to fight me at full force, Huang’er.”

Now that Huang’er was no longer restricted by the Generation Binding Curse, there was no longer any reason for her to refrain from fighting.

She smiled beautifully, “If you were anyone else I wouldn’t refute them, Brother Chen. But now I can’t help but think that you’re just being humble.”

“I’m not being humble. Back at Regal Pill Palace, it only took you one move to scare Cao Jin into fleeing with his tail between his legs. It’s a legendary story in Regal Pill Palace, you know?”Huang’er giggled, “I couldn’t just do nothing while you weren’t around. You would’ve lost face if I’d allowed him to behave atrociously in front of Regal Pill Palace’s entrance, wouldn’t you have?”

Jiang Chen laughed loudly and happily. He felt great to see a cheerful Huang’er who was no longer tormented by the Generation Binding Curse. One of his greatest worries had finally been completely assuaged.

“I wonder where Elder Shun is, though? Even if he did go back to Myriad Abyss Island, he should’ve returned already, shouldn’t he have?” He sighed softly as he recalled Elder Shen.

Huang’er also looked a little concerned when Elder Shun was brought up. “Elder Shun is a stubborn man, and he cares for me greatly. I’m just afraid that he isn’t willing to return without the Requiem Wood. Worse, I’m afraid that he may take dangerous risks to find it.""I hope he returns soon.”

Huang’er nodded in agreement, “Speaking of which, that bounty should be invalid now, right? Let’s find a suitable time to take down it down later. It’ll be terrible if those who saw it decided to run to the desolate wildlands to seek out the Requiem Wood and lose their lives for a mere great emperor relic in the process.

”Huang’er was born kind-hearted, so she didn’t want to see someone getting into trouble for her sake, especially since she was now freed from the Generation Binding Curse.

Jiang Chen nodded, “Come. Everything is done. Let us head back to Veluriyam Capital.”

The duo walked out from their hiding spot and returned to Tai-ah City. The city left quite a bad impression on Jiang Chen. He never forgot the fact that Tai-ah City had aided the villainous Gong Wuji in his attempt to hunt Jiang Chen down. Now that he had returned, Jiang Chen was wondering if he could find an opportunity to show them his ‘appreciation’.

However, after the two made their way into the city, they heard that the Eternal Celestial Capital and Ninesuns Sky Sect had actually started fighting each other in the Myriad Domain. The Ninesuns Sky Sect claimed that the Eternal Celestial Capital had destroyed their Purple Light Division. However, the Eternal Celestial Capital said that the Ninesuns Sky Sect was making something out of nothing so that they could invade Myriad Domain.

Neither sect gave ground, considering how they were competitors who shared many hostilities to begin with. As a result, escalating tempers eventually resulted in full-blown warfare breaking out within the Myriad Domain. The news sent a surge of pleasure into Jiang Chen’s mind. It’s a dogfight!

Chapter 903: Veluriyam Pagoda Gathering

Jiang Chen had only hatred for these two sects. He was perfectly content to see them at each other's throats. Sadly, he didn't have the leisure to see things through personally. It had been a long time since his departure from Veluriyam Capital. Though his trip had proceeded smoothly for the most part, he had spent several months restoring Huang'er back to full health. Afterwards, he had spent another few breaking through to the sky rank sage realm. All in all, it was a considerable number of days.

He would have missed the Veluriyam Pagoda's opening ceremony for sure. The festival centered around the Pagoda happened only once every sixty years. It was an excellent stage for rising stars at the capital to test their strength. The assembly properly began on the fifteenth day of the third month. From his calculations, it was already the fourth month. That meant the pagoda battles had already begun.

Thankfully, Jiang Chen's pill-related reputation in the city was already insurmountable. He didn't need the event to spread his fame. He wasn't missing out on much by skipping the sideshow. Because the Eternal Celestial Capital and Ninesuns Sky Sect were presently embroiled in a heated battle, Jiang Chen and Huang'er's return trip was fairly smooth.

Meanwhile, the pagoda battles were in full swing. The participants for this year's battles were far more numerous. Perhaps they had been inspired by the legend of a certain "Pill King Zhen", but geniuses from all over came to the pagoda battles, intent on using the battles as a stage for proving their worth and showcasing their skills. Their ambitions added a great deal of excitement to the proceedings. Because the divine Pill King Zhen wasn't participating, many talented pill geniuses wanted to take the crown, and in doing so, distinguish themselves as second-best.

The only loss was that Pill King Zhen, who had defeated Pillfire

City, hadn't yet appeared at any of the Pagoda's events. In particular, many pill geniuses called for the famous pill king to be a referee over the proceedings. The cries for this demand were so great that the entire Veluriyam Capital was swept up in them. Though they were ignored initially, there was strength in numbers. The petition made its way into the ears of the seven titled great emperors.

Emperor Peafowl had to step in to placate them. Pill King Zhen was out traveling and hadn't yet returned. But since everyone so eagerly expected the young prodigy, the emperor would do everything in his power to locate the pill king so that he could take part in the rest of the festivities. Jiang Chen had promised he would return for the Veluriyam Pagoda's opening, and the emperor's trust in him was firm and unshakable. As long as there weren't any extenuating circumstances, he would return.

For this year's ceremony, Emperor Peafowl seemed to be keeping a lower profile in general. He delegated much of the duties to the other titled great emperors and didn't show himself too often. This change caused a subtle shift in the winds that blew through the city. Was the emperor too old? This was the first thought that crossed many people's minds. Or was it because he was overly saddened by the passing of his disciple, young lord Fan? Did he no longer have any faith in the city's heritage? More crucially, was this Emperor Shura's time to take the stage?

Though there was no announcement, no official version of events, every sign pointed towards the latter's distinct possibility. The clans under Emperor Shura took the opportunity to rear their heads once more. The repercussion from the Majestic Clan's fall from grace had seemingly disappeared. Compared to them, the clans beneath Emperor Peafowl's command were completely inconspicuous. Though the Coiling Dragon Clan lord had appeared at the ceremony and its related festivities, a rumor spread across the city that he was nearing the end of his natural lifespan. He

would undergo cultivation dissipation in the next one or two years, maybe even within the next few months. The Coiling Dragon Clan lord was at the end of his rope.

Because of the low profile that both Emperor Peafowl and his foremost clan had taken, a curious atmosphere loomed over this year's ceremony. Within the Coiling Dragon Clan's halls, the clan lord was forlorn. Young master Ji San stood to his side, brow similarly furrowed. Neither man was particularly cheery.

"Ole Third, is there news of Pill King Zhen?" The Coiling Dragon Clan lord sighed quietly.

"Not presently." Ji San's reply was unhappy.

The clan lord picked up a list of names, reading it over again and again. "The top hundred for both the noble youths and wandering cultivators are out. The scions under His Majesty Peafowl's banner only have twenty-three spots in the top hundred, almost a historic low. Emperor Shura, on the other hand, has twenty. They're neck to neck with each other, and competition is tough."

Clearly, he wasn't pleased at the fact that there was a competition in the first place. Ji San shared in his plight. "If not for the fall of the Majestic Clan, I'd estimate that the numbers between the two emperors would be equal right now."

"Yes. That's why there's a sense of unease here in Veluriyam. The prevailing opinion is that Emperor Peafowl wants to abdicate the throne to Emperor Shura. There are more absurd rumors stating that His Majesty is too old and can no longer effectively compete with Emperor Shura any more." There was a tangible sense of helplessness from the Coiling Dragon Clan lord's words.

"Ridiculous. These people are ridiculous! Emperor Peafowl has ruled over Veluriyam for millennia. How can he lose to Emperor Shura?" Ji San was a diehard fan of the emperor. He wouldn't even entertain the thought. The situation was somewhat tempestuous, though. Even the factions that Emperor Peafowl was closest to

didn't know what His Majesty was thinking.

"Clan Lord, is His Majesty setting a trap?" Ji San couldn't help but ask.

The clan lord laughed dryly. After some consideration, he shook his head. "I've been thinking about that, too. His Majesty's thoughts are difficult for the rest of us mortals to comprehend. But it is true that His Majesty's management of both Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Veluriyam Capital has loosened in recent years. Almost as if it were intentional."

"Why? Has His Majesty finally seen through it all and cast off the shackles of power and ambition?" Ji San had no idea how it could be.

"His Majesty is insightful and wise. I have no doubt that he has his reasons." The clan lord shook his head, bemused. "Perhaps he really does have a different plan in mind that we can't see. In my perspective, Emperor Shura has the talent and skills to shoulder the duties of the city, but his fortune and morals are still somewhat lacking. There's something missing as to the way he carries himself, at least compared to Emperor Peafowl."

"The way… he carries himself?" Ji San was perplexed.

"That's right, though that might be a little insubstantial," the clan lord explained. "Let's look at it from a different perspective. Because Emperor Peafowl is in charge, we can ignore the threat of first-rank sects and loom above them. That's why we can evenly oppose even an entity as large as Pillfire City. In the hands of Emperor Shura, I'm not sure if we'd be able to do the same. That's the difference."

The comparison clarified things for Ji San immediately. He scratched his head, bothered by the possibility. "I really don't want that to happen. His Majesty seemed to take a strong interest in that sworn brother of mine, but the guy's disappeared at such a crucial time. It makes me worry about things." Young master Ji San really

was worried. He wanted Jiang Chen to become Emperor Peafowl's personal disciple from the bottom of his heart. He even wanted Jiang Chen to replace young lord Fan if possible, and become the most-admired heir of the emperor. That was conducive to the Coiling Dragon Clan's development as well. But Jiang Chen wasn't here when he needed the fellow!

The Coiling Dragon Clan lord was just as concerned as Ji San. Unlike the latter, he was anxious about his mortality. Though Jiang Chen's healing was good for the next two or three years, that would pass in the blink of an eye. He didn't want to collapse at such an important and complicated juncture. If he did, the entire clan would definitely immediately follow suit.

"Clan Lord, I hear that His Majesty has promised to find my sworn brother. Surely there'll be no problem if that's the case?"

"That depends on where he went. If it's far away, even His Majesty would have a hard time finding him." The clan lord shook his head. "More importantly, I hope that nothing bad has happened to him."

The whole conversation bothered Ji San. He decided to change the topic by asking a question that suddenly came into his mind. "How're the top hundred wandering cultivators this time around?"

The Coiling Dragon Clan lord was cheered up by the question, his eyes sparkling. "There are quite a few very talented cultivators this year. One mysterious person in particular has an absolute advantage over the rest, and shows incredible promise. I'd say he can even go toe-to-toe with noble youths."

"Oh, is that so? What an impressive guy. And you say he's a wandering cultivator?" Ji San was very surprised. "Could it be my brother pulling a new trick over our heads?"

The clan lord smiled wryly. "That idea popped into my head as well, but the truth is that that's probably not the case. The guy is

talented, but he uses drastically different methods compared to Pill King Zhen. His talent is remarkable, but they're still not quite the same caliber of genius. Still, it's amazing to see someone like that in Veluriyam."

"Then shouldn't we contact him ahead of time?" Ji San's eyes lit up.

The Coiling Dragon Clan lord coughed. "I don't think we could get him to join us. The seven emperors have their pick before we get our turn, and they have a lot more to offer. The first ten on the wandering cultivator list generally all get snatched up by the emperors. We can only think about the eleventh onwards."

"Then, does Emperor Peafowl have any inclination to extend an offer?" Ji San hurried to ask.

"Apparently not. Emperor Peafowl hasn't sent any messengers inquiring about him. We don't have any information from the actual person in question, either. From the current state of things, though, Emperor Shura's contact with him has been the most frequent. Many people speculate that he'll join them in the end."

This was bad news for anyone under Emperor Peafowl's wing. The top-ranked wandering cultivator typically picked the strongest faction to join. If the person who took first place in the pagoda battles was taken by Emperor Shura, it sent out a bad signal—namely, for the top geniuses, Emperor Shura was now more attractive than Emperor Peafowl.

Chapter 904: Emperor Peafowls Successor Candidates

Lin Yanyu was feeling as pleased as punch lately, but he was nagged by a tiny bit of worry. Thankfully, it was the happy kind. Half a year ago, after leaving the desolate wildlands, he had heeded 'Daoist Huang's' suggestion and traveled to Veluriyam Capital. He had heard that the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering that was held every sixty years was about to start, and that even wandering cultivators had the qualification to participate in the event and potentially advance their status.

This news invigorated Lin Yanyu greatly. He was a stray dog in Pillfire City, and Veluriyam Capital was Pillfire City's sworn enemy. If he could earn his place in Veluriyam Capital, he might be able to take revenge for his family someday. If he allowed this chance to slip by, he couldn't see a sliver of hope of taking revenge, even if he were to live for another few thousand years. Therefore, he had registered to participate in the Veluriyam Pagoda Meeting almost without thinking. He would be participating in the pill battles as a wandering cultivator.

Lin Yanyu was very confident in his own pill dao talent. However, he was aware that there was a legend who was even greater than him in Veluriyam Capital—Pill King Zhen. Pill King Zhen was Lin Yanyu's idol. This was especially true after he'd heard that Pill King Zhen had defeated that insufferably arrogant Pill King Ji Lang in the clash for the Longevity Pill. After all, Pill King Ji Lang was an old enemy of Lin Yanyu's father. Lin Yanyu had always thought that the true mastermind behind the Lin Family's destruction was that particular pill king.

That was why Lin Yanyu quite admired the man who defeated Pill King Ji Lang. While 'Daoist Huang's' suggestion was one of the reasons why he came to Veluriyam Capital, his wish to meet the

world famous Pill King Zhen was also a factor. However, he couldn't find any news about Pill King Zhen no matter how he tried to ask around. When the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering was about to begin, and after countless pill dao geniuses had requested specifically for Pill King Zhen to be the judge of the pill battles, Lin Yanyu finally learned that the famous Pill King Zhen had been absent from Veluriyam Capital for quite some time already. This news disappointed him a little.

Still, he progressed triumphantly in the pill battles and was placed first amongst the top hundred wandering cultivators. Plenty of forces within Veluriyam Capital sought out Lin Yanyu in an attempt to recruit him after the rankings were released. Out of all the powers, the most proactive faction of them was, without a doubt, Emperor Shura's faction. However, Lin Yanyu still hadn't made up his mind even now. Although Veluriyam Capital's state of affairs wasn't very clear to him, he knew that the strongest great emperor in Veluriyam Capital was Emperor Peafowl. Moreover, the famous Pill King Zhen was closer to Emperor Peafowl. Therefore, Lin Yanyu didn't make any hasty decisions, despite facing much enticement.

However, the top hundred names were about to be immediately declared. After that, the semi-finals would ensue to decide the top thirty-six cultivators who would enter the pill pagoda of Veluriyam Pagoda. The pill pagoda contained every pill dao inheritance that ever existed in Veluriyam Pagoda. It was a secret vault of pill dao. Here, there would be many opportunities.

……

Inside Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

"Your Majesty, the top hundred names of the pill battles have already been finalized. What will be your plan after this? I shall execute it straight away," Cloudsoar Monarch asked.

Emperor Peafowl smiled faintly, "I have no plans for now, I'm

afraid. What would be your plan of action, Cloudsoar?”

Cloudsoar Monarch was slightly caught off guard by the counter question. He smiled wryly, “The internal situation of Veluriyam Capital right now is somewhat awkward, Your Majesty. Everyone thinks that you are planning to abdicate soon. May I know if this is true, Your Majesty?”

Naturally, everyone in Sacred Peafowl Mountain was very concerned with this question. If Emperor Peafowl truly planned to abdicate the throne to Emperor Shura, then his strange inactivity as of late would make a lot of sense. But if the emperor truly planned to abdicate, he should have informed his subordinates beforehand and given them some time to prepare themselves mentally, shouldn’t he have?

Emperor Peafowl didn’t say anything, however. In fact, he hadn’t revealed even the slightest hint of his plans. His silence caused the situation to become even more awkward than before. Although everyone had all sorts of guesses, no one could tell what the emperor was thinking for sure. As Emperor Peafowl’s most trusted aide, Cloudsoar Monarch had never stopped trying to figure out his emperor’s true intentions. But he’d failed, and now he could no longer stop himself from asking.

“Abdicate?” Emperor Peafowl sighed softly. His gaze on Cloudsoar Monarch suddenly turned meaningful, “Did you know that I sensed the heavenly dao a thousand years ago?”

His answer was like a clap of summer thunder. It rang so loudly in Cloudsoar Monarch’s ears that he was stunned for a very, very long time. “Your Majesty… did you just say that you’ve sensed the heavenly dao?”

Emperor Peafowl sighed softly, “There is no point in hiding it any longer. I’ve tried to suppress this feeling for a thousand years, but the heavenly dao is unavoidable once you sense it the first time. Emperor Shura is full of ambition, but unfortunately he

never had the courage to rise to power and confront me for the throne. Sadly, I can only wait for him to come to a decision, but even to this day, he still lacks the courage and the strength to make that move." Emperor Peafowl spoke as if he wasn't included in the story he was currently narrating. In fact, he sounded a little despondent. "Everyone thinks that I am getting old, and that Emperor Shura will replace me one day. However, no one has realized that I am hoping that he can replace me as soon as possible."

Cloudsoar Monarch was speechless. This revelation was just too surprising to him. He never realized that Emperor Peafowl had reached a height so great that no one could understand him. Now, it would appear that the outside world's so-called worries were completely unnecessary.

Emperor Peafowl had sensed the heavenly dao and wanted to abdicate the throne since a long time ago. This was because a great emperor who had sensed the heavenly dao was the equivalent of a half-step empyrean cultivator. If he truly wished to hold onto his authority, then no one could have replaced him. There was only one reason why he would abdicate his throne, and that was because Emperor Peafowl had transcended to a level where worldly power no longer meant anything to him. His horizons had long since surpassed everything in Veluriyam Capital. Compared to Emperor Peafowl, they were as pitiful and amusing as frogs at the bottom of a well.

Cloudsoar Monarch was absorbed in emotions of pride and sadness for a while. He was proud because the emperor he'd pledged allegiance to was so capable that he'd actually sensed the heavenly dao. But he was also sad because the emperor would eventually heed the call of the heavenly dao and leave Veluriyam Capital one day. If that day were to come, where would Veluriyam Capital go, and what would be its fate in the future? Would the glory that Sacred Peafowl Mountain had maintained for such a

long time be lost forever after his absence? And would they really have to allow Emperor Shura's faction to take control of Veluriyam Capital?

"You don't need to worry about this, Cloudsoar. For a thousand years I was troubled by this predicament, but the answer finally came to me in recent years. The fog that once enshrouded Veluriyam Capital's future is slowly clearing, and it has enlightened me to a whole new path."

Cloudsoar Monarch trembled and looked at Emperor Peafowl in shock, "Have you made up your mind already, Your Majesty?"

Emperor Peafowl smiled faintly, "Not until recently, but yes, I have something in mind. Emperor Shura has proven himself to simply be a good agitator, but not the courageous ruler this power truly needs. Therefore, he can only be my second choice."

"Second choice?" Cloudsoar Monarch frowned visibly, "Who is the first choice then?" He didn't know why, but Cloudsoar Monarch suddenly recalled the deceased young lord Fan. His heart ached at the loss.

"Who do you think is most suitable, Cloudsoar?" Emperor Peafowl suddenly asked meaningfully.

"Alas..." Cloudsoar Monarch sighed softly, "The late young lord Fan may be the most suitable candidate. Unfortunately, his passing remains somewhat unclear even to this day."

Cloudsoar Monarch had always thought that young lord Fan's unexpected demise was most likely caused by Emperor Shura's faction. However, Emperor Peafowl had forbade them from discussing or making wild guesses about his demise. That was why Cloudsoar Monarch had never spoken of it in public.

But Emperor Peafowl suddenly laughed and shook his head, "Oh, Cloudsoar. Even you were fooled by him, weren't you?"

"What do you mean?" Cloudsoar Monarch was caught off guard.

“As matters stand, I can now tell you the truth. I killed young lord Fan with my own hands.” Emperor Peafowl said calmly.

“What?” Cloudsoar Monarch’s head buzzed with shock. He stared blankly at Emperor Peafowl in utter disbelief.

“A demon bloodline is a justifiable cause for execution. I had been waiting to see if any one of you could discover his bloodline. I was planning to choose that person as Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s successor. Unfortunately, not one of you managed to discover the truth.”

“The demon race?” Cloudsoar Monarch’s expression changed yet again. These surprising series of revelations were starting to overwhelm him. He worked hard to swallow a few times until he finally calmed himself down, his belly full of regrets. He’d never realized that the great emperor had been testing them. Unfortunately, none of the peak emperor cultivators had passed the test. However, another question immediately appeared in Cloudsoar Monarch’s mind. If Emperor Shura was only Emperor Peafowl’s second choice, then who was his first choice? Cloudsoar Monarch’s mind was once again filled with doubt.

“Your Majesty, your servant is truly slow-witted. No matter how much I mull it over, I can’t figure out who could possibly be your first choice. Just who is your best candidate?” Naturally, the only person in Veluriyam Capital who was more suited to rule than Emperor Shura was Emperor Peafowl himself. But Emperor Peafowl had already made it clear that he planned to abdicate. So who could possibly be the future master of Veluriyam Capital?

“This person has risen to attention for some time already. Are you truly this slow, Cloudsoar?” Emperor Peafowl sighed.

The answer abruptly flashed through his mind, and Cloudsoar Monarch couldn’t stop himself from exclaiming, “Pill King Zhen? Do you mean Pill King Zhen?”

“You’ve finally guessed it.”

“But where does Pill King Zhen’s martial dao talent stand? It hasn’t been verified yet, has it?” Cloudsoar Monarch couldn’t describe how shocked he was at present. He didn’t doubt Pill King Zhen’s pill dao talent in the slightest, but even at best Pill King Zhen had only displayed tremendous potential during a previous exam. True geniuses could only be identified through competition. Therefore, whether or not Pill King Zhen possessed a superior martial dao talent and strength that surpassed all other young geniuses was still pending a reality check. In addition, Pill King Zhen was much too young. If Emperor Peafowl’s plan was to groom him as a young lord, then the possibility wasn’t completely out of the question. But succeeding Emperor Peafowl’s throne? Wasn’t that a little too early? Could he even grow up to become a suitable ruler without at least three to five hundred years of time?

Chapter 905: The Return of Pill King Zhen

Cloudsoar Monarch had quite a few doubts. There was something he could rely on, however, and that was that Emperor Peafowl's judgments about people had never been wrong. He had no doubt about the continued truth of this fact. Pill King Zhen? Still, the choice left the monarch feeling a little helpless. He admired the young pill king, sure, but he had never imagined that His Majesty would secretly decide on the youth as his heir!

"Your Majesty, isn't Pill King Zhen only a sage realm cultivator right now? Given his level of cultivation, it'll take at least a hundred more years for him to reach the emperor realm. To become someone at Your Majesty's strength... that would take several hundred more. If you feel the call of the heavens, how many more years can you keep him safe?"

Emperor Peafowl smiled faintly. "A decade or a century, perhaps? I cannot be sure myself regarding such matters. However, I'll wager that when Pill King Zhen reappears, he'll be in the sky rank sage realm for sure. For him, the emperor realm can be attained within the next twenty years. And perhaps, he'll become as strong as me in just a hundred."

"What? A hundred years to become as strong as a titled great emperor?" Cloudsoar Monarch was baffled at the emperor's statement. From sage realm to great emperor realm in only a century? Was there even historical precedent for that, anywhere on the Divine Abyss Continent? Cloudsoar had never been as skeptical about His Majesty's insights as he was now. There had to be some exaggeration in his statement, right? His Majesty was being just a bit too optimistic?

Emperor Peafowl appeared to have no plans of elaborating on his reasoning, however. He smiled again. "Cloudsoar, there is no need to speak of the matter any further. We shall see all in due time."

The monarch could only nod. “Then, Your Majesty, let’s talk about something else… the top-ranked wandering cultivator in the Pill Pagoda Battles is a pill genius. Is there anything about his background…”

“Veluriyam has a specific set of ways for discerning his background. I’ll pay attention to it personally. Enemy factions’ interference in the city’s affairs is forbidden. Thank you for the concern. You may rest easy.”

“What, hmm…” Cloudsoar was silent for a moment, then interjected in spite of himself. “Your Majesty, why not ask him to join us? Sacred Peafowl Mountain should have enough of a reputation now to be considered one of the sacred pill lands of the world.”

Emperor Peafowl chuckled. “I’m sure he’s talented, but can he compare to Pill King Zhen?”

“Of course he can’t, Your Majesty, but I think a genius like this is still fairly rare. No other faction in Veluriyam is worthy of someone like that, no?” Cloudsoar was dead set on protecting Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s paramount position.

“Cloudsoar, calm yourself.” Emperor Peafowl gave the man an ambiguous smile. “If he is truly wise, then he will make his decisions accordingly. If he is short-sighted and foolish, then it will only prove that his genius is wasted.”

There was a lot of hidden meaning behind the comment, and the monarch had to think long and hard about it. At its core, though, he knew that His Majesty did not wish for them to recruit the wandering cultivator genius. Resigned, Cloudsoar asked another question. “Your Majesty, do you know when Pill King Zhen will return from his travels?”

“According to my calculations, he’ll be back within the month. We cannot speak in absolutes, however. Nothing is perpetually smooth in the world.”

……

Jiang Chen and Huang'er's journey out of the Swordland Region encountered no setbacks. In only a day or so, they reached Myriad Peoples City, on Veluriyam Capital's border. Jiang Chen discovered many forces taking orders from the Eternal Celestial Capital on the outskirts of the city. But he now had extremely clever ways of disguising himself—ways that were virtually undetectable by anyone from the Eternal Celestial Capital.

Thus, he and Huang'er both passed through the encirclement without much actual danger, returning to Veluriyam's holdings succinctly. They found that the entire countryside was filled with a fervent atmosphere. Anywhere they went, people were talking about the Veluriyam Pagoda events. Many rumors and tales made the rounds here, each more fantastical than the last.

In particular, Jiang Chen heard one rumor the most often—that Emperor Peafowl was old and weak, and was likely abdicating to Emperor Shura. He found the notion plainly ridiculous. Though Emperor Peafowl had already lived a few millennia, and he was a titled emperor that had touched the dao of heaven. It wasn't a stretch to call him a half-step empyrean cultivator. How could such a man be old and weak?

Rather than being naturally spread by the commoners, this type of rumor was more likely to have been intentionally sown as seeds of discord. Jiang Chen didn't need any brainpower to guess that Emperor Shura had been behind this. If not the emperor himself, then his crazed henchmen. This kind of gossipy rumor was very compelling, because it satisfied the public's desire for entertainment. Rumors aside, though, most still doubted whether Emperor Shura could lead Veluriyam towards continued prosperity, just as Emperor Peafowl had done. There wasn't much evidence from the former emperor's part thus far to prove that he was capable of such a thing.

Having heard all the news flying around, Jiang Chen stepped into

the city gates of Veluriyam. He gazed at the Veluriyam Pagoda, with its cloud-piercing peak; the structure radiated an eye-dazzling brilliance, as if it was made entirely of its eponymous gemstone. He knew that the light came from the tower's opening. Now that he was on his home turf, relatively speaking, Jiang Chen had no further need for disguise. He revealed Pill King Zhen's countenance, which caused the gate guardsmen to clamor with great excitement, even from a considerably distance away.

"Pill King Zhen?"

"It's really him. Pill King Zhen is back!"

"Pill King Zhen has returned!"

The news spread from the gates like wildfire, setting the entire Veluriyam Capital ablaze. So, too, did it reach the scene of the Veluriyam Pagoda's proceedings. The activities of the gathering were still taking place, and the second round of the Pill Pagoda Battles was about to begin. The top hundred pill geniuses were about to enter into a new trial of challenges.

When the people present heard of Pill King Zhen's return, the reaction was uproarious. Each and every one of the pill geniuses clamored for the pill king to come referee for them. Clearly, having their idol watch them compete was a big motivational factor. The people at Sacred Peafowl Mountain were invigorated by the news of Pill King Zhen's return as well.

"I shall go receive him," Cloudsoar Monarch said.

"I as well," the Coiling Dragon clan lord recommended.

"I'll come with, too." A large amount of Emperor Peafowl's retainers actively put themselves forward. The words that Cloudsoar Monarch had received from the emperor had evidently spread amongst those high-ranking enough to hear the news.

Though it hadn't yet spread publicly, the four monarchs and several of the great clans both had their guesses. Jiang Chen hadn't

expected such an intimate reception from so many important people upon his return. He became a little embarrassed in the heat of the moment.

“Thank you, everyone. I haven’t done anything deserving of such an honor, and so you have my sincerest gratitude.” Faced with so many greats from Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Jiang Chen’s attitude was mainly one of surprise.

Cloudsoar Monarch laughed, “Pill King Zhen, you don’t know how popular you are now. The Veluriyam Pagoda’s pill battles are filled with geniuses that all want you to be one of their judges. If you stay away any longer, I think they’ll riot.”

Though it was an exaggerated claim, there was a grain of truth to it. The Coiling Dragon clan lord laughed as well. “Pill King Zhen, I can vouch for the monarch’s words. You’re the most popular man in Veluriyam’s pill scene. It would be a shame if you hadn’t been able to come to the Pill Pagoda Battles, so it’s very fortunate that you came back at the time that you did.”

Though Ji San, standing behind the clan lord, didn’t have much authority to talk, his eyes were lit up as well. He looked at Jiang Chen with eager eyes and made a multitude of faces, clearly in a cheerful mood.

Jiang Chen individually saluted everyone with a cupped-fist salute before walking towards Ji San and patting his shoulder. “Brother Ji, I have some good news of my own for you. I came across an acorn from an Invisible Chameleon Cloudpine during this trip abroad, purely by chance.”

“What?!” Young master Ji San’s body shook at that last sentence, as if touched by electricity. He was frozen in place for a long while. The Coiling Dragon clan lord in front of him had heard as well, exhibiting a similar reaction. A cocktail blend of emotions surged into his heart, and his skin tingled. He was so giddy that he could barely walk.

How could he not remember that the acorn was one of the main materials for the Pinecrane Pill? He had the Goldencrown Cloudcrane already, but they had looked for the Pine to no avail. It was a major concern for the entire Coiling Dragon Clan. This exciting news came as a sudden shock. Did Pill King Zhen really just happen upon an acorn from the requisite Cloudpine by chance? That meant that both main materials for the Cloudcrane Pill were present, right? Only the pill itself needed to be refined. Even someone as advanced in years as the Coiling Dragon clan lord was overjoyed by the situation. It was a kind of happiness that only one escaping certain death could experience—an indescribable sense of mirth.

“Don’t get overexcited. We’ll talk about it at length later.” Jiang Chen didn’t want to explain the details at present.

Ji San took a deep breath to calm himself. “Brother, I owe you one yet again.”

“There’s no need for that. What else are brothers for?” Jiang Chen returned an easy smile.

The return of Pill King Zhen was an explosive piece of news. The Pill Pagoda Battles’ atmosphere only became more heated.

Standing at the forefront of the hundred wandering cultivators, Lin Yanyu saw Pill King Zhen arrive in the midst of a throng of people. His eyes were fixated upon Jiang Chen, looking him up and down.

“Is this Pill King Zhen? He looks very young. Tsk, he might even be younger than I am… the arrogant Pill King Ji Lang was defeated by someone like this? No way… wait a second, how come he seems so familiar?” A strange feeling came over Lin Yanyu. Pill King Zhen looked unfamiliar superficially, but something about him was oddly reminiscent of someone he knew. Suddenly, he noticed the young pill king’s gaze was resting on him. The pill king nodded and smiled at him! Lin Yanyu was astounded, his body shaking.

“He knows me? Did Pill King Zhen hear of my name already?” He didn’t know how to react to this surprising turn of events. The next moment was even more surprising, though.

“Daoist Lin, you really did come faithfully to Veluriyam Capital after the wildlands.” He knew the voice all too well. Lin Yanyu gaped at Jiang Chen. Something was stuck in his throat, and he didn’t know what to say.

Chapter 906: Popularity Through the Roof

It's Daoist Huang! Are Pill King Zhen and Daoist Huang the same person? A lightning bolt snaked across Lin Yanyu's mind, connecting a series of unrelated thoughts. All the clues fit together now.

"Yes, yes, of course Daoist Huang is Pill King Zhen. That's why he told me to come to Veluriyam Capital. He finds my talent remarkable. He wants to help me!" Lin Yanyu was overjoyed. "When he heard about my troubles with Pillfire City, and how my father was Pill King Ji Lang's mortal enemy, he must've taken pity on me. I would only have a chance to take revenge on Pillfire if I came to Veluriyam—that must've been his logic!"

He was a bright young man, and instantly knew what Pill King Zhen expected of him. "Still, what an unexpected revelation. Daoist Huang—no, Pill King Zhen—must have acted as an overbearing asshole to deceive the others!" A storm of sensations passed through Lin Yanyu's heart.

Seeing Jiang Chen's arrival, Emperor Peafowl sidled towards him with a faint smile. "My young friend, how have you been recently?"

Jiang Chen bowed. "I'm pleased to be able to keep my promise and come back in time. Still, I must have already missed some exciting moments."

"It's not too late to have returned now. Look, all these pill geniuses are looking for your approval. Shouldn't you return the favor somehow?"

Jiang Chen smiled and didn't ignore the request. He went in front, his eyes brushing past all two hundred of the pill geniuses' faces. A hundred of them were youngsters from the noble houses and aristocratic families in Veluriyam. A hundred more were wandering cultivators from all over the realm. On a holistic level,

the noble youths naturally had an edge. From an individual perspective though, Jiang Chen noticed Lin Yanyu's excellence. In intuition especially, he had a commanding lead over everyone else. It was just a first impression, though.

"Everyone, I am honored to be held in such a high regard in your hearts. The Veluriyam Pagoda gathering happens only once every sixty years. You have already distinguished yourselves from amongst the wider competition, proving your remarkable talents. No matter the results of this second round, you are already all winners. Having said this, the top three of this round will receive a pill-related opportunity from me personally. You'll have a certain degree of choice when that time comes, but I can't promise anything concrete. However, one thing is for certain—I guarantee that the quality of the opportunity will more than live up to the champions that arise here."

Not many people gave promises that were taken seriously by most. Only the likes of Emperor Peafowl, or his great emperor peers, had the appropriate status and honor. But ever since the battle over the Longevity Pill, the name 'Pill King Zhen' seemed to carry an infinite amount of charisma with it. Everyone was willing to put their faith in it. The crowd cheered with jubilation at the announcement. However, there was instant follow-up. "That's unfair! How come only the first three get it?"

"That's right, Pill King Zhen. They have enough nice things as the top three. Giving them further opportunities is just icing on the cake. Why not give us some much-needed help instead?"

"Yeah, we're not asking for much here. We only want Pill King Zhen to give a few more of his famous public lessons. Just like when Taiyuan Tower first opened!"

"It was three days last time, but you should make it seven to match the occasion of this gathering!"

"Seven isn't enough! I think ten is better."

Many voices echoed here and there beneath the podium. Most of them were wandering cultivators, but there were some noble youths who joined the cries as well, mostly from Emperor Peafowl's side. There were a few whose families were subordinate to other emperors, so they were demure. Nevertheless, sheer anticipation was plain in their eyes. Though Pill King Zhen was intrinsically Emperor Peafowl's man, no one found that particularly disconcerting, a select few of Emperor Shura scions aside. On the contrary, there was a great deal of respect for the pill king because he had defeated Pillfire's Ji Lang. In light of that, the feelings they had weren't unreasonable.

Off to the side, the Wei father and son grew increasingly passionate. The young man that had once been their guest pill king was currently one of the most popular people in Veluriyam. Who at House Wei wasn't proud of that? Who didn't feel like they basked in shared honor?

The old Jiang Chen wouldn't have been willing to spend ten days wasting time teaching, but his trip to the wildlands had changed his mind on many things. He wasn't just interested in keeping out of things and focusing primarily on self-preservation any longer. The demon race was on the move, and many human cultivators were dead as a result. Jiang Chen couldn't just stand by and let things play out. Emperor Peafowl's decision to stay the call of the heavens, just for the sake of keeping watch over the human race, was made all the more admirable because of it.

Jiang Chen hadn't been a particularly selfish man in his previous life. He had chosen to protect himself during this one out of necessity alone. But he was still a hot-blooded youth, and his father, the Celestial Emperor's responsibility was ingrained into his very bones. Thus, he came to a decision. If they wanted to hear from him, then he would teach!

"I've heard your demands, and I am pleased to answer. After the Pill Pagoda Battles are over, I will personally set up a stage here

and speak for ten days. I only have one thing to ask in return—please, spread the message far and wide. The more that show up for my lessons, the merrier."

The crowd cheered at Jiang Chen's promise.

"Oh, definitely! Only a fool wouldn't come to Pill King Zhen's lessons."

"That's right, even if my legs are broken, I'll crawl here if it's the last thing I do!"

"I can already see it—with everyone here, all the homes will be empty!"

"I for one will do my part. I'll bear a personal grudge against anyone that decides not to come!" The wandering cultivators were mostly simple men. They lacked the guile that the noble scions often possessed and had a tendency to say whatever came to their minds. They especially had nothing to hide from Pill King Zhen. He was a beacon and a goal for them, an example of how a wandering cultivator could rise up into eminence.

Before he'd come to Veluriyam, Pill King Zhen was a virtually unknown name. But now, his name was respected throughout the sphere. Who in the world had their fame spread faster than he had? Pill King Zhen had accomplished more in a year or two than most would throughout their entire lives. Defeating Pill King Ji Lang, defeating Pillfire City's indomitable myth...

No one had been able to do that for thousands of years. Pill King Zhen was a perfect exception to the rule. There was much rejoicing from Sacred Peafowl Mountain at the crowd's fervor. Strictly speaking, Jiang Chen could be counted amongst their numbers. This was even truer for Cloudsoar Monarch, who knew that Emperor Peafowl had decided on Pill King Zhen as his successor. He'd had some initial misgivings about it, but closer observation of the pill king revealed the emperor's wisdom.

For any regular person, having this many fervent fans would put them on cloud nine. Yet, Pill King Zhen was different. His face always carried a soft, calm smile, as if all of the adoration he'd been given was nothing to him. Such composure despite his youthfulness already greatly distinguished him from the rest. Most importantly, Cloudsoar Monarch discovered that His Majesty's prediction had been surprisingly accurate. Pill King Zhen emitted the aura of a sky sage realm cultivator! It was quite the convincing piece of evidence.

At the earlier trial on Sacred Peafowl Mountain, the monarch recalled that Pill King Zhen's martial prowess had only reached earth sage realm. It hadn't taken him long to move from the earth to sky realm. No wonder Emperor Peafowl considered him in a special light. Cloudsoar Monarch couldn't find anything to criticize even when comparing him to young lord Fan. Demon bloodline aside, the young lord had been quite popular due to him having carefully nurtured his reputation. Compared to Pill King Zhen's reputation, however, his popularity was still somewhat lacking.

Their pill dao talents were even further apart. Pill King Zhen could defeat the eternal legend of Pillfire City—there was no conceivable way that young lord Fan's could have compared. The only thing that they rivaled each other in was martial talent. Young lord Fan had been quite a bit stronger than even the current Pill King Zhen. But in a real fight, perhaps the pill king would still have the lead. He had a certain reticence that masked his true strength. The talent Pill King Zhen had exhibited during Emperor Peafowl's three trials, for example, had never before been seen, even from the deceased young lord. The flashiness and intensity with which Pill King Zhen had passed all three trials were remarkable even now.

Still, anyone from Sacred Peafowl Mountain was of course happy to see Pill King Zhen's continued popularity. Naturally, this meant

that there were some who were unhappy as well. Especially out of the seven judges for the Pill Pagoda Battles, a couple were certainly less than willing to witness this sight. After all, they were the real judges here, the main parts of the Pill Pagoda Battles.

The enormous amount of acclaim that Jiang Chen received made their faces flush with embarrassment. Each great emperor had a judge chosen from amongst their followers, which meant that there were seven judges for seven titled great emperors. Emperor Peafowl's judge was the best pill king beneath his banner. As a material witness to Jiang Chen's numerous miraculous feats, he had no objections to the lad. Several of the others hadn't seen that key battle with their own eyes, though, and weren't entirely satisfied with Jiang Chen's current level of fame.

None of the competitors had ever been so excited and grateful to the referees before, yet now they had chosen such a young pill king to be the target of their adoration. How could the older pill kings retain any shred of respect for themselves? As a result, two of the referees, because of the intense unhappiness that had arisen in their hearts from these series of events, wanted to stir things up and were planning to make trouble for this Pill King Zhen. However, Jiang Chen was still in the dark about all of this.

Chapter 907: Malicious Provocation

Due to strong demand, Jiang Chen had no choice but to join the judges. Now, there were eight judges instead of just seven. Thankfully, the slight increase in the number of judges wouldn't affect the contest. In fact, Jiang Chen's participation was exactly what everyone had been hoping for. It gave these pill dao geniuses the opportunity to display their talent before Pill King Zhen.

The moment Jiang Chen got close, he immediately sensed two or three concealed, unfriendly gazes snaking across his body. However, he paid them no heed and sat amongst the judges with a leisurely smile on his face. Beside him, Sacred Peafowl Mountain's first-rate Pill King Yi gave Jiang Chen a friendly smile and messaged, "Pill King Zhen, you should've been the judge of this festival instead of me, but because you didn't return sooner, I had no choice but to take your place and pad the numbers. However, although I'm aware of your skill, the rest of the judges here may challenge your authority. You must be careful, Pill King Zhen."

Jiang Chen was slightly startled by this initial reminder, but he quickly came to an understanding. The human heart was dangerous, and jealousy was one of its original sins.

Although he hadn't wanted to put himself in the limelight, there were certain things in the world that one couldn't avoid. He was the one who had chosen to sit down in the judge's seat, so he feared neither the jealousy nor the hostility of others that might result from it. When a person disliked someone, they could always think up a reason to attack them. Not once in his life had he thought to please people like this, so he chose to ignore them instead. If they really were foolish enough to provoke him, he had all kinds of ways to humiliate them up his sleeve.

Jiang Chen had participated in many pill battles in the past, but this was the first time he'd taken the role of a judge in this lifetime. Therefore, he was a little uncomfortable being in the judge's seat.

When Jiang Chen looked through the rules for the first time, he quickly understood how the system worked. After researching it for a couple more times, he fully grasped the rules.

“Let us begin.” Jiang Chen nodded towards the other judges. Pill King Yi was Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s representative, so naturally, out of everyone present, he had the right to speak first. Upon seeing Jiang Chen’s nod towards him, he immediately started.

“Alright, all participants, please pay attention to my words. I hereby announce that the semi-finals of the Pill Pagoda Battles start now. Everyone will be on the same starting line regardless of your status as a noble or wandering cultivator. We will choose the top thirty-six people out of the two hundred present to enter the Veluriyam Pagoda. All battles shall happen under our fair supervision, and we guarantee that there is no chance for either bribery or fraud to happen beneath our watch. If any one of you is planning to cheat in this contest, I can tell you to eliminate that thought right now. If you are caught, you will be exiled from Veluriyam Capital forever!”

Pill King Yi swept a dignified glance across all participants before he continued his speech with a serious look. “Finally, I would like to remind you all about one thing. To all those who have attended this contest with the ulterior motive of discovering the Veluriyam Pagoda’s secrets, I would advise you to erase that thought as well. Veluriyam Capital has caught countless spies since ancient times, and every one of them shared the exact same fate—death!”

Pill battles had many formats, but the basis of them were all the same. The semi-finals of the Pill Pagoda Battles were split into three segments. The first segment was a test of basics. The second segment was a test of theory. The third segment was a test of pill refinement. The test of basics evaluated a participant’s foundational skills. These were very important to a pill dao genius. It was an incredibly wide subject, and the test of basics would

evaluate even a participant's natural talent.

After all, talent was the first of many unavoidable obstacles one must face in either pill dao or martial dao. Nothing could be achieved without it. For example, in his past life Jiang Chen didn't have the talent to cultivate because he had been born with a yin constitution. Not even his father, the almighty Celestial Emperor who could reverse even the sun and moon, could change this.

Without talent, everything else was utterly irrelevant. The two hundred pill dao geniuses quickly started and finished the test of basics. Although the test of basics had plenty of components to go through, they were structured so orderly that Jiang Chen didn't need to work too hard to earn his 'pay' as judge. All he needed to do was to go through the motions. There was nothing special about this test of basics and the results quickly came out.

As it turned out, thirty out of the top thirty-six were all noble youths. Only six of them were wandering cultivators. It was made immediately clear that the noble-born had an overall advantage over the humble-born. However, when the test of basics came to an end, the name on the number one spot of the leaderboard surprised a lot of people. The spot didn't belong to a noble, but rather, to a wandering cultivator.

Even Jiang Chen had to gasp in admiration when he looked through Lin Yanyu's test results. Foundation wise, Lin Yanyu's skill was even better than Mu Gaoqi's. In terms of raw talent alone, Lin Yanyu might be a tad inferior because Mu Gaoqi possessed an innate wood constitution of high order. However, Lin Yanyu came from a family with an illustrious history, and every one of his foundational skills, excluding talent, was more solid than Mu Gaoqi's.

Mu Gaoqi might be ranked amongst the top five if he were to participate in this test, but he would never be able to claim the number one spot. It wasn't that he was incapable, but that Regal Pill Palace hadn't been able to fully tap into Mu Gaoqi's abilities

before disaster had hit. If Mu Gaoqi had been given thirty years of time to temper his skills in Pillfire City before he participated in this contest, then Lin Yanyu might not hold any advantage over him.

A hundred years after that, Lin Yanyu might even lose to Mu Gaoqi. But as of now, Lin Yanyu was without a doubt the best pill dao cultivator of the bunch. Even Jiang Chen was speechless. Pillfire City does not shame its title as the greatest power in pill dao. To think that the youth of a random family in Pillfire City would possess such extraordinary talent! Thank heavens Pillfire City doesn't know how to cherish their talents because they're flooded with them, or there would have been no way for Veluriyam Capital to obtain someone as amazing as Lin Yanyu at all.

Lin Yanyu proved just how far below Veluriyam Capital was to Pillfire City in terms of pill dao. It definitely wasn't a gap that could be closed in just three to five years' time. Although Jiang Chen admired Lin Yanyu a great deal, he didn't overtly show his emotion. This was because he knew that some of these judges were hostile towards him. If he were to show unusual admiration towards Lin Yanyu's performance, these judges might be tempted to show hostility towards Lin Yanyu too. He would be dragging Lin Yanyu into his own mess. The first segment ended, and Lin Yanyu currently placed first amongst all the participants. This result caused a discussion to break out among the judges too.

"Just who is this wandering cultivator? How is he so talented? Why did a genius like him come to our Veluriyam Capital?"

"We should investigate his background a bit. He can't be a spy from our enemies, can he?"

Jiang Chen didn't say anything despite being within earshot. However, just because he stayed quiet didn't mean that the others couldn't force him to break his silence. The old ninth-rank pill king under Emperor Shura wore a wide grin. "Pill King Zhen!

You're a reputable man, and I would like to hear of your opinion on this subject. Do you think that this wandering cultivator who seems to have appeared out of nowhere could be an enemy spy?"

His question was extremely provocative. On the surface he was talking about the wandering cultivator Lin Yanyu, but in reality the term implicated Jiang Chen too. After all, Pill King Zhen had also appeared out of nowhere just like Lin Yanyu. Another judge smiled when he heard this, "If I remember correctly, Pill King Zhen is a wandering cultivator too, isn't he? Brother Bu, aren't you implying that Pill King Zhen is an enemy spy too?"

This pill king under Emperor Shura's wing was called Pill King Bu. With a smile that didn't reach his eye, he responded, "Pill King Zhen, I am not trying to attack you. Please don't take this the wrong way."

Jiang Chen smiled indifferently and countered with a look of astonishment, "Were you talking to me just now? I thought you were talking to yourself."

Provoke me, will you? Then I will treat your words like how I treat farts. Jiang Chen's casual deflection of the attack was like a smear of mud on Pill King Bu's face. It made the pill king feel extremely embarrassed. That other judge cackled again, "Brother Bu, wouldn't you agree that the saying that the young replaces the old is definitely true? To think that someone of your achievements would be ignored so thoroughly by a junior. What a saddening sight this is!"

This judge had been fanning flames and sowing dissension between Jiang Chen and Pill King Bu since the beginning. The pill king's face turned chilly as he shot Jiang Chen a cold look, "You sure know how to be deaf and mute, Pill King Zhen!"

Jiang Chen smiled. "Do you really think that I should respond to everything you say?"

"Tsk tsk, you think you're something hmm! You truly are the pill

dao genius who shattered the invincible legend of Pillfire City. I guess we old folks are no longer worthy of your attention, are we, Pill King Zhen?"

Jiang Chen smiled and answered in a deadpan voice, "Let me correct you there for a second—I have no idea who you are to begin with, so it's not 'no longer' but 'never been, and never will be'."

This person had been continuously trying to create drama, and Jiang Chen never gave face to people like this. Therefore, his response was to slap him painfully in the face with all the rudeness he could muster. He turned completely red after this mockery. It was at this moment that Pill King Yi shot a glare at the three of them and scolded softly, "Men, you may insult each other all you want after we leave this place, but for now please stop embarrassing yourselves in front of a crowd."

Once done, Pill King Yi stood up again and announced to the participants beneath the stage, "Everyone, the second segment of the battle is the test of theory. We have eight judges here, and every one of us will be issuing a question. You must answer each question with careful exposition so that we may study and enjoy the full depth of your pill dao."

The test of theory was a test of knowledge, foundation, and true ability. Originally, the participants only needed to answer seven questions in total, but Jiang Chen's participation meant that they had to answer one more question. Therefore, more time was also added to the clock. Once Pill King Yi had made his declaration, he told the other judges, "Please begin making your questions now, fellow judges."

The questions were made up on the spot and restricted to a certain spectrum of subject matter so that no one could cheat during the test. To Jiang Chen, drafting a question was as easy as pie, but he didn't work half-heartedly. He carefully formulated the question in his head before he finally wrote it down. He would strive his utmost in anything that he did. The question needed to

be reasonably focused so that the gap between a first-rate genius and an average genius could be clearly distinguished. Otherwise, he would only be wasting his efforts if he were to draft a general question that had no distinction at all.

Jiang Chen finished composing his question only after fifteen minutes had passed. By now, the rest of the judges were done composing their questions too. In fact, Pill King Bu was shooting Jiang Chen a provocative glance. “Pill King Zhen, I wasn’t there to witness your glory with my own eyes when you took down Pill King Ji Lang. However, I dare say that even you might not necessarily be able to solve the question I’ve composed.”

Jiang Chen smiled coolly and remained indifferent. However, Pill King Bu wasn’t going to let matters slide just like that. He continued, “If the participants are allowed to vote for the one question they think is of the highest quality, I’m sure that they will choose the question that I composed.”

Pill King Yi smiled faintly in response, “I see that you are very confident, Ole Bu.”

Pill King Bu smiled proudly, “I am confident. I have been famous for a few hundred years, and no one-hit wonders who aim solely for fame is going to beat me!”

One-hit wonders, aim solely for fame. Everything he said was directed at Jiang Chen.

Chapter 908: Making Another Bet

Jiang Chen wasn't originally planning on bickering with these people over pride. He found it better to ignore their goading entirely. Still, even a sculpture had a few rough edges. This Pill King Bu constantly pushed at his boundaries, acting like they were sworn enemies. Jiang Chen glanced coldly at the pill king, silently sneering. If you want to put your face right in front of me, then don't blame me for taking a few swings at it.

"Pill King Bu, is it? I don't know where your confidence comes from. I'll put it simply. If you have an issue with me, then be a man and cut to the chase. Did you want to challenge me? Then speak up. Stop trying to take pot shots at me. We're both men, I assume. There's no need to be so cowardly about everything. Acting like some shrieking harlot... you might be shameless, but I'm not." Jiang Chen's statements didn't quite cut to the bone, but the comparison he made was still insulting.

Pill King Bu had been compared to a common wench, with none of the flair that was characteristic of a pill king. The mental image the comparison conjured up was enough to make some of the neutral judges snicker. No one was blind here. Everyone could see the lack of style in Pill King Bu's actions, and the jealousy contained therein. A long-established pill king was intentionally making things unnecessarily difficult for a rising star. This kind of behavior was completely unjustifiable.

Pill King Bu's face became as red as a pig's liver. "You're good at talking," he harrumphed. "But have you got the skills to match? Shall we make a bet on the questions?"

"How so?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

"We'll let the candidates choose which question they like the best, and which gives them the most inspiration. Are you up for it?"

Jiang Chen looked at his surroundings, then suddenly smiled. “What if neither of our problems are picked? Wouldn’t that be a rather shameful display?”

Pill King Bu sneered. “If neither of us is chosen, then that means neither of us is the best pill king in Veluriyam. I will accept that result.”

Jiang Chen couldn’t help but laugh. “So you admit that you’re causing trouble on purpose, then? You’re just jealous then. But okay, that’s fine. What do you have to bet on this?”

“What I have? Winning or losing is enough. Stakes are extraneous.” Pill King Bu was perplexed.

Jiang Chen shook his head. “What’s the point of a bet without stakes? Am I supposed to entertain your arbitrary request out of duty or charity?” His voice was full of rampant disregard for the old pill king, almost as if he was already being charitable enough by simply speaking to the man. Pill King Bu found the feeling greatly insulting.

“What do you have in mind?” The pill king bristled with anger.

“What do you have that’s worth anything?” Jiang Chen sneered.

Pill King Bu had never been looked down upon like this in his entire life. He took a deep breath. “Then let’s do it like this. The loser has to leave Veluriyam forever, and cannot return for the rest of their days. What do you think?”

That was quite the vicious bet. Jiang Chen smiled placidly, however, clearly not thinking much of it. “Is that really a worthy stake? I thought you were already going to sneak out yourself when you lost. Surely your skin isn’t thick enough to stay after the shame.”

Pill King Bu had reached the point of coughing up blood. He’s expecting me to lose before we’ve even begun? He glared at Jiang Chen. “Then why don’t you give a better suggestion?”

Jiang Chen tapped two fingers against his forehead in thought. “Well, let’s make the bet a bit more interesting. The loser has to ask the winner to become his master and follow the winner’s orders for the rest of his life.”

The raised stakes caused alarm to surface in all the other judges. Such a bet had irrevocable consequences. Any normal person would pale at hearing such a suggestion. It was shocking even for someone as arrogant and proud as Pill King Bu. His eyes bulged and he found it harder to breathe. His gaze fixated on Jiang Chen. He couldn’t just instantly accept such a deal, especially in the heat of the moment.

Once the bet was made, the loser would lose their entire life and freedom. For a pill king who had a thousand plus years of fame to become the disciple of a youngster... it was a fate worse than death. Entering eternal servitude was too much for an old man’s face to bear. Jiang Chen didn’t really want the old pill king to become his disciple anyways. He’d merely noticed how puffed up the other pill king was and wanted to strike at his ego. Only in that way could he suppress the pill king’s fierceness. If he really wanted to find students, he could easily find ones that were ten times stronger than this Pill King Bu. After all, his pill dao level was considered top-notch, even during his previous life in the heavenly planes. The current skills he displayed were only the tip of the iceberg. Pill King Bu’s hesitation showed his weakness before the bet had even begun.

Jiang Chen laughed casually, “Pill King Bu, I’m not going to force you to make the bet if you’re too scared. But please, don’t pretend like you’re number one next time. I don’t care if that’s what you really think, but don’t act in such a manner in front of me. I can’t say I enjoy seeing that kind of thing.”

Pill King Bu grit his teeth, and his gaze became firm. “Who says that I’m too scared to make the bet? I’ll hold you to your promise. I hope you’ll stay true to your words when you lose.”

“We’ll make a heavenly oath, naturally,” Jiang Chen returned with a serene smile. “I assume we’re not playing around, right?”

A heavenly oath to seal the deal? Even more shock was elicited from the judges at this new turn of events. This Pill King Zhen wasn’t really just mouthing off. Was he convinced that he’d win because he had some kind of hidden plan? The bystanders weren’t too concerned with the gravity of the consequences, and they looked on encouragingly at Pill King Bu. Their collective expectant gazes, tinged with a hint of interrogative intent, backed the pill king into a corner.

“A heavenly oath is perfectly fine. I’m no coward.” Pill King Bu had enough trust in the potency of his question to proceed.

Turning to Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s Pill King Yi, Jiang Chen chuckled. “Pill King Yi, how about you and everyone else here bear witness?”

The other judges all nodded in willing agreement. Neither party had a way out of it now. Both Jiang Chen and Pill King Bu made their respective oaths. News of the bet spread quickly to the seven titled great emperors. Emperor Peafowl shook his head when he heard of its absurdity. That kid is setting up a trap yet again.

On the other side, Emperor Shura could only frown. Why is someone as mature as Pill King Bu still so impulsive? His loss would throw a serious wrench into my plans. Emperor Shura had every confidence in Pill King Bu, but Pill King Zhen’s existence in Veluriyam had reached an almost mythical height. His meteoric ascension had given rise to a feverish atmosphere in turn. Truthfully speaking, the emperor thought that Pill King Bu had a pretty good chance, even if he were to be pitted against Pill King Yi. But against this mysterious Pill King Zhen... he had a few more doubts about the matter. It wasn’t because of bias, but rather, a kind of expert’s instinct. The emperor was thusly very unhappy about the bet. He wanted to call it off, but he knew that if he did so now, it would become even more of a joke.

All eight questions were given out to the two hundred participating pill masters. The time given for the theory-based examination was quite long—four hours in total. The eight judges who drafted up the questions were unquestionably the cream of Veluriyam's crop. They stood at the pinnacle of their craft. Each question had its own unique way of being thought-provoking, and the pill masters who took the test felt a tangible benefit to their comprehension of pill dao. One of the questions, though, was at a cut above the rest.

If the other seven were around the level of a top-ranked pill king, then this additional question had definitely entered a new realm, surpassing a pill king's limits. The question bestowed a sense of enlightenment upon many of them. The deeper they probed into its depths, the more insight they received. Almost every contestant made the same choice—they answered the other seven questions first, and then proceeded to focus their full efforts on the final one at the end.

Although the other seven questions were quite beneficial for their studies, they only applied to specific categories of knowledge. Compared to these questions, the last question was like a stroke of genius that expanded their horizons and brought them into a brand new world. It improved every aspect of their pill-related skills. Like a treasure trove, the deeper they dug, the greater the rewards yielded.

Typically, a certain portion of the papers would be handed in early during theory examinations. But this time, all two hundred of the participants were still embroiled in the test even after their allotted time had been used up. Many didn't even notice that time had run out, and there was collective displeasure at the interruption. Regret was only natural when certain key reflections were cut off mid-thought.

Each judge's question had its own corresponding identifier. Jiang Chen's was number 8, because he had shown up late. Each

participant had eight scrolls, each with a different identifier. The scrolls with the same identifier were gathered up and given to the judge who had come up with the question. That judge would then mark the scrolls one by one. Only when all of the scrolls were tallied up would a participant receive their final theory mark.

Because every judge had two hundred scrolls, it took a while for all of them to be scored. Still, it was quite easy to distinguish the quality of responses. The names on the scrolls given to Jiang Chen were obscured, having been sealed away via special methods to avoid any form of cheating.

Of course, judging pill battles was a sacred tradition, and cheating attempts were rare in the first place. From Jiang Chen's reading of the scrolls, most of the participants had spared no effort in drafting up their answers. There was sufficiently deep analyses on almost everyone's part. Despite this, however, barely anyone had an answer that shone through. There were a few glimmers here and there, but nothing particularly astounded him.

Only three or four out of the two hundred satisfied Jiang Chen's standards. Of those, two were somewhat superior, and Jiang Chen gave those especially high marks. He assigned scores to the other scrolls accordingly as well. The judges finished their marking processes at around the same time. All of the scrolls were sorted once more, this time by the examinee's name, in order to tally up the contestants' scores.

Suddenly, Pill King Yi piped up, "Everyone, please. We have a small additional request to make of you."

All of the contestants paused at this, looking at the pill king who had made the announcement. They didn't know what he wanted to say.

Chapter 909: Utter Defeat

As looks of curiosity focused on him, Pill King Yi could only smile. “We have a little… disagreement… internally with the judges. So, we’d like you all to rank the exam questions. Your exam consisted of eight questions. We’d like you to pick the one question you thought had the greatest beneficial effect for you. Please write it down, and we’ll tally up the results.”

There was some commotion from the test-takers. Finding the situation quite amusing, many of them broke out in laughter. The request left them in high spirits. There was a lot of pressure on them because of the judging process. Now, they were given the chance to decide something about the judges. No one would simply let such an enjoyable opportunity slip by! Everyone hastened to write down their answer. In truth, many contestants already had an internal answer to the question, even though they hadn’t expected this additional bonus round.

Most wrote without much thought. The entire crowd finished their judgments in only a brief amount of time. Pill King Yi noticed this as well, and found it a little bizarre. “What, you’re done already? You don’t want to consider things a bit more?”

At the judges’ table, Pill King Bu was clutching the sides of his chair with both hands with an intensity almost strong enough to break both armrests. His expression was conflicted and his gaze fierce, focusing on the contestants below. He was very interested in the final answer. Whose question would these participants pick? Why had it been selected so quickly and thoughtlessly? He didn’t know why, but Pill King Bu felt an unreasonable sense of panic arise in his heart when he saw everyone’s lack of hesitation. The answers had been given instantaneously. Though he felt his question could surpass everyone else’s, he still had some degree of self-awareness. No matter how good his answer was, it couldn’t have an absolute advantage… not enough to make everyone decide

in such synchronized unison, at any rate. He had a bad feeling about this. His eyelids started twitching.

Suddenly, one of the participants below decided to cry out, “All of the questions this time were well-written, but there’s no question about which one is the best.”

“I agree! One of them in particular touched me in a powerful way. I have to pick that one.” A single interjection turned into a sea of discussion.

The judges looked at each other helplessly at their table. Apparently, the decision process was very easy, and there was one question with significant public approval? An almost overwhelming edge, one could say? None of the judges considered their own question worthy of possessing such a characteristic.

Pill King Yi collected the two hundred slips very quickly, and returned to the other judges. Since Jiang Chen and Pill King Bu were the betting parties, they had no right to view the slips. The other six judges began the counting process. The results were simply stupefying. The judges’ expressions looked uniformly odd after reading only a dozen or so of the answers. In particular, Pill King Yi’s expression had the hint of a barely-suppressed smile within, like it was about to burst out at any given moment. All of them stared Pill King Bu up and down, their looks peculiar.

As the tallying continued, the judges’ gazes intensified. By the completion of the counting, they were simply baffled. It was as if an arduous task had just been finished. Each of them leaned back in their chairs, their foreheads beaded with cold sweat.

How incomprehensible.

All of the slips had voted for the same question! Not a single one was different.

Each of them selected question 8—the question Pill King Zhen had written. It was a total consensus. Even Pill King Yi hadn’t

expected such a conclusion. He had thought that Pill King Zhen was more likely to win, but not in such a devastating way. It was a complete and total annihilation!

Despite Pill King Bu's impudence, he had not received a single vote. All of them had voted for Pill King Zhen instead. Even Emperor Shura's scions hadn't picked another answer. Perhaps they disregarded matters of standing in this subject, choosing to view it in terms of skill level alone.

Pill King Yi's barely-contained mirth chilled Pill King Bu to the bone. Even a fool would know, considering the other judges' expressions as well, that the result of the tally was likely extremely disadvantageous for him. He didn't know exactly how bad yet, though. He looked at Pill King Zhen out of the corner of his eye. The kid was collected as always, almost as if he wasn't one of the betting parties. His confidence remained perpetually unshaken. Jiang Chen's aplomb painfully pierced Pill King Bu's ego.

"It's unfortunate for me to have to say this, but... Pill King Bu, you've lost." Pill King Yi wasn't too cruel about it. His announcement was matter-of-factly stated.

Pill King Bu's heart skipped a beat, and all blood drained from his face. He stuttered. "No... no way... how could I have lost? Did you get something wrong somewhere?"

"There's no mistake." Sighing softly, Pill King Yi shook his head. Maybe that was possible with only a few people, but all two hundred slips were identical. How could there be an error?

Pill King Bu was still struggling with reality. "I don't believe it. I want to see the slips!" He exclaimed loudly.

Pill King Yi laughed mirthlessly, "Pill King Bu, you definitely don't want to do that. You'll be even sadder if you do."

"Bullshit! How do I know you're not just messing with me if I don't get to see the votes?" The judges' table had a soundproof

barrier around it. The contestants could see the commotion, but they didn't know what they were discussing. Still, there seemed to be some kind of an argument.

Pill King Yi furrowed his brow at his colleague's attitude. He was saving Pill King Bu from further embarrassment by not elaborating on the details of his loss. How could Pill King Bu not know what was good for him? Calling him 'bullshit' was just rude. He suspected that everyone else was fudging the votes just to mess with him?"

"If you want to see the votes, then go right ahead." Pill King Yi's expression grew cold. "I only hope that you don't have nightmares that plague you for the rest of your life!"

There was no way the other pill king could take his advice now. Pill King Bu desperately wanted to see a difference somewhere. All two hundred of the slips were laid out in front of Pill King Bu. He looked through them one by one, his facial muscles spasming every time he read past a slip. Similarly, his face grew more and more colorless with each answer he read. He was already on the verge of collapse after going through forty or fifty slips. His hands and lips shook, as if he'd seen a ghost in broad daylight.

Past a hundred, he no longer had the courage to continue. He sank into his chair, his expression suddenly decrepit. Despair oozed out of his eyes. After a long while, the old pill king sat up again. He looked at Jiang Chen, his face ashen. "I admit defeat. I only have one request remaining. Let me see the question you wrote. What kind of question was it, that everyone picked yours over mine?"

"Feel free." Jiang Chen smiled easily.

Opening up the scroll, Pill King Bu read it for only a brief moment before his face underwent a series of different expressions. There was surprise, astonishment, and finally—utter helplessness.

“I… truly, I have totally lost.” Placing the scroll weakly down, he walked in front of Jiang Chen. “Pill King Zhen, I’m just a frog in a well. You are my master from this day forth, and I will heed your every order.”

There wasn’t much unwillingness in his tone. Only deep resignation and failure. No one had defeated him so soundly before. There was no room at all for debate. The aftermath of this localized storm was quickly passed on to the seven great emperors, who could only shake their heads one by one.

“You’ve lost another key general, eh?” Emperor Void said jokingly, sixth among the seven emperors.

Emperor Shura was sullen. “Just a small bout. Battles over pills can only be considered an appetizer. Not worthy of much mention, really.”

None of the other emperors wanted to respond. Shura’s displeasure was plain as day. Emperor Peafowl was the first to break the silence, “Both pill dao and martial dao fall under the demesne of the heavenly dao,” he smiled. “Your bias remains, Brother Shura.”

Emperor Shura frowned a little, “Do you hold pill dao in such high regard, Brother Peafowl?”

Emperor Peafowl returned an unrestrained smile, “Since time immemorial, countless geniuses have made their way into the world through pill dao. It’s not my opinion alone, you know. It’s the truth.”

Determined to pick a fight, Emperor Shura considered the pill geniuses before him thoroughly. “Then, if I may… Is there any among these pill geniuses who has the potential to become a great emperor?” He asked suddenly.

The question was somewhat tricky to answer, but Emperor Peafowl was unaffected. The emperor nodded instantly in

response, “Yes. For example, Pill King Zhen’s future accomplishments will not be any lesser to mine.”

The other emperors gasped in surprise at his words.

“Brother Peafowl, don’t you think that you’re drawing conclusions far too early?” The fourth-ranked emperor, Vastsea, couldn’t help but interrupt. He was like a brother to Emperor Shura. The two of them moved as one.

The resolution in Emperor Peafowl’s eyes did not dim. He didn’t turn directly to Emperor Azuresea, showing only a lighthearted smile. “Not at all. Perhaps my judgment could even be called somewhat late.”

Emperor Shura became very serious. “You must have high hopes for this Pill King Zhen then, Brother Peafowl. Perhaps losing young lord Fan and gaining Pill King Zhen is a blessing in disguise, hmm?”

“Quite so. Sacred Peafowl Mountain finally has a worthy successor with a genius like him here.” Emperor Peafowl didn’t go on, but the implication was clear. Because of that, Veluriyam had a worthy heir as well. However, he didn’t want to lay too many burdens on Jiang Chen all at once, nor cause the young man any undue trouble before the appropriate time came.

All of the other emperors reeled at his words.

“Brother Peafowl, do you truly want to make him Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s heir?” Emperor Void was the first one to speak up and inquire. Continuing to look at Emperor Peafowl, the other emperors were just as surprised. Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s successor was a serious matter, but they hadn’t heard the emperor mention such a thing previously.

Did this recent notion mean something was about to happen…?

Chapter 910: Pill Recipe Selection

A mysterious, calm smile persisted on Emperor Peafowl's face, leaving the other emperors to speculate the hidden meaning behind it.

"Brother Peafowl," Emperor Shura suddenly declared. "First, know that I don't mean to inquire deeply into the matter of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's inheritance. I understand that Pill King Zhen has talent with pills, but he has few martial achievements to speak of. I doubt everyone will be internally satisfied with him as the heir, hmm? Unless he proves an exceptional martial ability as well, of course."

"He will prove himself. Hasn't an opportunity already presented itself?" Emperor Peafowl smiled with great wisdom. It was difficult to know what he was truly thinking.

"Opportunity? Do you mean the gathering's Martial Pagoda battles?" The other emperors glanced sidelong at Emperor Peafowl as well. Any news relating to a new heir for Sacred Peafowl Mountain was of personal interest for everyone present. Sacred Peafowl Mountain was the keystone that had propped up Veluriyam for thousands of years. Any changes to it would affect the city's fate directly, so a certain degree of concern was necessary. Aside from giving an ambiguous smile, Emperor Peafowl didn't respond.

His silence stopped the other emperors from asking any further questions. After all, Emperor Peafowl was the true master of the city. Though the other emperors were nominally his equals, they were in fact mere assistants. Veluriyam Capital would still be the same without any of the other emperors. Without Emperor Peafowl, however, it would never have achieved its current day prominence. Even Emperor Shura couldn't deny this fact.

At the judges' table, Pill King Bu had admitted defeat without

much struggle. The other pill kings previously antagonistic to Jiang Chen were thankful that none of them had been the one to provoke Pill King Zhen. They didn't particularly relish the possibility of a disastrous fate befalling them.

Because Pill King Bu hadn't tried to renege on his promise after the fact, Jiang Chen backed off as well. "I'm glad you're so faithful, Pill King Bu," he smiled faintly. "And I am equally glad to accept you as my disciple. However, do realize that since I'm formally your master now, you'll have a lot of trouble if you try to deceive me from this day onwards."

"Don't worry. I agreed to the bet in the first place. I can take the loss." Though Pill King Bu was upset, he was at least true to his word. He was a bit too proud and stuck-up, sure, but he was no lying ruffian. Moreover, there was the matter of the heavenly oath as well.

Jiang Chen smiled casually at Pill King Bu's attitude. "Then we'll leave it like this. You shouldn't feel too bad about it, though... maybe you'll be happy that this happened, one day."

He wasn't merely pushing his advantage. It was the reality of the situation. Pill King Bu was extremely fortunate to have him as a master given his actual pill dao level, even though nobody besides him knew that at present.

The sideshow concluded, and the Pill Pagoda battles continued. Now that the first two rounds were over, the next round was related to refining pills. This round required heavy involvement from all of the participants. Over a month of time was allotted to its completion. Every judge needed to come up with a question to test the participants, just like they'd done during the theoretical round. However, the skill being tested this time was the participants' finesse over the pill refining process. Each judge would teach an exclusive recipe to the participants. After they were furnished with materials, the participants would then refine the pill according to their intuition. Finally, they would be graded

based on the quality of the finished product.

Each judge had five days of time—one for teaching the recipe, three for the time it took the contestants to refine the pill, and the last for examining the pill's quality... and tallying up the results, of course. Eight judges meant at least forty days for the competition.

Jiang Chen didn't want any special treatment. Because he was the last judge to arrive, he voluntarily placed himself in the final timeslot. That way, all seven of the other judges would finish before it was his turn. His deference to the other judges earned him a reduction in enmity and an increase in respect from all of them. It was normal for a youth who was the idol of an entire city to be puffed up. If he wanted to make any demands of them, it was entirely within his right. Who were the other judges to deny him? But Pill King Zhen was following the rules to the letter. He treated everyone else with full respect and volunteered to be last. Such character was extraordinary.

Ordinary people found it difficult to stay calm in the face of fame. It was rare and unexpected for someone to keep their composure given the circumstances. A young man that was able to control himself was quite respectable. That he managed such a feat made him greater than many other pill kings with centuries of experience.

The Veluriyam Pagoda gathering had the undertones of being a festival. Even though it took place over an entire year, no one had ever felt that it overstayed its welcome. Rather, they relished in its length. Jiang Chen began preparations for his own recipe. He chose yet another work from the Deviant Pill Faction's repertoire. After all, he'd made a name for himself in Veluriyam by using the Deviant Pill Faction's fame. Why not see that charade through to the end?

The recipe he wanted to put forth this time was the Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill. As a pill that perfectly answered the demands of body-refining cultivators, it was an excellent pill for its niche. In

addition to strengthening the flesh and reinforcing bone, it could remove the lingering pains of old, long-healed wounds. It was a rare effect for an equally rare pill. Though there were other pills that purportedly did the same available on the market, they were largely mediocre. Moreover, they were often singular in their function, and carried a number of undesirable side effects.

The Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill had no side effects whatsoever. It could both help in cultivation and heal one's body. It held two uses within one pill. The best thing about it, though, was that anyone from origin realm cultivators to emperor realm cultivators could use it... depending on the pill's quality. Emperor realm cultivators would find it somewhat less effective, especially those at the pinnacle of the realm, but it was still quite good for those at the lower ranks of the emperor realm. For sage realm cultivators, it was an amazing, top-notch pill.

After deciding on the pill recipe, Jiang Chen carefully examined it to determine how exactly it should be taught. He was putting in quite a bit of effort for the judging process. If the pill was presented at Taiyuan Tower, it would surely cause yet another wave of publicity. But he was willing to publicly give away the recipe for the sake of the competition. Not for fame alone, of course.

For what exactly? Jiang Chen wasn't able to say himself. Perhaps it was to give some face to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, or perhaps this level of pill recipe wasn't really much to someone like him. Regardless of the reason, he knew very well that his recipe would definitely overshadow the other judges' yet again. It wasn't his original intention, but he didn't just want to give out a normal recipe in order to make a show of mediocrity.

It had been a struggle for the pill geniuses present to enter the top hundred. As a judge and an object of admiration, he felt that it was fitting that he give them both a present and an opportunity. This time, none of the other judges wanted to bet with Jiang Chen.

Everyone knew just how terrifying the young pill king was. Anyone that did want to bet with Pill King Zhen should be prepared to lose in advance. Nothing good had ever come of a bet with him, starting from the first day he showed up in the city.

At the opening of Taiyuan Tower, Pill King Rong had challenged Pill King Zhen on the Majestic Clan's behalf. The result? The Majestic Clan lost one of their stores in the Farmer God Market. The second enemy was even more formidable—the indomitable legend of Pillfire, Pill King Ji Lang. It resulted in a devastating loss for Pillfire City. The third time—well, it was that Pill King Bu. Everyone had seen how that had turned out.

The present Jiang Chen was a horseman of the apocalypse, an omen of bad luck. Maybe it was alright to make bets in other subject matters, but betting against him on anything pill-related meant a sure-fire loss. If there had been any dissatisfaction before, Pill King Bu's misfortune removed any and all ideas of causing trouble.

The judges' segments went by without a hitch. Understandably, the only recipes presented were for pills of normal quality. These judges preferred to keep the best pills to themselves. It was customary, but not particularly challenging for the pill geniuses. There had been no method of differentiating between skill levels. So far, the refining round could even be called boring.

The seven titled emperors saw the phenomenon, of course, but came to a tacit understanding. Having top-ranked pill kings to part with their best exclusive pill recipes was unrealistic. There was no reward for doing so. Yes, every top-ranked pill king had many great recipes, but who wanted to simply give one out for the sake of teaching the youth? Even Emperor Peafowl knew that the situation couldn't be helped. Still, he wasn't particularly pleased with their behaviour. I wonder if Jiang Chen will be as miserly as those other pill kings? The pill kings were the cream of the crop of the seven emperors' representatives, but they didn't carry

themselves in a way that befitted that fact.

Emperor Vastsea smiled suddenly, “Brother Peafowl, I hear that Pill King Zhen’s astounding genius is due to his tutelage from a secluded hermit. I wonder if he will show us something amazing this time, too?”

Emperor Peafowl laughed, “Don’t ask me. I have no idea who his master is, either. I do know one thing, however. He is no threat to Veluriyam, but rather, a boon.”

Emperor Vastsea laughed as well. He wanted to question Pill King Zhen’s identity, but he knew as well as anyone that it was taboo. If anyone openly questioned someone that Emperor Peafowl was so optimistic about, then wasn’t that person just openly rebelling? Vastsea was a great emperor, but he knew that he didn’t have the qualifications to challenge Emperor Peafowl’s authority, nor was it possible, really. History had proved Emperor Peafowl’s foresight many times. He was rarely wrong about anything.

Emperor Void had his own opinion. “If this kid can disregard the shackles of profit and differentiate himself from the cheapskates, then I’ll change my opinion of him.”

Emperor Peafowl chuckled. “Then you may very well have to do that, Brother Void.”

“Oh? Are you positive, Brother Peafowl?” Emperor Void’s interest was roused. He had no opposition to Pill King Zhen, and in fact respected the young pill genius quite a bit for his victory over Pillfire City.

“Quite sure. The size of his heart is much larger than that of ordinary men.” Emperor Peafowl stroked his moustache, smiling.

It was finally Jiang Chen’s turn to teach and judge.

Chapter 911: The Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill

The seven judges before him had given fairly ordinary pill recipes. Though the recipes weren't entirely unremarkable, there were no surprises. The participating pill geniuses originally had illusions of receiving some new pill recipes, but although the recipes were new, their quality made them completely useless. Only Pill King Zhen's recipe remained. There was still some anticipation, but it had been greatly reduced since the beginning of the round. There were even feelings of lethargy among some present.

Jiang Chen could feel the dreariness in the air. If he had been a participant, he would have also been dejected with how tight-fisted the top-ranked pill kings were being.

"I'm sure that everyone here is very tired after a month of exertion. But, you must pay special attention to this next segment. The pill recipe that I am about to teach is not for the distracted or the dull. Frankly, one day isn't enough, especially without your full attention. This is a top-rank pill that even emperor realm cultivators can use!" Jiang Chen's speech was like a fresh infusion of blood into the participants' bodies. Their eyes instantly lit up as they looked at Jiang Chen, full of anticipation once more.

"A pill that emperor realm cultivators can use? So, an earth rank pill, then?"

"Ho, an earth rank pill! That's definitely suitable of being called a top-rank pill!"

"As expected of our city's idol! Pill King Zhen is always generous."

"Haha, that's what I thought too. There's no way that the great Pill King Zhen would let us down. Man, the pills before were such a

bore.”

The participants were none too pleased about the recipes that the judges had presented before. Just because it was customary didn’t mean that it wasn’t beggarly. Without the competition at play, they would have no interest whatsoever in learning such recipes. On the other hand, Pill King Zhen instantly differentiated himself from the people before him in both poise and largesse. He acted in a way that was well-deserving of his fame. There was a lot of discussion and cheering from the crowd because of it.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. He didn’t care too much about not stealing the other judges’ limelight anymore. Honestly, he had his own complaints about their selfishness. The judges were all pill dao seniors of considerable renown. It was normal for such people to help their juniors. Why let the youngsters go home empty-handed from this rare festival?

That these pill kings couldn’t reward the youths even a little, at a time like this... No wonder Veluriyam’s pill dao couldn’t surpass Pillfire’s. In terms of accomplishment, it wasn’t even a third of their rival’s, and this was one of the reasons. He had decided to present the Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill out of this consideration. Its properties allowed it to easily be classified as an earth rank pill. Comparatively, the other seven judges’ pills were all garbage. There was no contest.

Jiang Chen’s heart was moved when he saw the participants’ eyes brimming with emotion. He pressed both hands down to signal silence. He had clearly underestimated the weightiness of his command. The hand signal alone was more effective than any words could have been. Every participant closed their mouth in unison, and noise was gone from the arena instantly.

He was a little surprised, but then smiled, “This is the moment that everyone’s been waiting for. Because I didn’t want to let you guys down, the pill that I am presenting today is indeed an earth rank pill. It is called the Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill, with

the power to invigorate muscle and marrow for any body-refining cultivator. Furthermore, it cleanses the aftereffects of old, long-healed wounds, and strengthens your meridians as well. It can do many things, and has no side effects. Truly, it is one of the best body-refining pills available out there." Jiang Chen slowly introduced the pill to his captive audience.

"The... Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill?" Pill King Yi couldn't help remarking aloud.

"What, have you heard of this pill before, Brother Yi?" The other judges were curious.

Pill King Yi's expression was complicated as he looked on, impressed. "Yes, I had the fortune of seeing it in an ancient manual," he nodded. "But there is no record of the recipe for it in Veluriyam Capital. If this pill spreads, Veluriyam's weakness in this area will be strengthened." Having said this, the pill king suddenly stood up, "Pill King Zhen, I'm sorry to interrupt. May I say something here?"

Jiang Chen smiled at Pill King Yi's sudden interjection. He knew that the old pill king had something important to say. He waved, "Sure thing. Please go ahead, Pill King Yi."

Pill King Yi looked sternly at the participants. "Everyone," he bellowed. "That Pill King Zhen wants to teach you this remarkable recipe is something I both envy and admire. However, I must first play the part of a villain. Everyone here must make a heavenly oath not to spread this recipe out of Veluriyam Capital. Even if you do teach it to someone else, they too must be loyal to Veluriyam. Otherwise, I cannot let the recipe be taught to you."

Everyone understood what he was getting at, including the other judges, who nodded approvingly. Sure, there was always internal strife, but their attitude towards outside enemies was uniform. Nobody wanted something good that Veluriyam possessed to be stolen by another faction, especially one like Pillfire City. A good

pill recipe making its way into their hands was like a lamb making its way into the jaws of a tiger. Veluriyam was already at a disadvantage against Pillfire. It wasn't worthwhile at all for this recipe to be lost to them.

Pill King Yi wanted to ensure that this didn't happen—a demand echoed by the other judges, and even Jiang Chen himself. He didn't want his recipe to be another's unintentional benefit. The recipe of the Longevity Pill was an excellent reminder of what kind of trouble such recipes could cause. It had almost made the bastards at Pillfire an absurd amount of money. He wanted to avoid making this same mistake. Though the Hundredfold Marrow-Cleansing Pill couldn't remotely compare to the Longevity Pill, Jiang Chen still didn't want the fruits of his labor to be simply taken away by Pillfire City again.

It wasn't an unreasonable request. None of the participants were against it, and all made their appropriate heavenly oaths in order to keep the recipe a secret. Only afterwards did Jiang Chen begin to teach. The Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill was ten times, perhaps even a hundred times more complicated than the recipes given by the previous judges.

Every participant had to give 120% effort in order to understand it. Thankfully, Jiang Chen had put a considerable amount of thought into how he would convey its finer points, reducing the recipe's complexity a fair bit. It was impossible that such a recipe could be internalized in only a day's time otherwise. Still, the studying process was tiresome and painful for many, with the end result only being seventy or eighty percent proficiency. Exactly how much they managed to learn was up to their own powers of comprehension.

Jiang Chen had taught all he needed in just the one day. He wasn't going to repeat himself. All the materials were ready at the beginning of the second day, and the refining process properly ensued.

The vast difficulty of this pill was apparent at once from the get-go. The weaker participants barely managed to retain all the information regarding the refining process. Success was very uncertain, but nobody complained. Everybody knew how big of an opportunity this was. If they could fully understand the pill, it would be a lifelong benefit to their understanding. Because they had been taught in the exact same way, any lack of understanding was entirely attributed to their own weakness. There was nothing to lament.

Jiang Chen's altruism put the other judges to shame. There was no jealousy or antagonism here. It was obvious that Pill King Zhen truly was on a different level from the rest of them. It was them instead who should be honored to be sharing the same position as him. Even the great emperors up on their platform had vastly mixed feelings about him. Emperor Void spoke words of sincere praise, "Brother Peafowl, you truly know this Pill King Zhen well. His generosity is unmatched. I cede this to you."

The other great emperors were similarly impressed. Emperor Shura was the only one unaffected. He looked at Jiang Chen, deep in thought; his eyes held a glimmer of something within, almost like he wanted to see right through him.

Emperor Peafowl took in the reactions of all present, though he didn't comment himself. His smile was as cheery as it had always been. He had already anticipated Jiang Chen's actions entirely. Jiang Chen was a real genius, a young man of great fortune that his All-Seeing Eyes had locked on to. He couldn't possibly be matched by mortals who tended to the tedium of their daily lives.

For the two hundred candidates, the three-day refining process was a rare trial, a battle and a struggle. Even Lin Yanyu, who had come out of Pillfire City, was shocked at the recipe for the Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill. He knew now that Pill King Zhen truly was the same person as Daoist Huang, who had taken care of him back in the wildlands. He had always thought that

Daoist Huang was a martial dao genius. Only presently did he realize why Pill King Zhen had such a resounding reputation here in Veluriyam. This Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill was explanation enough.

Lin Yanyu had shown remarkable performances in the first two rounds of the Pill Pagoda battles. In the same characteristic fashion, his understanding of the pill surpassed his peers. It only took two and a half days out of the three allotted for him to refine a cauldron of the Hundredfold pills. In terms of speed, he was the first. Following him, a fair few others finished their refining processes as well.

Still, more than half of the participants hadn't finished by the end of the three days. Their scores were understandably zeroed, but Jiang Chen didn't interrupt them. He wouldn't do so unless they stopped themselves first. Sometimes, the pill-refining process deepened a pill master's understanding of the dao. It was a rare occurrence and hard to intentionally replicate. To interrupt them was to interfere with their cultivation. Everyone concluded their refining on the fourth day. Some were successful, while others had failed.

Jiang Chen had no reaction to their joy or sorrow. He had given them the opportunity—it was up to them to grasp it. He began to tally up the scores. The quality of Lin Yanyu's pills allowed him to take the foremost position. Even Jiang Chen was impressed by his pill dao intuition. Without hesitation, Jiang Chen gave the young pill master full marks. The others who had managed to finish within three days received their scores as well.

Chapter 912: Nominated as Young Lord

When Jiang Chen finished calculating the results, the overall score of the refining segment had been decided upon as well. Subsequently, the combined score of all three segments of the pill battle was swiftly calculated. Wandering cultivator Lin Yanyu had taken the number one spot and defeated every noble youth in Veluriyam Capital. When the ranking list was displayed, an uproar overtook the scene. No one expected that a mere wandering cultivator would beat out every noble youth and pill genius in Veluriyam Capital. For a time, everyone discussed the results heatedly. However, the scores had been calculated carefully by the eight judges. Naturally, there wouldn't be a mistake in the results.

Pill King Yi began announcing the results, "The ranking list is out, and the top thirty participants who passed the tests are the final winners of the Pill Pagoda battles. In accordance to your rankings, each one of you will get a chance to cultivate inside the pill pagoda. Besides that, the top hundred wandering cultivators will also have the chance to join a faction of your own choosing, and change your fate!"

When he said this, all one hundred wandering cultivators broke into a cheer. Lin Yanyu was the only one who remained relatively calm, but the rest of the wandering cultivators appeared as if they had gone mad with joy. Wandering cultivators were ultimately just wandering cultivators. No matter how prideful they were, they knew that they were incomparable to those noble youths. For a cultivator, a patron made a world of difference in the world of martial dao. The descendants of a wandering cultivator might still be a wandering cultivator.

The things a wandering cultivator had to work his entire life to earn might be the same things that a noble descendant was born with. Number one Lin Yanyu aside, the second greatest genius amongst the wandering cultivators sat at the twelfth spot on the

ranking list. This showed that the top hundred wandering cultivators were actually quite far behind the top hundred noble youths. The wandering cultivators only had ten seats in the ranking list, but the noble youths had twenty. Still, all those who had fought their way to the top more or less had some potential in them. Even if they were not worthy of the seven great emperor's attention, it wasn't entirely hopeless for them to enter an average aristocratic family or great clan.

Of course, the ten genius wandering cultivators who'd made it to the top thirty were the ones who were truly in high demand. Naturally, Lin Yanyu was the most popular choice of them all. In fact, the fight for him had started immediately after the results of the preliminary contest were announced. Other than Sacred Peafowl Mountain, who maintained a neutral attitude, every other power had more or less thrown Lin Yanyu an olive branch. Speaking of which, it was now time for the wandering cultivators to choose their faction.

"Wandering cultivator Lin Yanyu, the top cultivator amongst the wandering cultivators. Please make your choice."

Lin Yanyu was pushed up on the stage before everyone's eyes. Pill King Yi smiled while looking at him, "Young friend Lin, you may now declare your choice before every person in Veluriyam Capital. Remember, you don't need to be afraid of anything. Just follow what your heart tells you to do and make your choice."

Although Lin Yanyu was a wandering cultivator in name, he was in fact the descendant of a great clan. He had been given noble training since young, so he wasn't that afraid of being on stage. He spent some time thinking about his choice, but the determination behind his eyes was clear from the beginning. While looking at Jiang Chen, he said loudly, "I have come to Veluriyam Capital for one reason only, and that is to join Pill King Zhen. He was my only choice since the beginning, so I will join whichever faction he belongs to. Some of you may be wondering why a mere wandering

cultivator like me would be so loyal to Pill King Zhen even though I shouldn't have met him before. I can only tell you this. Half a year ago, Pill King Zhen saved my life and enlightened me about many things." Naturally, Lin Yanyu was talking about the time in the desolate wildlands. However, he didn't speak in detail because he hadn't obtained Jiang Chen's permission to do so.

A murmur rippled through the crowd when they heard his words. The seven great emperors' factions were especially frustrated. This outcome was even more displeasing to Emperor Shura's faction because they'd thought that it was almost certain that Lin Yanyu would join them. In the end, however... Not only had they failed to get Lin Yanyu to join their faction, but they'd even lost Pill King Bu in the process. It was obvious that Emperor Shura's faction had been completely defeated in the Pill Pagoda battles.

When Pill King Yi heard Lin Yanyu's choice, his wrinkled face immediately bloomed into a wide smile. As he'd thought, Pill King Zhen's name had all the rallying power in the world. If someone asked, which faction did Pill King Zhen belong to? Why, Sacred Peafowl Mountain of course! This is Veluriyam Capital, so why is that even a question? This meant that the wandering cultivator Lin Yanyu was joining Sacred Peafowl Mountain! His addition to the fold was, without a doubt, like adding a pair of wings on the tiger that was Sacred Peafowl Mountain's pill dao inheritance.

A huge tidal wave of emotion was also surging inside of Emperor Shura's heart. For the first time, he grew cognizant that this mysterious Pill King Zhen had transformed the entirety of Veluriyam Capital. His influence was truly starting to change all kinds of things inside Veluriyam. Suddenly, Emperor Shura recalled Emperor Peafowl's earlier words and fell into deep thought.

The wandering cultivators after Lin Yanyu continued to make their respective choices. Sacred Peafowl Mountain was without a

doubt still the most popular choice out of all the powers due to Pill King Zhen's presence. At least thirty wandering cultivators had chosen to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain out of the hundred wandering cultivators who had qualified. As a result, a lot of good seeds came to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Of course, this didn't mean that the rest of them didn't admire Pill King Zhen—they just had their own considerations and circumstances. They knew that if everyone joined Sacred Peafowl Mountain, the amount of resources and level of attention that they'd receive would be affected. The leader of the ranking, Lin Yanyu, was already enough to make them pale in comparison, much less the legendary Pill King Zhen. Thus, the wandering cultivators ultimately made the smarter choice for their own future.

When the wandering cultivators were done selecting their factions, the Pill Pagoda battles officially announced its closure. However, due to everyone's previous demands, Jiang Chen still had to lecture for another ten days. After discussing with everyone, he decided that the lecture would start three days later. Although everyone was anxious to hear what Jiang Chen had to say, they didn't force him to start earlier.

There was still a month or so before the Martial Pagoda battles started anyway, so they have plenty of time. They all could afford to wait. It was understandable that a ten-day lecture would require a certain amount of preparation. The lecture would only be better if Jiang Chen could prepare everything he needed. They could understand the necessity of his request. However, Jiang Chen hadn't delayed the lecture to three days later because he needed to properly prepare for it. Rather, he needed to report everything he'd learned from the desolate wildlands to Emperor Peafowl.

……

In Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Emperor Peafowl's face had taken on an unprecedented level of seriousness.

"The reason that holes have appeared in the seal must be due to

the influence of the demonic aura in the area. Can the demonic calamity truly not be averted?" Deep sadness colored Emperor Peafowl's tone. Even he, a titled great emperor who had been famous for three thousand years, was feeling a deep sense of helplessness. His views regarding the demon race had always been quite broad and insightful. However, this wasn't something that he could simply change with his power alone. The desolate wildlands' seals had isolated it from the outside world, and even he could only try to glean bits of information from the edges. He couldn't see what was going on inside the desolate wildlands at all.

He could only determine some of the demon race's movements and the state of the seals by observing the foundations of the outer formations and gleaning some other clues. Although these things were all proof that the demon race was plotting something, they weren't actually rampaging across the land yet. Emperor Peafowl was deeply saddened by the large groups of human cultivators who had been lured into the desolate wildlands through the tattered seals and turned into food or pawns.

"You did very well in this matter, young friend." Emperor Peafowl praised him. He was referring to Jiang Chen sealing the holes with his formations and preventing the human cultivators from entering. As long as more human cultivators weren't lured into the desolate wildlands, the resurgence of the demon race could be delayed for at least a little while longer. Otherwise, if an endless amount of human cultivators were baited into the desolate wildlands and turned into the demon race's food or puppets, the demon race would only grow stronger.

Although resealing the holes wasn't a long-term plan, it was the only plan Jiang Chen could think of at the time.

"I am only doing my duty, Your Majesty. Still, the resurgence of the demon race can hardly be stopped. In my opinion, they will break out in ten years at best, or three years at worst. They will definitely reawaken, leave the desolate wildlands, and invade the

human domain en masse.” Jiang Chen’s warning was absolutely not just alarmist talk.

From the commotion caused by the Shadow Demons and Wood Demons inside the desolate wildlands, it was obvious that the demon race had already started making preparations. It was just that they couldn’t do anything on a large scale quite yet.

Although the restriction at the entrance of the desolate wildlands was a seal to prevent the demons from entering the outside world, it was also a barrier to humans. Even if the experts of the human race wished to enter the desolate wildlands, the seal was stopping them from doing so. Moreover, the desolate wildlands was without a doubt the best protection the demon race had. Even if the human race were to send in all their elites and even if the demon race were to falter before the humans, they could still hide themselves inside the desolate wildlands.

Therefore, although it looked like the demon race was just starting to make their move, the human race didn’t really have many ways to eliminate them while they were still weak. After all, the desolate wildlands had been the demon race’s domain since the ancient war.

After contemplating the situation for a very long time, the light of determination abruptly shone in Emperor Peafowl’s eyes, “Even if the demon race’s resurgence cannot be stopped, that is no reason for us cultivators to sit here and do nothing about it. Young friend, I have sensed the heavenly dao, and I may be summoned by it in just a hundred years’ time. I must do something about this threat before that happens. I only have one request I’d like to make today, and that is to transfer the inheritance of Sacred Peafowl Mountain to your hands.”

“What?” Jiang Chen was shocked. Although there were some promises between the two of them, he still thought that the emperor’s decision to pass control over Sacred Peafowl Mountain on to him was a little too hasty.

“Considering how urgent the situation is, we cannot take things step by step any longer. After the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering is over, I will declare you as the young lord. However, even though you will only be known nominally as the young lord, you will actually be the one who decides every important matter that goes on in Sacred Peafowl Mountain.”

“But what about you, Your Majesty?” Jiang Chen exclaimed.

“I will be your shield, but my main attention will not be directed towards Veluriyam Capital.” Emperor Peafowl’s voice was distant and heroically determined.

“You’re planning to head to the desolate wildlands?” Jiang Chen broke into an involuntary cry.

“There are some things that must be done. If my departure can raise everyone’s awareness regarding the demon race, then whatever happens, I won’t regret my decision.” Emperor Peafowl sighed, “I know that I am making your life difficult by putting such a heavy burden on your shoulders so soon. However, the emergence and greatest successes of all geniuses start from troubled soil.”

Chapter 913: Pinecrane Pill

Jiang Chen felt like he'd been taken for a ride. He didn't know how to respond to Emperor Peafowl's speech.

Responsibility?

Duty?

Jiang Chen didn't know what to say. If his father the Celestial Emperor knew about his current circumstances, his father would never encourage him to take the coward's way out and escape from it all.

"I don't know how I'll do, Your Majesty, but I will work as hard as I can." Meeting Emperor Peafowl's fervent gaze head on, Jiang Chen made a manly promise.

"Excellent! I'd expect no less from someone as unparalleled as you." Greatly pleased, Emperor Peafowl showered Jiang Chen with praise. "I don't know why I feel this, but I feel that you are the only one that can break down the invisible barrier holding back the Divine Abyss Continent. Only you can bring an end to this warring chaos." His words weren't baseless. Though his All-Seeing Eyes were only open to a certain degree, he could still see things that ordinary people could not. The fortune surrounding Jiang Chen's fate was one of them.

It wasn't the first time that Jiang Chen had heard similar words from Emperor Peafowl. However, he wasn't particularly optimistic. True, his cultivation had seen significant improvements as of late, but the Divine Abyss Continent was still shrouded in mystery. There were many things he did not understand. The human domain, the domains of other races, the desolate wildlands, even the deeply hidden Myriad Abyss Continent... Jiang Chen couldn't put everything together yet.

There was one thing for certain, however—the Divine Abyss

Continent wasn't just any normal mortal plane. There were many secrets for him to unravel. For now, Jiang Chen didn't feel like he had to think too much about it. Overthinking was meaningless without the strength to match. His composure strengthened Emperor Peafowl's belief in the youth. Any other youth would perhaps be puffed up at his success. However, the emperor saw a different impassivity in the youth that belied his actual age.

"This time around, Majesty, I'd like to speak about the demon race for a bit. Is there anything in particular that you would like me to relay?"

Emperor Peafowl paused at that. "The demon race?"

"That's right, I'd like to publicize my recipe to resist the Wood Demons."

The young pill king's seriousness was respectable and praiseworthy. "Good child. It's a valuable formula, just like the Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill's is. The readiness that you show in presenting it forward so simply puts many other, more prominent individuals to shame."

Jiang Chen didn't think it was a particularly grand gesture, though. He didn't need to make money off these formulas. There was no way he could remain unscathed in the event of a demonic invasion in any case. Profiteering in such a circumstance would be immoral. After he bade farewell to Emperor Peafowl, Jiang Chen left Sacred Peafowl Mountain to prepare for his ten-day lecture. He came across Ji San on the outskirts of the mountain just as he was leaving. The latter was visibly cheered up when he saw Jiang Chen come out.

"I thought His Majesty would keep you a few more days, brother." Ji San's eyes were full of worry and concern. Jiang Chen knew why the young man was waiting.

"Aren't we brothers, Brother Ji?" He patted the young master on the shoulder. "I'm not about to let the Coiling Dragon Clan fall to

the wayside. The clan lord has looked out for me time and time again. We'll talk more about it after we get back."

Jiang Chen's words reassured Ji San. He knew that something was going to come of it. "Come, come!" He shouted happily, pulling on Jiang Chen's arm. "Let's talk more at the lord's residence. The clan lord wants very badly to see you as well. The old lord is understandably quite anxious."

Jiang Chen smiled and nodded. Any worries were purely natural. Few men could defy the threat of mortality. The clan lord was at the end of his days. A weaker man would likely have already been scared to death by the daily approach of his demise.

The clan lord's face was full of smiles when he saw Jiang Chen's arrival at the residence. "Pill King Zhen, it's been over half a year. Your cultivation has improved again, has it not?"

Jiang Chen was perfectly polite, showing deference to the clan lord before laughing, "You look pretty well yourself, Clan Lord. Your health seems good, as of late, at least."

The clan lord smiled wryly. "I can maintain this for about two or three more years, but given how things are, I don't think that'll be enough time for them to change. His Majesty Peafowl's attitude is pretty unclear. Many think that Emperor Shura will take the throne once the former retires. As the foremost clan under Emperor Peafowl, at best I expect that we'll undergo absolute disintegration."

Disintegration? Jiang Chen had to chuckle at that. "I know you're always looking ahead, Clan Lord, but isn't that a bit too much?"

"No, no, not at all." The Coiling Dragon clan lord's expression was very solemn. "If Emperor Shura takes the helm, everyone from Sacred Peafowl Mountain will have to retire. But that's not going to be the case for us clans and houses, right? We'll be used to set an example for others."

With Emperor Shura at the helm, something like that wouldn't necessarily happen, but it was fairly likely. There were many hidden enemies for a clan as prominent as the Coiling Dragon.

Any change to the people in power meant a change in their respective subordinates. Nobody could guarantee that the Coiling Dragon Clan would be left untouched.

"Brother, there are no outsiders here, so do forgive my haste. Is it true that you've acquired an acorn from an Invisible Chameleon Cloudpine?" This was a more important matter for Ji San. He wanted to know about it without delay.

The Coiling Dragon clan lord looked towards Jiang Chen with equally brilliant interest.

"Am I the type of person who would joke about that?" Jiang Chen grabbed at the air casually and produced an acorn between his fingers.

"Is that... is that a Cloudpine's acorn?" Young master Ji San was overjoyed. His eyes weren't the only ones on the acorn. The Coiling Dragon clan lord stared fiercely at it with a deathly fixation, as if it was the source of his life.

"Yes. With this acorn and the Cloudcrane's heart, we have both of the main materials required for the Pinecrane Pill. The remaining materials are easy to obtain." Jiang Chen nodded.

"Then... when can it be refined?" Ji San wasn't a hasty man, but he couldn't sit back idly either with something so intimately related to the Coiling Dragon clan lord. In the greater scheme of things, it directly affected the clan's fate.

"Refining it... will take a bit more time and effort." Jiang Chen sighed softly.

"Why? You can't contact your master?" The Coiling Dragon clan lord's body shook. He was very interested in the answer to that question. "As long as he is willing, I will pay any price. Anything

that the Coiling Dragon Clan has is his."

"It's not a matter of the price." Jiang Chen smiled. "I really can't contact my master. He is a secluded man, and I've tried the method he gave me without much success. Perhaps he has gone to a place sealed off from the outside world."

"What?" The Coiling Dragon clan lord's expression became dull at once.

Ji San was in a panic. "Is there no other way?"

"Probably not in the short term." Jiang Chen shook his head. "However, my master did teach me how to refine the pill once upon a time."

"Huh?" Ji San's sadness was replaced with a renewed vigor. "Then you can refine the pill too, right?"

The Coiling Dragon clan lord clutched at his chair's handles. He looked at Jiang Chen, not knowing how to feel.

Jiang Chen didn't deny it. "Yes. But I haven't refined the pill before, so I suppose I only have a fifty percent chance at success."

The Coiling Dragon clan lord was ecstatic. "I'm willing to bet with even ten percent. Fifty is more than enough. If your master really cannot be reached, I will have to rely on you instead, little friend."

Ji San grabbed Jiang Chen's shoulder as well. "Brother, you're lucky by nature. Fifty percent for you is at least seventy to eighty for someone else!" He became animated at once, shrugging off his previous despair. "What other materials do you need? I'll go prepare them right now."

"No rush," Jiang Chen laughed wryly. "Refining the Pinecrane Pill isn't child's play. I need some time to remember it and figure things out. If I rush headlong into it, there's no way I'll succeed."

"Right, right, my bad." Ji San quickly changed his tune. "Yes,

you should take some time and think about it. I'll go prep the materials in the meantime."

Jiang Chen gave the acorn to Ji San. "Keep the acorn for now. I'll give you a list in a bit. Refining the pill... well, that'll have to wait until the gathering's finished." He raised his head to the Coiling Dragon clan lord. "Are you willing to wait, sir?"

"Haha, the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering only lasts for a few more months. I can wait for that long. I wonder how long the refining process will take, though?"

The Pinecrane Pill was a sky-rank pill, and thus difficult to attempt.

Jiang Chen did some quick mental math before giving a conservative estimate. "Anywhere between fifteen to sixty days."

The Coiling Dragon clan lord breathed a sigh of relief at the quote. "Okay, then I will patiently await your good news. If you manage the feat, the Coiling Dragon Clan will forever be in your debt." As the lord of a great clan, it was rare that the Coiling Dragon clan lord would say such things.

"Mm. I'll go write up the materials list, then I have to do some lecture preparation. I'm off. Please be patient."

The Coiling Dragon clan lord laughed. "Haha, no problem. Ole Third, see our friend out for me."

The two of them left Coiling Dragon Clan territory. Jiang Chen wrote up the list, then gave it to Ji San.

"Brother, I don't think you told the truth in front of the clan lord. How sure are you really about refining the Pinecrane Pill?" Ji San couldn't help but ask.

"Didn't you say it already?" Jiang Chen smiled. "Seventy to eighty percent sure."

"That high, really? So you're basically entirely certain!" Ji San

was amazed.

The Pinecrane Pill was just a normal pill for the Jiang Chen of his previous life. It wasn't a divine-rank pill, so he didn't expect to have any trouble with it. But, Jiang Chen hadn't quite restored his pill proficiency to his previous life's level yet. Furthermore, making empty guarantees simply wasn't his style.

Chapter 914: Subduing Pill King Bu

When he returned to Taiyuan Tower, Jiang Chen was greeted by an entirely different situation. The Wei father and son duo were now sidelined in the Tower's operations. They knew as much and had no intention of contesting it. Their attitude was one completely fit for their station. Presently, House Wei relied on Jiang Chen instead of the reverse. Everyone in Veluriyam Capital knew that. If Pill King Zhen had not appeared out of the blue, the Wei father and son duo would be long dead.

Acting as a judge in the Pill Pagoda battles was already an exceptional honor. All of the other judges were direct subordinates to the titled great emperors. Jiang Chen was the only exception. Pill King Zhen was from Taiyuan Tower alone, which had undeniable ties to House Wei. Furthermore, Jiang Chen had truly made a name for himself throughout the course of the battles. He became even more reputable than all seven other judges combined. The title of 'best pill master in Veluriyam' now belonged to him.

The Jiang Chen of today was the greatest in Veluriyam in regards to pills, whether the metric was strength, bearing, or fame. After a brief conversation, Jiang Chen clearly noticed the difference in the Wei father and son's attitudes. They had become far more humble, and he wasn't quite used to it. Still, this shift in disposition was completely understandable given Jiang Chen's increase in fame and status. A difference in station meant a marked difference in how one presented oneself as well. Jiang Chen didn't plan on changing it, because honestly, it couldn't be helped. Instead, he grinned at the House Wei head's humble smile. "House Head, you should make some advance preparations. House Wei should be ready to become a great clan someday."

"Become a great clan?" Wei Tianxiao blinked. "I... I'm not sure if I'm ready to think about that." It wasn't due to a lack of ambition. Current circumstances were complicated. Emperor Peafowl's

continued governance of Veluriyam itself was in question. As a faction under Emperor Peafowl, House Wei's future hinged upon the identity of Veluriyam's ruler. Without this having been properly decided, their future lacked clarity.

"Don't be fooled by appearances, House Head. You should move forward without hesitation when the time comes." It wasn't Jiang Chen's place to say much more. House Wei was the first faction he'd made acquaintances with in Veluriyam Capital. It was natural for him to want to help them rise up in stature.

Hearing this, Wei Tianxiao pondered the situation for a bit. There seemed to be a hidden meaning in Jiang Chen's words, but he couldn't quite put a finger on exactly what it was. As they spoke, there was an announcement from outside. "House Head, Pill King Zhen, there is a visitor calling himself Pill King Bu. He has a white beard, but says he is Pill King Zhen's student."

Jiang Chen had to smile at the thought. Pill King Bu was a high-ranking pill king loyal to Emperor Shura who had lost a bet to him during the Pill Pagoda battles. It didn't seem like the old man was planning on reneging.

"Let him in." Jiang Chen had no fear of that in any case. If the old man did go back on his words, the heavenly oath that was in place would judge him appropriately.

Pill King Bu had a lot on his mind. Normally, he wouldn't spare the House Wei father and son duo a second glance, despite their nobility. However, he knew what kind of position he had to adopt. With a helpless laugh, he nodded towards them in a half-greeting.

Wei Tianxiao was very pleased that an ordinarily high-and-mighty high-rank pill king was now so honest. Pill King Bu was acting like a child waiting for punishment. He didn't dare dwell on it though, and grabbed at Wei Jie's sleeve. "Jie'er, let us depart for a bit. We should let the pill kings talk alone."

Pill King Bu stood awkwardly in place after the House Wei father

and son duo departed. He rubbed his hands incessantly. Despite his loss, it was still hard for someone of his position to grovel too much. He managed only a few phrases after a long period of time. “Pill King Zhen, this old man admits defeat. Why don’t you lay down your rules? As long as you don’t shame me, I’ll do whatever you say.”

Having lived out a fairly successful life for most of his years, Pill King Bu only wanted to preserve his reputation. Other things were largely immaterial.

“Shame you?” Jiang Chen smiled. “One only receives respect when they respect others. If you didn’t shame yourself in the first place, what opportunity would I have had? But you’re my student now, so there’s no need to take it out on you anymore. Tell me, will there be retaliation if you leave Emperor Shura? If so, let me know and I’ll settle it.”

Pill King Bu smiled wryly, “I’m an old man who’s devoted my entire life to pill dao. I have no wife and children, nor do I have any relatives. What retaliation could there possibly be? I only have a few pounds of flesh on my body. If he wants them, then let him come. There’s no way that I’m going back on my word.”

The old man’s serious expression told Jiang Chen that he would rather be on Emperor Shura’s bad side than break his promise. He was an honorable betting man, in any case.

“Let him come?” Jiang Chen sneered. “You’re my student. I’m not just going to let him come. But I’m warning you right now as well—don’t think of keeping your mind elsewhere. You’re my student now, so I’d recommend you cease any designs on changing your mind later. Twice-betrayers rarely meet a good end.”

Pill King Bu’s neck stiffened. He felt personally insulted. “Don’t worry, I’m not someone like that!” He shouted. “I’m no traitor.”

Jiang Chen smiled, but didn’t affirm the statement. He looked at Pill King Bu for a moment before continuing, “Maybe you think it’s

a bit embarrassing to be my student, but even the likes of Pill King Lu Feng begged to become such. If I didn't have a great need for people, I wouldn't have been so keen about taking you on as my student myself."

Pill King Bu's face turned blue, then purple. He didn't know what to say. From his expression, though, it was clear that he didn't completely accept his situation. Jiang Chen smiled. "There's no one else here. If you still don't respect me, I can give you another chance to challenge me. The topic is irrelevant. If you can gain even a little advantage over me, I'll give you your freedom again. You can go wherever you want."

Although he wanted Pill King Bu's help, Jiang Chen didn't want the pill king to harbor any lingering negativity in his heart. Any enlistment of the old man had to be done with his utter and complete submission. One had to remove all distrust from a man's heart before he could be used. Jiang Chen didn't want the long-term help of someone that hated him for any reason.

Pill King Bu was curious. How could the young pill king be this generous?

"I'm giving you the opportunity. If you don't have the courage to take it, then that's not up to me." Jiang Chen said with a half-smile.

Pill King Bu's chest heaved, his eyes bulging. "Do you really mean that?"

"You talk too much. Show me your moves, if you have any. If you don't, then stay put." Jiang Chen was annoyed.

Pill King Bu wasn't upset by the young man's attitude. He considered for a moment, then took out a pill. "I'm not going to challenge you to anything else. As long as you can successfully analyze this pill and tell me its materials, I'll be completely convinced. Even half is enough to secure my loyalty."

The old pill king had mustered up all his courage to say this. He'd attributed his previous loss to lack of care, so he was still disgruntled about it. Smiling faintly, Jiang Chen motioned for Pill King Bu to put down the pill. He swept his gaze across the pill. "This pill has been passed down for three hundred years, has it not? Is it a unique one?" Jiang Chen smiled serenely as he asked.

A look of surprise flashed across Pill King Bu's eyes. Still, he was unmoved. "Don't test me. Analyze this pill first."

Jiang Chen found the old man's staunchness amusing, and took the pill between his fingers casually. Suddenly, the hint of a mocking smile played across his face. He tossed Pill King Bu's treasured pill straight into the trash can beside him.

"You..." Pill King Bu's face colored in fury. "You can shame me, but you can't shame my master's pill! I..."

"Is a Profound Dreamweaver Pill really worthy of being treasured like this? It's just an imperfect version. You haven't kept this for the last couple centuries, have you?" The degree of Jiang Chen's ridicule was plain on his face. In fact, the Profound Dreamweaver Pill wasn't garbage at all. Jiang Chen had merely acted in such an exaggerated fashion to destroy the last shred of Pill King Bu's dignity and ego. Jiang Chen knew that an old man as stubborn as him wasn't likely to lose his airs so easily. He would only do so after his ego was completely gone.

"You... you recognize this pill?" Pill King Bu's entire person was in disarray. His face changed color several times, and he began to stutter. His eyes belied great astonishment.

Jiang Chen curled his lips, "Do you think that everyone is as ignorant as you are? Keeping trash as treasure... surely not!"

Pill King Bu was as gray as ash. Jiang Chen had landed a square hit to the jaw. The pill had been given to him by his first master long ago, on the latter's deathbed. His master had given him the pill with old, decrepit hands. The pill was his masterpiece, the old

man had said, but it was incomplete. If he had been able to refine a real Profound Dreamweaver Pill, then his life would have truly been complete, satisfied unto death...

One of the requests that his master had made was that Pill King Bu, as his student, should successfully refine the Profound Dreamweaver Pill. The pill king had always considered the request to be on the same level of importance as an imperial command. However, he was more than a thousand years of age, yet his master's dream still had not been fulfilled. Thus, he'd taken out the pill to intentionally make Jiang Chen's life difficult. He hadn't thought that a pill that he held in such high regard would be treated as garbage in Pill King Zhen's eyes.

The pill that his master had requested for him to complete with such sincerity on his deathbed was trash to another. Pill King Bu wanted to lash out, but could not. He simply didn't have the confidence. Pill King Zhen had directly said the pill's name with such ease, after all. Maybe it really was garbage in the young pill king's eyes?

Chapter 915: Complete Submission

Pill King Bu had a complicated look in his eyes. The anger and grievance that he'd initially felt were slowly turning into helpless submission. This was because he knew that the gap between his skill and that of the young pill king was too great. The young man's horizon was so distant and his strength so great that he could crush even Pill King Bu's late master with less than a finger. Before a titan, Pill King Bu realized that he couldn't salvage even a scrap of pride. Sullenly, he walked up to the trash can and picked up the defective pill with red eyes. Then, he wiped it gently, as if he was wiping his most precious treasure. It was only when the pill was completely clean that he finally put it away carefully. His late master had left this pill behind as he drew his last breath. Even if it was worthless, he didn't wish to see it thrown into the dustbin.

Jiang Chen was a bit startled and moved when he saw Pill King Bu's actions. Now he was the one who felt a bit sorry. He could see that this pill was extremely important to Pill King Bu. Although the pill was trash and defective, to Pill King Bu it might be a keepsake that was worth risking his life to protect. The sacred emotion made Jiang Chen realize that he might have gone a little overboard just now. He knocked the table lightly and stared at Pill King Bu. "Ole Bu, this pill may be a keepsake that you've inherited from your master, and as such, it may hold a special meaning for you. So I apologize."

Pill King Bu looked a little surprised as he looked up at Jiang Chen. He obviously didn't expect the arrogant Pill King Zhen to apologize to him.

"I'm not apologizing because this pill is amazing or anything. I'm apologizing because the emotions you've invested in this pill is admirable." Jiang Chen said indifferently.

Pill King Bu let out a wry laugh and said in a distressed manner, "The victor is king, so you may humiliate me all you like. This Ole

Bu has lost so thoroughly that I've lost even my underwear."

Jiang Chen could no longer see any trace of arrogance or non-acceptance on the other's face anymore. There was only a deep sense of powerlessness that would naturally follow after a crushing blow. "The Profound Dreamweaver Pill is a pill that sends its user into a dream. It can temper, repair, and improve a cultivator's consciousness. Even more amazing is its ability to repair all damages to one's consciousness, no matter how severe. Therefore, the Profound Dreamweaver Pill really is a first-rate pill. Unfortunately, the refining process of this particular pill is pretty much a failure." Jiang Chen spoke frankly.

Pill King Bu was startled, and he couldn't stop himself from asking, "You know how to refine the Profound Dreamweaver Pill?"

Jiang Chen smiled. "How could I have recognized it at first glance otherwise? The Profound Dreamweaver Pill is a pill that I often refined for practice when I was ten."

He purposely said this in an easygoing manner. However, it still caused a muscle in Pill King Bu's face to twitch in response. The comparison was starting to kill him. The Profound Dreamweaver Pill was a pill that he often refined for practice when he was ten? Was this pill really so insignificant? Was it really a pill that the ten-year-old Pill King Zhen had used to hone his skills, even though his master had failed to uncover its mysteries despite having spent his entire lifetime researching it?

It was common sense that pills that could be used for practice were common goods one could buy off the street. Could Pill King Zhen really afford to be this luxurious since he was ten years old? Was he really that impressive?

"Do you wish to learn?" Jiang Chen smiled meaningfully at Pill King Bu.

Although Pill King Bu wanted very much to raise a prideful rejection, the mere thought of it felt like he was committing a

crime. He couldn't help himself from nodding at Pill King Zhen, even though his wrinkled face blushed bright red immediately afterwards. He felt like he was a kid salivating at a tasty lollipop, with Pill King Zhen being the suspicious uncle trying to kidnap him with it.

"Or you don't want to?" Jiang Chen's smile was so irritating that it invited a punch to the nose.

Pill King Bu smiled wryly, "Pill King Zhen, if your intention is to make fun of me, then I must admit that you've succeeded. The Profound Dreamweaver Pill is a regret my master was never able to resolve before he died. Before he drew his last breath he instructed me to perfect and refine the real Profound Dreamweaver Pill."

Jiang Chen nodded, "The basic structure of this Profound Dreamweaver Pill is correct, but there are so many wrong details in this pill formula that you can spend ten lifetimes attempting to refine it and still not come up with anything."

"What?!"

Jiang Chen smiled and stared at Pill King Bu, "I'm telling the truth. You've lived for more than a thousand years, haven't you? You've also spent quite a lot of time trying to refine the Profound Dreamweaver Pill, haven't you? What do you have to show for it?"

Pill King Bu shook his head dejectedly. Reality was a cruel mistress, and lying was beneath him.

Jiang Chen stretched out three fingers with a 'I knew it' look on his face. "If you are willing to learn from me, I can guarantee that you will master the method of refining the Profound Dreamweaver Pill in three days' time."

"What? Three days?!" This time Pill King Bu was so stunned that he almost suspected that his ears had failed him at a critical moment. Three days? This wasn't eating or walking they were talking about. Three days?! Pill dao encompassed a wide spectrum

and was extremely profound. Just where would one find a pill that could be mastered in three days?

“You don’t believe me?” Jiang Chen smiled, “If I let you teach my Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill to your students, how many days do you think they’d take to learn it?”

After thinking for a moment, Pill King Bu responded in defeat, “I may need a month or so.” On that note, he abruptly raised his eyebrows, “Can you really teach me how to refine the Profound Dreamweaver Pill in three days?”

“Three days is a safe estimate. If your comprehension capabilities aren’t especially poor, a day and a half should be enough.”

Pill King Bu was starting to feel like his brain was lagging behind. A day and a half? Did he just say that I can learn in one and a half days what my master failed to figure out after an entire lifetime? If my master hears this in the underworld, he would probably be so angry that he’d just jump out of his coffin, wouldn’t he?

After hesitating in conflicted anguish for a while, Pill King Bu finally made up his mind and spoke loudly, “Pill King Zhen, if you really can teach me this Profound Dreamweaver Pill and resolve my master’s dying wish once and for all, you may command this bag of bones however you’d like in the future. I will willingly obey your every command and not feel even the slightest bit of reluctance.”

“Have you finally thought things through?” Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

Pill King Bu nodded resolutely, “No, but there is no doubt that you are tens and hundreds of times better than I am. I will only be humiliating myself if I remain stubborn.”

Pill King Bu was an arrogant and bad-tempered man. His flaws were all extremely obvious. However, he was not without any merits either. One, he was a man of his word. Two, he was a man

who admired experts. If there was an expert who was stronger than him, and this person managed to dominate time and time again, he would dedicate all of his loyalty to this expert.

Jiang Chen didn't plan to waste any more breath. He grabbed a brush and a piece of paper and wrote the Profound Dreamweaver Pill's formula in beautiful script. When he was done, he brandished his sleeves and sent the pill formula flying towards Pill King Bu.

"This is the the pill formula and refining insight of the Profound Dreamweaver Pill. I've written everything in there clearly, so if you have good powers of comprehension, it should take you at most a day and a half to understand it all. If not, it may take you three to five days. Remember your promise." Jiang Chen's movements had the natural bearing of a person in power, and Pill King Bu caught the pill formula subconsciously while feeling startled. For a time he was quiet and wasn't quite sure what to say.

Jiang Chen was already striding outside. "I will be cultivating behind closed doors for two days so I can prepare the contents of my lecture. I hope that you'll have completely comprehended the pill formula by the time I come out. When that happens, you will join me and act as my support during the lecture."

If Jiang Chen was anyone else, his words would've caused everyone in Veluriyam Capital to drop their jaws in shock. But since he was Jiang Chen, no one thought that he was wrong to say something like this.

When Jiang Chen's back had finally vanished from the room, Pill King Bu eventually came back to his senses and looked at the pill formula. He only looked through a few lines before his expression changed abruptly. He immediately began reading seriously with trembling hands. The more he read, the more grave Pill King Bu's expression became. In the end, his entire body involuntarily trembled in response. It was obvious that he had seen something that agitated him greatly.

He muttered to himself with trembling lips, “The Profound Dreamweaver Pill is actually real? These refining details... They are all where my master went wrong back then. So the reason why I’ve spent half a lifetime researching using my master’s findings and coming up with nothing is because there are too many places where he went wrong. No wonder...”

Pill King Bu inhaled once deeply. The pill formula he was holding felt as heavy as Mt. Tai.

He never thought that Pill King Zhen would actually give him the real pill formula. In his opinion, there was at least an eighty percent chance that Pill King Zhen would humiliate and make fun of him instead. But reality was a lot more difficult to believe than his imagination. This pill formula was very simple and direct. It pointed out all the flaws in his thinking when he studied the pill. Moreover, these details were stated in a very logical fashion. He was sure that the information written on the pill formula wasn’t simply fake nonsense.

“He... he only looked at my pill a couple of times, but he still managed to find so many problems with it and identify all of its core issues. Just what is... his real level of pill dao?” Pill King Bu suddenly felt very cold. The more he thought about it, the more he felt that this Pill King Zhen was unfathomable. He almost couldn’t believe that he, a mere frog in a well, had issued a challenge against someone as great as him. Was it an undeserving loss? No, it wasn’t. Not at all!

Suddenly, Pill King Bu felt as if he was enlightened. If a man learns of the right way in the morning, then he may die in the evening without regret! In fact, an abrupt thought popped into his mind. It might have actually been a good thing to lose that gamble. Pill King Bu himself was shocked by the thought. Why had he changed this quickly? This wasn’t like him! But when Pill King Bu looked at the pill formula in his hand once more, he threw out all reservations and walked quickly towards the door. He could wait

no longer to research this formula.

Two days later, Jiang Chen stepped out from his closed door cultivation. He was finished preparing the contents of the lecture. The moment he stepped out, he immediately saw a person standing respectfully at the entrance. He had both arms to his sides and a look of great admiration on his face.

“Ole Bu?” Jiang Chen looked surprised.

Pill King Bu took a step forward and knelt with both knees, “Please accept my respects, master.” After that, Pill King Bu kowtowed stiffly to Jiang Chen. When the master-disciple formalization ritual was complete, Pill King Bu didn’t hurry to get up on his feet. Instead, he said sincerely, “Master, Ole Bu is your disciple from hereon. You may beat or scold me as you wish. Your disciple is willing to accept any punishment for my earlier offense towards you, master.”

If anything, Pill King Bu’s attitude showed that he had nothing to lose. There was a saying that stated that one does not slap a smiling person. Considering that Pill King Bu had truly submitted to him, Jiang Chen no longer saw the need to belittle him any further. “I see that your power of understanding isn’t bad, Ole Bu. Have you mastered the Profound Dreamweaver Pill already?”

A trace of joy passed through his eyes. “If it wasn’t for your teaching, I might actually have spent ten lifetimes in utter failure. Your knowledge of pill dao is as deep as the sea, and Ole Bu accepts his defeat and submission with great joy, master.”

Suddenly, a strange cry rang from outside, “Ole Bu, you shameless bastard! I can’t believe you took my master from me! Listen here, you! I became master’s disciple first, so you better call me your senior brother from now on!!” They didn’t need to look to know who the voice belonged to. It was none other than the childish Pill King Lu Feng.

Pill King Lu Feng started wailing when he strode in and saw

Jiang Chen. “Master, why are you so biased? All of the pill formulas you gave me aren’t equal to even one Profound Dreamweaver Pill. Can you really call this proper treatment of the senior brother?”

This old urchin was starting to call himself a big senior brother already!

An amused Pill King Bu wasn’t sure how to react. Technically speaking, Pill King Lu Feng had entered his master’s tutelage earlier than he did, so there didn’t seem to be anything wrong with the way he addressed himself.

Chapter 916: Three Disciples

With Pill King Lu Feng and Pill King Bu there to assist him, Jiang Chen's burden became much lighter. He imparted some of the contents of his lesson to them so that they could take over some of the lectures. They were both first-rate pill kings in Veluriyam Capital. As such, it was only natural for them to have a high comprehension level. They were able to completely understand the lecture material with just a few pointers from him. However, Jiang Chen didn't dare give them too many lessons to teach. People wanted to listen to him, after all, and not somebody else. After he was done distributing lectures to Pill King Lu Feng and Pill King Bu, somebody outside suddenly announced that the champion from the Pill Pagoda battles was asking for an audience.

Lin Yanyu? Jiang Chen slapped his forehead. He'd forgotten all about the matter. If there was anyone in the entire Veluriyam Capital who could subdue this supercilious young man called Lin Yanyu, it would be no other than Jiang Chen. This was because he had two identities, and Lin Yanyu was deferential towards both. One of his identities was Lin Yanyu's savior. If Jiang Chen hadn't rescued him at the entrance to the desolate wildlands, the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain would have caused Lin Yanyu to suffer a great loss. The second identity was that of Pill King Zhen. Lin Yanyu greatly admired Pill King Zhen. However, It wasn't because he blindly worshipped him, but rather, because Pill King Zhen had defeated the overweening Pill King Ji Lang. Coincidentally, Pill King Ji Lang was also Lin Yanyu's mortal enemy.

Pill King Bu wasn't unfamiliar with Lin Yanyu. As such, he was a little surprised to see this young pill dao talent act as obedient as a lamb in front of Jiang Chen. Before the pill king came under Jiang Chen's tutelage, he'd acted as the representative for Emperor Shura. He'd even twice represented Emperor Shura in recruiting

Lin Yanyu. Thus, Pill King Bu understood what Lin Yanyu's personality was like. This young man might seem obedient, but he was actually like an iron fist encased in a velvet glove. An ordinary person would not be able to change his mind easily.

Pill King Bu had tried to recruit Lin Yanyu many times on the behalf of Emperor Shura. The wandering cultivator had always appeared outwardly polite and respectful, but he'd never once made any substantial promises, nor did he ever make it clear that he'd join Emperor Shura's side. This genius wandering cultivator might seem unimposing on the surface, but he was surprisingly opinionated. Meeting under such circumstances was awkward indeed.

Lin Yanyu was a little surprised when he saw Pill King Bu, but he didn't say anything about it. He only gave Jiang Chen a very humble and respectful bow. "Senior Zhen, Junior Lin Yanyu pays his respects."

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. "Since when did I suddenly become your senior?"

"Pill Master Zhen is number one in pill dao in Veluriyam Capital. Therefore, being respectful towards your seniors is only a matter of course." Lin Yanyu said with a serious look on his face. Pill King Lu Feng and Pill King Bu were quite pleased to hear those words. They were both willingly under Jiang Chen's tutelage. But if Lin Yanyu had suddenly spoken to Pill King Zhen as though they were peers, they would have a little difficulty holding onto their dignity. How were they supposed to hold their heads high in the future if this young junior was of a higher seniority than them? Fortunately, Lin Yanyu was extremely tactful and chose not to address Jiang Chen as Brother Huang like he'd done in the past. Otherwise, those two old men might really lose all of their face.

Jiang Chen also noticed this issue and said nothing about it. Instead, he spoke with some amusement and looked at Lin Yanyu. "Why have you not entered the Pill Pagoda?"

Lin Yanyu quickly replied, “Everyone has applied to postpone their entrance to the Pill Pagoda by half a month. They all wish to listen to senior’s lectures.”

Pill King Lu Feng snorted. “These young brats are surprisingly sly.”

Jiang Chen wasn’t too surprised. He then asked, “What are your plan from now on?”

“This junior wishes to follow senior around and listen to senior’s teachings.” Lin Yanyu said sincerely.

A pill dao senior that could defeat Pill King Ji Lang, was worthy of Lin Yanyu’s respect and sincerity. However, Pill King Lu Feng’s brow twitched. “Brat. You’re seeking tutelage under our master too?!”

Pill King Bu stared at Lin Yanyu with an antagonizing look.

“Both of you, stop bullying him. Yanyu is a young man whom I place high hopes on.” Jiang Chen laughed in an easy-going manner.

Lin Yanyu was moved when he heard those words. He quickly dropped to his knees and kowtowed. “Senior, I beseech you, please take this disciple into your tutelage. This disciple will definitely serve master well and put his heart and soul into learning.”

Jiang Chen had already planned on doing so in the first place. Otherwise, he would never have summoned Lin Yanyu to Veluriyam Capital. However, accepting a disciple was not child’s play. “You won’t regret this?” Jiang Chen asked with a deep growl.

“Your disciple will never regret this!” Lin Yanyu replied with no hesitation. He was no fool. Pill King Zhen’s mastery over pill dao was extremely obvious. Even the legendary, undefeated Pill King Ji Lang had been defeated by this man! How many people in the Divine Abyss Continent could possibly be more powerful than him?

Although Lin Yanyu had inherited his family's profound knowledge, it was all outdated. No matter how deep his family's foundations were, he'd only inherited a portion of that knowledge. Moreover, even if he'd inherited all of his family's heritage, it still wouldn't be enough for him to seek revenge on Pillfire City. If he wanted the slightest glimmer of hope for revenge, or to return the Lin family to its previous glory, he had to seek the tutelage from this god-like senior of pill dao. He would beg to be accepted and learn from such a person. For the past two days, Lin Yanyu kept repeating this question in his mind and eventually came to such a conclusion.

Jiang Chen suddenly started laughing and looked at Pill King Bu and Pill King Lu Feng. "I intend to accept him as my disciple. What do the both of you think of this?"

Since Jiang Chen had already made his decision, the two pill kings naturally could not object. Moreover, there was no reason for them to object. With their master's status in pill dao, it was only natural for him to widely accept disciples.

Pill King Lu Feng grumbled, "In any case, I will be the eldest senior brother."

Pill King Bu laughed wryly. Even though he didn't place much importance in status or titles, he wasn't willing to be a junior to somebody much younger than him.

Lin Yanyu was elated when he saw that neither of these old men had objected. "Yanyu pays his respects to both senior brothers!" He quickly yelled. This meant that he acknowledged the status of his two senior brothers.

Delighted, Pill King Lu Feng immediately broke into a beaming smile. His attitude also took a complete turn. "Good lad. Good lad! You have a keen eye! Mmm! Now that you've joined us, you will be put in charge of attending to master in most of the dirty and tiring work since you're still a young man!"

Pill King Lu Feng immediately put on the airs of the eldest senior brother. Even though this old man might seem to have the personality of an old imp, he was actually quite clever.

“Of course. My two senior brothers are both well-respected individuals and have already made a name for themselves as Mt. Tai and the Big Dipper in pill dao. It is only natural for this junior to be responsible for those tasks.”

Pill King Bu let out a quiet sigh. To think that this kid would so willingly enter master’s tutelage, even though the Emperor Shura was unable to recruit him! This enormous contrast in attitude caused the pill king’s heart to be filled with a wide range of emotions. It seemed like Emperor Shura’s ability to attract the younger generation had been slowly surpassed by the young Pill King Zhen. Pill King Bu had just come under Jiang Chen’s tutelage, and thus hadn’t solidified his position here. He naturally wouldn’t flaunt his seniority. He patted Lin Yanyu on his shoulder to show his support but wouldn’t say anything more.

“Yanyu, both your senior brothers are helping me with the lecture. You should also join them to help me give some lectures instead of just being in the audience.”

Lin Yanyu was taken by surprise. “I… I will lecture too?”

Even though Lin Yanyu had inherited his family’s profound knowledge, his family had encountered huge misfortune when he was young, so he’d wandered from place to place ever since. Therefore, he was no different from any of the other wandering cultivators. With his family background, he wouldn’t get to the point of stage fright. But to lecture on a podium was an entirely different matter.

Jiang Chen patted Lin Yanyu on the shoulder. “No need to worry. I will explain and teach you everything you need to know for the lecture. This is training. If you wish to become a legendary figure in pill dao whom everyone respects, you will have to go

through this."

Legendary figure in pill dao? The three disciples were surprised to the point of speechlessness.

"It would be my own failure if you fail to become a legendary figure in this continent after you've been through my tutelage." Jiang Chen said nonchalantly. He'd spoken those words in a very nondescript manner, yet nobody could conjure any doubts on their authenticity. This was because they could all clearly feel the confidence emanating from their master.

A legendary figure in pill dao, huh? Even old bones like Pill King Bu and Pill King Lu Feng could feel hot blood coursing through their veins, something that hadn't happened in quite a long time.

The ten-day lecture that the entire Veluriyam Capital had been looking forward to was finally about to begin. Jiang Chen, along with his three disciples, began their lectures under the pill pagoda of the Veluriyam Pagoda. Back when Taiyuan Tower had first opened, Jiang Chen had given a lecture for three consecutive days and had captured a lot of attention. However, everyone had only just begun to hear about Pill King Zhen's reputation at that time.

This time, the situation was no longer the same. Back then, Jiang Chen had only defeated Pill King Rong, a sixth rank pill king. But now, Jiang Chen had defeated the insufferably arrogant Pill King Ji Lang, a legendary figure from Pillfire City. He was currently the strongest at pill dao in Veluriyam Capital. Thus, it went without saying that the popularity of his ten-day lecture exploded.

A crowd formed under the pill pagoda that extended as far as a few miles back. It was a sea of black in all directions. There wasn't even the slightest space to be found. At a glance, there was at least one million people present. And these were just the lucky ones that came early enough to find a place. Nobody knew for sure how many were lingering outside after they'd failed to find a place for themselves. A lecture given by the number one in pill dao in

Veluriyam Capital! For ten days in a row at that too! This was an event that might not even happen once every decade, or even once a century! Nobody was going to want to miss it.

One after the other, Jian Chen began to impart words of wisdom right from the beginning of the lecture. He brought up many classical parables of pill dao and integrated them into knowledge taken from a few pill dao schools. His lecture this time was immensely profound. He captured everyone's full attention as soon as he began the lecture.

Jiang Chen had actually prepared for this lecture very meticulously. He understood that people were there to listen to his lecture on pill dao and not to listen to him ramble on about inconsequential things. Because of that, he discussed some earth-shattering information right off the bat, capturing everyone's attention as if he had used a hook. Without a doubt, only a multi-talented pill dao genius of Jiang Chen's caliber could do such a thing as easily as lifting a feather, condensing so much knowledge into a ten-day lecture.

The surrounding ten mile area was basked in complete silence for a time. After hearing the astounding information from the start, some of the pill experts in Veluriyam Capital that had only attended the lecture to watch a good show couldn't bear to leave. Every single one of them listened as though they were intoxicated. They'd completely forgotten that they were originally there to simply watch the hustle and bustle.

However, the ones that were caught by surprise the most were not these experts, but the three disciples who sat right beside Jian Chen. They were already very impressed by the sheer amount of knowledge their master possessed. But after listening to the lecture, they came to realize that they were like frogs at the bottom of a well. Their master's profound lecture was far beyond Veluriyam Capital's level. One could say that it was far beyond what they thought was possible. This made them feel like they

hadn’t just improved by one level, but by multiple levels in one go!

Chapter 917: Foremost in Pill Dao in Veluriyam Capital

Jiang Chen wasn't trying to show off. Truth was, with the heavenly knowledge of pill dao he possessed from his previous lifetime, he would be ashamed of himself if his lectures were too elementary. Moreover, it was quite obvious that many people in Veluriyam Capital were attaching great importance to his lectures. Emperor Peafowl in particular had high hopes for him. Jiang Chen was also deliberately using this chance to broaden the horizons of pill dao in Veluriyam Capital, bringing everyone up a level.

Even though Veluriyam Capital's level pill dao wasn't particularly weak, its scope of knowledge was simply too narrow. Without more knowledge, Veluriyam Capital's plans of competing with Pillfire City would forever be a pipe dream. Thus, Jian Chen's goal for this lecture was to broaden everyone's horizons, elevating the stagnant status quo to the next level and injecting a renewed vigor.

It wasn't difficult for him to achieve this because of all the knowledge he possessed. Just a tenth of his knowledge was enough to turn Veluriyam Capital into an eternal legend. Naturally, a simple lecture wouldn't impose much of a challenge for Jiang Chen. But for the pill dao experts in Veluriyam Capital, this was earth-shattering knowledge! Many of the peak pill dao experts here initially chose not to attend, as they just couldn't put down their pride.

Pill King Zhen might be famous and he may have even defeated the overweening Pillfire City once, but at the end of the day, he was still representing Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Because of this, a few of the pill dao experts serving other emperors decided that showing their face would be too shameful, while others simply chose not to attend. But they'd begun to regret their decision now.

They'd just received news from the pagoda that this lecture was one meant for the gods and celestials. Missing the lecture would cause lifelong regret. At the start, these people thought nothing of it. How beneficial could one lecture possibly be? Would listening to it grant them eternal life?

However, they soon received more and more information regarding the lecture, and rumors of the contents from the lecture gradually started piling up. Slowly, these pill dao experts realized that the information covered in the lecture was actually surprisingly profound. In fact, it was actually beyond anything found in Veluriyam Capital's history. Many sharp-witted pill dao experts realized that this was definitely a lecture that broke through milestones. If one were to miss it, one would surely harbor regrets for a lifetime.

None of them cared about their dignity anymore if this was truly the case. Even the pill dao experts who used to loathe Pill King Zhen had no choice but to put down their pride and scurry out from their nests. They secretly disguised themselves so that nobody could recognize them at the lecture. Some even shamelessly cut queues and squeezed through the crowds. It didn't even matter if people were glaring at them or giving them an earful. Naturally, Emperor Peafowl and the four monarchs of Sacred Peafowl Mountain weren't required to queue up. They had special private seats inside the Pill Pagoda and had the privilege of listening to Jiang Chen's lecture while enjoying fine wine. Other emperors who had originally chosen not to attend were now rushing to their seats with their cohorts.

In the end, every single emperor attended the lecture apart from Emperor Shura. News about the lecture quickly spread by word of mouth, causing many influential people to no longer hold themselves back. They wanted to listen to the lecture and see for themselves just how exaggerated the rumors of the lecture were.

Emperor Void had been present ever since the start of the lecture.

He laughed when he saw his colleagues rush to their seats. “My fellow daoists. I must say that many of you are already late. You’ve missed quite a bit of earth-shattering information.”

“This emperor heard that the lecture is extremely profound, quite beyond anything Veluriyam Capital has ever seen. I immediately came here when I heard that. I wonder if the rumors are true?” The one who asked this question was the fourth-ranked emperor, Emperor Vastsea.

“Oh, you’ll see.” Emperor Void exclaimed with a face filled with amazement. “Daoist Peafowl, Pill King Zhen is truly a genius descended from the heavens! I must ask, who is his mentor? With his level of understanding in pill dao, even the strongest pill dao expert from Pillfire City is nothing in front of him!”

Emperor Void had always been very curious about Pill King Zhen’s true identity and origins. This wasn’t the first time he’d asked such a question. However, Emperor Peafowl only smiled without answering the question. “Focus on the lecture. This emperor has a feeling that after this lecture, Veluriyam Capital’s pill dao will move forwards onto a new stage. This will break the boundaries of our previous knowledge and allow us all to reach a new level of understanding. Everyone will be free from the shackles of established thought. Those with a higher level of comprehension will gain a lot from this.”

Emperor Void agreed. “Mmm. This will indeed upgrade our previous knowledge of pill dao and form a new understanding. After this lecture, Pill King Zhen will surely go down in the history books as one of Veluriyam Capital’s milestones.”

Even the usually quiet Emperor Petalpluck was smiling as he looked at Emperor Peafowl. “Daoist Peafowl. Time and time again, you’ve managed to surprise all of Veluriyam Capital. This time, however, is truly your largest surprise yet! This junior has stayed in Veluriyam Capital for so many years, yet I’ve only ever looked up to you. But I’m afraid that there is now a new person competing

for my admiration."

Emperor Petalpluck was ranked second amongst the seven emperors. However, he was always one who stood aloof from worldly affairs and took no particular interest in matters of power or status. Because of this, he was actually beneath the third-ranked Emperor Shura in regards to authority, despite his higher rank. But since he was almost the same age as Emperor Peafowl, he had no intention to compete or be jealous of Emperor Shura.

"Why do all of you exaggerate? If this is true then I'd better open up my ears and listen closely to see what's so special about the lecture." Emperor Vastsea had always been Emperor Shura's staunchest follower. He was actually here as a representative for Emperor Shura, as the emperor would sooner die than come to the lecture. Pill King Zhen had snatched the wandering champion Lin Yanyu away from him, causing him to lose a lot of face. But as time went on, Emperor Vastsea's expression slowly became increasingly solemn. When he finally came back to his senses, three days had already passed. The lecture had gone on for three days in a row. Every single person listening to the lecture seemed intoxicated, enlightened. Every single one of them had gained much from this, especially those with a high natural talent for pill dao.

On the fourth day, Jiang Chen began to move on to another topic in his lecture—the demon race. He had planned this right from the start. If he suddenly talked about the demon race for no apparent reason, everyone would surely take his words as that of an alarmist. But on the fourth day, he was able to smoothly divert the topic to the demon race and make it seem a lot less abrupt. He instructed Pill King Lu Feng to talk about what happened to He Hongshu, and how he'd drawn out the wood demon parasites.

The atmosphere immediately turned heavy once he brought up the demon race. It was evident that everyone present still feared and felt somewhat conflicted about the demon race. However, Emperor Peafowl nodded in secret, quite pleased. Since he was the

foremost pill dao expert, Jiang Chen would be extremely persuasive if he brought up the topic of the demon race. When Pill King Lu Feng discussed how he'd drawn out the wood demon parasites from He Hongshu, alarm bells began to ring in the hearts of everyone present.

"Everyone, wood demon parasites can enter through any orifice! Pill King Zhen chose not to abandon me and imparted me with a special method for dealing with them. It is also Pill King Zhen's intention to share this method with everyone! Today, I will be responsible for imparting this method to you. This is important knowledge that could save your life. I hope that none of you will treat this as a laughing matter." Even though Pill King Lu Feng usually didn't take things very seriously, earning him a reputation as an old imp, it actually had a much greater effect when he decided to be serious every once in a while.

After Pill King Lu Feng finished lecturing about the Wood Demons' poisonous parasites, Lin Yanyu followed up with a lecture about the desolate wildlands. Basing the lecture off of his personal experiences, he embellished the harm and destruction caused by the demon race. The demon race was a scourge to the Divine Abyss Continent since ancient times. This was a well-known fact.

Jiang Chen didn't plan to overexaggerate the details regarding Wood Demons either. He felt slightly more at peace after imparting the method to defend against them. As long as the method was widely known, it didn't matter if everyone believed him or not. By doing this, he could at least suppress the spread of wood demon parasites and greatly reduce the threat from the Wood Demons. As for the Shadow Demons, Jiang Chen decided not to elaborate. Even though Shadow Demons were dangerous too, they weren't as threatening as Wood Demons.

Eight days of the ten-day lecture went by in the blink of an eye. For the final two days, Jiang Chen decided not to lecture. Instead, he'd be doing some questioning and answering so he could help

solve some of the audience's problems. This part of the lecture required even more knowledge and foundation.

One could prepare the contents of a lecture beforehand, but the same could not be said if one was answering questions on the spot! But this wasn't an issue for Jiang Chen either. For two days, hundreds of people were given the opportunity to have their questions answered, and he was able to give a satisfactory answer no matter how tricky or uncommon the question was. With the ten-day lecture coming to a close, people could no longer dispute Pill King Zhen's place as the foremost pill dao expert in all of Veluriyam Capital.

Setting the citizens of Veluriyam Capital aside, even Jiang Chen's fellow disciples from Regal Pill Palace were caught by surprise. They could never have imagined that a fellow disciple from a small place like the sixteen kingdoms alliance would have such a profound understanding of pill dao. This had genuinely overturned their previous beliefs. Even though Regal Pill Palace had been built upon pill dao, they weren't worth mentioning when compared to Veluriyam Capital. However, Jiang Chen had become the number one pill dao expert in all of Veluriyam Capital! With the backing of such a genius in pill dao, the resurgence of Regal Pill Palace was no longer just an empty dream!

With the conclusion of the ten-day lecture, Jiang Chen left the Pill Pagoda while being swarmed by a sea of voices asking him not to leave. At the end of the day, he was only providing them with supplementary guidance for pill dao. There was no way Jiang Chen would ever want to stand out so much in the pill dao world if he hadn't made a promise to Emperor Peafowl.

Standing out in such a way was going to bring about some disadvantages along with some advantages. Moreover, his biggest goal for this lifetime wasn't to become a heavenly pill dao master again. Instead, he was going to make up for the regret he felt for being unable to cultivate in his previous life! His eyes were set on

martial dao! In the world of martial dao, only the sovereign would have the last say!

The very reason Veluriyam Capital could become one of the strongest powers in the Upper Eight Regions was due to their flourishment in martial dao. In the domain of martial dao, Jiang Chen remained an insignificant character. The upcoming Martial Pagoda battle would be the perfect stage for him to test his abilities. Countless geniuses from Veluriyam Capital would be up on stage for him to assess his martial dao. It was this particular stage which he loved the most!

Chapter 918: Plans to Carve a Formation Disk

Less than two weeks remained before the Martial Pagoda battles. Jiang Chen planned on preparing amply in the time that he had left. The battle was a chance to test his mettle. He didn't want to use too many of his treasures unless they were absolutely required, especially ones that were overwhelmingly strong. Many things could only be honed in the heat of battle—things such as understanding the boundaries of martial prowess and sharpening the ability to process information. Jiang Chen knew this well.

"The fact that I've reached the seventh level sage realm is definitely related to the countless battles I've fought in, both big and small. Many geniuses are planning to attend the Martial Pagoda battles. It would be foolish for me not to take this opportunity to test my martial ability." Jiang Chen had used various items to assist him in many of his battles, especially those fought against higher-level opponents.

If neither side used treasures, Jiang Chen had the natural confidence that he could crush anyone on his same level in a purely martial competition. Even opponents who were one or two levels higher weren't a problem for him. However, each of his battles had been a matter of life and death. If he hadn't used items, his enemies would have. Thus, the Martial Pagoda battles were a rare opportunity for him to participate in something different... a proving ground of sorts.

Understandably, if others used items despite the circumstances, Jiang Chen wasn't likely able to stay the odd one out. His trip to the wildlands had provided him with considerable benefits. The large defensive cauldron that had belonged to Lu Shinan looked quite imposing. It seemed to possess a remarkable force that could draw in various kinds of attacks. It was definitely a defensive

powerhouse.

The eight statues that he'd acquired were even stronger. What a shame that the formation disk hadn't come with them. Jiang Chen was very curious about the statues. He felt that they hadn't been fully utilized in the hands of the Prince of Shangping. Since its master was dead, Lu Shinan's cauldron no longer had a personal imprint on it. It took no effort at all for Jiang Chen to claim the defensive cauldron as his own. But although the same was true with the eight statues, he was more upset about the missing formation disk. However, he did take the time to examine the statues more closely. There seemed to be a particularly strong will hidden within. They weren't just typical relics of the past.

"The Prince of Shangping is already dead. From the look of these statues, any previous connection between them and the formation disk is no longer. It seems that the prince had created his own formation disk to communicate with the statues. Unfortunately for him, he could only command the bare minimum of the statues' strength. If he had been able to access even a tenth of their full potential, I likely would have been the loser back then."

The more Jiang Chen looked at the eight statues, the more he felt afraid. He had been really lucky to have the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman on him. Without it, the eight statues would have been impossible for him to take on. "What a lucky bastard the prince must've been, to have gotten his hands on a treasure like this." He fiddled with the statues in his hands, filled with an inexplicable fondness for them. "Too bad his fortune didn't last."

He had the feeling that the eight statues would be tenfold stronger now that they were in his hands, perhaps even a hundredfold. Jiang Chen was a man of action. There were about a dozen days left, so he decided to give personally crafting a formation disk a shot. The earlier he could control the statues, the better. He wasn't after perfect command of them from the outset. As long as he could delve into the basics of their strength—even a

tenth was enough!—it would be sufficient to use them as a potent weapon on the offense.

“No wonder something as powerful as my Galaxy Slash technique left only a faint mark back then. More remarkably, the statues can even self-repair! It looks like the earlier damage from my attack has already disappeared.” The more closely he examined the eight statues, the more surprised he was. Though the eight statues appeared to be unliving, they had the ability to regenerate like living creatures.

“There are endless marvels in this boundless universe. The eight statues are definitely extraordinary. Let’s see if I can carve a formation disk and put them to good use.” He had gotten the feeling of immense strength from the eight statues during his battle with the Prince of Shangping, but he hadn’t taken them too seriously. He had many treasures with which to fend off the eight statues. Conjuring up a magnetic golden mountain, using the mint ginseng, commanding the Bewitching Lotus… and so on. But now it seemed that he’d underestimated the eight statues.

“Perhaps that prince’s consciousness hadn’t reached the particular level necessary to discover these statues’ greatness. Like pearls before swine, their true value had been obscured because of their owner’s blindness. How disgraceful.” Thinking such thoughts, Jiang Chen exited the secret room and headed outside. As he came to the door, he saw Shen Trifire leading two others. All three were standing in a circumspect way, clearly having awaited Jiang Chen for hours.

“Senior brother, these two came to Taiyuan Tower half a year ago. They said that you’d sought them out. As a junior, I dared to decide on matters myself, so I sent them out separately on a few errands. Conveniently, they came back to report on their missions today, and because they heard that you were back, they just had to come and see you.” Shen Trifire was a little uneasy. He was scared that he’d been duped. They had tokens on them that signified

Jiang Chen's trust, true, but who knew if there was some kind of hidden deception involved?

Jiang Chen smiled. "I'm glad that the two of you arrived in one piece. Fantastic. I've been busy ever since my return, so I haven't been able to make time to see you guys."

The two were the old friends that Jiang Chen had rescued from the Great Scarlet Mid Region—Myriad Spirit Sect disciples, Liu Wencai and Lu Yali, hailing from the sixteen kingdoms alliance. Both of them were brothers that Jiang Chen had met during their previous trials in Eternal Spirit Mountain. Because the Myriad Domain had been shattered into pieces, they no longer had a place to go home to. They'd been a bit fearful after coming to a place as big as Veluriyam Capital, not knowing what to do afterwards. Thankfully, Shen Trifire hadn't given them any attitude despite his wariness. Their existences here were somewhat riddled with anxiety, but also relatively peaceful, much better than drifting out in the chaotic world, anyway.

"For convenience's sake, you two should call me senior brother from now on as well," Jiang Chen instructed.

Both Liu Wencai and Lu Yali nodded. Discovering Jiang Chen's lofty position of prominence after arriving at Veluriyam Capital had been daunting, even frightening to a certain degree. Yes, they had been brothers since a long time ago, but there was such a huge gap between them now. Even Liu Wencai felt like he was reaching significantly up the social ladder.

Jiang Chen didn't think so, though. He gave both of their shoulders a firm pat. "Get Trifire to settle you in. I'm going out to deal with a few more things. I'll catch up with you two later."

He valued Shen Trifire a fair amount, but he had only average relationships with the other disciples from Regal Pill Palace. He was closer with these two brothers from the sixteen kingdoms alliance. After all, he'd barely spent any time at Regal Pill Palace,

and he wasn't on tremendously amicable terms with the members even back then. If the sect hadn't fallen, Jiang Chen would have never gotten together with them.

Even now, he sheltered these people only for Palace Head Dan Chi's sake. If the broken Regal Pill Palace wanted to rise again another day, they would have to rely solely on themselves. Essentially, he was helping the palace cultivate a new batch of hopefuls. Alas, Mu Gaoqi was still lost in the outside world, a fact that hung heavily on Jiang Chen's mind. Of the younger generation that was still alive, only he and Ling Bi'er warranted his worry. Departing from Taiyuan Tower, Jiang Chen headed for Sacred Peafowl Mountain straight away.

"Haha, young friend, it's rare for you to come find me of your own volition. I don't think it means anything good?" Emperor Peafowl found Jiang Chen's spontaneous visit a little unexpected.

Jiang Chen avoided being roundabout, "Your Majesty, I haven't refused any of your requests," he chuckled. "Now I have a few problems of my own, and I'd like to ask for your generous assistance."

"What are you planning to extort from me, hmm?" Emperor Peafowl smiled. "Please do tell. There's nothing I have that I'll deny from you."

"I'd like to create a formation disk. I wonder if Your Majesty has any materials for that sort of thing?"

Formation disk? Emperor Peafowl hesitated for a moment, his eyes looking deeply at the youth. There was astonishment in them. "You know how to make formation disks? Do you know how much energy and effort goes into them?"

Jiang Chen shrugged. "Those who find something particularly difficult do not truly know how, and those who do find it rather easy. I've learned a few things about carving formation disks here and there."

Emperor Peafowl was silent for a long while before he spoke again, “Your mysterious teacher taught you that too, didn’t he?” He asked dejectedly.

Jiang Chen smiled, but didn’t deny it. Even Emperor Peafowl listened to this with jealousy. “Ah, little friend, I wonder what kind of a terrifyingly proficient person your teacher is. It feels like there’s nothing he doesn’t know.”

Jiang Chen smiled again. “You know, maybe that’s true. My teacher is full of knowledge and wisdom. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him stumped on any matter.”

“A senior as great as him is worthy of all respect. It’s unfortunate, us experts of the present are mere well-dwelling frogs in comparison, often full of ourselves to boot.” Emperor Peafowl had some strong feelings regarding the issue.

Gazing serenely at Jiang Chen, the emperor spoke once more. “As for the materials you want… I did, as a matter of fact, incidentally manage to collect some on my travels. I can give them to you, but I have a request in return.”

“What is it?” Jiang Chen was curious.

“I would like to observe the entire carving and creation process.” Emperor Peafowl was extremely blunt, discarding courtesy.

“Does Your Majesty wish to secretly learn from me?” Jiang Chen chuckled.

Emperor Peafowl grinned, not refuting the claim. It wasn’t that he necessarily wanted to learn from him in such a manner. Rather, he was more interested in whether this incredible youth really could make a formation disk on his own. Formation disks in general weren’t especially incredible. How strong a disk was depended on its rank and quality.

Moreover, the formation activated from a disk had no foundation. Compared to ones created with flags and spirit stones,

it possessed a few more flaws. However, it did also have a distinct advantage—that of instantaneous activation, without much advance preparation required. Formation flags couldn’t compete with formation disks in this aspect. In duels to the death, this unique benefit provided by a formation disk often provided opportunities to turn the tables. Thus, a strong ancient formation disk was still fairly attractive to powerful cultivators. Even Emperor Peafowl was no exception to this rule.

The emperor was no formation expert, but he had more than a passing interest in them nevertheless. The art of carving formations in particular had always been seen as an ancient tradition. On the modern Divine Abyss Continent, artisans that were knowledgeable in this skill were as rare as dragons and phoenixes. Highly proficient ones were essentially extinct.

Chapter 919: Successful Completion

Though Jiang Chen hadn't researched formations as deeply as he had pills in his previous life, he still had a fair amount of experience with them. Plus, the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect was a supreme formations sect from the Divine Abyss Continent's distant past. A classic text of the sect that had been left behind was The Heart of Formations, which contained many facets of knowledge relating to formations. Jiang Chen's sharp intuition meant that he would have a very high success rate if he were to carve a formation disk using the classic as a guide. More importantly, a great deal of technical material regarding disk-carving was included in The Heart of Formations—skill, technique, material, and theory. He couldn't proceed forward with even one of these components missing.

Yes, he was a bit lacking in terms of manual dexterity and practice, but he had several advantages as well—experiences from his previous life, a wealth of knowledge, and a strong fortitude. His past memories were a solid foundation that allowed him a heightened degree of confidence and composure in all that he did. It was no different in this case. He had every faith that the formation disk would turn out perfectly fine.

The difficulty in this case didn't lie in carving the formation disk itself, but bridging the distance between the disk and the eight statues. He wanted them to resonate in a powerful way. If that couldn't be done, it didn't matter how good the formation disk itself was. There were actually many types of materials that could be used in carving formation disks. Naturally, they differed in quality as well, from inferior to superior levels. The materials worthy of Emperor Peafowl's collection were certainly of superior quality.

Taking the materials into his hands, Jiang Chen marveled at them in quiet awe. As befitting of his status as the foremost titled

emperor of Veluriyam, Emperor Peafowl had quite the stash. With their prior agreement in place, Jiang Chen had no reason to refuse the emperor's intentions to observe.

A secret room was prepared and the youth sprung into action. Jiang Chen didn't bother attempting to conceal anything from the emperor; he didn't have the time to waste. Thankfully, he'd already put sufficient thought into how the disk was going to be made. A confident artist with a properly formulated plan up his sleeve could proceed to work remarkable magic. So it was with Jiang Chen. He had the idea and outline for the disk already. His mind and hand moved with fluid inspiration. There was no stiffness in his movements at all.

The process was even smoother than Jiang Chen had imagined. His mental fortitude ensured that every detail in the carving process was etched with perfection, and his handiwork was akin to that of an old hand who'd honed his craft for centuries. Jiang Chen admired his workmanship after the disk was complete, rather pleased.

Now came the heavy lifting. The completed disk had to communicate with the eight statues—a connection that had to be created via formational resonance. Formational resonance was a phenomenon in which the disk triggered a formation containing the eight statues. Jiang Chen's consciousness would serve as the link between them, carrying information to and fro. It was a very technical process, but it was also one that Jiang Chen had perfected his ideas for. Still, it took an excruciating and grueling seven days for the final step to be completed.

Marveling at the resonance between the eight statues and his consciousness made Jiang Chen feel quite satisfied. His hard work over the past few days had not been for naught. In terms of both bearing and tapped potential, the eight statues under Jiang Chen's control far surpassed their previous merit under that of the Prince of Shangping. There was no doubt about that. After the entire

disk-creating process, only a few days remained before the Martial Pagoda battles. Walking out from the secret room, Jiang Chen saw Emperor Peafowl's half-smile almost immediately. "Your Majesty," he placed a hand to his head. "I have forgotten myself. I almost forgot that I was in your estate."

"So, you really do know how to carve a formation disk," Emperor Peafowl sighed in praise. "Truly a precocious youngster. That's an ancient skill almost lost to time."

Jiang Chen chuckled. "I'm fortunate to have such a masterful teacher."

Emperor Peafowl deeply agreed, nodding. "Your teacher is truly accomplished. That I once wanted to take you on as my disciple... I blush to consider it, now."

Being impressed with someone else was a very rare occurrence for the emperor. He had prevailed in Veluriyam Capital for three millennia, commanding a strength powerful enough to shake the entire Upper Eight Regions. There weren't many who were his equal, much less many whom he could wholeheartedly respect. However, he truly did fully admire this teacher of Jiang Chen's, though they had never met.

It was easy for Emperor Peafowl to imagine what kind of person Jiang Chen's teacher was. A secluded expert of legendary prowess with strength that possibly exceeded even the great emperor realm, and perhaps even a level higher still. That mysterious teacher's martial ability aside, his pill dao ability and formation-disk carving skills showed that he possessed a remarkable breadth of talent. This was no ordinary man. The emperor was very confident in himself, but he also had enough self awareness to feel short in light of those achievements.

Thus, he completely understood now why Jiang Chen hadn't wanted to become his disciple. With a master as amazing as that, why would he be a consideration? Emperor Peafowl was speaking

out of self-reflection, but this was no place for Jiang Chen to follow up on the conversation. He smiled instead. “Still, Your Majesty’s foresight cannot be denied. In a different world, I would have been greatly blessed to become your student.”

It wasn’t really what he thought in his heart, but he still had to be polite. Flattering someone as prominent as an emperor, or even just cheering him up a bit—that was compelling enough alone. Emperor Peafowl roared in laughter. “You certainly talk slick. I somehow can’t believe you’re being very truthful, though.”

“No, I assure you. I really am.” Jiang Chen chuckled.

The emperor didn’t choose to press the matter any further. He inclined his head. “I’m not envious of the fact that you possess the skills you do. Rather, I feel gratified. It was a very wise choice to have entrusted Veluriyam Capital’s future to you. Perhaps even the city itself will be destroyed in the coming demonic invasion, but as long as you remain, our heritage will not be completely lost. Just like what’s happening now with Regal Pill Palace. Their sect fell, but their heritage lives on.”

Stunned, Jiang Chen looked at Emperor Peafowl with some apprehension. Emperor Peafowl laughed again. “Don’t look at me like that, little guy. The things that happen at your Taiyuan Tower are made plain to my All-Seeing Eyes.”

Not knowing how to respond, Jiang Chen simply stayed quiet. This Emperor Peafowl was something, alright. All-Seeing Eyes were shut off to most, even in the heavenly planes. It was quite difficult for him—as well as anyone else, really—to perform any sleight of hand beneath the emperor’s eyelids. Emperor Peafowl’s lack of malice towards him suddenly felt very precious. Jiang Chen was happy as well that he had been friendly towards Sacred Peafowl Mountain in return. He was suddenly thankful for a great deal of the choices he’d recently made.

“Don’t worry, Your Majesty,” he became serious. “I keep public

and private business separate. I won't let Regal Pill Palace become a burden to Veluriyam Capital."

The emperor he addressed this to didn't seem to particularly care. "Why split hairs like that? We're comrades in the same boat, now. Any differences in sect or region should be discarded. Burden or not, there's no need to explain things like that. Do you really think Veluriyam Capital is scared of a mere Eternal Celestial Capital?"

Emperor Peafowl did not deliberately adopt a regal air as he spoke, but the words themselves had been spoken in an unquestionable manner. That's right, Veluriyam Capital was stronger than even a first-ranked sect. In fact, the power of the city could barely be matched by two first-ranked sects combined. What was the reason for Veluriyam to be scared of Eternal Celestial Capital?

"Your Majesty..." Jiang Chen had a profound admiration for Emperor Peafowl's magnanimity. No matter what followed, he was thrilled at the declaration alone. There was no reason for Emperor Peafowl to appease a fourth-ranked sect like Regal Pill Palace, but the emperor didn't care about the sect's rank. The broadness of his heart was evident in the gesture.

"I've said this before—I won't oppose you even if you use or borrow Sacred Peafowl Mountain's power in order to rebuild Regal Pill Palace. Of course, the precondition is that you have to become the young lord. There's no authority for you to use the Mountain's resources otherwise." The older man stared earnestly at his younger counterpart. "Don't look so startled. When the demonic invasion begins, all of these worldly differences will become history, whether their name is the Upper Eight Regions or the Myriad Domain. There will only be two divisions in the future. Either you are a demon, or you are not."

Jiang Chen sighed softly. He knew as well as anyone how terrifying the demon race was, how methodically they could tear

through the heavenly planes. The demons were a war-like race—tyrannical and intrusive. Like locusts, they brought destruction everywhere they went. A plane inhabited by a great race was extremely difficult for the demons to invade. One like the Divine Abyss Continent, however, with such prevalent internal strife... any incursion made by the demon race would surely lead to them taking to it, like ducks to water.

“Even though the demon race is on the move in the wildlands, Your Majesty, there shouldn’t be an outburst in the short term. I think the next decade or two will still be safe, but fifty or a hundred years later becomes more difficult to say. I set a formation at the wildlands’ entrance, outside the restriction. Great emperor realm cultivators aside, anyone else attempting to break through will have a very hard time.” Jiang Chen had reported this to Emperor Peafowl once before. From what the emperor had said at the time, he appeared as if he wanted to go there himself to protect the formation. Greedy cultivators had to be warded off from forcibly breaking through.

Since the demon race was reawakening in the wildlands, entering would be walking right into the beast’s jaw. It would only feed the speed with which they resuscitated themselves.

Emperor Peafowl sighed softly. “As the saying hopefully goes, if there’s a will, there’s a way. As Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s young lord, you have the authority to decide on everything when I am not here. This extends to matters of the Capital as well. No one can prevent you from doing anything. They won’t even have the right to.”

Jiang Chen’s heart shook. The emperor was giving him a paramount degree of power.

“It’s still too early to talk about these things. At this year’s Martial Pagoda battles, you must fight your way past the competitors and take the championship. Make it known that you have the qualifications to be Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s young

lord, and that you're the best candidate for the job. Silence all voices that question you. The only way to do all of these things is to utterly crush your competition."

"Crush... my competition?" Jiang Chen muttered softly, his eyes glittering with eagerness. He had been waiting for this moment for a long while. Not because he wanted to become the young lord, but because he wanted to fight it out with the best of the youths within the Upper Eight Regions on a grander stage.

Chapter 920: The Fight of Three Rankings

However, Jiang Chen still knew nothing about the rules. He didn't know exactly how many outstanding geniuses there were in Veluriyam Capital either. Emperor Peafowl seemed capable of seeing through Jiang Chen's thoughts when he saw the youth's inquisitive gaze. He smiled, "You haven't been in Veluriyam Capital for long, so you must be very unfamiliar with the Martial Pagoda battles. Do you know how many people are registering for them?"

Jiang Chen wasn't in a hurry to answer the question. Instead, he asked, "Is there an age limit?"

Emperor Peafowl nodded, "All participants must be below sixty years old. This is because the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering is held every sixty years. Therefore, everyone only gets one chance in a lifetime to participate in the gathering."

"Is there a cultivation requirement?"

Emperor Peafowl nodded, "All participants must be at the sage realm or above. Of course, those who aren't even sage realm experts will only be treated as cannon fodder."

Considering these two requirements, the number of registrants shouldn't be too ridiculous. He immediately offered a tentative answer, "One hundred thousand?"

He knew that the number of participants in the Martial Pagoda battles must be ten times bigger than the number of participants in the Pill Pagoda battles. After all, in the world of martial dao, cultivation reigned supreme while pill dao was only secondary. Not all martial dao geniuses had pill dao talent and vice versa.

Jiang Chen heard that the number of people who participated in the Pill Pagoda battles numbered around thirty thousand or so. Only two hundred participants were left during the semi-finals—a

hundred wandering cultivators and a hundred noble youths. Therefore, although one hundred thousand was a safe estimation, the actual number shouldn't be too far off either.

However, Emperor Peafowl laughed loudly, "One hundred thousand? Too few, that is far too few. You might have gotten it right if you had multiplied that number by 10."

"10 times?!" Jiang Chen looked stunned, "A million? There are that many sage realm geniuses younger than sixty years old in Veluriyam Capital?"

Emperor Peafowl smiled, "It's not just people from Veluriyam Capital, but also the surrounding powers and wandering cultivators. They are all very interested in the gathering. Veluriyam Capital is an extremely attractive power in the southern side of the Upper Eight Regions, and not even first-rank sects can be considered to be on the same level as us."

Compared to sects, Veluriyam Capital was more open and free. That was why a power like Veluriyam Capital was more attractive to wandering cultivators and others. After all, a sect had many strict rules and sect-based customs. It was also incredibly difficult for a normal person to enter a sect. However, a power like Veluriyam Capital was different. They could absorb a lot of experts due to their great tolerance and inclusivity.

Of course, their system was not without flaws. A power like Veluriyam Capital was not as unified as a sect. But with Emperor Peafowl around, Veluriyam Capital's unity was more or less solidified. After all, he had ruled Veluriyam Capital for three millennia. His influence and his power to rally and awe the people were deeply rooted in Veluriyam Capital. In addition, Emperor Peafowl himself had incredible charisma.

Jiang Chen couldn't help but feel shocked when he heard that a million people had registered for the Martial Pagoda battles. "Only thirty-six out of a million people can ultimately enter the

Veluriyam Pagoda?" He was stunned by this extremely disparate ratio.

"Yes, only thirty-six people can truly enter the main pagoda of the Veluriyam Pagoda. However, we do allow up to two hundred people to enter the Martial Pagoda."

The Veluriyam Pagoda had three pagodas in total, with one main pagoda and two auxiliary pagodas. The two auxiliary pagodas were known as the Pill Pagoda and Martial Pagoda. The main pagoda was the real totem building in Veluriyam Capital. It had stood since ancient times and safeguarded Veluriyam Capital's fate.

"The saying of one in a myriad is truly fitting here," Jiang Chen sighed. "Most of these people don't actually have any hope of winning a spot, so I guess they are just here to make up the numbers?"

"Make up the numbers?" Emperor Peafowl laughed, "A lot of people knew that they could never qualify for a spot in the Veluriyam Pagoda Meeting, but still they fight like madmen all the same. Do you know why?"

Jiang Chen looked startled. "Why?"

"Simple. They fight hard because it's an opportunity to train themselves. A gathering of many geniuses and opponents of the same level is certain to spark much conflict and inspiration. In history, there are many geniuses with low cultivation who had failed to enter the top thirty-six, but they all ultimately became first-rate experts after attaining great enlightenment in the Martial Pagoda. In comparison, there are also a lot of geniuses who made it to the top thirty-six, but were ultimately killed in action or died of illnesses. Therefore, uncertainty forever shrouds the path of martial dao. No one knows who will have the last laugh until the time comes. With your level of comprehension, you should understand what I mean when I say that winning is just a process to true geniuses, shouldn't you?"

Jiang Chen nodded thoughtfully in response. A competition with over a million of participants and innumerable battles of varying sizes was typically a kind of experience that was impossible to encounter normally. A contest of this scale might put a cultivator through hundreds of battles in just a couple of months' time. There were definitely a lot of insight and experiences to be gained. This was especially true for those martial dao geniuses. This contest was absolutely a great opportunity to temper and improve themselves.

He suddenly understood why there were over a million registrants. It was obvious that not everyone was participating for the sake of making it into the top thirty-six. A lot still wanted to participate in the Martial Pagoda battles despite knowing that there was no way they could enter the top thirty-six. The reason had been stated by Emperor Peafowl earlier. Those who managed to emerge out of a million participants were no doubt geniuses amongst geniuses.

"No wonder the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering is viewed as Veluriyam Capital's greatest festival. So this is where its attraction lies." Jiang Chen sighed in admiration.

"A clash between geniuses is never lacking in attraction. However, you'll not be enjoying any special privileges during the Martial Pagoda battles, Jiang Chen. You must fight from the very bottom like everyone else."

"What do you mean?" Jiang Chen looked startled.

"The Martial Pagoda battles has three rankings—the New Star Rankings, the Genius Rankings, and the Ranking of Young Lords.

"The so-called New Star Rankings refers to the cultivators who manage to enter the top ten thousand. Only those who qualify for the New Star Rankings have the right to compete for the Genius Rankings. However, a large majority of the noble youths in Veluriyam Capital can bypass the New Star Rankings and

participate in the Genius Rankings directly. After the top two hundred cultivators of the Genius Rankings are decided, they are pitted against each other for one last time to decide the strongest thirty-six cultivators of the Ranking of Young Lords. Those who come out on top are allowed to enter Veluriyam Capital's main pagoda."

A total of ten thousand people were allowed to enter the New Star Rankings. Out of that ten thousand, a total of two hundred people were allowed to enter the Genius Rankings and Martial Pagoda. Finally, a total of thirty-six people out of the two hundred who made it into the Genius Rankings were allowed to enter the main pagoda of Veluriyam Capital. The difference between all three rankings was extremely clear. For example, it wasn't actually that hard for many young cultivators to enter the New Star Rankings. Out of a million, the top ten thousand were allowed to enter the New Star Rankings. It was a ratio of 100:1.

However, entering the Genius Rankings was a much more difficult task. All cultivators who managed to endure the cruel competition of the New Star Rankings and enter the top ten thousand wouldn't be mediocre. Therefore, one could only imagine just how difficult it was to emerge as one of the top two hundred cultivators and qualify for the Genius Rankings.

With these kinds of circumstances, competition would definitely be fierce. Every available spot would be fought for tooth and nail. The ratio of the Genius Rankings was 50:1 since only two hundred geniuses would qualify out of ten thousand. Although this stage of the contest seemed easier because it had a 50:1 ratio instead of a 100:1 ratio, this was absolutely not the case. This was due to the fact that the first stage was comprised of participants of all levels of strength. But after the first round of selection, that was no longer the case.

Thus, those who managed to enter the Genius Rankings wouldn't be mediocre cultivators. Every one of them was deserving of the

title, ‘genius’. And lastly, the top thirty-six cultivators would be decided from these two hundred geniuses. They would enter the Ranking of Young Lords. The competition and the skill level of cultivators at this stage were only higher than before. One could even claim that the competition of the Ranking of Young Lords decided the future of Veluriyam Capital’s fate. As its name would imply, all cultivators who entered the Ranking of Young Lords were strong enough to qualify as a young lord and heir to any of the seven emperors.

It was like a competition between the top ten true disciples of a great sect. Every one of them was extraordinarily talented, exceptionally smart, and incredibly powerful. The difference in strength was very distinguishable. It was almost impossible for a cultivator who lacked extraordinary strength or capability to reach the top thirty-six. An upset could happen in one or two battles, but only those with true strength would persevere in continuous battles.

Jiang Chen quietly digested the contents of Emperor Peafowl’s words. He had to admit that the three rankings were logically set up and clearly distinctive. The setup ensured that the weaklings would all be disqualified. It was absolutely impossible for those who feigned their strength to enter the final Ranking of Young Lords. Only those who possessed genuine abilities and superior knowledge surpassing all others could enter.

“Your Majesty, it seems that the noble youths have an advantage in this matter. After all, they are allowed to skip the first stage and participate in the second stage of the Martial Pagoda battles, are they not?”

“Theoretically that is true, but there is a quota. A first to third rank aristocratic family is given only three slots, while a fourth to sixth rank aristocratic family receives five slots. A seventh to ninth rank aristocratic family secures tens slots, while a great clan is allotted twenty slots.”

“What about the geniuses under a great emperors?” Jiang Chen asked curiously.

Emperor Peafowl laughed, “The geniuses under a great emperor don’t need to participate in the Genius Rankings contest. They only need to participate in the final Ranking of Young Lords contest.”

“What? Doesn’t that mean that they can wait at ease for the final battle to arrive while everyone else struggles to the top?”

“Yes. That is why the top two hundred of the Genius Rankings should really be counted after subtracting out the quota taken up by the geniuses under great emperors. Therefore, there are in fact only a hundred or so slots open to everyone else.”

Jiang Chen didn’t know how to react. “The geniuses under a great emperor take up a total of thirty-six slots. Doesn’t that mean that they are going to snap up a lot of those slots in the top thirty-six?”

“It’s not a lot, but most of them. The so-called contest of the Ranking of Young Lords is actually a chance given to the geniuses below to challenge them. The system has been set in hopes that a few outstanding geniuses can take down those great emperor geniuses and form a system in which only the strongest survives. Unfortunately, there are very few people who have managed to rise from the bottom after all these gatherings. The highest number of common geniuses to ever replace great emperor geniuses was five. On average, the number hovered around two or three. There were actually a couple of times where no common geniuses managed to dethrone a single great emperor genius at all.”

Jiang Chen wasn’t surprised by this in the slightest. A genius under a great emperor’s banner far exceeded all other geniuses beneath them, be it in terms of talent, resources, or horizon. It was just much too difficult for people who were on a different level

since childhood to beat them.

Chapter 921: The Start of the Martial Pagoda Battles

It was easy for one to say that one should not discriminate against the poor, but in the world of martial dao, the rich will always triumph against the poor, regardless of the latter's talent. The reasoning behind this was because the poor did not have the privilege of being born with a silver spoon in their mouths nor did they have any access to formidable cultivation techniques, potent medicinal pills, pointers from formidable elders, and other additional resources. The poor simply lacked far too many things.

The starting line for the poor was already all the way in the back, and there was no way for them to catch up. The odds were extremely stacked against them if they wanted to shorten the distance. The world of martial dao had always been this ruthless. The reality of such truths would manifest itself in the three ranking battles in the Veluriyam Pagoda. The hierarchy and divide between the two would be obvious.

The geniuses under the great emperors need only take part in the Ranking of Young Lords. There was no need for them to take part in the lesser ranking battles, nor would they care to take part. As for the normal geniuses from great families and clans, they need only participate in the Genius Rankings. There was no need for them to fight for a place in the New Star Rankings. There was, in every sense of the word, a clear divide between those from differing levels of social status.

Emperor Peafowl flashed a meaningful smile when he noticed Jiang Chen's silence towards the matter. "Why? Are you surprised? Or do you feel that it's unfair?"

Jiang Chen did truly feel that it was unfair, but there was no way he'd voice such an opinion. It might seem unfair at first glance, but one should always be farsighted during their journey in martial

dao, as the heavens were always fair. He was not the type to fret over such matters.

“Your Majesty, there is no such thing as absolute fairness in this world. If one strives for fairness, then one should fight for it with their own hands. This junior is not so foolish as to hope that the heavens would bestow fairness upon this world.”

Emperor Peafowl broke into a laugh. “I can definitely tell that you are quite sensible! You’re not fretting over this at all!”

“There is no need for me to fret over such matters. Climbing to the top, one step at a time, will be a good experience. Those geniuses that you speak of have already gotten used to being at the top. They would never be able to experience such a thing.” Jiang Chen spoke from the bottom of his heart. Because he hadn’t been able to cultivate in his previous life, he had no way to experience the pleasure of competing with the geniuses of his previous world. Since he was given the opportunity to do so in his second life, he would cherish this moment incomparably. As the Celestial Emperor’s son, he had already experienced what it was like to be above everyone else. However, he was never given the chance to experience anything else other than that. All he had felt was incomparable loneliness. Why would he complain after being given a chance at a new life? Even if Emperor Peafowl had given him some special privileges, Jiang Chen might not have accepted them.

“Good!” Emperor Peafowl praised. “If this is truly what you believe, then you will surely surpass all those geniuses in the future! However, I must remind you to mentally prepare yourself. Compared to the lower geniuses, geniuses under the great emperors are at a completely different level.”

There was no need for Emperor Peafowl to issue this reminder. Due to the presence of countless young geniuses in Veluriyam Capital, those who stood at the top were undoubtedly the cream of the crop. Jiang Chen would never belittle his enemies. Of course,

he would never improperly belittle himself either. They had their advantages, and he had his own. “This junior will bear Your Majesty’s advice in mind. The Martial Pagoda battles are about to begin. Since there are only a few days left, this junior will now return home to prepare.”

Emperor Peafowl nodded. “Go. I look forward to seeing you soar through the heavens in half a year’s time.”

The look of admiration in Emperor Peafowl’s eyes still hadn’t diminished one bit after Jiang Chen was gone from sight. He gently sighed and muttered to himself, “This child is destined to achieve great things. He is so remarkable even though he started out in such a tiny and mundane place like the Eastern Kingdom. I truly cannot imagine the height of his achievements if he had started out in Veluriyam Capital instead.” Emperor Peafowl wasn’t concealing his admiration towards Jiang Chen in the slightest.

……

Wei Jie was coincidentally just about to exit the building when Jiang Chen returned to Taiyuan Tower. When he saw Jiang Chen, he immediately approached the latter and greeted him in an excited manner. But inevitably, Wei Jie had become a little more reserved in terms of his attitude and familiarity. Jiang Chen was slightly unaccustomed to this.

“Wei Jie, you’re being distant!” Jiang Chen said while smiling.

Wei Jie scratched his head. “You’re now the number one pill dao expert in Veluriyam Capital. My father warned me to not be too casual in front of you. I…”

“Don’t listen to him! We are brothers that have been through thick and thin together. Once a brother, always a brother! By the way, what are your thoughts on the upcoming Martial Pagoda battles?”

Wei Jie sighed. “I’m not required to enter the New Star Rankings

battles as I've already qualified for the Genius Rankings battles. But reaching the top two hundred on this list is a daunting task. I'm not putting much hope into achieving that."

"It's that difficult?" Jiang Chen was slightly surprised.

"It's impossibly difficult." Wei Jie forced a smile. "I've estimated that I might be able to climb to the top three hundred if I'm lucky. To be within the top two hundred, I'll probably need the luck of a lifetime."

"Surely that can't be true. Are there really so many geniuses?" Jiang Chen was slightly skeptical.

"I'm not exaggerating at all! First of all, there are already thirty-six geniuses under the emperors. That means that there are only 164 places left in the Genius Rankings. There are also twenty-eight clans with multiple outstanding geniuses from each clan. Cultivators from the aristocratic houses can never dream of defeating them. They will take up around a hundred places or so. The remaining places will then be taken up by some of the cultivators from the surrounding lands and additional cultivators from other aristocratic families. There will occasionally be a few geniuses amongst the wandering cultivators... After my estimations, I really don't have much confidence that I will be able to climb to the top two hundred." Wei Jie was not being humble. Such was the reality of things.

In House Wei, Wei Jie was the most outstanding person amongst the younger generation, but Veluriyam Capital was simply too gargantuan. There were too many outstanding geniuses here. Most importantly, the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering was open to not just Veluriyam Capital citizens. The geniuses from surrounding regions were also allowed to attend. House Wei wasn't just competing with the elites of Veluriyam Capital.

"What does House Wei expect from you?" Jiang Chen asked curiously.

“They expect me to be in the top two hundred of course. If I manage to enter the Genius Rankings, my place as the heir of House Wei will be solidified.” Judging from Wei Jie’s expressions, it was obvious that he wasn’t too confident that he could achieve such a feat. He had only been at the seventh level sage realm when Jiang Chen had first met him. He’d since broken through and was now at the eighth level sage realm. Unfortunately, he was still one step away from the peak ninth level sage realm. To compete for a spot within the top two hundred was quite an enormous task. After all, for a stage of this level, sage realm geniuses were probably not a rare sight.

That especially held true at the peak of the Genius Rankings. Those who could manage to enter the Genius Rankings were likely not beneath the ninth level sage realm, unless they were ridiculously strong like Jiang Chen. In fact, some of them were only half a step away from the emperor realm. There were even a few that had already taken half a step into the emperor realm, and were as powerful as emperor realm cultivators. Jiang Chen didn’t inquire as to who they were, nor was he planning to do so in the short term.

Noticing Wei Jie’s predicament, Jiang Chen suddenly remembered that he still had one Sage Smile Pill left, a pill which would help a sage realm cultivator break through to the next level without any side effects. He’d received two in the past and had already consumed one pill.

“Young master Wei, I still have one Sage Smile Pill with me. This will help you break through into the ninth sage realm level. That’s all I can do to help you.” Jiang Chen wasn’t a stingy man. Moreover, the Sage Smile Pill was already useless to him. It would bring him no benefit if he used it, so he might as well give it to Wei Jie. He wouldn’t feel a sense of loss if it would help Wei Jie in his time of need.

Wei Jie was so taken aback that he stood there with his face

aghast. He didn't dare to reach his hands out to take the pill. Jiang Chen reached for his hands and handed it to him directly. "Just take it. Since you don't have to enter the battle for the New Star Rankings, you should have enough time to cultivate and break through into the ninth sage realm level. Remember, you must enter the Genius Rankings. Don't waste the Sage Smile Pill that I just gave you."

Wei Jie felt his nose sting with gratitude.

"Brother Zhen. I..." Wei Jie wanted to say something in a refined manner, but the words were stuck in his throat.

"You deserve this." Jiang Chen patted Wei Jie on the shoulder. "If it weren't for you, I would never have been able to enter Veluriyam Capital, nor would I have had the pleasure of being your friend today."

Wei Jie nodded. "I will forever remember Brother Zhen's magnanimity. I won't be able to part the seas, but if you ever need me or my family's help, just say the word and I will come to your aid without even the slightest frown, even if I have to cross a mountain of daggers and an ocean of flames. Otherwise, may the heavens and earth shall condemn me to death."

Wei Jie wasn't the kind of person who would abandon his previous allies after achieving his goal. He was an honest and loyal person. If it weren't for that fact, Jiang Chen would never have created a partnership with him in the first place. Even though they'd been partners for a long time, Wei Jie remained incredibly honest. Moreover, he was also a very tight-lipped person. He hadn't told a single soul about Jiang Chen's position at Regal Pill Palace or Taiyuan Tower, nor did he ever inquire about anything else. Jiang Chen was quite fond of people like him. Thus, he didn't feel even the slightest regret when he gave the Sage Smile Pill to Wei Jie.

"Time is of the essence. Go. Break through to the ninth level and

enter the Genius Rankings. Let the entire House Wei know that you are the most outstanding heir. Nobody can ever stand to replace you."

Wei Jie was also incredibly excited. He would never have imagined that he would be able to get his hands on such a miraculous pill like the Sage Smile Pill. Not even in his dreams. But today, he'd gotten his hands on one at an incredibly crucial timing! This Sage Smile Pill meant the world to him. Other than simply raising his cultivation by one level, it gave him the opportunity to fight his way into the Genius Rankings so that he could solidify his position as heir to House Wei and silence those who opposed him. This was the greatest significance of the Sage Smile Pill.

Seeing Wei Jie leave in high spirits made Jiang Chen very happy too. He had no intention of wasting the few final days he had left to prepare. He consolidated his own cultivation realm,practiced various martial methods, and prepared his various equipments, being as thorough as possible.

The Martial Pagoda battles officially began five days later.

On that day, all employees from Taiyuan Tower were allowed a day off so that they could go cheer Jiang Chen on. The famous Pill King Zhen was going to participate in the Martial Pagoda battles. News of this spread like wildfire, and it didn't take long before all of Veluriyam Capital had heard of it. In the beginning, everyone thought that Pill King Zhen would be given special privileges in the Martial Pagoda battles.

But news soon spread that Pill King Zhen hadn't been given any special privileges at all! Like other wandering cultivators, he would have to start from the very bottom and fight for a spot out of the ten thousand available in the New Star Rankings. Even the cultivators from surrounding lands were taken by surprise, not to mention the normal cultivators from Veluriyam Capital. With Pill King Zhen's fame, nobody would ever deny him any special privileges if he'd asked for it. However, he didn't want any special

treatment and was willing to fight his way up from the very bottom!

Chapter 922: First Round of Selections

Veluriyam Capital exerted every resource at its disposal for this gathering's sake. Most surprisingly, the assembly wasn't disorderly despite the number of entrants. Even Jiang Chen was impressed by this kind of administrative ability. Of course, the sheer volume of millions still put considerable stress on the organizers' shoulders. Standing in the crowd, Jiang Chen breathed in and scoped his surroundings. People were everywhere around the Veluriyam Pagoda, mountains and oceans of teeming activity.

"I don't know what to say, brother. What are you doing signing up for the New Star Rankings? If you ask me, you should've just asked the Coiling Dragon Clan to get you a slot. There's no need for even His Majesty to intercede. You could have gotten yourself into the Genius Rankings straightaway." Ji San was standing beside Jiang Chen. Though it wasn't necessary for him to compete in the New Star Rankings, he was Jiang Chen's sworn brother. He had to attend an event like this, if only for support alone.

Smiling faintly, Jiang Chen refrained from giving a proper explanation. Instead, he gazed intensely at everything around them. "Wouldn't I then miss this million-strong competition? I couldn't just leave the festivities alone."

Ji San laughed, baffled. "These are just the qualifiers. Honestly, a lot of these people are simply here to have fun. That's why we need to filter them out. There'll only be a hundred thousand once that's done. Afterwards, we'll have to choose a tenth of those guys. Only then will they have a place in the New Star Rankings."

Jiang Chen knew the rules for the Martial Pagoda battles now. The registered million had to go through an initial round. The people that passed this round were actual contestants. After this first layer of filtration, one million would shrink into a hundred thousand.

“Have the Martial Pagoda battles in previous years also hosted this many people?” He asked, curious.

“Yes, it’s always been this many. According to the clan lord, more than one and a half million people have participated in some of the previous Pagoda gatherings. But this year is the most popular in the most recent millennium.”

Jiang Chen laughed. His heart was moved by the eager faces all around him. In the world of martial dao, it was difficult to make a name for oneself and climb up the social ladder. Chances to do so were exceedingly rare. Everyone wanted to grasp such opportunities and become famous overnight. The wandering cultivators with grassroot origins especially desired to do so, so that they could change their own destinies.

It was a pity that these opportunities, when all was said and done, were still stages reserved for geniuses. Most who came with beautiful dreams in their hearts were doomed to return with spirits laced with disappointment. Those especially unlucky would even lose their lives here. Nevertheless, their passions could not be quenched. The world of martial dao was cruel. Risking life and limb in the course of adventure was a common occurrence. How could one hope to succeed without such a mindset?

The first round’s process was very simple. A formation would be activated around the base of the Veluriyam Pagoda. The million entrants would be split into twenty waves of fifty thousand each. The five thousand and fewer that lasted the longest within the formation’s aura were eligible to move on to the next round. Thus, the purpose of this round was to eliminate ninety percent of the entrants. The tenth that remained would then compete for the New Star Rankings’ ten thousand spots. Jiang Chen was assigned to wave eighteen, out of twenty. He wasn’t going to enter for a while. That was good in its own respects, though. He could use the extra time to gauge the overall quality of the entrants.

Rays of colorful light flooded down from the peak of the

Veluriyam Pagoda's main pagoda. Seven-colored auspicious radiance hurtled towards the ground, giving off a feeling of sacred regality.

"The formation has been activated, and the first wave is inside. Please pay careful attention, contestants. if you cannot hold on, crush the jade slips in your hands immediately and you will be automatically ejected. Remember, the formation will not respond to your emotions, and you are responsible for your own life and actions. Don't struggle in vain. However, staying as long as your strength permits is naturally better as well. Your present performance will determine the arrangements for future selections." An intimidating voice echoed around the Veluriyam Pagoda. It was both a reminder to the immediate first wave and an admonition to all the entrants in the ensuing waves.

Jiang Chen watched the main Veluriyam Pagoda become enveloped in powerful streams of rainbow-colored air. From the outside, the main pagoda was like an isolated space. The sheer sense of dissociation gave off a feeling of dimensional independence.

Ji San yawned from the side, "Brother, this kind of selection isn't that interesting. With your level of strength, there's no need to worry at all."

As if on cue, it wasn't even fifteen minutes before masses of cultivators began to continuously stream out, unable to bear the pressure of the formation any longer. The final results of the first wave were decided after about an hour.

"The first wave's number of eliminated entrants is now sufficient. Congratulations to the five thousand who remain. You've passed the first round. Now, it's up to you to decide how much longer you'd like to stay."

"Does the amount of time you stay in the formation matter for subsequent rounds?" Jiang Chen asked, curious.

Ji San nodded, “I’ve heard the clan lord discuss the specifics of this rule. Apparently, the longer you stay, the better it is for you later on.”

However, there wasn’t likely to be a significant gap between the entrants at this level of competition, and evidence supported this. Two hours hadn’t even passed before the entire first wave emerged. The exact ranking of the wave was immediately tallied up, another testament to the efficiency of the organizing party.

Ji San shook his head thoughtfully, “There was no one remarkable in that wave.”

“Why do you say that?” Jiang Chen didn’t quite understand.

“According to the clan lord, this is actually the first chance to observe all of the contestants. This formation is a kind of touchstone. Many geniuses that rose from the bottom in previous years had amazing performances in this formation.”

“Oh? How amazing?” Jiang Chen’s interest was piqued.

“The year that the clan lord participated in had a lot of geniuses. There was a guy that stayed inside for an entire six hours. He was a wandering cultivator, too!”

Anything that the Coiling Dragon Clan lord participated in was definitely considered ancient history. Jiang Chen recalled the lord’s age. The man was almost at the end of his natural life, so it must have been at least a few thousand years ago. “Is six hours the record?”

Ji San moved his head from side to side, “Definitely not. Genius abounded in ancient times. Those that could stay inside for six hours were fairly common. But in the recent few millennia, especially the past one thousand years, there has been a clear decline in the number of wandering cultivator geniuses.”

Jiang Chen didn’t find that surprising at all. The increasingly tight control of the largest sects and factions over the Divine Abyss

Continent's territories was proof enough that wandering cultivators had less and less room to thrive. It was harder to make up the difference between those hailing from sects and the sect-less. With the increasing monopolization of various large sects over all kinds of resources, not much remained for the wandering cultivators. Understandably, fewer of them could even think of rising up as a result. That was plain enough to see. There was something Jiang Chen wanted to know even more, however—how long could Veluriyam's own noble scions last in this formation?

"Brother Ji, do noble youths enter the formation to be tested as well?"

The young master smiled. "Some people are bored enough to give up their special treatment and take part, yes. Their performance has always been pretty good overall as well. However, I've not heard of any true top-ranked genius do something like this. Six hours should be likely enough for the young lords and such, at least by my estimate."

The disparity was clearly illustrated. There were none in the first wave that could last even two hours, but young lords and their peers were able to stay for six. Jiang Chen was silent, having come up with a rough plan. By now, the second wave had entered the formation as well. Just like the first wave, the second wave was unimpressive. No suspension of disbelief was necessary. Nothing was surprising at all. It continued on like this for another two waves.

There was a little jolt during the fifth, though. There were three geniuses in that wave that stayed past the two hour barrier. The most adept among them lasted an entire three. It gave people watching the first round a hint of excitement, a little bit of conversation-eliciting material. The three geniuses instantly became the talk of the crowd. As the top three of fifty thousand entrants, getting into the New Star Rankings was no problem for them.

Quite a few, in fact, felt like they had the ability to reach the two hundred strong Genius Rankings. After all, there were only twenty waves. If there were three as strong as these fellows in every wave, that still meant only sixty total. Even if noble youths commandeered the vast majority of spots, there was still hope for a small group about that size to contest the rest.

Perhaps it was due to the fifth wave's stimulation, but three-hour-plus geniuses kept popping up in the few waves that followed. There was even one person in the eighth wave that almost reached four hours, though he fell short of that line in the end. Ji San felt a little regretful on his behalf. "I feel for him. Anyone that stays past the four hour mark is clearly on another level. It'd be a definite confirmation that they are capable of challenging the Genius Rankings as well."

Though they had broad horizons, noble youths like young master Ji San found that kind of ability respectable nevertheless. Each subsequent wave carried a few marvels of their own, but no one could break the four-hour line. It wasn't until the thirteenth wave that this statement no longer held true. A genius in that wave managed to remain inside for four hours and fifteen minutes. It was the best record yet for this first round. As a result, the person's name was easily committed to memory.

"Chu Jianhuan?" Ji San quietly muttered the name over and over. "This guy... it's definitely possible for him to go for the Genius Rankings. Not every genius has to come from a highborn background, huh."

For Ji San to find him so valuable... this Chu Jianhuan's excellence was undeniable. Jiang Chen gave the cultivator two glances. From a cursory inspection, the man was at least in the ninth level sage realm. A hint of sternness flashed across his visage. Jiang Chen filed the man into memory. Chu Jianhuan's results were positively intriguing. There were two geniuses after him that almost broke the four-hour mark, but they didn't quite

manage to reach it.

Four days passed by very quickly. When the seventeenth wave had entered the formation, Jiang Chen finally felt a sliver of anticipation in his heart. It was almost time for him to engage.

“Brother, your time is almost here. Be bold, be dazzling, show them that our very own Pill King Zhen is a genius of many talents! A master of both martial dao and pill dao!” Ji San encouraged Jiang Chen.

Chapter 923: The Much Acclaimed Pill King Zhen

Even as Jiang Chen flexed his muscles in preparation for battle, an irregularity arose in the seventh wave. A genius named Sunyu Xiaosheng stayed a full five hours inside the formation. It broke Chu Jianhuan's previous record in one fell swoop! The result sent ripples of shock all through the Pagoda's surroundings.

Sunyu Xiaosheng replaced Chu Jianhuan as the hottest piece of news. He'd stayed in the formation for three more quarter-hours than Chu Jianhuan had. Anyone who'd been in a formation before knew that it was increasingly more difficult to resist the longer one stayed. These three quarter-hours showed a clear edge in both strength and formation-resisting ability.

Ji San sighed softly, "Where did this guy come from now, huh? Could he be a genius from a nearby faction? I don't think even I could stay for twenty quarter-hours if I were to go in."

It was rare for Ji San to praise a stranger so. His words oozed respect for this Sunyu Xiaosheng. However, he remembered in the next moment that his own brother was about to experience the same trial. Praising Sunyu Xiaosheng like that seemed like an unnecessary knock on Jiang Chen's confidence. Smiling wryly, he moved to console his friend, "No pressure, brother. Just do the best you can. With the mental fortitude that you've shown in your pill-related pursuits, surely you won't be affected by outside factors like this?"

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, refraining from giving a concrete response. He clearly understood that compared to his pill talent, extolled as the best in Veluriyam, his martial talent wasn't known by nearly as many in the city. A fair few knew that he'd received a reward from Emperor Peafowl back at Sacred Peafowl Mountain. But since that time, nobody had actually seen his performance

with their own eyes. Many suspected that the emperor had intentionally given Jiang Chen a treat and that it hadn't been entirely meritorious.

Though Ji San didn't particularly believe these rumors, he nevertheless didn't have nearly as much faith in Jiang Chen's martial ability as he did his brother's pill ability. After all, the level of martial expertise that Jiang Chen had showed was still a ways off from geniuses who were nearer to the pinnacle. Yes, Jiang Chen had broken through to the seventh level sky sage realm, but Ji San had been at the ninth level sage realm for a long time already. There wasn't any top-ranked genius in the great clans at a lower cultivation level than that. The top geniuses of the great clans were all in the ninth level sage realm. As for the young lords closest to the emperors, many were already halfway to the emperor realm; some had even reached it already. In the martial world, such differences were marked. Ji San's words to his brother, therefore, meant absolutely no ridicule.

In separate secret rooms within the Veluriyam Pagoda, all seven great emperors and their retinues were attentively focused on the selection process. It was simple on the surface, but every emperor assigned significant importance to this round in particular. No matter what level of genius one was at, it would be reflected accurately in this process. For example, the Chu Jianhuan from before was held in high esteem by several emperors.

When Sunyu Xiaosheng appeared, no emperor apart from Peafowl could keep their calm. Even Emperor Shura was greatly astonished, instructing his Moon Monarch to keep close tabs on this particular genius. If the kid could make it into the two-hundred-strong Genius Rankings, then he absolutely had a place under Emperor Shura's banner. Emperor Shura's faction had collected many geniuses over the years. Not every genius could achieve individual prominence in maturity, but that was no obstacle to the practice. More geniuses meant more that would be

able to last to maturity.

Moon Monarch nodded, “I will definitely do so. I’m just worried that he’ll be as unappreciative as that Lin Yanyu from the previous Pill Pagoda battles.”

Lin Yanyu’s first place result amongst the Pill Pagoda battles’ wandering cultivators made him a primary target for Emperor Shura’s recruitment. Unfortunately, it only resulted in double the disappointment. Not only had their efforts in recruiting Lin Yanyu proven ineffective, but they’d lost their very own Pill King Bu in the process as well. The most upsetting thing about it was that Pill King Zhen had been the person to win both of them over. He was virtually best buds with Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

According to rumors, Emperor Peafowl had plans to make heavy use of Pill King Zhen. There were other rumors that if the pill king showed an excellent performance at the Martial Pagoda battles, Emperor Peafowl would possibly make him Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s next young lord. The news hadn’t spread externally, but it had certainly made the rounds internally amongst the seven emperors. Though everything was still yet unknown, the other titled emperors’ keen instincts told them that the well-timed comments were far from baseless.

A sliver of coldness flickered across Emperor Shura’s eyes. Evidently, he found the previous events quite unpleasant, even shameful to an extent. “Which wave is that Pill King Zhen in? Has he not passed the first round yet?” He didn’t know why, but the emperor had become a bit wary towards this Pill King Zhen.

“I’ve looked into it already,” Moon Monarch replied hurriedly. “His name is in the eighteenth wave, coming up next. Looks like the kid didn’t want any special treatment. He’s starting from the bottom. What’s he got up his sleeve?”

Emperor Shura found it somewhat baffling as well. “Perhaps Emperor Peafowl intended for this to happen?” He murmured to

himself. “He doesn’t want others to have any room for criticism?”

“Does Emperor Peafowl really want to make this kid Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s young lord? That… that seems positively ridiculous. How long has it been since he first arrived here—not even three years?”

Emperor Shura was quite serious. “A number of signs point towards this being a distinct possibility. But, how good is this Pill King Zhen’s martial talent really?”

“We’ll see shortly,” Moon Monarch harrumphed.

“Still, what is Emperor Peafowl really playing at?” Despite his years of experience interacting with his fellow emperor, Emperor Shura still couldn’t see the intentions behind the gesture. Was it a smokescreen, or was it to test him?

“Your Majesty,” Moon Monarch interrupted, “no matter what Emperor Peafowl is planning, control of the city will fall to you come his retirement for sure. Nobody else is adequate.”

Yes, that was true in theory, but Emperor Shura wasn’t convinced. He had always tightly controlled himself in front of Emperor Peafowl, lest the latter build up a dislike for him. Only then would it be possible for him to justifiably inherit Veluriyam Capital and thereby become its actual leader. However, Emperor Peafowl had never clearly expressed any inclination towards such a plan.

It was soul-crushing for Emperor Shura. In recent years, these negative emotions had become sharp edges, perpetually showing themselves and cutting against Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Still, he knew as well as anyone that as long as Emperor Peafowl remained, all of his machinations had to remain as ambition alone and could not be carried out concretely. The past several thousand years had been Emperor Peafowl’s era. As long as the emperor still remained, the years accounted to his period would stretch on and on.

“Your Majesty, that kid has entered the formation. I see him now,” Moon Monarch advised.

Emperor Shura’s eyes moved towards the center of the formation. He was able to find the pill king very quickly. He was the young man who had stirred up so many storms in the city lately. That young man was like an unsolved riddle. The emperor had guessed endlessly at Pill King Zhen’s identity during his idle hours. He’d crafted many hypotheses, but none of their accompanying conclusions satisfied him. He had even suspected the pill king to be Emperor Peafowl’s illegitimate child... for a time. But there was no tangible proof for such an absurd conjecture. Moreover, the kid’s pill talent wasn’t something that Emperor Peafowl could instill.

Emperor Shura didn’t put much stock in calling this Pill King Zhen merely Emperor Peafowl’s game piece. This was because the pill king’s strength was greater than the other emperor could possibly cultivate.

Two hours passed very quickly. Moon Monarch firmly furrowed his brow, muttering, “How unexpected. That kid is pretty strong. He made it past two hours. Eh? There’s four others that did as well?”

This was a little excessive. There hadn’t been a single two-hour survivor in the first three waves. Were geniuses better and more numerous in the later waves? Of course, one couldn’t rule out the possibility that the first few waves’ entrants were keeping their strength in reserve or hiding it outright, really. In fact, the possibility was quite high.

Nobody had known the finer details of the round at first. Passing, and thereby guaranteeing moving onto the next round, had been enough. This wasn’t the case for the later waves. With more and more geniuses displaying their radiance, the conflict beneath the table grew white-hot. It was normal for better and better results to continually surface.

“There’s three left still after three hours. Tch, will there be a heaven-defying genius appearing in this eighteenth wave?” Moon Monarch’s eyes were half-shut, his tone perplexed. Most importantly, Pill King Zhen—who was the object of their scrutiny—had still not departed. To add insult to injury, there was no sign from the pill king’s expression that he was struggling at all.

“This Pill King Zhen’s martial talent is not to be underestimated, Your Majesty… even if it may not be as remarkable as his pill talent.”

Emperor Shura smiled faintly, “Three hours isn’t much. If he doesn’t pass the four-hour line, even the Genius Rankings might be too good for him.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Moon Monarch nodded. “The longer it goes on, the more difficult it becomes. He’s worthy of our scrutiny only after he crosses that line. If he can’t, then he’d better be content with simply staying as just a pill genius.”

It wasn’t just Emperor Shura who was captivated by Jiang Chen—he was the talk of the town with the other emperors as well. Because of his status as the foremost in pill dao, it was difficult for Pill King Zhen to stay under the radar. The seven emperors, the other contestants, and even the various factions… all had only one question on their minds—how long could Pill King Zhen stay in the formation?

Chapter 924: To Go Against The Heavens

At this moment, Jiang Chen's heart was as tranquil as still water. The formation had indeed impacted him after he'd entered it. However, the heavy pressure that it exerted was clearly intended not to kill, but to test him. It not only put the defensive ability of cultivators to the test, but also examined their willpower and the strength of their consciousness. This formation was not filled with killing intent, nor was it intended to cause despair. As Jiang Chen sat within the formation, his mind was clear and calm. He experienced the immense pressure the formation exerted and slowly adapted to its rhythm.

Not bad, it doesn't feel like much even after three hours. It seems that using the Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods to refine my body was quite effective. My physical strength should be more or less on par with those so-called half-step emperor realm cultivators. As for my willpower, I've seen so many heavyweights from various realms when I accompanied my father in my previous life. Naturally, I will not quake before the pressure of this formation. And with my Boulder's Heart, coupled with the remarkable power of Psychic's Head, my consciousness has far surpassed that of an ordinary cultivator. This means that this formation was completely made for me.

If Jiang Chen had only possessed these advantages, he might be able to stay in the formation for a good while, but he could still not surpass those top geniuses from ancient times. However, he was coincidentally incredibly talented at formations. After inheriting the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's prowess at formations, he could adapt to the rhythm of this formation very quickly.

There was still a considerable difference between a genius who understood the art of formations and a genius who did not. Certainly, the Veluriyam Capital carried on the will of the ancient era. Their powerful formations were not ones that Jiang Chen

could shatter. However, he could still find ways to counter them. These details could allow him to endure for longer than the others. He actually came to like the feeling of the formation battering against him. The pulses of frightening pressure that this formation exerted on him might be called a test, but in reality, it was also a form of training. Particularly, the longer he stood in it, the harder the formation hammered at him.

“A tidal wave against sand. The formidable pressure of this formation batters not just a cultivator’s corporeal body but also their will and consciousness. It’s like forging steel. The formation is the forge, and I am a sheet of quality steel. I’ll allow this formation to hammer me into shape,” Jiang Chen repeated this silently to himself.

As time passed, the strength of this formation continued to rise. The pressure on Jiang Chen also continuously increased. But his internal mantra allowed him to persevere within the formation.

……

At this moment, the outside world had fallen into an uproar. The other geniuses of the eighteenth batch had already been expelled from the formation. The only one left within it was Jiang Chen. He was like a small sailboat circling the vast open seas, but was never engulfed by the waves.

“Pill King Zhen still hasn’t emerged. Is he really an omnipotent genius?”

“It’s been four hours. Who’d have thought that Pill King Zhen’s martial talent would be so strong! Since he’s surpassed the four hour cutoff, he would at least be able to break into the ranks of the top two hundred geniuses, right?”

“Extreme respect! I won’t ask for the entirety of Pill King Zhen’s talent but if I had even a third of his skill, I’d be bringing honor to my clan!”

“What wishful thinking. Pill King Zhen is the best in pill dao in our Veluriyam Capital. If you had even a third of his skill, at the very least you’d be comparable to a ninth rank pill king.”

“Haha, I guess you’re right.”

“Let’s guess how long this Pill King Zhen can stay within the formation! Do you guys think he can break the previous record?”

“As long as Pill King Zhen is the one doing it, anything is possible.”

“Right? Pill King Zhen seems to leave a trail of miracles everywhere he goes.” Loud praise erupted from the area surrounding the Veluriyam Pagoda. Some had even abandoned the envy in their hearts, leaving behind only endless admiration and respect. This was because everyone was aware that Pill King Zhen was on a completely different level. Being jealous of him was completely pointless.

Ji San stood within the crowd, surrounded by sounds of various discussions. At this moment, he felt as though the synapses in his brain were failing to connect to each other. Indeed, the shock he was experiencing was comparable to everyone else present at the scene. Everyone knew that Pill King Zhen was a genius in pill dao, the absolute number one. But his martial talent had never been revealed and not much was known regarding it. Even Ji San had been bamboozled. At this point, he could only force out a rueful smile. He didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. “Dear brother, I worried needlessly for you. I didn’t think you’d be able to keep your composure. It’s funny. I even tried to comfort you earlier…”

He was naturally aware of what staying for more than four hours inside the formation meant. One had to know that from the first time this formation had been used to sift for talent until now, just how many people had managed to persist for more than four hours? Of course, some people might be deliberately concealing their talent, but it was obvious that anyone who surpassed the

four-hour mark was a top-tier genius. What was more, Jiang Chen was still in the formation. There was still the possibility that he could break the previous record.

“This brat, could he be thinking of breaking the record that Sunyu Xiaosheng had just set?” The idea of this piqued Ji San’s interest. If Jiang Chen put up such an outstanding show even with regards to his martial talent, then the happiest one here would definitely be Ji San. He wasn’t a jealous person. He knew how to be happy for the people around him. If his brother possessed extraordinary martial skill, he would definitely be even more grateful to know that he had a good eye for people.

“You can do it!” Ji San clenched his fingers into a fist and pumped it into the air in support of Jiang Chen.

On the side of Emperor Shura, Moon Monarch’s brows had furrowed into deep ridges.

“Your Majesty, as expected, this brat possesses some crafty technique. He’s actually already surpassed Chu Jianhuan’s record. It seems that he’s targeting Sunyu Xiaosheng’s record of twenty quarter-hours.”

Emperor Shura’s remained impassive as he replied without inflection, “If the person chosen by Emperor Peafowl couldn’t even endure for four hours, that would be the biggest joke of all. You saw during his confrontation with Pill King Ji Lang that this child wasn’t ruffled at all. At the very least, that proves the degree of his mental fortitude. This kind of person with such a strong resolve would definitely not be lacking in martial willpower. As long as his innate skill isn’t too bad, his martial skill will be fairly successful. What’s more, he can still fall back on that skill in pill dao he was blessed with.”

For an ordinary martial genius, even if he had some innate skill in pill dao, there was still a limit to how much he could use pill dao to complement his martial talent. But this Pill King Zhen was

different. The extent to which his heaven-defying level of pill dao complemented his martial dao was alarming. Historically, there was no lack of powerful pill dao masters who used their unnatural talent in pill dao to artificially expand their ordinary martial skill, hence becoming top-ranked martial dao masters.

The frown on Moon Monarch's face had not dropped. It was obvious that he was more and more unwilling to accept Jiang Chen's unnatural performance. His enmity with Jiang Chen had been unconcealed all this time. From his point of view, the culprit behind the destruction of the Majestic Clan was this Pill King Zhen. Some parties rejoiced while others fretted. As for Emperor Peafowl, he remained completely calm, as though Jiang Chen's development was within the sphere of his predictions.

Conversely, it was Cloudsoar Monarch who exclaimed upon seeing Jiang Chen's performance, "Your Majesty, your subordinate has once again been subdued by your eye for talent! Who would have thought that this Pill King Zhen's martial talent would be this extraordinary?!"

When he recalled the time when he'd questioned Emperor Peafowl's judgment of Jiang Chen, he couldn't help but flush with shame. He suddenly understood why Emperor Peafowl was so adamant in instating Pill King Zhen as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. It seemed that it was still the emperor who possessed the most foresight.

"Cloudsoar, how long do you think Pill King Zhen will be able to endure the formation?" Emperor Peafowl suddenly broke into a small smile.

Cloudsoar Monarch contemplated briefly before he spoke up, "Perhaps, he's hoping to break the record Sunyu Xiaosheng set just now? Twenty quarter-hours?"

"Haha, it's not just pure hope that he can break twenty quarter-hours but rather, it's a fact that he will." Emperor Peafowl smiled

blithely. “What this emperor is curious about now is, will he able to surpass six hours?”

“Six hours?” Cloudsoar Monarch was at a loss for words. “Your Majesty, the last time this record appeared was two or three thousand years ago, wasn’t it?”

“Is it not precisely because it’s been so long since we last saw it that we should eagerly anticipate it?” Emperor Peafowl said with deliberation.

Cloudsoar Monarch seemed to have come to a realization as he stared at Jiang Chen with thoughtful eyes. There was both amazement and admiration in their depths. If this young man could really set a record unseen in the past three thousand years, then he would truly be qualified to reach the same level as that of the geniuses from the ancient era. For this kind of genius, there was no need to even mention entering the top two hundred rankings. There was even the possibility that he could contest the ultimate ranking of the top thirty-six. Once Pill King Zhen entered that ranking of the thirty-six young lords, Emperor Peafowl could then legitimately establish him as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Cloudsoar Monarch finally understood why Emperor Peafowl had insisted that Pill King Zhen claw his way up from the bottom instead of granting him any special privileges. As it turned out, His Majesty was hoping that through a series of events, Pill King Zhen would publicly display his martial talent to others so that the entirety of Veluriyam Capital would recognize his skill. This had all been done in preparation for the next step.

“Your subordinate bows before Your Majesty’s foresight.” Unexpectedly, Cloudsoar Monarch was not jealous of this youth. He had served Emperor Peafowl since the beginning and as a long-time follower of the emperor, he had never once hoped to become his heir.

After all, the four monarchs had also grown old. They couldn't be considered viable long-term choices. He had worried about the matter of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's heir for a long time. He didn't want Sacred Peafowl to become marginalized in the future and to be roughly jostled out of power by Emperor Shura. And now, he gazed upon the new person chosen by Emperor Peafowl, a person with raw talent comparable to young lord Fan. This caused Cloudsoar Monarch to feel at ease.

"Twenty quarter-hours... As expected, he surpassed twenty quarter-hours. Your Majesty, Zhen's talent in both pill and martial dao are absolute. He's a genius descended from the heavens!" Cloudsoar Monarch stared at the time and could not help but exclaim in wonder. This was a heaven-defying development of events.

Chapter 925: The First Victory

Absolute in both pill and martial dao. These words were continuously surfacing in the minds of everyone present. The person who had set the record earlier, Sunyu Xiaosheng, also fixed his narrow eyes on the formation below Veluriyam Pagoda. The apathetic expression on his face had shifted to one of bewilderment. The record he had just set had been broken as simply as that. Obviously, he was curious about the person who had surpassed him.

“Sigh, if I’d known, I would have persevered a little more.” He felt a little regretful. He still had a bit of energy remaining when he’d left the formation. He hadn’t wanted to push himself too much, afraid that he would affect his performance in the remaining competition, so he hadn’t tried his best. He felt that he definitely could have persisted for a longer time if he hadn’t held back. Since his record was broken, the on-site discussion only grew more intense.

Now, the only question was, could Pill King Zhen break the record that no one had surpassed for a few thousand years? Could he persist within the formation for six hours? As Jiang Chen sat within the formation, it never occurred to him that he had become a topic of heated debate in the outside world.

Unknowingly, the sixth hour approached.

“Hm? It seems that I’ve come close to six hours. I heard from Brother Ji that for these past few thousand years, six hours has been the highest record. I still have some remaining strength so I might have a chance to surpass seven hours, or perhaps even eight hours. But this is only the preliminary selection. I should quit while I’m still ahead. There’s no need to show off quite so much...” Jiang Chen monitored the time as he decided that he would leave the formation the moment it reached six hours.

When the hourglass indicated six hours had passed, a tidal wave of cheering swept over the outside world. It was clear that in this era, a record of six hours was truly an enormous inspiration. It didn't matter that he was their competitor. At this moment, everyone was cheering for Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen also did not dally within the formation. He crushed his jade token and was instantly teleported back to the outside world. In order to avoid showing off, he deliberately stifled his facial expression to a deathly pale shade, as though he had been greatly weakened. Nonetheless, no one really paid attention to those details. Everyone was only concerned about the record of six hours.

"Long live Pill King Zhen!"

"As expected of Veluriyam Capital's idol! Absolute in both martial and pill dao!" Within Veluriyam Capital, Pill King Zhen was originally someone worthy of idol worship. As of today, his enchanting performance that had broken a millennia-old record naturally won him plenty of support.

Ji San also walked up to him and pounded his shoulder with a fist. "You little brat, you really concealed your power from everyone!"

When Jiang Chen glanced at the joy laced across Ji San's face, he knew that the latter was delighted for him. He immediately smiled and replied, "It's not that I was concealing my strength. I just happened to know a little bit about formations. It was a struggle to be honest."

Ji San laughed uproariously, "Reasons don't matter. What matters is that you've persisted until the six hour mark. I believe that after this selection, the fame of your martial dao will spread to every corner of Veluriyam City, just like that of your pill dao. It'll even spread to the entirety of the Upper Eight Regions!"

Conversely, Jiang Chen was not overly prideful of his

accomplishments. The rankings for the eighteenth batch of cultivators was quickly tallied. Amongst the cultivators here, Jiang Chen was at the top of the list. There was no question about that. The remaining two batches had possibly been spurred on by Jiang Chen. Multiple extraordinary candidates popped up, one even surpassing the six hour mark as well. This grand occasion instantly shook the entire Veluriyam Capital to its core. Who would have thought that even the preliminary round of selections would erupt in such a fiery battlefield of hot-blooded cultivators? After this selection, ninety percent of the one million competitors was instantly eliminated. The hundred thousand people left would officially begin the fight for the ten thousand spots on the New Star Rankings.

“Congratulations to the qualifying competitors. Next, the hundred thousand of you will be divided into a thousand groups, a hundred people to a group. Every group will have ten designated spots on the New Star Rankings. Hence, ultimately a group of ten thousand people will be accepted onto the list.”

“The top one thousand competitors from the preliminary arena just now will not meet each other in battle. They will be split evenly across the thousand groups.”

Jiang Chen had stayed within the formation for six hours and was tied with another person for first. He was the most popular candidate for entry into the New Star Rankings. Moreover, the one thousand competitors who had topped the preliminary competition would be split into a thousand different groups. This way, the top-ranked one hundred geniuses would not run into each other beforehand. This would also ensure that the top-ranked geniuses would not be preliminarily eliminated as a result of a precursory fight.

Jiang Chen’s exemplary performance within the formation placed him into the first group as the arena lord. Naturally, as the lord of this group, he had certain privileges. According to the rules,

the arena lord only needed to defeat ten people in a row to advance. The rankings on the New Star Rankings would be decided by the number of victories one held. In the end, the one with the highest number of victories across all the competitors in every arena would be ranked at the top of the list. Every spot on the New Star Rankings would be decided entirely based on the number of victories one held. If there was a tie, the person who performed better on the previous formation challenge would be granted priority in placement.

In the first group, Jiang Chen's performance in the formation challenge was the best. Hence, if he could secure the greatest number of victories here, he would be ranked first even if there was someone who tied with him here. Of course, apart from the arena lords, the other participants had a fixed number of entries every day. In the end, every competitor needed to guarantee that he had participated in ninety-nine fights. In other words, he needed to ensure that he had fought every other person in his group at least once.

As the lord, Jiang Chen's greatest advantage was that as long as he achieved ten victories in a row, he could advance forward. As for the others, their chances of advancement were solely dependent on their final number of victories. However, if the lord could not achieve a record of ten straight victories, then he would be judged just like the rest, based on total victories. Ultimately, this rule was still advantageous towards the arena lords.

As the arena lord, Jiang Chen was naturally part of the first battle. He stood on the elevated arena granted to the lord and swept his eyes across the ninety-nine opponents beneath him. Some of their gazes were veiled, making it difficult to tell what they were truly thinking about. Others' gazes were filled with heated passion, as though they were about to jump onto the arena and challenge him straightaway.

Everyone here hoped to use this as an opportunity to gain

renown. However, not everyone would have the chance to challenge the lord. Within a day, the lord would generally only have to accept three challenges. Of course, if the lord himself was willing, continuing to battle was completely fine.

“Let me take on the illustrious Pill King Zhen of Veluriyam Capital!” Suddenly, a short and fat fellow yelled out from beneath the arena. The fat covering his body made him look like a meatball. He bounced directly onto the arena. Jiang Chen glanced at the fellow.

This newcomer’s cultivation was not low. He had already reached the fifth level sage realm. However, as he watched Jiang Chen’s reserved behavior, he could not see through the latter’s level of power. Hence, a seed of wishful thinking sprouted within him, that he might actually make his name known through this single match. The moment Jiang Chen spotted the sneaky smile that had snaked across this guy’s face, he knew that the latter was an opportunistic fellow.

“Hehe, Pill King Zhen, everyone knows that you are number one in pill dao within Veluriyam Capital. As everyone’s idol, don’t be too harsh on me!” The fellow might act jovial and agreeable, but his eyes carried hints of craftiness in their depths.

With just a glance, Jiang Chen could tell that this person was someone who would distract him with honeyed words while slipping a sword into his back. He immediately schooled his face. “After you.”

The short fatty suddenly grinned nastily before Jiang Chen finished speaking. With a flick of his sleeves, two concealed weapons arched through the air in inky streaks as they hurtled directly towards Jiang Chen. The appearance of these concealed weapons was too sudden and their technique was extremely clever. Clearly, this short fatty had used this trick to plot against countless people in order to have trained to this level of proficiency.

Immediately, a series of hisses and boos emanated from beneath the arena. This short fatty's tricks had obviously not been well-received by the spectators. There were no rules that prohibited concealed weapons on this battlefield arena. Nonetheless, everyone was aware that even if one wished to use concealed weapons, one should at least wait until the match had officially started.

Jiang Chen had only just agreed to the match before this fellow had unleashed such a sudden attack. This was definitely not morally upright. Nonetheless, this short fatty didn't seem to mind at all. With a chuckle, he curled his hands around the shaft of a deadly-looking scimitar. Waves of intense and savage blade aura broiled in the air. This sinister aura immediately stirred up pulses of miserable cries, like the howls of ghosts and wolves, engulfing everything around it.

Jiang Chen's heart grew cold. As expected, his judgment had been correct. This short fatty might appear genial, but behind that facade, he was incredibly crafty. However, it was too naive for a mere fifth level sage realm to even think about ambushing him.

Jiang Chen lightly flourished his sleeves, silently activating his Featherflight Mirror. With a light brush, the two concealed weapons slowed down greatly as though they had met with some invisible resistance in the air. He chuckled coldly before he flicking a finger.

Pop pop! With two consecutive popping noises, the two concealed weapons made a complete turn around before they crashed back towards that short fatty.

The short fatty had trained his attack to perfection. His concealed weapons had never once failed him. As he suddenly saw the two weapons make a sharp turn and shoot back towards him, he was completely dumbfounded. His scimitar glinted in the light as it raised a mighty tidal wave to stop these concealed weapons. However, unexpectedly, he felt a titanic weight press against his

palms. The next moment, the power flowing through his scimitar had only built halfway before its effect completely dispersed. It was as though some unseen force was suppressing his hands.

“Not good!” The short fatty’s face instantly turned green. Everything happened in a single second. In an instant, the two concealed weapons plunged into his own chest.

Bam bam! The two concealed weapons instantly detonated, blowing up the short fatty’s chest in a shower of flesh and blood. Fortunately, this short fatty was incredibly scared of death and had equipped himself with a set of rather overpowered defensive armor. But even so, the explosive power behind these weapons was akin to an all-out assault from a sky sage realm practitioner. As the short fatty’s blood spurted into the air, he instantly lost the strength to keep fighting. He collapsed soullessly to the ground, his face ashen in defeat. A venomous glare flashed across his eyes. He was obviously uncomfortable with the way he had disgraced himself before spectating eyes.

“Haha, he got what he asked for, didn’t he?”

“I’ll accept his use of concealed weapons but he actually attacked while his opponent was still speaking. Despicable! We should all be mindful of this fatty.”

“Get off the arena, you disgrace!!” Waves of condemning voices rose and fell from the cultivators beneath the arena. It was clear that everyone was against the use of such ambushing tactics.

“The winner of the first match is Pill King Zhen!”

Chapter 926: Nine Consecutive Victories

There would always be opportunistic people and those who wished to become famous overnight amongst cultivators. As the arena lord of the first arena, Jiang Chen was of course the best shortcut for these people to become instantly famous. Therefore, he didn't lack challengers after the short fatty was forcefully swept off the arena. However, everyone quickly realized that their opportunistic thoughts were a massive joke. Two challengers in a row had gone up to the arena after the fatty, but none of them managed to hold out for more than ten bouts.

This truth finally wiped the challengers' eyes clean—Pill King Zhen didn't just possess outstanding pill dao. His martial dao was just as monstrous. He hadn't held out for six hours inside the formation because Emperor Peafowl was helping him cheat. He truly was that capable.

After accepting three challenges in a row, Jiang Chen didn't grow impatient and try to rush things. Instead, he chose to rest for a moment. According to the rules, it was completely within his power to accept more challenges and even finish ten consecutive victories in a row, allowing him to ascend to the next round. But considering that the Martial Pagoda battles had just begun and that this was just a stage in the New Star Rankings, he found no reason to fight that hard at all. Therefore, he decided to follow his own pace. Jiang Chen's steadiness won Emperor Peafowl's praise.

"He has the strength, but he doesn't try to rush things due to impatience or arrogance. I am growing more and more optimistic about this boy," Emperor Peafowl smiled leisurely.

Cloudsoar Monarch very much agreed with Emperor Peafowl's opinion. "There is absolutely no problem for this boy to enter the Genius Rankings. Perhaps he may even qualify to fight for the final Ranking of Young Lords. Unfortunately, his realm is ultimately a fatal flaw. If he encounters a genuine first-rate opponent later,

with just the power of seventh level sage realm I fear that…" Right now, this was Cloudsoar Monarch's only worry.

Emperor Peafowl smiled, "He is the kind of genius who becomes stronger if his opponent is strong. You don't need to worry about this, Cloudsoar. All we need to do for a genius that appears only once in a millennium like him is to relax and enjoy the show."

The next day, Jiang Chen continued to accept more challenges. Since he was the arena lord, he was the target of all cultivators. Everyone in the world of martial dao wanted to fight against the strongest opponent. So even though Jiang Chen was very strong, it didn't stop his opponent from challenging him. Still, his performance on the second day was as steady as ever.

In fact, one might even say that his performance was so boring that one could fall asleep during the battle. It wasn't that he wasn't weak, but because he was so steady, it seemed like he would never put on a brilliant, gorgeous display. His performance disappointed all onlookers who were hoping for a fantastic show. They all knew that Pill King Zhen was extraordinarily talented in pill dao, but they also wanted to see him perform brilliantly in martial dao. However, the pill king was always able to take out his opponent without having to execute any unbelievable techniques. A lot of people couldn't even tell how his opponents lost.

"Simple, practical, and completely unobtrusive movements. This Pill King Zhen is such a difficult man to see through."

"This is just a stage in the New Star Rankings, so of course Pill King Zhen hasn't employed his full strength. If he displays his trump cards now, won't that mean that he'll be fully exposed?"

"That's true. A fight at this level is probably just a warm-up to him."

"Hehe, he's already accumulated six consecutive wins. There should be no problems for Pill King Zhen to take ten consecutive victories and move on to the next round, right?" No one

particularly begrudged Pill King Zhen for moving on to the next round because he possessed true strength. This contest would be a joke if someone with genuine strength like him couldn't ascend to the next round.

Back at the Coiling Dragon Clan, Ji San had returned to an audience with the clan lord. Three young men were currently standing before the clan lord. Ji San aside, Jiang Chen had seen the other two men before. They were Liuxiang and Ji Zhongtang. These two young men and Ji San were said to be the most hopeful young geniuses to succeed the Coiling Dragon clan lord.

"Ole Third, your friend Pill King Zhen is truly an eye-opener. His pill dao talent is already unparalleled, but is his martial dao talent so monstrous too?" The clan lord had obviously been drawn to Jiang Chen's performance.

Ji San answered smilingly, "He has hidden his strength well and even I was fooled by this fellow, Clan Lord. If I'm not mistaken, he seems to have set his sights pretty high this time around."

The Coiling Dragon clan lord let out a soft sigh, "What an enviable genius he is."

He wasn't trying to be courteous. Right now the clan lord couldn't even begin to describe how impressed he was at Jiang Chen's astounding talents. He was one of those who knew about Jiang Chen's true identity, and the fact that Jiang Chen had been born in a tiny place like the Myriad Domain only served to impress him even further.

However, Liuxiang was frowning slightly, "Clan Lord, this Pill King Zhen is a little too extraordinary, don't you think? Maybe I'm overthinking this, but I can't help but think that he's a spy planted in our midst by an enemy power."

Ji San was unhappy with this comment, "Don't tell me you're getting jealous, Liuxiang?"

Liuxiang said calmly, “You are overthinking this.”

“You’re the one who’s overthinking this. Or do you think that your insight is better than Emperor Peafowl’s?” Ji San snorted coldly. Jiang Chen was his brother, and he knew of Jiang Chen’s background. Naturally, he wouldn’t allow anyone to slander his brother. Not even another one of his fellow clansmen.

Liuxiang smiled calmly and turned the question to Ji Zhongtang, “What do you think, Brother Zhongtang?”

Ji Zhongtang’s voice was indifferent, “We cannot determine a definite answer for this, nor do we need to. Our emperor will be the one to decide if this Pill King Zhen is genuine or not.”

Ji San praised him, “You are truly open-minded, Zhongtang.”

The clan lord smiled leisurely, “There is no need for argument. As Zhongtang said, our emperor must have his own plans in mind, not to mention that we are talking about his martial dao talent and not his background. What do you guys think about his performance? You first, Zhongtang.”

Ji Zhongtang pondered for a moment before replying, “Pill King Zhen’s martial dao talent is beyond first rate. In my opinion, he has the qualifications to compete for the Ranking of Young Lords. However, he hasn’t showed any unusual performance in terms of martial dao foundation yet, so there is still much to be seen.”

The clan lord smiled and looked at Liuxiang. Liuxiang was holding a bit of a grudge right now, and he didn’t particularly like Pill King Zhen either. It was because he knew that Pill King Zhen was Ji San’s brother. If Pill King Zhen’s status were to grow higher in the future, then Ji San’s status would subsequently rise as well. Therefore, this outcome was extremely disadvantageous to him. However, right now the clan lord had asked him a question personally. Naturally, Liuxiang didn’t dare shoot off a careless comment. Even if his opinion was biased, he couldn’t let it show too much.

“Liuxiang believes that Pill King Zhen’s foundation is one of the more solid ones amongst the geniuses of Veluriyam Capital. However, his realm is obviously his weakness. Right now it hasn’t posed a problem, but it’s hard to tell if he can win the difficult battles that are to come later. As for the Ranking of Young Lords, I don’t think that a seventh level sage realm cultivator has the right to challenge those young lords. Maybe he’ll be qualified several decades later, but now? Now is too soon.” Liuxiang thought that his commentary was already quite fair.

The clan lord chuckled and looked at Ji San. Naturally, there was a reason behind his decision to ask Ji San the question last.

“Clan Lord, Pill King Zhen is my brother, so it’s only natural that I support him unconditionally. Right now, he hasn’t displayed too many essences of martial dao because his opponents are too weak. Also, preparing for future battles might be a problem if he were to display too much of his real skills, so I think that his choice of tactics is correct. Most importantly, since when has this guy done something that he isn’t confident of success in? He has always been the type of guy who brings many pleasant surprises against all odds and expectations. So this time around, I think he’ll give Veluriyam Capital a pleasant surprise too.” Surprisingly, Ji San didn’t hide his favoritism at all. One did not avoid appointing the wise just because they are related, much less in a mere commentary.

The Coiling Dragon clan lord chuckled and nodded, “You all have your own opinions, and you all have good reasons to think that way. We will know if this Pill King Zhen is a dragon or a snake after this Veluriyam Pagoda gathering.”

As a trusted aide of Emperor Peafowl, naturally the Coiling Dragon clan lord knew of some of Emperor Peafowl’s intentions. He knew that Emperor Peafowl had the intentions of appointing Jiang Chen as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. If he were to be honest with himself, the Coiling Dragon clan lord was greatly looking forward to that day.

Competition was exceedingly fierce over the course of two days of battles. Arena lords aside, the rest of the candidates were also battling each other. After all, every candidate was required to fight a total of ninety-nine battles. There were still no surprises during the third day.

Almost all the challengers who had challenged Jiang Chen were defeated in the same way. This outcome made the challengers feel very depressed. Forget defeating the arena lord, it would appear that they couldn't even force something new from him. Up until this point, none of the nine defeated cultivators managed to hold out for more than ten bouts. No one managed to force out a real trump card from him either. The candidates of this arena quickly realized, to their dismay, that Pill King Zhen was absolutely unbeatable.

"Sigh, forget beating our arena lord, we can't even force out a new move from him!"

"A genius is a genius. A genius like him should have moved on with special privileges instead of participating in the New Star Rankings, don't you think?"

One must admit that Jiang Chen had won the general acknowledgement of this arena zone with his strength after a mere three days worth of consecutive battles. He had fought nine battles in three days and won all of them. Almost everyone thought that Pill King Zhen would move on to the next round with ten consecutive wins.

However, at a certain corner of the first arena zone, there was an inconspicuous cultivator observing Jiang Chen in the arena with remote eyes. It had been three days already. The only thing this cultivator did other than fighting his own battles was to observe Jiang Chen.

"Paohui, remember, this is your one and only shot." A voice cut across the darkness like a blade to a cultivator.

Harsh killing intent fleeted across this cultivator's eyes.

"Pill King Zhen... you better be him, or else I, Yan Hu,i will be adding another wronged soul to my score." The cultivator shot an indifferent stare at Jiang Chen.

Chapter 927: Three Images

As Jiang Chen stood on the arena after his ninth consecutive victory, he suddenly felt a piercing gaze shoot right through him. However, the person had already retracted his gaze before he could even react to it. He wanted to find the culprit, but there wasn't any leads. It seems like I've summoned the true geniuses into motion after my ninth consecutive victory. Maybe this will make my following battles slightly more interesting?

Achieving nine consecutive victories in three days hadn't been much of a challenge for Jiang Chen. After all, the top one thousand geniuses had all been separately placed in different arenas. Thus, it only made sense that he would meet slightly less capable geniuses as opponents. Even the strongest genius that he'd previously fought was only at the sixth level sage realm.

Sixth level sage realm cultivators were already no match for Jiang Chen when he was at the initial sage realm. What hope could they have of defeating him now that he was at the seventh level sage realm? There wasn't even a need for him to use powerful martial methods when he was matched with lower level opponents. He could squash them on a whim.

……

At a dark corner of Veluriyam Capital, inside the Eternal Celestial Capital's other secret base. Three holy kings—Holy King Bei, Saint Holy King Ke, and Saint Holy King Mu were gathered here.

"Holy King Bei, is everything prepared?" Saint Holy King Mu asked.

Holy King Bei had a somber expression. "The preparations are done, but none of our people were placed in the first arena."

"Hmph! Doesn't matter unless that brat fails to enter the top two hundred Genius Rankings," Saint Holy King Mu snorted.

Saint Holy King Ke nodded in agreement, “Yes. As long as he manages to enter the Genius Rankings, there will be a great possibility that he has to face our geniuses.”

However, Holy King Bei was filled with worry. “Noble holy kings, your subordinate has suffered greatly after the punishment from last time. I truly can’t predict whether your arrangements will eventually end in happiness or doom.”

By last time, he naturally meant that time when Emperor Peafowl had blocked their way while they were chasing Pill King Zhen and sealed off every single escape route. At that time, Emperor Peafowl had chosen not to kill them after he’d considered his own position. Holy King Bei genuinely felt that messing with Jiang Chen again was like playing with fire. He’d always been against such plans. Unfortunately, Saint Holy King Mu was determined to get his hands on Jiang Chen. He strongly suspected that Pill King Zhen was Jiang Chen, and was willing to pay any price to check if that was the case.

“Holy King Bei, stop entertaining groundless fears. We’ve done nothing nothing wrong this time. There’s no rule to prevent foreign sects from joining the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering.”

Generally, great sects didn’t send people to attend something like the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering. This was because geniuses were too precious to these sects. It would be a great loss if anything were to happen to those talents. However, these geniuses would occasionally attend these meetings of their own volition.

But this time, the Eternal Celestial Capital had dispatched three very extraordinary geniuses to attend the meeting. One of them was even ranked fifth amongst all youths in the Eternal Celestial Capital! As for the other two, while they weren’t amongst the top ten, they were definitely well-situated within the top twenty. With such a lineup, the organization was confident that they would succeed in assassinating Pill King Zhen.

“We didn’t make any contact with them this time around. No matter how powerful he is, there’s no way Emperor Peafowl will be able to connect them to us.” Saint Holy King Ke asserted.

The Eternal Celestial Capital had learnt their lesson. This time, they’d chosen to relay a message back to the Eternal Celestial Capital and ordered the sect to deploy three geniuses. They were to disguise themselves as wandering cultivators and join the Martial Pagoda battles. These three were also intelligent enough as to not reveal their true talent too early. In the first screening selection, they performed very mediocrely, only revealing enough capability to qualify.

This was just the New Star Rankings battles. With their abilities, they could definitely move to the next level with ease if they’d gone all out. Instead, they chose to suppress their abilities. Their one and only target was Jiang Chen. They couldn’t reveal their true identities before they met him in battle. They hadn’t met any of the holy kings ever since they’d left the Eternal Celestial Capital. Thus, it was imperative for them to keep a low profile.

This was also why Saint Holy King Mu and Saint Holy King Ke were so confident. They simply didn’t believe that Emperor Peafowl would be able to identify them. However, Holy King Bei had been stationed in Veluriyam Capital for a long time, so it was only natural for him fear the emperor. His intuition told him that Emperor Peafowl simply had a way of knowing things, despite everything they’d done to conceal themselves. However, this was the final decision made by the two saint holy kings. Holy King Bei had a lower rank than them, so he had no choice but to follow the orders from above.

“Brother Mu, you’ve been observing Pill King Zhen for a while now. How sure are you that the pill king and Jiang Chen are possibly the same person?” Saint Holy King Ke asked.

“In regards to my own intuition, I’m at least ninety percent certain. However, if you want an educated guess based off of our

various leads, I'm only forty to fifty percent certain," Saint Holy King Mu responded lowly.

"It doesn't matter if they are the same person or not. This brat must be killed," Saint Holy King Ke said coldly. "Life and death are hard to predict in the arena." This was what they hoped would happen.

Killing Pill King Zhen in any other situation would carry a risk of them being discovered, regardless of how secretive they were. But in the arena, they could kill the pill king in front of everyone and not care about any repercussions. Life and death in the arena was up to fate.

Saint Holy King Mu displayed an ominous expression for a fraction of a second. "The plan might be perfect, but we should not underestimate the enemy. Pill King Zhen has already achieved nine consecutive victories, yet he hasn't even shown any of his trump cards. In fact, nobody can even tell what the origins of his martial arts are. Young geniuses like him are very unnerving."

"Hehe. His talent in pill dao might be because of a fortuitous encounter. But for martial dao, he won't be able to soar through the heavens with just one bound even if he managed to have another fortuitous encounter! It's only been three years since the shattering of the Myriad Domain. Even if his cultivation were to improve quickly, what can he achieve within three years?" Saint Holy King Ke asserted.

"Mm. Based on his abilities alone, any of the three that we've sent should be enough to squash him like a bug. However, this brat has encountered many fortuitous events. He will surely have a hidden trump card. We must keep testing the waters with actual combat. Since we have three people, it doesn't matter if two of them are to fail. As long as we manage to get to the bottom of his abilities, we can subdue him!"

"Mm! Two will test the waters, while the other will finish him!"

However, Holy King Bei suddenly interrupted, “Now that we’ve set a base here, Ninesuns Sky Sect will surely follow suit. Maybe we should also consider how they might influence our plans?”

“Ninesuns Sky Sect?” Saint Holy King Mu was slightly taken aback. “Have they also guessed that Pill King Zhen and Jiang Chen are somehow connected?”

“Better safe than sorry.”

There’s nothing we can do to prevent Ninesuns Sky Sect’s influence now. We need only proceed according to our plans,” Saint Holy King Mu waved his hands. “

……

Even though the Martial Pagoda battles had only just begun, Jiang Chen had no idea that numerous powers had already set their targets on him. Even though he’d won nine consecutive victories, he didn’t let success get to him. The New Star Rankings were only a warm-up. The true battle would begin at the Genius Rankings. However, the fight he was looking forward to the most was the Ranking of the Young Lords. He was looking forward to sparring with the strongest geniuses in Veluriyam Capital. One who knows oneself and their enemies best shall never fall in battle.

At this very moment, Jiang Chen was cultivating the Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods. He’d already mastered the initial five transformations. The golden body of demons and gods had made his defenses impregnable. However, he was dissatisfied with the protection offered by this golden body at present.

The final four realms of the were the true essence of Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods, the formation of the images of demons and gods. There were a total of four levels comprising the formation of the image of demons and gods—the Preliminary, Intermediary, Advanced, and Heavenly Images. Of course, to form the image of demons and gods, one needed to reach the sky sage realm. Only at the sky sage realm could one practice the various

divine arts.

Jiang Chen was now capable of forming three preliminary images. The first was the Redscaled Firelizard Image, which could also be simplified as the Giant Lizard Image. He had already assimilated the Redscaled Firelizard bloodline in the past. Now that he was at the sky sage realm, the Redscaled Firelizard Image that he'd formed naturally surpassed the strength of the spirit creature he'd met all those years ago.

Other than the Redscaled Firelizard, Jiang Chen could also form the Golden Cicada Image. The Golden Cicada Image had no offensive power, but it had a remarkable ability known as Cicada's Disappearance, which could confuse the enemy. Moreover, the Golden Cicada Image conferred immunity from any lightning and poison attacks.

Aside from the Giant Lizard and Golden Cicada Image, there was also the True Dragon Image, which was the most powerful image of all three and in turn, also the most difficult to form. Jiang Chen had assimilated the true dragon bloodline, which meant that he also possessed the dragon clan's bloodline. Because of this, the difficulty involved in forming the image was also greatly reduced. But even so, he still had to expend a great deal of energy. The True Dragon Image required excessive energy and was difficult to conjure,ut in exchange, it was incredibly powerful. Conjuring the True Dragon Image was almost like summoning a true dragon. Its aura was capable of making all beasts bow in its wake.

"It's a pity that the Golden Body of Demons and Gods can only form images from bloodlines. This art is restricted by its bloodline requirement. It would be almost impossible to form a image without the possession of a bloodline." Of course, Jiang Chen was already quite formidable for possessing three different images. In the world of martial dao, some wouldn't even cross paths with a single bloodline in their lifetime. Yet within a short time, he'd managed to acquire three bloodlines. His luck was truly heaven-

defying.

“It’s unfortunate that I can only form preliminary images since I am only at the sky sage realm. When I enter the emperor realm, I will be able to form an intermediate image. I will then be able to flatten all enemies at the same level without breaking a sweat.”

A divine art like the Hundred Transformation of Demons and Gods was truly one of a kind. One was able to gain invincibility, yet also possess many variations of attacks. It was considered an incredible ability even in the heavenly planes. Jiang Chen consolidated the three images and entered a state of oblivion.

With the passing of the night came the fourth day of battle. According to the rules, with just one more win, he would have achieved ten consecutive victories and would thereafter be promoted to the New Star Rankings. He was going to be directly promoted regardless of his score from then onwards. Naturally, Jiang Chen wouldn’t be satisfied with just ten consecutive victories. Ten consecutive victories might guarantee him a promotion, but it would do nothing to help his placement in the New Star Rankings. He didn’t want to have a miserly rank.

“The arena lord is now seeking challengers! Who wishes to be the first to challenge the arena lord today?” The host’s soulful voice reverberated through all corners of the arena. After witnessing his battles for three consecutive days, everybody now understood just how powerful the arena lord was. Thus, it was only natural that they were no longer as enthusiastic as they had been three days ago.

“Let me!” A loud voice suddenly thundered through the crowd.

The voice reverberated throughout the arena like thunder and immediately captured everyone’s attention.

Chapter 928: A Miraculously Powerful Opponent

The challenger was an enormous brute, as buff as a ferocious lion. His golden mane gave off an aura of power and glory. He had popped out of nowhere, overwhelming the people around him.

“Just where did this brute come from?”

“He’s laid low all this time. Why does he suddenly want to flaunt himself?” The candidates of the first group began to heatedly discuss the situation when they saw the newcomer leap onto the arena. Clearly, everyone could tell from the imposing manner of this challenger that he was not the typical contender. Even Jiang Chen was caught slightly off guard when the brute hurtled into the arena from below. His incredible intuition as a cultivator prickled as a hidden wave of menace swept over him.

Ever since Jiang Chen had embarked on his martial journey, his instincts had always been very powerful. This brute might look impulsive, but if he could cause Jiang Chen to feel threatened, he was definitely going to be an extraordinary opponent.

“Who’d have thought that there were indeed people who’d concealed their true power?” Jiang Chen swept his gaze over the challenger’s figure. He was very sure of the fact that the new challenger must have hidden his potential during the formation challenge. With his power and potential, there was no way he wouldn’t be in the top thousand. Jiang Chen even had a feeling that he could possibly be in the top three.

At that moment, a shiver ran down Jiang Chen’s spine. His expression remained impassive, but he silently put up his guard. This brute had not hesitated to hide his potential and had chosen to issue his challenge at this time. This was definitely not a series of coincidences.

“Pill King Zhen, let me challenge you!” There was an august manner with which the brute spoke. His voice was as deep as the chimes of a grand bell.

Jiang Chen kept his gaze indifferent, “And who might you be, sir?”

The man laughed disparagingly, “There’s no need for questions. I only wish for a battle. A battle disregarding life and death, where we fight to our hearts’ desire.”

Disregarding life and death? Generally, this selection’s arena might occasionally result in fatalities, but everyone usually restrained themselves and took care to avoid deaths whenever it was possible. Although there were no rules that prohibited killing, no one would deliberately aim to murder another candidate.

“What, you too scared to accept the challenge?” The brute bellowed in laughter. As he stepped closer, power suddenly flared from his body. A wave of imposing pressure surged outwards, like a male lion who was about to break his iron tether and subsequently proceed to ferociously devour the people around him. Every movement that this person took along with his head of wild hair completely complemented his aura, exuding an omnidirectional intimidating feeling.

This flare of power instantly shot towards Jiang Chen like an earth-shattering force. Every spectator watching from below the arena immediately sucked in a breath of cold air. Where had this perverse power come from? This person’s potential obviously far surpassed that of the previous nine challengers. In fact, the combined power of those nine people might not even reach half of this brute’s.

In that moment, the arena was so silent that you could hear a pin drop. It was as though everyone had been suffocated into silence by the brute’s aura. Jiang Chen abruptly laughed, “Are you hoping to suppress me with your aura and win without having to fight?”

That brute replied arrogantly, “So what if I am? I don’t care if you’re the arena lord. Only if you can survive this next strike will you be qualified to accept my challenge!”

His tone was extremely violent, to the extent that he appeared like a tyrant. An unruffled smile appeared on Jiang Chen’s lips. “What a clumsy mental attack. You probably think your power is quite intimidating. But to me, you’re just a wimpy little brat throwing a loud tantrum.”

Wimpy little brat? When the challenger heard this, he merely laughed and nodded instead of growing angry. “Such clever eloquence. Then taste my attack now… ooooow…. ooooow….”

That brute’s voice suddenly exploded like a crack of thunder. He had unexpectedly dragged out the last word he’d uttered, “now”, shaking the air like the howl of a tiger or the wail of a legendary beast. In that instant, his voice formed a massive soundwave that crashed violently towards Jiang Chen like a tsunami.

The sky immediately turned dark as the light from the sun and moon was completely obscured. Even the spectators below paled drastically while activating their defensive abilities and covering their ears, not to mention the one in the arena. However, this soundwave was clearly not an ordinary strike. It attacked not only one’s hearing, but also one’s consciousness. This kind of sensation felt as if numerous wild beasts were pouncing on one’s consciousness in a flurry of teeth and claws, ready to destroy one’s mind at any time. The cultivators watching below weakened successively as they retreated one after another. At the same time, they sealed their consciousness to defend against the soundwave’s assault. Luckily, this sound wave was not directed towards them; the brunt of it was aimed at Pill King Zhen.

But even so, the soundwave still battered against them violently. If this was the case, wasn’t Pill King Zhen facing an imminent crisis akin to a small sailboat attempting to stay afloat amidst powerful ocean waves? Jiang Chen’s brows twitched as a look of

astonishment entered his eyes. Obviously, no ordinary cultivator could refine the soundwaves of their voice to this extent. He thought furiously and finally decided that this person was definitely specifically targeting him.

Whose lackey is this? Some other disciple of Veluriyam Capital's emperors? Or maybe even someone from the Ninesuns Sky Sect or the Eternal Celestial Capital? Various possibilities flashed across Jiang Chen's mind. He twisted his body and activated his Golden Body of Demons and Gods, immediately shrouding himself in ten rays of golden light. At the same time, he swirled his sleeves around himself. His Featherflight Mirror swayed in the air, turning the space around him into a protective barrier. The soundwaves pressed down upon him like a tidal wave that was being continuously dissipated under the brilliant rays reflected from the Featherflight Mirror.

The strength of the sound waves lay in their focus. It lay in their sharpness, in the ferocity of their combined power. Once they were split apart, this kind of soundwave would be no different from an ordinary aerial attack. Jiang Chen suddenly burst into loud laughter. Instead of retreating, he stepped forward boldly, "Your insignificant attack stirred up quite an enjoyable breeze, didn't it?"

What? Upon seeing this, the challenger widened his eyes. Disbelief shone from their depths.

The spectators below the arena were all dazed with shock. They could sense how fierce the attack was even as pure bystanders. Yet Pill King Zhen, who had stood in the eye of the storm, had withstood it without getting so much as a scratch on him? Moreover, he had stepped forward instead of retreating?

"You... you actually deflected my soundwave attack, Thunderous Lion Roar?" The brute also seemed to be slightly shocked. However, he immediately calmed himself and smiled, "I knew it. You possess a treasure that can greatly reduce the speed of any attack. It seems that compared to you, I have no advantage in

terms of speed."

Jiang Chen's thoughts chilled. He had concealed the use of his Featherflight Mirror very ingeniously. From the perspective of outsiders, they would not have seen it at all. They would only have thought that he had used some particular method or special ability. But this brute had actually seen through him with just a glance? Nonetheless, Jiang Chen didn't fall for his tricks. Who knew if the brute could be deliberately trying to bait him? Naturally, he would not admit to possessing the Featherflight Mirror so easily. He immediately sneered, "Stop making excuses for your incompetence."

That brute's smile disappeared, "Incompetence. Brat, that was just the appetizer. Don't be so full of yourself this early on. Even if you have some kind of speed-reducing treasure, do you think that I can only rely on my speed to defeat you??" As the brute spoke, he flexed his palms. His hands abruptly transformed into a pair of sharp claws, similar to that of a male lion. "Brat, my strength lies in close combat!"

He sprinted towards Jiang Chen the moment he said that. There was not a trace of deception in his movements as he dashed straight at Jiang Chen. From his pose, he was obviously planning to engage in a head-to-head fight. This brute's power was indeed terrifying. With every pump of his legs, it seemed as though an enormous mountain was crashing forward. Moreover, that pair of brightly glinting, keen claws was filled with a strong thirst for blood. Clearly, this fellow was definitely a bloodthirsty berserker. Nonetheless, Jiang Chen was truly not afraid of anyone in close combat. Especially after he had perfected the Golden Body of Demons and Gods, he had never doubted his own close combat ability.

Back at the Myriad Grand Ceremony, when he had fought tooth and nail with Xiang Qin of the Sacred Elephant Clan, he had given Xiang Sheng such a beatdown that the latter had no choice but to

capitulate. This terrifying opponent today was obviously more powerful than Xiang Sheng, and not just by a little bit. But the Jiang Chen of today was a also different person compared to the Jiang Chen of the past. Back then, he had been a mere mortal sage realm cultivator, whereas presently, he had already advanced to the sky sage realm.

Golden light poured forth as Jiang Chen brandished his fists. His movements were as plain as day as he collided directly with those showy, sharp claws.

Bam! In that moment, the air seemed to have stopped flowing. The brute's movements slowed. The deep crevices beneath his feet clearly indicated how powerful his earlier attack had been. However, at this moment, he actually stopped. Indeed, it wasn't just him. Jiang Chen had also stopped.

Time seemed to have frozen. In the next heated instant, the two's bodies shot away from each other. The brute stumbled ten steps back. Jiang Chen also did the same before he steadied himself. Hot blood frothed within their bodies. Only after breathing heavily could they suppress the rush of blood in their veins.

Just now, that straightforward collision had almost caused Jiang Chen to spit out blood. However, it seemed that his opponent had not gotten off lightly either. His face alternated between shades of white and red before it finally stabilized.

The brute sighed lightly. A look of astonishment made its way onto his face as he scrutinized Jiang Chen briefly. Evidently, he had never thought that someone would dare to fight him head-on. What's more was that they had fought to a standstill! He also knew that if he had continued his assault just now, he would definitely have completely overwhelmed his opponent. However, his inner energy and blood had surged within him to the extent that he had no way to focus on a follow-up attack. By the time his inner energy had calmed down, so had his opponent's.

They were still even at this point.

Jiang Chen was equally appalled. He knew better than anyone just how powerful his Golden Body of Demons and Gods was. Who would have thought that a direct hit had given him no advantage at all? On top of that, the terrifying strength of his opponent was absolutely on par with a genius disciple from any of the first-rate sects. He might even surpass that Cao Jin in terms of raw power. Back when he had killed Cao Jin, Jiang Chen had made use of the terrain and all kinds of lucky coincidences. Moreover, he had called on Long Xiaoxuan for help. But today in this arena, he obviously stood on equal ground with his opponent. Alarm bells clanged loudly in Jiang Chen’s mind.

Chaper 929: An Eye for an Eye

Jiang Chen's battle with this mysterious brute had attracted a lot of attention. The intensity of their fight had exceeded everyone's expectations. Originally, they'd thought that Pill King Zhen would easily achieve a streak of ten victories. There could be no doubt about it. Who would have thought that such a mysterious brute would pop up out of nowhere? This brute's imposing manner and his cultivation skills had all appeared out of the blue. As the saying went, "While the connoisseur recognizes the artistry of the fight, the layman simply enjoys the show."

From the moment he'd appeared, this challenger's aura had been completely different from that of other candidates. As of now, his combat ability had also caused the people around him to suck in a breath of cold air. As Cloudsoar Monarch watched this bitter fight, he was immediately at a loss for words. "Your Majesty, just where did this prodigious cultivator come from?"

Emperor Peafowl was watching the fight with a meaningful gaze. He also appeared to be deep in thought. "Every movement of this cultivator has the bearing of a disciple from a large sect. Although he had been concealing his strength all along and although he simply appears to be displaying boorish violence, there is actually a rhyme and reason to his every action. Everything he has done so far has been meticulously calculated. I believe he was sent here to directly target Pill King Zhen."

"Oh?" Cloudsoar Monarch was a little shocked. "Directly target Pill King Zhen? You don't mean..."

Emperor Peafowl's tone was grave, "Pill King Zhen has been too carefree up until now. This will be a good test for him. If he can clear this stage, there will be hope for him to make it onto the Ranking of Young Lords."

"This stage is that difficult?"

“Extremely so. His opponent presents a thornier problem than what you might expect,” Emperor Peafowl sighed lightly.

Cloudsoar Monarch could also see that this opponent was not an easy one to handle, but he had not thought that it would be as bad as his liege had described. He couldn’t help but inspect the challenger a little more closely.

On the stage.

The brute howled at the sky. His voice crescendoed like a tidal wave, as though it was heralding the onset of an imminent thunderstorm. In that moment, the entire stage was enveloped by a heavy pressure. Numerous dark clouds weighed down upon the arena. One by one the strands of the challenger’s wild mane stood up like copper needles.

“Brat, again!” With a ferocious roar, his powerful legs pushed forwards as he hurtled towards Jiang Chen with heavy footsteps. He twisted his body like a high-speed spinning top. His immense arms swung in a circle and swept towards Jiang Chen.

“Fine by me!” Jiang Chen licked his lips, a cruel smile appearing on his face. It had been a long time since he had been able to let loose so carefreely against an opponent. While his Golden Body of Demons and Gods took effect, his fists pounded again and again on his opponent like an unrelenting downpour.

Their shadows collided rapidly, growing even faster and wilder as the fight dragged on. In the end, their figures blended together into two streaks of lightning-fast movement. It was impossible to tell which one was Pill King Zhen and which one was the challenger.

Bambambam! The sounds of battle raged around them, burning the space surrounding them with pulses of ear-splitting whistles. This was how intense their battle was.

“Who’d have thought that the elegant and scholarly Pill King

Zhen would be this strong at hand-to-hand combat. He's actually going toe-to-toe with a genius who obviously trained specifically in martial arts. Amazing!"

"Hehe, aren't you too naive? Previously when Pill King Zhen was the judge for the Pill Pagoda battles, he taught everyone how to refine a type of strengthening pill. Do you know what this means?"

"What?"

"You still don't get it? It means that Pill King Zhen is also an expert in physical arts. Otherwise, why would he be so interested in body-strengthening pills?"

Jiang Chen had previously provided the recipe for the Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill for free. This had created quite a stir. Thereafter, everyone had begun guessing at his background. Currently, every candidate within thirty meters of the stage had already retreated out of the fight's range. The intensity of the battle raging on stage had spread in all directions, causing the weaker cultivators to feel a little uncomfortable.

"Pill King Zhen, I never imagined that you'd be this talented at close combat. This is unexpected. I admit that you're an interesting opponent. But if this is the limit of your abilities, then prepare to perish before what's coming next!" The brute brandished his steel-lined hands to the extreme. He emanated a dominating aura, sometimes resembling the might of ten thousand stampeding horses, other times embodying the destructive capability of a catastrophic landslide as he roared his intent at Jiang Chen.

If Jiang Chen's consciousness had not been resolute or if his willpower had not been sufficient, he would have quailed and his spirit would have been shattered under the sheer pressure exerted by his opponent. Under the overwhelming force of his lion's roar, a normal cultivator would've been done for if they'd showed even the slightest crack in their resolve. However, he wasn't even

slightly moved by this display. It wasn't as though he'd never been in a more ferocious, more bloodthirsty situation than this. Naturally, he would not be scared of his opponent's mere aura. Jiang Chen sneered thinly, "If the winner of this competition was determined by how big you can talk, you'd be the uncontested number one."

How would he be unaware of his opponent's psychological tricks?

"Hah, little brat, why don't you eat three more punches?" The brute viciously clawed at the air. As his fingers sliced through the air, arcs of electricity gathered at their tips and then shot directly at Jiang Chen like crackling lightning,

"Lightning attribute?" When Jiang Chen saw the brute's lightning-coated fists, he knew that the incoming punch would be no ordinary attack. He silently cursed at the the challenger's craftiness. His opponent's attacks may look straightforward, but in reality, the rhythm of the battle had already shifted. Aside from raw power, the punch was also suffused with thunder and lightning. This attribute may not look too conspicuous on its own, but once it entered his body, it would immediately paralyze him from head to toe.

Although he might only be briefly immobilized, on a battlefield even a second of carelessness would mean the difference between life and death. Jiang Chen smirked, completely unfazed. Not only did he refuse to activate any techniques, he charged straight at his opponent, leaping fearlessly towards that fully-charged fist.

A second away from impact, he suddenly twisted his body to the side. The brute's enhanced punch slammed heavily into his shoulder. At the same time, Jiang Chen brutally rammed his own fist into his opponent's chest!

Bam bam! Both of them had taken each other's punch. The challenger's body curled backwards. An almost imperceptible

smile appeared on the corner of his lips. The next moment, his stomach contorted before he vomited out a spurt of fresh blood.

Jiang Chen's punch had not been inferior to the power of an emperor realm cultivator either. Even with the brute's martial training and his set of high-grade protective armor, he had still been pummeled to the point of coughing up blood. However, silent glee bubbled up within the brute's heart. Evidently, he had anticipated this punch. His goal had been to exchange blows with his opponent. His body suddenly stopped as the brute screeched to a halt. His gaze was deadly as he glared at Jiang Chen and bared his teeth into a smile, "Brat, you're courting death."

Jiang Chen stood his ground as though he had been completely frozen. He didn't move a muscle. A look of astonishment was plastered on his face, as if he had been shocked to a standstill. The brute roared with laughter, aware that his opponent had been momentarily immobilized by his lightning-covered punch. Since he knew this, the brute would naturally take advantage of the moment. With a curl of his fingers, an enormous spear appeared in his hands. The tip of the spear shot towards Jiang Chen's jugular, akin to a venomous cobra striking from the darkness of its lair.

A fatal strike! The spear shot forth like a pouncing dragon, reaching Jiang Chen in the blink of an eye. Jiang Chen remained motionless. The brute's lips curled into a triumphant grin. He knew that if this spear collided, even if his opponent was an emperor realm cultivator, his death would still be unavoidable.

"Ah!"

"How did this happen?"

"In the end, it was Pill King Zhen who underestimated his enemy."

However, in the second that followed, the brute's line of vision suddenly became unfocused. He abruptly felt as though his spear was coming to a stop. His opponent, whose death he'd thought was

certain, blurred into motion again.

This is bad! A hint of alarm entered the depths of the brute's eyes.

"Lightning attribute? Too bad, that's not enough," a cold voice whispered into the brute's ear. The next instant, another powerful punch smashed into his stomach.

Bam! This punch was even more powerful than the previous one. It battered against his stomach without the slightest warning. Previously, he had deliberately eaten Jiang Chen's punch and had been mentally prepared to activate his defenses. Moreover, the impact of his own punch had canceled out his opponent's power to a certain extent. Therefore, although that punch had hurt him to the extent that he spat out blood, he had not suffered any severe injuries. But with this punch, another heavy impact crashed into the area where he'd been injured. The formidable true origin energy coating his opponent's fist coursed past his defenses, directly striking his most vital organ, his heart. The brute was scared witless as he instinctively put up his defenses to guard against this unforeseen punch.

Wah! The brute coughed up several mouthfuls of blood. His complexion had instantly paled to a sickly white. But even so, he didn't dare let down his guard. His hands were still curled tightly around his spear. He affixed his gaze at Jiang Chen, ignoring the wounds that covered his body. Obviously, he was more afraid of his opponent's follow-up attacks than his current injuries.

When Jiang Chen saw his opponent maintain his battle stance in spite of his condition, he knew that any subsequent attacks would be unable to bypass the latter's defenses. He immediately restrained his steps and gazed meaningfully at the brute, "How did that taste?"

The brute spat viciously on the ground. "Brat, you damn cheat!"

Jiang Chen replied indifferently, "And you think your punch was

so noble? You call me a cheat but I'm just following your rhythm and using a few tricks of my own, that's all."

Previously, Jiang Chen had seen his opponent suffuse his fist with electricity and instantly predicted the latter's actions. He had only seized the opportunity to trick his opponent into thinking that he had been momentarily immobilized by the lightning attribute so that the latter would let down his guard and launch an impulsive attack. It was because of this that he had the chance to land a heavy blow when his opponent was least expecting it. After Jiang Chen had refined the Golden Cicada Bloodline, not even a hundred poisons could invade his system nor could a thousand weapons injure him. He would remain unfazed even in the face of a torrential thunderstorm.

That brute's stomach twinged with pain. He knew that that he had been too careless this time. Not only had he failed to take down his opponent, he had suffered quite a heavy injury. However, this only served to send another rush of hot blood through his veins. He bared his teeth into a grin. His gaze turned frigid as he said, "Brat, you've successfully roused my ire. Your cultivation efforts have not been a total waste. Next, I'll use all of my power to send you on a trip to the underworld!"

Every bone on the brute's body crackled and popped like hot oil in a pan. It was as if every bone and tendon in his body were simultaneously resonating with one another.

Chapter 930: Image Versus Image

Jiang Chen wasn't sure what his opponent was thinking, but he was sure that the other was going to use a trump card, considering that he had just suffered a couple of losses in a row. This brute must have beef with me considering how hostile he is. But no matter what background he has or what power he hails from, he is my opponent and enemy as long as he is standing in this arena. If he wants me dead, then I won't let him live either!

The brute waved his arms and instantly ripped through the clothes on his upper body. The muscles on his torso looked incredibly powerful and impactful, almost as if they had been smelt by copper and forged by iron.

Jiang Chen snorted derisively at the display. This was a fight between experts and not a brawl in a tavern. Taking off one's clothes and showing off one's muscles in a battle like this was pointless. However, he didn't dare let down his guard. He was sure that his opponent hadn't made such a bizarre action just to flex his muscles flauntingly.

As expected, the brute made multiple hand seals and conjured many strange runes from his palm. He then slapped them into his muscles repeatedly. When he was done, strange runes slowly surfaced on every part of his body. They looked like numerous tadpoles swimming across his body. When these runes reached their rightful places, they abruptly united to form an entire entity. A fierce lion suddenly appeared from the brute's upper torso. The lion sat with its head held high and peered disdainfully at everything before it. It looked incredibly formidable.

Jiang Chen paid attention to the brute's every move. For some reason, the scene before him felt very familiar.

"Totem! This is the power of totems," Jiang Chen immediately recalled the time he had fought against Xiang Tai at the Myriad

Grand Ceremony. One could say that his current opponent's technique was so similar to Xiang Tai's that almost no difference could be spotted. His opponent was just an enhanced version of Xiang Tai. Back when Jiang Chen had fought against Xiang Tai, the physical brawl had only lasted for a brief moment before they had switched to another way of competing. They hadn't fought each other to the bitter end. His current opponent, on the other hand, obviously had a different idea in mind.

Jiang Chen knew a little about the power of totems. It was a truly astounding power that boosted a cultivator's combat strength massively once obtained and summoned. Even scarier was a totem's ability to create images of greater power. There weren't many factions that wielded the power of totems on the Divine Abyss Continent, but those who did were normally stronger than their peers. Jiang Chen stood alert, ready, and full of anticipation. He too wanted to know just how mighty this so-called power of totems was.

Emperor Peafowl also frowned when he saw this, "The power of totems? This young man can actually summon the power of totems! He can't possibly be a wandering cultivator."

"Your Majesty, just what is his background?"

"The legacy of totems has always been quite secretive, and a lot of great sects possess hidden totem inheritances. Therefore, it is very difficult to distinguish a cultivator's background from their display of totems alone. However, I am sure that this young man is a youth of a great sect or a great power. Moreover, Pill King Zhen is definitely his target."

Cloudsoar Monarch frowned, "Should we expose him then?"

"Expose him? How will you expose him without actual evidence? Plus, this fight is a rare opportunity for Pill King Zhen. If he misses this opportunity to temper his strength, he is certain to hold a grudge against you and me," Emperor Peafowl said leisurely.

Cloudsoar Monarch looked surprised, “But Your Majesty, this brute should be at least a peak sage realm cultivator. With the power of totems on his side, he is absolutely capable of holding his own against normal emperor realm experts.”

“Just watch. Pill King Zhen has always been good at creating miracles. Perhaps this will be the battle where he becomes famous for his martial dao?” Emperor Peafowl’s smile was as calm as ever.

The rest of the spectators weren’t as collected as Emperor Peafowl, however. On the Coiling Dragon Clan side, the clan lord said worriedly, “Pill King Zhen may be in trouble this time.”

After a moment’s thought, young master Ji San finally recalled what the brute’s strange actions meant and blurted out, “Is that the power of totems?”

The clan lord nodded, “The power of totems... just who is this brute? Is he someone from Pillfire City? Are they trying to kill Pill King Zhen because they hate him to the bone for his victory over the Longevity Pill?”

Ji San muttered angrily, “Dammit, fame truly has its price!”

……

As the brute continued to call upon the power of totems, his aura swiftly grew stronger and stronger. Jiang Chen was also fixated on the brute and gathered his own strength in secret.

“Kid, you can die now that you’ve forced me to use my power!” The brute let out a sinister laugh before he flexed his towering body. The man actually grew bigger and taller again. In the next moment, the brute grabbed his spear with both hands, stepped forwards, and stabbed it at Jiang Chen’s chest with the might of an ancient demon god.

The benefits of the power of totems were obvious once executed. It literally doubled the brute’s aura and granted him immense power. The air gathered at the tip of his spear and transformed

into the pale shadow of a male lion in an instant. It pounced towards Jiang Chen with brandished claws and teeth, appearing as formidable as an ancient god or demon. It could likely tear a defenseless mountain to pieces instantly.

Jiang Chen didn't hesitate. Instead of using weapons, he deployed the Golden Light of Demons and Gods to its utmost and used the power of his blood at the same time, swiftly creating his own image. He punched out with both fists, and the image of a giant lizard howled and slammed into the male lion without any fear or show of weakness.

"What?!" The scene stunned every onlooker present. The brute's strength had at minimum doubled after he'd activated the power of totems and created an image. Everyone thought that Pill King Zhen was down on his last legs. But contrary to expectations, Pill King Zhen had actually created an image of his own! Although his image didn't contain any power of totems, it was powered by Pill King Zhen's bloodline. Not all images were totem images. The Golden Light of Demons and Gods that Jiang Chen cultivated could conjure images as well.

The surprising clash of images made the battle incredibly entertaining. There was no doubt that a melee battle was completely incomparable to a battle of images. Although the former was fairly entertaining in its own right, it wasn't nearly as pretty as a battle of images. A battle where both parties were blasting each other with ostentatious attacks made the fight incredibly exciting.

Rumble! Although the giant lizard was bigger than the male lion, it was still ultimately torn apart. Even so, the giant lizard's ramming had managed to stun the male lion a little and cause it to grow fainter and more blurry. Jiang Chen didn't have time to care about the clash of images at the moment, however. The enemy's deadly spear had come within three meters of him as the images clashed. He grabbed at the air and summoned a large cauldron

right in front of him.

The big man felt like he was stabbing a mountain when he hit the big cauldron. An astounding burst of light and a horrific sound of clashing metals rippled out from the point of contact.

“Mm?” The brute obviously didn’t expect Jiang Chen to take a defensive stance instead of fighting him head on.

Furthermore, the cauldron looked a little familiar for some reason. Suddenly, the brute recalled something and asked agitatedly, “Where did you get this cauldron from?”

Jiang Chen smiled coldly, “Are you always this chatty in arena battles?”

He had gotten this cauldron from Lu Shinan, and Lu Shinan was a cultivator who deserved worse than death for submitting to the demon race. Jiang Chen felt no remorse about robbing his possession. Before this, he already thought that this cauldron’s defensive power was quite impressive. It didn’t disappoint him after he used it to block the spear strike.

The brute abruptly turned angry. “You show off your ill-gotten goods before me? I’ll destroy you with the power of my totem!”

He was in an obvious rage as he created another three images even at the cost of expending his energy. The formidable-looking images attacked Jiang Chen from the top, middle, and bottom. It was as if the power of an apocalypse was rushing towards Jiang Chen.

“Remember not to be so arrogant the next time you reincarnate, kid!” The brute said bitterly. It was obvious that he hated Jiang Chen to the bone.

Jiang Chen realized that the three male lion images were incredibly dangerous, and they had almost cut off all of his escape routes. If he chose to avoid the attack or defend passively, he would absolutely be torn to shreds and die a horrible death.

Jiang Chen knew that he had no other choice during that split second of thought. This male lion image was not just any image. It was an image that was fused with the willpower of a totem, and it possessed the instinctive warlike behavior and bloodthirst of a real male lion.

“Come.” Suddenly, Jiang Chen urged his bloodline into resurgence once more with a solemn look on his face. He awakened all of the energy in his body and made a series of hand seals with incredible speed, preparing himself for the ultimate gamble.

“With demons and gods as the foundation and inner energy as the guide, I summon my image to shatter a myriad laws!” Jiang Chen burnt his inner energy to the max as he chanted. The power in his blood detected the true essence of martial dao in that fleeting second. It was completed in the moment that followed. Hanging above Jiang Chen’s head was an image created from his bloodline and inner energy. It rose into the air behind Jiang Chen.

“What... what is that?”

“It’s a dragon!”

“It really is a dragon! Oh heavens, what am I seeing?”

“This Pill King Zhen can create an image of a true dragon. This is too scary. Does Pill King Zhen have the power of totems too? A dragon’s totem no less?”

“Impossible, Pill King Zhen doesn’t have the aura of totems on him. His image probably comes from some other powerful ability, one that can create a true dragon image no less.”

“Amazing, this is too amazing! Pill King Zhen is literally as omnipotent as people say.”

For a time, every spectator was speechless with shock. A true dragon was an existence that lived in legends. Most importantly, Pill King Zhen’s true dragon image was incredibly realistic. They could sense a powerful aura and the accompanying willpower of a

true dragon from it.

The moment the true dragon image appeared, the three male lion images immediately let out plaintive whines, like a commoner seeing a king. Their wills were completely shattered by its appearance. Forget the spectators beneath the arena, even the great emperors inside the Veluriyam Pagoda were stunned to the core. It was obvious that the true dragon image had caused the battle to become unpredictable even to them!

Chapter 931: Inexhaustible Trump Cards

Even though nobody worshipped the true dragons in the Divine Abyss Continent, to cultivators they were still an existence akin to the gods because of the ancient legends. The dragons were the royals of old and also one of the noblest races ever, true dragons especially. They were a noble bloodline that was famous throughout the heavens.

The true dragon image charged towards the beast head on and instantly shattered the savage-looking lion image into nothing. Just how powerful was the will behind that bloodline? A low-level image was only powerful in appearance. Without the presence of will, it would possess attack power but lack sovereignty. The image that Jiang Chen had formed encompassed the powerful will of a true dragon, and thus also contained the might of a true dragon. This was why it was able to shatter the enemy image in an instant.

For a brief moment, the entire arena was enveloped in silence. Many had yet to react, as they were too busy digesting the series of events taking place before their eyes. Their minds were filled with all sorts of questions. How could there be true dragons in the Divine Abyss Continent? Pill King Zhen had obviously refined the true dragon bloodline. Otherwise, the true dragon image that he'd conjured couldn't possibly possess such a strong willpower.

"Your Majesty, Pill King Zhen..." Cloudsoar Monarch's brain had also fizzled out for a brief moment. He couldn't even manage to eke out a proper sentence.

"The will of a true dragon! This young brat actually possesses the bloodline of a true dragon! He's a true genius!" Emperor Peafowl was overjoyed. Incidentally, the reason behind the emperor's current cultivation base and status was due to him having stumbled across the fortuitous encounter of a lifetime when he was young. He had accidentally obtained the bloodline of the ancient peafowl during his youth. The peafowl was also one of the noble

beasts from the ancient era. In fact, their clan was only slightly inferior when compared to the dragon clan.

Due to the strength of that bloodline, the young Emperor Peafowl became famous for being able to master everything he learned, eventually becoming the overlord that he was at present. Because of that, he understood just how powerful bloodlines were more than anyone else. He could tell that Jiang Chen's true dragon bloodline was extremely pure. It was apparent that there were no impurities in it due to the authentic physique of the true dragon image. Countless people had descended from the dragon clan ever since ancient times, but their bloodline only became increasingly thinner with every new generation. However, there was also a few who were the direct descendants of the true dragon clan.

Emperor Peafowl was extremely shocked, but also a little glad that he had a keen eye for talent. Jiang Chen is destined to become a legend in the Divine Abyss Continent one day.

Over at an uneventful corner not far away from the arena, two elderly men disguised as wandering cultivators were in disbelief at what had just happened in the arena. They were in a bind. One was a twelfth rank inspector of the Ninesuns Sky Sect, while the other was the sect's venerated elder. They both held very high positions in the Ninesuns Sky Sect. They'd snuck into Veluriyam Capital for Pill King Zhen, disguised as wandering cultivators. Like the Eternal Celestial Capital, they were suspicious of Pill King Zhen's true identity.

However, they had a better reason than the Eternal Celestial Capital for their suspicions. They'd accidentally come across information that Pill King Zhen had once brandished his pill king badge at the border of Veluriyam Capital and stated that he was a second-rank pill king. In the Ninesuns Sky Sect, there was a second-rank pill king named Shi Zhen that was associated with Cao Jin. However, the name on Pill King Zhen's pill king badge was Zhen Shi. Obviously he'd simply reversed the order of the name!

The Eternal Celestial Capital had no idea that the Ninesuns Sky Sect once had a young pill dao genius called Shi Zhen. After all, a mere second-rank pill king wasn't likely notable. But, the Ninesuns Sky Sect knew that Shi Zhen and Cao Jin had disappeared at the same time. Moreover, all evidence pointed towards the fact that the fall of Cao Jin had something to do with Jiang Chen. If that were the case then Jiang Chen likely had something to do with Shi Zhen's disappearance as well. Thus, it was only logical to suspect Pill King Zhen after he had brandished the badge.

They were almost certain that the badge belonged to Shi Zhen. They also suspected that Pill King Zhen was the same person as Jiang Chen. After analyzing the evidence they had, they were at least eighty percent sure that Pill King Zhen was Jiang Chen himself. They had even more grounds for their suspicions than the Eternal Celestial Capital. Thus, the Ninesuns Sky Sect was paying close attention to this match. The large brute in the arena was actually one of their great disciples. His ranking was even higher than Cao Jin. Cao Jin was ranked ninth, while this man was ranked seventh.

He was Xiao Paohui, stronger than Cao Jin in every single way. Moreover, this man was very fierce and agile in battle. All his thoughts of fear and death were thrown to the wind during battle, making him incredibly aggressive. Many who had battled with Xiao Paohui couldn't adapt to his aggressiveness and were utterly crushed.

Xiao Paohui was actually quite close to Cao Jin. Because of that, he didn't even hesitate before accepting this mission. However, he wasn't just trying to avenge Cao Jin. His superiors from the clan had told him that the Ninesuns Sky Sect ardently wanted something that Jiang Chen might have obtained from a fortuitous encounter. This only gave Xiao Paohui even more motivation.

Xiao Paohui had placed great hopes on Cao Jin from the start. Thus, it was evident that Cao Jin's death had influenced him

greatly. He wasn't sure if Pill King Zhen was the same person as Jiang Chen, but if he was, then his cultivation base must not be half bad if he could manage to eliminate Cao Jin and his three-man group.

Maybe there was an unexpected reason for Cao Jin's defeat, but he had no doubt that this was an opponent that he couldn't take lightly, even if the opponent only appeared to be at the seventh level sage realm. Xiao Paohui walked onto the arena with this in mind and didn't take his opponent lightly at all. He'd wanted to crush his opponent with the Thunderous Lion Roar, but it had proved ineffective. After that, he'd switched to his specialty of close combat, hoping to overwhelm his enemy with his strength and aggressiveness, but that had also proved ineffective. These continuous failures had made him take his opponent very seriously, which was why he decided to use his ultimate trump card of all, the power of totems.

He strongly believed that after using this trump card, he would be able to kill his opponent as easily as flipping a hand. After all, the power of his totem would double his combat strength. Moreover, the totem image was capable of destroying all in its path. The power of an image was not to be compared with that of common martial methods. An image didn't just deal physical damage; it also dealt divine damage.

Moreover, common defense methods were unable to deflect the power of an image. Xiao Paohui could never have imagined that his opponent would use an even more powerful image to instantly destroy his ultimate killing technique. Even a man as confident as Xiao Paohui would feel a great sense of loss after that. The proudest achievement in his cultivation had been easily destroyed by another person with the same method. He stared at Jiang Chen with a look of defeat. "You... you understand image attacks too?"

Jiang Chen revealed a bland smile. "The power of totems. You mustn't have come from a simple background, am I right? Who

sent you? Why do you show your tail but hide your head?”

Xiao Paohui’s glare danced to and fro as he roared savagely, “I’m not convinced that your image is stronger than mine!”

The savage roar was as loud as the collapse of mountains and the cracking of earth. Xiao Paohui’s body began to emit a silver brilliance. It seemed like he was going to accumulate all of the strength in his body into one strike.

“Brat! If you don’t fall with this strike, then it shall be my demise!” Xiao Paohui was no longer treating his opponent as he would any other. He understood that he would have to go all out in order to defeat this enemy. Silver runes began to materialize, as if they were carp splashing around in the blue ocean waves. They became increasingly brilliant. Xiao Paohui put his hands together and formed a rune that was a foot wide and three feet long. It appeared within the void and seemed to bear the strong will of a mighty expert.

He opened his arms, causing the rune to turn into a ball of silver light and enter his body. Moments later, it almost seemed as if he’d been possessed by an emperor realm expert. The silver brilliance emitting from his body suddenly swelled by ten feet and shot into the clouds.

“The might of a great emperor!” Someone below the arena exclaimed.

“This is the will of a great emperor! Did an emperor possess his body?”

“Not good! Pill King Zhen is in danger!”

Jiang Chen immediately realized what was happening when he felt the frightening amount of power. It was indeed as powerful as the aura of a great emperor, but it wasn’t emitted by a genuine emperor. It was the rune that had encapsulated the might of a great emperor and temporarily manifested itself in Xiao Paohui’s

body. He suddenly felt an inexplicable sense of danger.

Jiang Chen made a decision in a split second. He grabbed the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman and activated it. The defensive power of a great emperor instantly entered his body as well. The Imperial Advent Defense Talisman had come from Ji San, indirectly given to him by the Coiling Dragon clan lord.

Jiang Chen had also used it once in the desolate wildlands. An Imperial Advent Defense Talisman could be activated twice. Since he had already used it once, it could only be used once more. Jiang Chen hadn't planned on using it easily. However, he understood that if he didn't use it now, there was a chance he would no longer get to use it again. Since the opponent had manifested the might of a great emperor, he now temporarily possessed the might and power of a great emperor. Jiang Chen now had the same. This way, the powers might cancel each other out, helping him endure the attack.

Ji San was relieved as he observed the battle play out. "It's fortunate that I gave him the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman. Otherwise, he would have eaten a big loss this time."

The Coiling Dragon Clan Lord nodded in agreement, "Ji San, you must maintain a good relationship with Pill King Zhen. He's an incredible genius that has an incredible future ahead of him. After thirty or fifty years, the entire continent will probably become Pill King Zhen's era and legacy!"

The clan lord didn't feel that it was inappropriate to describe Jiang Chen in such a way. The clan lord's words made Liuxiang, who was sitting right beside them, incredibly upset. The smug look on Ji San's face only served to make him even more jealous. Isn't it just due to luck that you were able to become friends with Pill King Zhen? Ji San! I, Liuxiang, will forever be better than you!

Unexpectedly, Ji Zhongtang seemed to be watching Pill King Zhen with a profound look in his eyes. His face was filled with

nothing but admiration.

Chapter 932: An Earth-Shattering Strike

Even though the Eternal Celestial Capital been itching for a fight before this, the series of unforeseen events that had just unfolded in the arena had made them incredibly nervous. At this very moment, Saint Holy King Mu, Saint Holy King Ke, and Holy King Bei were right outside the arena, having blended in with the crowd to observe the battle. They were trying to observe Pill King Zhen to see whether or not he was indeed Jiang Chen.

The current Pill King Zhen had displayed a completely different fighting style from what they'd heard about Jiang Chen in the rumors. Jiang Chen hadn't revealed his trump cards often in the past. Every time he was forced to reveal them, he would eliminate the enemy without leaving behind any trace of evidence. The only thing everyone knew that he possessed was the Bewitching Lotus of Ice and Fire, because it was simply too heaven defying and unique. Many had seen it with their own eyes, which was why every major sect had deeply associated the Bewitching Lotus of Ice and Fire with Jiang Chen. Other than that, they were finding it incredibly difficult to associate Jiang Chen with any other unique ability.

"Brother Mu. It seems that Pill King Zhen is a lot harder to deal with than we'd originally thought. I've become a little unsure if he really is Jiang Chen," Saint Holy King Ke had become slightly skeptical.

Saint Holy King Mu's expression darkened, "This brat might've hid it well, but my instincts tell me that there's definitely something more to him. We cannot use our common sense to make judgments when dealing with this kid. Even though this brat might have stronger battle techniques and martial methods than Jiang Chen, you must not forget that it has been almost two years since the destruction of Regal Pill Palace. Judging by how quickly that kid improves..."

Saint Holy King Ke didn't say anything else. Saint Holy King Mu had made a good point.

However, Holy King Bei, who was staring at the large brute in the arena, suddenly frowned, "My two honorable saint holy kings, are neither of you somewhat suspicious of the large brute's background?

"Suspicious? Why do you say so?"

"It's obvious that the large brute's martial methods and divine abilities are from a large sect. A disciple of his stature could never have come from a small clan or a small sect. Your subordinate is wondering if he might actually be a disciple from the Ninesuns Sky Sect?"

The two saint holy kings immediately scowled. The Ninesuns Sky Sect?

The presence of the Ninesuns Sky Sect was the last thing they wanted to hear. Even if one were to ignore the heated battles between the two that recently took place in the Myriad Domain, they'd already been at each other throats over Emperor Featherlight's inheritance for a thousand years by now. If the Ninesuns Sky Sect's disciple were to defeat Pill King Zhen today, they'd gain the upper hand. No matter how perfect or elaborate, the Eternal Celestial Capital's plans would become completely meaningless, even if Pill King Zhen truly was Jiang Chen. The Ninesuns Sky Sect was also been looking for Jiang Chen. They were planning to use Jiang Chen to unlock the secrets of Emperor Featherlight's inheritance.

"Ninesuns Sky Sect..." A cold glint appeared on Saint Holy King Mu's face as he wrapped himself in his own thoughts.

Saint Holy King Ke however, forced out a laugh instead, "Don't tell me we're supposed to pray for Jiang Chen? Pray that he'll win?"

They felt incredibly conflicted right now. On one hand, they were worried that the large brute was actually a genius from the Ninesuns Sky Sects, and that their age-old enemy would gain the upper hand after the battle. Yet somehow, they were also hoping that Pill King Zhen wouldn't be too strong. After all, the Eternal Celestial Capital had also planted a few of their own members to battle him later on. If Pill King Zhen were to defeat the large brute, it would mean that the arrangements they'd made earlier might not actually be sufficient. This was because none of the three geniuses that they'd sent out were capable of defeating the large brute in terms of absolute strength! Thus, anxiety began to envelop the two saint holy kings.

Back in the arena, the battle had reached its climax.

One side held the might and power of a great emperor, while the other held the defense of a great emperor. The two opposing sides were equally matched. It was hard to tell who would end up the victor.

One could tell that Xiao Paohui currently possessed a sharp increase in attack power. His plan was simple. He planned on crushing his opponent by simply using the might of a great emperor. He was used to defeating his opponents in close quarters. An emperor's might was incredibly frightening, even though it was actually strength that originated from a mere rune. Xiao Paohui was throwing out a flurry of attacks at a speed that had reached an entirely new level. Every single punch that he threw seemed to release a gust of wind that was as loud as the roar of a tiger. It was so mighty that the entire arena seemed to be shaking and so powerful that nobody could even approach beyond a few hundred meters from them.

"Pill King Zhen, I admit that you are worthy to be my opponent, but this will be as far as you go!" Xiao Paohui looked towards the skies and roared. Power continuously rushed around his body as his might soared. Behind him, faint ethereal silhouettes of gods

began to form into being, making him look extremely celestial.

“This is the Judgement Fist of the Celestial Emperor! You should feel honored for making me take your life with this move!” Xiao Paohui spoke dominantly. In fact, he was exuding an aura of dominance from head to toe. It was as though he was a sovereign that had descended upon the world.

“Celestial Emperor? Judgement Fist?” Jiang Chen frowned as he spoke. All of a sudden, he began to laugh coldly, “The Celestial Emperor? Are you even worthy of using such a name?” He felt a strong sense of abhorrence and disgust when he heard those two words escape his opponent’s mouth. As the Celestial Emperor’s son, Jiang Chen had never once heard his father create a move called the Judgement Fist. This move was likely named by a pretentious and lowly cultivator from the lower regions. One could easily tell that this move would be grandiose only in name.

Xiao Paohui could never have guessed that the opponent standing in front of him was actually the reborn son of the celestial emperor! This was why he was able to act as though he was the personification of the celestial emperor himself, high and mighty as though he dictated all life. “Take this!” Xiao Paohui swung his arm to deliver a punch, tearing the void. The punch felt like one was being crushed by a mountain range from a distant, ancient era, or by a fallen star from the endless night sky. It seemed unstoppable. A giant fist, at least one hundred feet tall, struck down from the void towards Jiang Chen.

“Die!” Xiao Paohui kept swinging his arms, materializing countless numbers of fists that began to merge with the giant fist formation. It was as though thousands upon thousands of experts had fused their attacks together into one move.

Moments later, the void began to tremble, and the arena began to collapse into rubble. The four pillars that supported the arena had begun to collapse one by one. This arena had been originally designed for youths, which was why it couldn’t withstand the

might of an emperor realm attack and was thus currently disintegrating.

It was evident that this was an attack at a level so destructive that it would destroy everything under the void. However, Jiang Chen, who was standing in the middle of the arena, didn't seem to be overly concerned about the attack at all. It was as though the huge fist bearing down on him was not an attack worthy of any reaction. The Imperial Advent Defense Talisman was showing its full capability.

Even though his current battle capabilities wasn't high enough to be able to retaliate, the protection he received from the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman wasn't something the enemy could easily penetrate. After all, the enemy was only borrowing power from a rune to gain a temporary boost in might and attack. But he wasn't up to the standards of an emperor realm expert in other aspects, such as the knowledge and understanding of martial dao. Thus, the powerful-looking fist formation was frightening to others, but only frivolous and weak to Jiang Chen.

Once the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman was fully activated, Jiang Chen was enveloped by an energy barrier that contained the defense power of an emperor realm expert. The giant fist formation was only able to bear down thirty feet above his head, unable to penetrate any further.

One side wielded a giant silver fist while the other side wielded a shiny golden energy barrier. The giant fist struck down violently, causing a huge dent in the golden energy barrier, but it couldn't penetrate beyond the thirty-feet mark. Xiao Paohui was dumbstruck when he saw this. This is a great emperor attack! How can he possibly withstand it?

"A great emperor realm barrier?" Xiao Paohui immediately lost all composure. This was his most powerful trump card! He had no other trump cards to unleash after this strike!

“Impossible!” Xiao Paohui roared again and again. He began to unleash a flurry of fists at a faster rate. “Shatter! Shatter! Shatter!!”

His fists kept on materializing and merging with the ethereal giant fist formation. As expected, the fist began to sink a few more feet into the barrier after his incessant frenzy of punches. However, a frenzied attack like this was also going to consume a great deal of life energy. At the end of the day, Xiao Paohui was only a half-step emperor. The more he did this, the more of a toll it took on his body. If he maintained this rate of attack, he would fall into a cultivation deviation within an hour. There was even a possibility that he would suffer a backlash from the great emperor aura as well!

Jiang Chen felt immediate relief when he saw how his opponent was reacting. He knew that the opponent had lost his calm. This was a good opportunity to retaliate. The enemy might’ve gotten a temporary great emperor level boost to his attack and might, but his defense was definitely still the same. If he could launch a surprise attack on the enemy, dealing a fatal strike was definitely possible.

Jiang Chen’s mind was set once he arrived at such a conclusion. With the protection of the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman, there was no need for Jiang Chen to worry about defense. Right now, all he needed was to find an opportunity to deal a fatal strike to the enemy. Numerous finishing moves appeared in Jiang Chen’s mind in a split second.

In the end, he ultimately decided to use the Pentecolor Divine Swords given to him by Emperor Peafowl. These were divine swords that had been branded by the emperor himself. It was time to show the world the Pentecolor Divine Swords’ edge! Jiang Chen once again called upon the power in his bloodline. The golden brilliance exuding from his body suddenly became blurry and faint. He had formed the Golden Cicada Image. Cicada’s

Disappearance!

His true self circled behind Xiao Paohui. The Pentecolor Divine Swords boasted of five techniques. The five techniques could turn into one, just as easily as one could turn into five. It could change between techniques freely. Jiang Chen slapped the sheath, causing five colored beams of light to break through the void. Encompassing the strength of the heavens and earth, he hewed the blade towards Xiao Paohui.

The strike overturned the wind and clouds, and moved the sky and earth. Five colored beams of light shone through the void, bringing along five iridescent clouds. Like trained horses, the five distinct lights flashed by, merging into one and converged upon their target.

Strike!

Chapter 933: Strike! Kill!

There was no way anyone could describe the strike with words. It was peculiar, because nobody could understand it. How did Pill King Zhen break free from his opponent's attacks and strike Xiao Paohui from behind?

Such dominance! There was so much profoundness in the sword dao of this single strike that it dumbfounded many of the famous sword dao experts that were present. This was the "Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique" that Jiang Chen had trained to use with the Pentecolor Divine Swords. This particular sword art had a very extraordinary background. The expert that had practiced this sword art back then had been even more powerful than his father, the Celestial Emperor!

Years ago, the Vastsky Divine Emperor ascended from a secular world to become a divine celestial emperor. The Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique was one of this legendary being's ultimate techniques. Jiang Chen had idolized the Vastsky Divine Emperor ever since he was a boy. His father had often mentioned that within the vastness of the cosmos, there lived the legendary divine celestial emperors of the heavenly plains.

Jiang Chen had been very intrigued by the traces left behind by the Vastsky Divine Emperor. Because this was a man that had ascended from a secular world and had cultivated both pill and martial dao. He was also immensely talented in pill dao, having skyrocketed in strength in his later years. Eventually, he would becoming a divine celestial emperor that would shock the entire cosmos.

Jiang Chen had just displayed the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique in the Divine Abyss Continent. It was not a sword technique from this plane. The sharpness of the sword edge and his talent had been displayed in just one strike. It was at this moment that things were destined to come to a close, and Xiao

Paohui destined to die.

The invincible sword light struck Xiao Paohui's enormous body. His body suddenly turned stiff, as though struck by a paralyzing glyph. His eyes were filled with disbelief. He wanted to turn around to see who had dealt him the fatal strike. As strong as he was, he unfortunately couldn't even muster up the strength to turn around.

Moments later, the sword light pierced straight through his body. Five beams of light equated to five holes in his body.

Bam! Xiao Paohui fell to his knees before his huge body slumped onto the floor. His body was so enormous that it kicked up the dust around him. Resentment remained in his eyes even in death. His eyes were wide open like a bell.

The arena was so quiet that it almost seemed like the air had solidified. It remained like this for a few breaths before the sound of applause exploded from all sides. The praise swept through the area and came in like a tide from both near and far. Jiang Chen sheathed his sword. "Who's next?" He asked, seemingly unfazed.

After such a battle, Jiang Chen had gained a battle aura. This was an aura that was vastly different from his aura from previous battles. In the past, he had been able to defeat the strong by relying on his equipment. Even though he had used the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman in the battle, his techniques were noticeably more sophisticated than before—images, sword techniques, the Golden Body of Demons and Gods, and more.

Every candidate in the first arena was silent due to fear. It was evident that all cultivators in the first arena had given up any intentions of fighting Jiang Chen after such a battle. However, the rules stated that it was mandatory for every single one of them to challenge Pill King Zhen. This was a hard rule that was set so that every single candidate would have to fight one another. But against a person of Pill King Zhen's stature, these cultivators simply

couldn’t find the courage to challenge him.

“That’s insane! Is this Pill King Zhen’s true capabilities in martial dao?”

“Unbelievable! I’ve always thought that Pill King Zhen was just a genius in pill dao. Never in my life would I have imagined that Pill King Zhen was just as capable in martial dao!”

“No wonder he could become the arena lord of the first arena. Someone even mentioned that he’d cheated during the formation selection stage. That person must be hitting himself right now!”

“Forget it. I’ve decided to forfeit against Pill King Zhen.”

“I will forfeit and admit my loss too.”

“Which idiot wouldn’t forfeit against him? I’m not about to let him torture me!” One by one, the cultivators in the first arena sighed in relief. They could finally put down the baggage in their hearts. If they were going to lose irrespectively, they might as well admit defeat. Admitting defeat against someone as powerful as Pill King Zhen wasn’t shameful in the least.

At a corner far away from the arena, the two high-ranked members of the Ninesuns Sky Sect were petrified as well. They’d risked danger, disguised themselves as wandering cultivators, and blended in with the crowd, all so they could watch Xiao Paohui crush Jiang Chen in the arena. They had all but confirmed that Pill King Zhen was truly Jiang Chen. Moreover, they were extremely confident this time. Xiao Paohui was a top-notch genius, ranked seventh among the ten great disciples. Amongst the youths in the Ninesuns Sky Sect, those who could defeat him in battle could be counted on one hand.

Jiang Chen might be heaven defying, but he was too young. And with the passage of only a few short years, how heaven defying could an origin realm speck like him possibly be?

And yet...

The result from the battle had overturned their beliefs. The two looked at each other and saw the bitterness and resentment in each other's eyes. It was evident that they both couldn't accept the result. Xiao Paohui was dead! It wouldn't have been an issue if it were some common disciple. There were an infinite number of geniuses in the Ninesuns Sky Sect. Losing one or two wouldn't make much of a difference, but the ten great disciples weren't just any common disciples! These disciples were supposed to be the future pillars of the sect!

Cao Jin's death had already caused a great deal of unrest in the sect. Adding Xiao Paohui's death to the list was truly one disaster on top of another. Their deaths weren't debilitating for the sect, but they were still a huge blow. Worse, they couldn't even collect the body under such circumstances!

Even though nobody knew where Xiao Paohui was from, the one thing people knew for sure was that he'd come for Pill King Zhen. Collecting his body right now would expose their true identities. This was Veluriyam Capital after all. They calmed themselves down after the heartbreaking result, but they still didn't dare to collect the body. They had a feeling that Emperor Peafowl had already set his sights on them. If they were to collect the body from the arena now, somebody else might have to come collect their bodies with it too.

"Let's return to the sect." The two figure heads of the Ninesuns Sky Sect looked at each other. They made this choice begrudgingly because they knew that their plans had failed yet again. However, this failure only made them even more confused. They were no longer positive that Pill King Zhen was the same person as Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen was a genius, but he was only a young brat that had just broken through to the origin realm at Precious Tree Sect those few years ago. How many years had it been? It wasn't possible for a person to improve so quickly that he could defeat a half-step

emperor within such a short period of time! Not a single person in the entire history of the Divine Abyss Continent could achieve such a feat.

Were we truly mistaken? The two figure heads of the Ninesuns Sky Sect were feeling extremely conflicted. If they were mistaken, it would be like smashing their own feet with a stone they'd picked up themselves. Moreover, there was no way for them to seek revenge on a person from Veluriyam Capital. If they were to do so, all of Veluriyam Capital might retaliate. After all, this was Veluriyam Capital's home turf and also their tournament. Sending a great disciple to deal with a genius from Veluriyam Capital was already a huge violation of the rules. The two Ninesuns Sky Sect figures quickly took their leave.

"That was astounding!" Over at the Coiling Dragon Clan, Ji San had been clenching his fists nervously. When he saw Jiang Chen's heroic and mighty display, he was overrun by excitement.

The clan lord was staring at Jiang Chen's back with an astonished look. "Genius... Genius! Veluriyam Capital has not seen a genius of such a level for the past three thousand years! It seems like His Majesty was truly farsighted!" The clanlord muttered to himself.

The three youths from the clan were surprised when they heard the words, "His Majesty".

The clan lord laughed. He knew that he'd spilled the beans. All this while, rumors had been circulating that Emperor Peafowl was going make Pill King Zhen the heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. This was a rumor that seemed to have some truth behind it, but there hadn't been an official announcement yet.

Even though the disciples of the great clans were often spreading the rumor around, nobody could say for sure that it would happen. Since the clan lord was Emperor Peafowl's trusted subordinate, it was only natural that he'd know a thing or two about it. However,

he didn't dare to wag his tongue before the emperor's official announcement. Liuxiang couldn't resist asking, "Clan Lord, is the emperor really going to make Pill King Zhen his heir? Isn't this decision a little too rash?"

The clan lord broke into an odd cackle, "How can you believe such baseless rumors?"

"Many are saying that it'll happen, but they all feel that it's unfair. After young master Fan's death, many disciples of the major clans in Emperor Peafowl's faction were planning to make themselves stand out during the Martial Pagoda battles, so that His Majesty would notice us," Liuxiang replied.

"It's not a bad thing for youths to set a goal for themselves," the clan lord responded with a chuckle.

"Liuxiang, don't tell me that you intend to compete for the position as heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain too?" Ji San asked mockingly.

"There's no harm done in participating. If one were to have no dreams, they would be no different than a mere salted fish," Liuxiang replied with a quiet snort.

"Fine. I admit that you have very bold dreams. But don't tell me you still plan on realizing that dream?" Ji San asked with a supercilious smile.

"Don't tell me that you believe Pill King Zhen can scare everyone off with just that performance?" Young master Liuxiang responded with a cold laugh. "I admit that he is strong, but nobody on the Genius and Young Lord Rankings are to be scoffed at."

Liuxiang had his own pride. It was evident that he didn't believe that he was inferior to Pill King Zhen.

"Why are you quarrelling over such matters? The stage has already been set up for you in the Martial Pagoda battles. Find out who's stronger in the arena," the clan lord said conclusively. Ji San

laughed yet again, but didn't say anything else. Liuxiang, however, was caught up in his thoughts. Nobody could tell what he was thinking about.

Jiang Chen didn't know whether to laugh or to cry when he saw what was happening. Every single candidate in arena one was now forfeiting their matches against him. His consecutive victories shot up within a short amount of time. He hadn't expected this to happen. He never thought that this difficult matchup would bring him so much fortune in the end!

Chapter 934: The Intent of Ten Thousand Blades

The first arena became the oddity of the New Star Rankings. It took only ten challengers for its lord to receive a flawless record. Regardless of whether other champions matched this achievement, they would still be marked as latecomers. This was entirely due to Jiang Chen's first arena advantage, decided during the formation test prior. Moreover, securing first place in the New Star Rankings with only ten matches was an unprecedented record in the history of the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering. Though these rankings weren't as heated as the Genius Rankings and the Ranking of Young Lords that would take place afterwards, it was still no stranger to fierce conflict over its positions. A placement concluding in a mere ten challenges had never happened before.

In addition, nobody doubted the authenticity and ability of this particular first-place finish. Perhaps not everyone had seen the fights firsthand, but too many had nonetheless. Rumors, stories, and gossip of all kinds abounded, but there was no doubt about the actual result. This was because Pill King Zhen had met an expert who was at least in the ninth level sage realm in battle, possibly even in the half-step emperor realm. Using the power of glyphs, the opponent had wielded a great emperor's might for a short time. That Pill King Zhen was able to perform a reversal in such circumstances was the most astonishing of all.

Faced with sudden danger, many people could only wait for their inevitable demise. Some geniuses, however, distinguished themselves from the rest. Put into the same kind of situation, they would instead turn the tables in an incredible manner. Pill King Zhen was a genius of such a caliber, an expert amongst experts. There was no debate, and could be none, about his first-place position on the New Star Rankings.

Even the few factions that weren't as friendly with Pill King Zhen had nothing to say on the matter. Because Jiang Chen's results had been decided in advance, he no longer needed to participate in any upcoming battles. The next two months that would have been spent in the New Star Rankings' battles were thus freed up for him. He had no intentions of letting his newly-acquired two months of interim go to waste. He returned to Taiyuan Tower in order to further cultivate and refine his strength.

He hadn't trained the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique very much yet. He needed more time to understand its intricacies. He had only managed to cut down Xiao Paohui because the latter hadn't been on his guard. As a result, he'd been able to exploit his opponent with the simple use of a decoy. But many people now knew about this technique because of the battle. Given another opponent on Xiao Paohui's same level, it was unlikely he'd be as lucky. Thus, he still had much to learn and practice with this technique.

The Thunderclap Sword Technique wasn't for delivering a sneak attack, but for killing the opponent with stateliness and majesty. The technique had been used by the Vastsky Divine Emperor of yesteryear. No matter if his opponent was at his same level or much stronger, he was able to crush his opponents in a dominant fashion once the technique was in full swing. The technique relied on both the exertion of one's aura and an overwhelming sword intent to annihilate everything in its path. The 'five' in the technique's name corresponded to the five elements, as did the 'pente' in the Pentecolor Divine Swords'. The two fit each other extremely well. Even Emperor Peafowl hadn't foreseen this fact.

Of course, the technique wasn't suitable for the average cultivator. Only a cultivator like Jiang Chen, who cultivated all five elements, could take up a sword technique like this. He had thought this problem through long ago when he was still entering the spirit realm. In martial cultivation, many geniuses focused on

one or two elements according to their personal talents. It was impossible for the vast majority of cultivators to refine all five, and they had none of the requisite knowledge and resources anyway.

Jiang Chen was different. Because he had kept the issue in mind when he was still establishing his foundation, he'd used the Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill to coalesce all five types of qi within his body and cleave open the spirit realm. As a result, energy of all the elements ran through his meridians. This special advantage allowed him the option of refining them all. Perhaps there was no visible edge in the short term, but its benefits would certainly be clear over a long period of time.

Because he was tempering all five elements at the same time, he could learn any technique he wanted. On the other hand, a cultivator with only one or two elements available to them had no way of learning a great number of superb techniques, even when presented with the option to do so. The stronger one's level was, the more pronounced this difference became. Many cultivators had no way of breaking through once they reached a certain point because of this. They hadn't established a solid enough foundation all those long years ago, at the very beginning.

Jiang Chen had delayed entering the spirit realm specifically for this purpose. It was better to be slow and steady and do everything correctly. Now, he was reaping the benefits.

"My Thunderclap Sword possesses only sound and fury. It lacks substance. I haven't understood even a little bit of the technique's intent." Jiang Chen knew himself better than anyone else. For him to reach that kind of understanding required calling upon his own energy to summon the five thunders.

Accompanied by the swords' aura movements, the five thunders carried a destructiveness potent enough to shatter worlds. If the Vastsky Divine Emperor knew about how Jiang Chen was using his trademark technique, he would likely find it both amusing and annoying.

The most basic of basics for the Thunderclap Sword technique was refining qi. All five types of qi had to be abundant and perfectly balanced. Only if one were to sufficiently gather enough qi would one be able to balance them well, thereby summoning the five thunders and form sufficient killing power in the technique.

Jiang Chen had always been attentive to refining all five qis. Assisted by his Bewitching Lotus, his water and fire qi were the most solid. His metal qi was honed by his magnetic golden mountain, and thus easily rivaled his water and fire qi. As for his wood qi, he had the wood spirit spring, fueled endlessly by the Taiyi Jade Vine.

Gong Wuji had taken the spring once upon a time, but Jiang Chen had recovered it later. Ultimately, he didn't lack much in this regard either. The only elemental treasure he was lacking was earth. To make up for it, he used a variety of spirit herbs and medicines. There was a gap between earth and his other four elements, but it wasn't enough to severely hamper him.

Was there some effect? Of course. If Jiang Chen's earth qi matched his other elements', then his practice of the Thunderclap Sword Technique would be made a fair bit easier. Because that wasn't the case, he felt some difficulty and restriction in his attempts. Still, he was in no hurry to make up for this imperfection. He knew that finding something appropriate was entirely up to luck and fate. His own desires had very little to do with it. Actually, earth element treasures were not uncommon; Jiang Chen simply hadn't encountered any. "If I can find an earth element treasure one day and exert all five of my elemental attributes with the same degree of effectiveness, then my Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique will be complete."

Though the technique wasn't entirely complete yet, the power behind the technique still allowed him a fifth or tenth of its actual strength. Opponents on the same level, or even two or three levels higher, were easily swept up by its might, even at a fraction of the

technique's true potential. Grabbing two stalks of earth element earth rank spirit herbs, Jiang Chen sighed softly. "To think that I'm eating earth spirit herbs like snacks... if anyone else knew about it, I'd be the target of widespread contempt."

Earth rank spirit herbs were appropriate for emperor realm cultivators. The average emperor rank certainly didn't have a limitless supply of earth rank spirit herbs, but Jiang Chen had the luxury of simply snacking on them.

A month passed. Countless swarms of meteors suddenly soared across Jiang Chen's consciousness, which had become as vast as a borderless universe.

"Is this the intent of ten thousand swords in flight?" Jiang Chen suddenly opened his eyes; they were glittering like stars. His face was flush with excitement. The month or so of contemplation had finally paid off. He could finally feel the sword intent! Every cell in his body carried an explosiveness that could not be contained. He desperately needed an outlet for the energy. He wanted more than anything to pour his entire body's strength into this sword intent and vent all his excess intensity.

"Vastsky Divine Emperor, I will definitely spread the name of your technique far and wide, into every corner of this Divine Abyss Continent! All masters of the sword everywhere will find embarrassment from it!" Jiang Chen had an endless confidence. The sudden revelation was like a ray of light cutting through immeasurable darkness. His dao heart cleared up quite a bit more. He'd learned a lot from the enriching experience.

Jiang Chen couldn't wait to return to the arena and find another strong opponent. He wanted to test his newfound understanding. He left his secret room and was congratulated by everyone he saw.

"Senior brother, New Star Rankings number one, congratulations!" Shen Trifire was the first. Liu Wencai, Lu Yali, and various others trailed closely behind.

In contrast, Gouyu, Xue Tong, and his other personal guards showed themselves comparably less. All they needed to do was cultivate and cultivate. Though it had only been a short while, Gouyu and company's cultivation levels increased at a drastically rapid pace. They were catching up to Shen Trifire and his peers very quickly. With enough time, it wasn't inconceivable for them to surpass the people from Regal Pill Palace.

Still, Jiang Chen had the highest expectations for Liu Wencai in terms of martial dao. He'd always taken good care of Liu Wencai. Back at Eternal Spirit Mountain, he'd given the young man Redscaled Firelizard blood essence. As expected, Liu Wencai hadn't let him down at all. He had almost caught up to Shen Trifire, a genius of a former fourth-rank sect.

The sight of Liu Wencai reminded Jiang Chen of Tang Hong from Precious Tree Sect. Jiang Chen thought favorably of both brothers, an opinion that had persisted since the beginning. The entire Precious Tree Sect had gone into seclusion, though. Who knew where they were now?

"Come with me, Wencai. I have a few questions I'd like to ask," Jiang Chen specifically called his brother to the back court. Knowing that Liu Wencai was Jiang Chen's sworn brother, the others didn't think much of it.

Chapter 935: Heritage of Dragon Blood

Liu Wencai was by nature a cautious man. In this regard, he was different from the somewhat careless Tang Hong. He had a few reservations about Jiang Chen's summons. Was he not good enough? Had he let senior brother Jiang Chen down? Jiang Chen's care of him at Eternal Spirit Mountain resulted in Liu Wencai viewing the former as a dear brother, worthy of lifelong respect and admiration. Even Forefather Ninelion, the sect head of Myriad Spirit Sect, couldn't compare at all.

The young man's hesitance was plain enough. This was when Jiang Chen wondered if he was being too serious. It wasn't intentional, of course. His stoic demeanor had been entirely in order to alleviate the doubts of others.

"Senior brother... have... have I done something poorly?" Liu Wencai rubbed his palms continuously against his clothes.

"Done... something... poorly?" Jiang Chen smiled wryly.

Liu Wencai was red in the face. "We're eating and sleeping here for free, and we haven't been able to contribute much... we're... we're like freeloaders, right?"

Jiang Chen laughed upon hearing that. He finally remembered that Liu Wencai wasn't the same as Tang Hong. His discreteness, while sometimes positive, also meant that small things would be arbitrarily magnified. Liu Wencai was a sensitive youth.

"Look at how large Taiyuan Tower is. Do you think that I can't afford a few living expenses?" Jiang Chen smiled with mild irreverence, "Really, don't sweat it. I didn't tell you to come here to get you to do anything. There's only one mission here."

"What mission?" Liu Wencai's eyes lit up. Senior brother Jiang Chen was finally giving him something to do! He felt a lot more important somehow. There was no more worry of not earning his

keep.

“Your mission is to fully devote yourself to cultivation. You must tap into all of your latent strength. Wencai, do you remember what I said to you back at Eternal Spirit Mountain? Just like a buried treasure trove, your body carries endless potential. I didn’t have the ability to dig it all up before, but we’re at Veluriyam Capital now. I can provide a relatively stable environment with my ability and position, as a convenience for you. I don’t know how long it will last, though, so you should work extra hard. Seize the day, and beware of time,” Jiang Chen was entirely serious as he said these things. He obviously wasn’t joking.

Liu Wencai was stunned. “Cultivate? Senior brother, is that really a mission? I’m taking up resources here, but I’m not doing anything... I’m worried that other people will talk about me.”

“This place belongs to me. As long as I don’t say anything, who’s going to contradict me?” Jiang Chen was impassive. “Don’t worry about what others say. Taiyuan Tower’s motto is make the best of men and material. You don’t have talent for pill dao, and you can’t manage external or internal affairs. Your biggest asset is your cultivation potential, and the thing I need for you to do most is develop it.”

Jiang Chen didn’t actually want to borrow Liu Wencai’s power. He simply felt that it was better for his own brother to be stronger. Who knew what the future held for the Divine Abyss Continent? In a chaotic world, more strength meant a better chance to survive. Liu Wencai had a lot of talent, and his gifts would be wasted elsewhere. Not even the heavens could tolerate that kind of waste.

Liu Wencai’s eyes reddened, and his nose grew stuffy. He was a sensitive person, but rarely heard such heartfelt comments. Even Forefather Ninelion had promoted and trained him solely because the old man knew about his potential. Only senior brother Jiang Chen had honestly and sincerely cared for him from beginning to end.

“Senior brother, I... I’m worried that I’ll let you down.” Liu Wencai’s throat was a little clogged. His tone carried a tinge of bawling.

Jiang Chen sighed softly, “Wencai, you’re a big softie, but sometimes you shouldn’t overthink things. You should know that I’m not the type of person to be so preoccupied about every little detail. We’re brothers, and that’s what you’ve called me, right? Who am I supposed to take care of, if not you?”

Liu Wencai’s eyes were entirely puffy now. He could do nothing but nod, his lips trembling.

Jiang Chen gave him a light pat on the shoulder. “Letting me down or not, that’s not important. You should worry more about not letting the heavens down, or your parents down, instead... they were the ones who gave you your talent and body, after all.”

His words brightened up Liu Wencai’s expression instantly. Having been an orphan since he was very young, Liu Wencai clearly felt strongly about his parents. He strongly nodded at Jiang Chen’s comforting advice. “Senior brother, I understand. I will train and train with all my might and help you in the future, when I am stronger.” A statement like that was positively unique for Liu Wencai—definitely one of the bravest he could muster.

Jiang Chen made no attempt to hide his joyful acknowledgement. This kind of Liu Wencai was the kind he wanted, brimming with confidence. He fished out a small bottle. “Wencai, this bottle contains something very important for you. I hope you can make the most of it.”

“What is it, senior brother?” Liu Wencai was somewhat confused.

“This is the blood of a true dragon,” Jiang Chen said softly. “I once gave some to the Precious Tree Sect’s Ye Chonglou. Tang Hong had some as well. But you’re the one that can make the best use of it. I can feel the potential in you. Perhaps there will be an

unexpected breakthrough once you are stimulated by the dragon blood."

"The blood of a true dragon?" Liu Wencai's entire body shook. He suddenly remembered the image of a true dragon Jiang Chen had conjured up in the arena. "You have this much, senior brother?"

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, but didn't say anything. If I told you I had a true dragon, would you be scared to death instead? He muttered internally.

He casually handed over two dragon crystals alongside the bottle of blood. "These are dragon crystals. They have a similar effect to dragon blood. I hope that with time, you can become a great emperor who hails from the Myriad Domain."

Great emperor? Liu Wencai's gaze wavered. There was great yearning in his eyes.

"There is no doubt that you have the potential. The Myriad Domain is a lower region not because it lacks geniuses, but because it has been robbed of all its resources. Maybe one day, you too can contribute to the recovery effort."

"Senior brother, to do so would be an honor and a duty."

Jiang Chen nodded, "You should either refine these or carefully store them away. Remember, never reveal them to anyone."

Not everyone had the qualifications to use dragon blood. Jiang Chen had a modest amount of the material, and he wasn't going to just hand it out like candy. That would only do more harm than help. Only those who were compatible with the blood and could make the most of it were deserving of being given dragon blood. Liu Wencai was definitely the best candidate for it.

Holding the bottle and crystals in hand, his fingers trembled a little. He was trembling with anticipation. Either of these two things could be sold in an auction house for an absurd price. They

would have been impossible to find in the Myriad Domain, end of statement. Liu Wencai hadn't heard of any treasures as valuable as dragon blood during the length of his stay in Veluriyam Capital either. He was really quite curious—had senior brother Jiang slain a dragon once? A question like that was a bit too sensational. The thought passed by like a flash in Liu Wencai's heart, but he didn't dare actually ask.

Watching Liu Wencai's figure gradually disappear, Jiang Chen exhaled with every emotion. "If Wencai really makes full use of the dragon blood, then becoming a great emperor is no empty promise. I just hope he still has enough time to grow."

Given his current position in Veluriyam Capital, Jiang Chen could absolutely feed and clothe Liu Wencai and company for an indefinite amount of time. The problem was that he was unsure when the demons of the wildlands would finally invade. Once the demonic invasion was fully underway, the entire human domain would descend into chaos. Though Veluriyam Capital was very strong, it would nevertheless be impossible for it to remain unscathed.

No cultivator could remain removed in midst of such an invasion, even the ones that hid themselves in the wilderness. Everyone would be caught up in it, regardless of whether they wanted to or not—much like an avalanche sweeping everything it passed along for the ride. Jiang Chen could only hope that the invasion would begin later rather than sooner. The people close to him needed some room for growth.

Ten, twenty years? Jiang Chen was more hopeful for thirty or fifty. After that many years, even the weakest amongst his friends; such as Xue Tong, Guo Jin, and the Qiao brothers; would be able to hold their own. They had low starting points, but the resources they possessed now matched those available to a first-rank sect's disciples. They didn't lack the potential, but potential without the proper catalyst was useless. With both the resources and the

tutelage in place, everyone grew at a rapid pace. Those who came later were seemingly poised to surpass the average geniuses from Regal Pill Palace. Even Shen Trifire, previously amongst the top ten at Regal Pill Palace, no longer had a commanding lead over the newcomers.

After a month or so of battles, the competition for New Star Rankings was finally over. The ten-thousand-man New Star Rankings were finally ordered. Pill King Zhen was at the top of the chart, a placement that nobody had any doubts about. Sunyu Xiaosheng followed closely after, taking second place. There was a series of names that came afterwards, all of whom had been highly ranked during the formation test. Conversely, there was another batch of high-ranking names that had only shown an average performance during the formation test. Evidently, these people in particular had clearly hidden their strength during the test. Jiang Chen didn’t care much about this, however

Most of the people on the New Star Rankings would have to stop here. The next round of competition meant that these ten thousand cultivators, plus the early-qualifying noble scions, were competing for only two hundred slots.

The Genius Rankings. Thirty-six of those slots were reserved for those directly tied to the great emperors. Thus, the two-hundred-man Genius Rankings was in actuality only a hundred sixty or so. Ten thousand plus people, vying for a hundred sixty placements... it was quite the cruel squeeze.

Chapter 936: The Genius Rankings Battles

“You sure are free, brother. You disappeared immediately after you finished the New Star Rankings battles. Have you forgotten your brother here?” said Ji San in a half joking, half begrudging way while throwing a fist at Jiang Chen’s shoulder.

Jiang Chen knew that Ji San wasn’t actually angry because he was smiling, despite his tone. He immediately returned the smile, “What if I tell you that I’m studying the Pinecrane Pill right now?”

Ji San froze before laughing foolishly, “Good, that’s very good. You truly are the model of youngsters and the aspiration of all in the world of pill dao! I am truly impressed by how hardworking you are, even though you’re so talented already. You chose the perfect time to cultivate behind closed doors! Absolutely perfect.”

Jiang Chen laughed, “I lied, I wasn’t researching the Pinecrane Pill. I spent the last month preparing for the Genius Rankings battles.”

Ji San’s smile immediately froze. A wry look appeared on his face. “Come on brother, don’t play with me like this. I know you must have figured out the ins and outs of the Pinecrane Pill already, right?”

Jiang Chen knew that the Pinecrane Pill was a sensitive topic for Ji San, so he immediately straightened up his act and answered seriously, “Don’t worry, you will have the Pinecrane Pill.”

Ji San immediately smiled with delight, “Really?”

“Would I lie to you?”

Ji San immediately hugged Jiang Chen and laughed loudly, “Good, good. You truly are a good brother!”

His particularly effeminate action caused Jiang Chen to break out in cold sweat, “Let go of me, let go of me! If you don’t then the Pinecrane Pill never existed, you hear?” When he felt the strange

gazes glancing at him from all directions, all he wanted was to destroy this brother of his with his glare ten times over.

Ji San didn't look ashamed in the least as he chuckled, "What are you people looking at? We're best brothers for as long as we live! You jealous?"

Jiang Chen had nothing to say about this guy. It was at this moment that someone pushed his way through the crowd. It was Wei Jie of House Wei. When Ji San saw Wei Jie, he assessed the other with a bit of astonishment, "Did you achieve a breakthrough, Wei Jie?"

Wei Jie had always acted a bit reserved in front of Ji San. He was after all, House Wei's superior. "Yes, young master Ji San. With luck, I managed to ascend to the ninth level sage realm," Wei Jie was very modest and cautious before Ji San.

Ji San chuckled, "That's great. Congratulations! I doubt there's anyone else in House Wei who will question your abilities to succeed the family in the future."

Wei Jie felt very pleased to hear this praise and nodded, "The elders of House Wei are indeed quite pleased to hear of my breakthrough." Having said this, Wei Jie bowed respectfully towards Jiang Chen, "It's all thanks to you, Pill King Zhen."

Jiang Chen waved his hand, "Thank Ji Ole Third instead. That pill was gifted to me by the Coiling Dragon clan lord."

Ji San was surprised, "You mean that Sage Smile Pill?"

Wei Jie finally understood what they meant, and he hastily saluted Ji San, "Please receive my thanks, young master. And please give my thanks to the clan lord."

Ji San was very generous, "Don't thank me, the clan lord's the one who gave Pill King Zhen that pill as a greeting gift, so he can do whatever he wants with it. Pill King Zhen has already settled the debt between you and me, so this is between you and Pill King

Zhen. I can't accept your thanks for free."

Wei Jie still said respectfully, "I'm still going to thank you, young master."

Ji San waved his hand, "You and your rules, Wei Jie. Fine, you can thank me if you want. Now that you're a ninth level sage realm expert, your chances of entering the Genius Rankings just became a lot higher."

"I'll do my utmost for this battle. I hope I'll be able to come away with something."

"It's not a hope, but a must. House Wei has been neglected for several years, and even with Pill King Zhen's backing, your family will be lucky to maintain their position. At your current state, advancement is almost impossible. However, if you can enter the Genius Rankings, House Wei will win back the status they've lost. Only then will your family have a bit of hope in advancing with Pill King Zhen's help."

House Wei was a ninth rank aristocratic family; advancing further would make them a great clan. Although a great clan was split into different ranks as well, a great clan was on another level compared to a ninth rank aristocratic family. After all, even the worst great clan was still a great clan.

A trace of anticipation appeared in Wei Jie's eyes when he heard Ji San's encouragement. He nodded resolutely, "I won't disappoint your expectations, young master, Pill King Zhen."

The competition of the Genius Rankings battle was no doubt going to be fierce. Every aristocratic family and great clan disciple was finally joining the array. Although the great emperor geniuses hadn't joined the battle yet, the injection of the aristocratic family members, great clan disciples, and wandering cultivators who had fought their way through from previous battles was undoubtedly going to make the competition that much fiercer. There were ten thousand already from the New Star Rankings, adding the noble

youths to that number made for a total of 12,800 people.

This number was the result of careful calculation.

Two hundred finalists were going to be decided through six rounds of combat and enter the Genius Rankings. So although the Genius Rankings battles were not as complicated as the previous battles, they were more desperate. The format would be the most brutal elimination process. Moreover, there were no such thing as seeding in this elimination tournament. Anyone could be eliminated in a single round no matter what level they were at. Therefore, luck was a huge element in this type of tournament.

Two of the greatest geniuses of the tournament might have the misfortune to run into each other early on. In that case, the top two hundred geniuses who were to enter the Genius Rankings might not necessarily be the strongest possible geniuses. Therefore, there were some mechanisms installed to avoid too many chance tragedies happening during the elimination contest.

After the six elimination rounds were over, the top thirty contestants who were defeated in combat would be given a shot at coming back. This shot at a comeback was the right to challenge any one of the top two hundred contestants. If they succeeded, they would replace their opponents and join the Genius Rankings instead.

This comeback rule was a chance to rectify things for those geniuses who had the misfortune of running into the most powerful enemies early on. Despite failing to become part of the top two hundred contestants the first time, they could still challenge another opponent and potentially win. This rule was very humane. After all, the top thirty who were unfortunately eliminated might be powerful experts. They might not necessarily be unqualified to enter the Genius Rankings. This comeback rule also flushed out the weak cultivators who were lucky enough to make it to the top two hundred, per survival of the fittest. Even Jiang Chen was very impressed by this rule.

“Everyone, I am sure that you are clear about the rules already. There will be six rounds, and the opponents you meet will be completely random. Once the battles are complete, you will be fighting again to decide your ranking. Only those who have are amongst the top thirty are completely safe and cannot be challenged by the comeback contestants. Everyone else is free game. Therefore, I hope that you will pay your full attention during these rounds and especially during the subsequent rankings battles. Otherwise, your position may be in danger even if you make it to the top 200 the first go around. Also, unlike the comeback contestants, you won’t get a chance at coming back in.”

The rules were harsh, but it was also fair to everyone. No one knew who would enter the Genius Rankings first and who would be eliminated first.

Ji San chuckled and swept a fearless glance at the crowd. He was the successor of the Coiling Dragon Clan, and out of every genius in Veluriyam Capital, the great emperors’ geniuses were the only ones he was afraid of. It was true that there were some great clan disciples amongst these people, and they shared almost the same talent as him, but Ji San didn’t think that those people were capable of disqualifying him at all. In the end, it all came down to how one performed in actual combat. The great clan disciples were good, but Ji San knew very well that they weren’t so good that they could kick him out of the top thirty. Therefore, he wasn’t worried about getting into the Genius Rankings at all. His target was the Ranking of Young Lords. Although he knew that that ranking would be very difficult, he was willing to give it a try. Even if he were to fail in the end, he would at least figure out how far he was away from those great emperor geniuses!

“Brother, I’m warning you first. If you run into me during the Genius Rankings, I’m not going to go easy on you,” Ji San chuckled.

Jiang Chen laughed involuntarily, “You think you can disqualify

me?”

Ji San puffed up his chest, “It doesn’t matter. I’m not going to go easy on you. If you can beat me, then I will admit that you’re better.”

“You mean that you don’t think I’m better yet?” Jiang Chen chuckled.

“Oh, I’m like 70 or 80% there. At first I did think of you as my better, but then my clan lord secretly told me that I should surrender immediately if I see you. So I’m not giving up just yet. Hahaha!” Ji San couldn’t help but laugh when he said this, but a look of dejection quickly overwhelmed him, “The clan lord used to think highly of me, but this time he’s discarded his own and taken your side! This is so unfair.”

Jiang Chen couldn’t help but laugh at Ji San’s whimsical appearance. When he cast a glance at Wei Jie beside them, he noticed that Wei Jie was looking a little nervous. He immediately consoled Wei Jie, “Be more confident. You’re a ninth level sage realm expert, aren’t you? There is absolutely hope for you to make it into the top 200.”

Wei Jie nodded. He knew that the Genius Rankings battles were no pressure to neither Jiang Chen nor Ji San. However, he would have to put in 200% effort to have even a sliver of hope at winning a spot.

“Alright, we will start drawing lots now. First round contestants, once your names have been drawn, an arena will be generated for you. Please remember both your arena numbers and your opponents.”

12,800 people would have to go through six rounds of battles before the top 200 ranking could be decided. Therefore, the battle to enter the top 200 wasn’t exactly easy. It was highly unlikely for someone to be so lucky that they would meet no powerful opponents six times in a row. This also meant that the contestants

who survived to the end were more or less the real deal. Sometimes, there were some insanely lucky people who made it to the end without much difficulty. However, the comeback contestants would definitely challenge them and take them out of the running.

Chapter 937: Sword Dao Genius

It was likely that before Jiang Chen had fought Xiao Paohui, many arrogant disciples among the great clans were more than willing to be matched up against Pill King Zhen in the Genius Ranking battles. Since Pill King Zhen was exceptionally talented in pill dao, they'd assumed that his talents in martial dao would only be mediocre at best. His sage realm cultivation level also seemed unspectacular on the surface. However, they no longer thought the same after watching his battle with Xiao Paohui. On the contrary, those disciples were now praying that they wouldn't have to cross paths with Pill King Zhen, as they all felt inferior to the large brute. Jiang Chen hadn't been thinking all that much about such matters. The identities of his opponents didn't matter to him.

"Wandering cultivator Ye Tianzuo against Pill King Zhen!" A wandering cultivator was selected as Jiang Chen's opponent in the first round. This made the disciples of the great clans sigh with relief. At least they didn't have to fight someone as insane as Pill King Zhen in the first round.

Ye Tianzuo had a thin physique and spirited eyes that made him look quite intelligent. However, helplessness was written all over his face at the moment. "Pill King Zhen, you may be strong, but this is a martial dao competition. I understand that I am no match for you, but I will still have to give my all. Please forgive me for the offense." He gave Jiang Chen a respectful bow. Even though he was only a wandering cultivator, it was evident that he was still extremely respectful of the foremost expert of pill dao in Veluriyam Capital.

Jiang Chen's heart didn't waver and he returned the bow. They were rivals in the arena. His opponent's words and respect towards him didn't matter. Those were things that only mattered outside of the arena. As long as they were in same arena, both of them would only have one goal—defeat the enemy. Even though his

opponent was only at the seventh level sage realm, Jiang Chen still didn't underestimate him. Being able to fight his way into the New Star Rankings was already a testament of his opponent's abilities.

"After you." Jiang Chen cupped his hands. He was now considered a celebrity in Veluriyam Capital. When fighting a wandering cultivator, it was only natural that he would show some graciousness by letting his opponent make the first move.

Ye Tianzuo smiled calmly, "Pill King Zhen, for years I've been wandering the world in my attempt to comprehend sword dao. I have a sword technique called the Four Seasons Sword. I hope that Pill King Zhen can point out my shortcomings. This sword only has four moves. If I am unable to win after four moves, I will admit defeat and continue to perfect my sword techniques."

Jiang Chen looked at his opponent for a brief moment. This man had unwavering eyes. It seemed like he was being sincere. His eyes reminded Jiang Chen of Feng Pao. During the Myriad Grand Ceremony, Jiang Chen had given Feng Pao some pointers in his sword techniques. Later on, he'd saved Feng Pao's life in the Great Scarlet Capital as well. At that time, Feng Pao and Liu Wencai were being auctioned off as slaves. It was Jiang Chen who'd saved them from their predicament. He wondered where Feng Pao was now.

Feng Pao was also a sword dao maniac. He had dedicated his entire life to the dao of sword and was willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of this pursuit. People like him, even though they weren't powerful figures now, had limitless potential as long as they didn't lose sight of their goals. Jiang Chen had always been quite respectful of swordsmen dedicated to the sword dao.

"Four Seasons Sword," Jiang Chen nodded. "Make your move."

A hint of eagerness appeared in Ye Tianzuo's eyes and he cupped his fist, "Then I'll begin." He unsheathed his green, three-foot long sword. His technique didn't contain any flashy or superfluous moves. With his sword in hand, he suddenly began to exude an

aura of extreme sharpness. The ordinary-looking sword almost seemed like it had roared to life. Its aura was astounding and full of vigor. It emitted an unconcealed, keen aura.

“First move of the Four Seasons Sword, Suppleness of Spring!”

The sword became increasingly brilliant, flickering endlessly like the fine rain during a shower in the spring. Like vines from a willow tree, it instantly enveloped the arena within a realm of the intent of spring.

Overnight rain in the spring. This was his sword intent. A formidable sword intent didn’t always have to encompass extreme sharpness or monstrous killing intent. The realm intent decided the strength of the sword. It was evident that the Suppleness of Spring was a formidable example because it enveloped the surrounding area. Only a truly formidable sword technique was capable of creating such realms.

Common sword techniques were simple and violent, as their only purpose was to kill. They weren’t capable of creating a realm of sword intent. Such techniques were only suitable for killing third-rate opponents. Only through sword intent could one gain realm intent, and thereafter attain absolute control of the battlefield. That was a sword intent that all formidable foes would then fear.

Ye Tianzuo had truly achieved great heights in sword intent! A glimmer of admiration appeared in Jiang Chen’s eyes. He could tell that his foe had reached this level all on his own. A cultivator that could attain his own sword intent and create a personal sword technique was definitely no ordinary swordsman.

Jiang Chen had always cultivated techniques that had been created by others. He’d never created a martial technique on his own. However, his foe was actually using a sword technique that he’d created himself. Jiang Chen was suddenly overrun with feelings of admiration. This was definitely a foe worthy of his respect. Ye Tianzuo was a much more accomplished swordsman

than Feng Pao. Feng Pao was dedicated to sword dao too, but he was only immersed with the sword. Ye Zuotian however, was already immersed with sword intent. He'd already begun to detach himself from the apprehension of common swordsmen and started to create his own martial dao by immersing himself in sword techniques and sword intent. He'd begun to form his own comprehension and his own thoughts.

Once people like him attained a grand mastery of their own martial dao, they would establish their own sect or their own clan and thereafter become martial dao grandmasters. Reaching the peak in martial dao was easy;establishing a clan or a sect was difficult. Those who created their own martial techniques were definitely capable of becoming grandmasters in their later years.

Even though Ye Tianzuo was still a young fledgling, Jiang Chen could sense his immense talent in sword dao. Jiang Chen had suddenly become highly interested in him. His sword intent fluttered like a gentle spring rain, leaving no openings in its wake. It was also like the vines on a willow tree, impossibly complex and entangled. The most formidable part of this sword intent was its persistent and chaotic nature. It seemed gentle and non-threatening on the surface, but that was a only a ruse. People would lose their way, never knowing when the lethal strike was going to fall upon them. Jiang Chen shut his eyes and immersed himself in the sword intent. It was as though he'd forgotten about the threat imposed by the foe's technique.

The audience was taken aback when they saw what Jiang Chen had done.

"What is going on? Why did Pill King Zhen close his eyes? Was there some kind of demonic power in the sword technique that could influence a person's mind?"

"Are you kidding me? What's he doing?"

"The young lord is..." Gouyu was frowning as well.

“Everyone, stop worrying in the stead of others. I’m sure senior brother is trying to come up with a counterplan. Didn’t senior brother win the previous round despite facing an incredibly strong foe?” Shen Trifire suddenly said.

Indeed, Xiao Paohui was definitely stronger than this swordsman. Everyone stopped fretting upon realizing this. However, none of them could let their guards down. After all, accidents could happen during a clash of martial dao. It was possible for a certain technique to be susceptible to another. One’s strength wasn’t just dependent on one’s mastery over martial dao.

Even though Ye Tianzuo was in a state of hyperfocus as his sword intent raged, he was still taken aback when he saw Jiang Chen shut his eyes. However, a formidable swordsman would never prematurely end their sword intent because of the actions of others. In fact, his sword intent only became even more complex after that.

Jiang Chen suddenly smiled. He shot a golden ray from his eye into the fluttering rain. That was the Evil Golden Eye. The golden ray instantly sawed through the lethal strike within the fluttering rain. It then struck the sword at the blade.

Ping!

Ye Tianzuo felt his wrist turn numb. The sword in his hand suddenly felt like it had become a thousand pounds heavier. A powerful force was weighing it down. His sword intent quickly crumbled.

Jiang Chen withdrew his Evil Golden Eye once the sword intent had dissipated. He smiled and gave Ye Tianzuo a nod, “Good sword technique. Continue!”

Ye Tianzuo felt chills down his spine. His opponent had defeated his fluttering sword intent without moving, taking only the time to open and close his eyes. He knew that Pill King Zhen was formidable, but after experiencing the latter’s prowess for himself,

he realized that there was actually no limit to the pill king's strength. And yet, he didn't feel depressed. In fact, his failure only seemed to motivate him even further. "Pill King Zhen, you should be wary of summer's savagery!"

The Four Seasons Sword contained the laws of the four seasons. Spring was gentle whereas summer possessed a ferocity. His sword intent changed forms abruptly. Now, it felt like the arena was being scorched by the heat of ten blazing suns. The temperature began to rise significantly. Ye Tianzuo's sword had also become even more glaring. All of a sudden, the surrounding void felt like it had gone up in flames. The floor became searing hot while the four surrounding pillars in the arena seemed like they were going to spontaneously combust at any moment and collapse.

Jiang Chen was actually quite surprised. He began to think even more highly of Ye Zuotian. It would take incredible talent to be able to drastically switch sword intent within such a short span of time. Common swordsmen typically didn't have multiple drastically different sword intents because they had inherited their sword techniques. However, Ye Zuotian was able to switch between drastically different ones at a whim! Even though the switching method was a little rigid, it wasn't his fault.

The fault actually fell on the Evil Golden Eye that Jiang Chen had used to defeat Suppleness Of Spring. He'd destroyed the sword intent, yet his foe was still able to link the two in an adept manner and switch to a drastically different one. Ye Zuotian's attainments towards sword dao was actually quite startling. Even the seven great emperors were piqued by what was going on in this particular arena. They were paying attention to Pill King Zhen, but soon realized that Pill King Zhen's opponent was actually incredibly talented as well! The seven emperors all agreed that it was a waste to let such a find talent wander about in the outside world. The sword intent of summer was tyrannical, sharp, and scorching. It looked as if it was going to scorch the entire world

with extreme savagery.

Endless scorching fires began to gush out from all sides, as though countless pill furnaces of the heavens had been toppled. Immediately following, a violent burst of flames that contained an inexplicably powerful sword aura shot towards Jiang Chen. Jiang Chen couldn’t help but admit that his opponent’s control was quite astonishing.

Chapter 938: Enemies, Like Lovers, Are Designed to Meet

Ultimately, Jiang Chen considered an attack at this level to be slightly lacking. The strike had sufficient theory and intent behind it, but it also displayed insufficient maturity and discipline on the part of the swordsman. After all, his enemy was only a sky sage realm cultivator, in the seventh level sage realm to be precise. From this imperfection, Jiang Chen could perceive that his opponent was indeed a genius in the art of the sword, but had rather common prospects in other areas. The potency of the sword intent failed to hide the weakness in his level of cultivation.

Jiang Chen being in the seventh level sage realm was comparable to someone who was in the half-step emperor realm, and he was able to hold his own against such people in battle. Yie Tianzuo's seventh level sage realm, on the other hand, was unabashedly ordinary. With the assistance of his sword intent, he could perhaps defeat eighth or ninth level opponents. But when faced with a half-step emperor realm opponent, he would be at a disadvantage.

Surrounded by frenzied sword intent, Jiang Chen produced a large cauldron. It was the one he'd obtained from Lu Shinan, superb in its defensiveness. With great force, all of the attacks were sucked directly in.

Clang!

In the next moment, Jiang Chen's finger tapped the blade of Ye Tianzuo's sword. It hummed with sorrow, and the sword intent upon it faded away once more. Ye Tianzuo's eyes shone with surprise. Pill King Zhen's mercy was evident. In fact, the pill king had pretty much only played along with him until now. There had been only an admiration of his sword techniques without an actual follow-up counterattack. Given Pill King Zhen's powerful offense, it was unlikely that Ye Tianzuo would even be able to bring a

fraction of his sword techniques to bear when put on the defense. The swordsman hesitated a little. He had never hesitated on matters relating to sword dao, but the present situation gave him sufficient reason for pause. At this point, carrying on his attack would be akin to not knowing chalk from cheese.

Jiang Chen smiled serenely. “Daoist Ye, feel free to continue. Your sword intent is remarkable, masterful even. I would like to see as much as you can show.”

Ye Tianzuo blinked before flashing a wry grin. “Pill King Zhen, my sword intent seems to have no effect on you at all. It seems that my cultivation is still insufficient. I am a long, long way from being a real genius.”

Jiang Chen shook his head. “Not at all,” he answered seriously. “It may look easy for me, but it truly wasn’t when I faced the first two waves of your sword intent. What I showed and what I felt were very different.”

“Truly?” Ye Tianzuo was very pleased.

Jiang Chen didn’t want to crush a sword dao genius like him. “Exactly so. I think the intent in your next two techniques will be even more powerful.”

Ye Tianzuo was greatly cheered up. “I’m not so sure that the next two techniques will be more powerful, but they will definitely carry different intents. If that’s what you think, Pill King Zhen, then I will give this showing my all. No matter if I win or lose, it’s a big help for me to trade blows with a top-rank genius such as yourself.”

He gathered up sword intent once more as he spoke. In the next instant, the atmosphere around the arena changed once more. The killing intent was real and tangible this time.

“Autumnal Slaying Sword!”

When the garden blooms, I am not there; when I come, all

flowers perish.

Autumn was the season of cessation. When time rolled from summer into fall, both leaf and petal alike met their endings. A chilly season gave character to a chilling sword intent. At the urging of the swordsman, another aura descended upon the surroundings. Every flower was wilting, every leaf shedding and falling, every life descending into eternal slumber…

Life was being cut out of each and every living thing. The Autumnal Slaying Sword would kill all. If the two previous sword intents had their own twists on the act of causing death (one had carried a softness, and the other a fierceness), then this sword-strike embodied only one essence instead.

Slaughter, as simple and brutal as death itself. Every streak of sword energy, every little detail and movement served to accomplish the conveyance of that concept. The sheer intensity of the killing intent caused palpitations in Jiang Chen's heart. He had seen many sword techniques before, including those which had names that included 'killing', 'slaying', or 'slaughtering'. But they had been far too complicated, contrived, and luxurious. They overly pursued beauty and elegance.

Ye Tianzuo's sword technique was none of these things. It had only one thing it sought—for it be simple enough for one to forget that this was a technique at all. A sword technique like this was truly terrifying. A killing sword that had no bells or whistles attached, no devotion to useless things in its aura. A true killing sword technique needed only one word: kill!

From the destruction of the flesh and heart to the total annihilation of body and soul, along with one's opponent's martial will—all of these things were utterly destroyed. Ye Tianzuo had represented the embodiment of a killing strike's essence. Even Jiang Chen didn't dare take the attack too lightly. He pushed his golden body to its limits. Hands outstretched, he deployed a powerful magnetic force field over the entire arena, pushing out

every other influence with it.

Clang, clang, clang... The incessant crashes were discordant to the ear. Everyone present felt discomfort upon hearing the noise. Under the disarrayed force field, Ye Tianzuo's sword intent missed entirely, scattering everywhere like a headless fly.

"A powerful technique!" Jiang Chen praised. In order to evade the attack, he had been forced to exert his magnetic aura to alter the arena's force field outright. Essentially, it was a sign that even he hadn't been able to find an appropriate solution in that split second.

Out of the Four Seasons Swords, this Autumnal Slaying Sword was the most powerful. Alas, even it had failed to penetrate the opponent's defenses. Ye Tianzuo sheathed his sword, coming to a still before saluting Jiang Chen respectfully, "Pill King Zhen, you're truly extraordinary. You have my utmost respect. I do not yet fully understand the profound truth in my last strike. For me to use it would be fooling around in front of a true expert. I concede the fight."

Jiang Chen was startled. "Do I not have the fortune of experiencing your final technique?"

"I do not have the courage to show it without first perfecting it." Ye Tianzuo sighed. "If one day I manage to accomplish that feat, and complete all four techniques, I hope to challenge you at that time once more."

Jiang Chen nodded, a little despondent. "You are sure to become a master one day with your talent. How come you're still a wandering cultivator?"

Ye Tianzuo smiled placidly. "There've been a number of sects willing to take me, but I am a man chasing after my own freedom. How can I wield an unfettered blade if I myself am fettered by a sect's regulations? I know that they'd be able to give me many resources as well as serve as a powerful backer, but I don't want

either of those things. My sword dao must stem from a pure and sincere heart if I am to reach its pinnacle."

The words conjured up a strong feeling of admiration in Jiang Chen. "You're a true swordsman in every sense of the word." He nodded. "I hope that in thirty or fifty years, your name will spread across this entire continent."

"You can count on it." Ye Tianzuo's laughter rang out with sovereign leisure. "Then, until we meet again."

"You're going just like this? Are you giving up on the opportunity to get back into the competition later?" Jiang Chen smiled. "If I make it into the top thirty, you'll have another chance." One of the rules had the clause was that anyone defeated by a genius in the top thirty could enter the competition for another round. Given Jiang Chen's ability, getting into the top thirty wasn't much of a problem.

Ye Tianzuo laughed again. "I came here only to prove my sword, not for a place in the rankings. I've received all I'd hoped for and more from you already. The Genius Rankings? That doesn't mean anything to me. There's no point competing further."

A real swordsman was independent and unrestrained, either by fame or anything else. Jiang Chen remained silent after that, only nodding thoughtfully in acknowledgement. To say anything further would be an insult. He understood both what the other man sought and his mindset. This Ye Tianzuo was undoubtedly a genius, one that was certainly much more powerful than Feng Pao. The latter was obsessed with the sword, but didn't possess a great deal of individuality. He had easily accepted Jiang Chen's teachings back then.

But Jiang Chen surmised that even if he were to teach Ye Tianzuo, the latter would likely be unreceptive of his guidance. This man was only loyal to his own understanding of sword dao. More importantly, he didn't know what he could teach the other,

even after some consideration. Ye Tianzuo's sword had its own dao already. Any advice from him would be equivalent to holding a candle to the sun. Aside from some pointless mucking about, it would accomplish little.

Jiang Chen had to admit, though, that he was a particularly interesting opponent. If he had reached Cao Jin's level of cultivation and was a first-rank sect's important disciple, then Jiang Chen would have had much more difficulty defeating him. Unquestionably, the fight would have been harder than Xiao Paohui's.

Ye Tianzuo's departure prompted a following of countless figures. Clearly, they were various adherents of the seven emperors who wanted to recruit him. Jiang Chen didn't put much stock in the likeliness of their success though. Ye Tianzuo had no intention of relying on any faction. He pursued only his own dao. Even the seven great emperors had no way of influencing a sword dao genius like Ye Tianzuo. He would be one of the primary choices for prospective true disciple candidates for any faction otherwise, worthy of being counted amongst the top-ranked geniuses. Now that Jiang Chen thought about it, even Cao Jin was likely inferior to Ye Tianzuo. Although he'd only won the first round, his opponent had given Jiang Chen far more enjoyment than winning ten rounds in a row would.

Unlike Jiang Chen's battle, the first rounds of the Genius Rankings taking place elsewhere were unexciting. No strange outcomes or dark horses had arisen. For the most part, the stronger contestants rose through the ranks, while the wandering cultivators were eliminated. The wandering cultivators had weaknesses in both tutelage and equipment. A competition like this brought both flaws into prominence.

After the first round's trial by fire, few wandering cultivators remained. However, the wandering cultivator geniuses that had obtained highly ranked spots in the New Star Rankings were

largely still in the competition. The entire first round took three days to fully come to a close.

The single elimination procedure meant that only 6,400 were left, exactly fifty percent of the 12,800 initial contestants. There was no pause in the proceedings. The conclusion of the first round heralded the beginning of the second round.

This time, Jiang Chen's opponent was a noble scion, one that he knew quite well, in fact. It was Murong Qiu. Jiang Chen was amused by this turn of events. Enemies, like lovers, were destined to meet. Jiang Chen had first encountered the young nobleman when he was assisting Long Xiaoxuan in his breakthrough. Entranced with Huang'er at the time, Murong Qiu had received a harsh lesson from Jiang Chen. Neither party had pursued the matter to an extreme at the time. However, this reunion on the sands was a fresh opportunity to settle an old score!

Chapter 939: A Clean, PreEmptive Strike

Murong Qiu clearly hadn't expected to encounter Jiang Chen in such a situation. With so many candidates available, it was surely misfortune that drew them together upon the same stage once more. Jiang Chen was none too pleased either, but there was evidently deeper hatred emanating from Murong Qiu. Murong Qiu had eyed Jiang Chen with hostility the moment he got on the stage. His gaze was filled with a murderous intent.

"Oh, who's this? Young lord Murong, hmm?" Jiang Chen said mockingly. "You didn't get cleared out alongside the rebellious Majestic Clan, eh? What a surprise, considering how inseparable you people were."

Murong Qiu's anger boiled over. "Don't get so full of yourself, Zhen!" he retorted coolly. "You're proficient with pills, I'll give you that. But the world of martial dao is ultimately reserved for martial geniuses only. It's definitely not your lucky day today! You're in my hands now, and I'll make sure you get your reckoning!"

He made no show of hiding the malice in his tone. He hated Jiang Chen's guts. Now, on this stage, he finally had the chance to take his nemesis' life, fair and square. Taking out Pill King Zhen would be a great achievement to present to Emperor Shura.

Jiang Chen couldn't help but laugh at Murong Qiu's unfounded confidence. "Martial genius? Are you possibly talking about... yourself?"

A few more careful looks at the youth revealed that Murong Qiu's cultivation had gained a rank. Compared to his previous seventh rank sage realm standing, he was a rank higher now. But in the Genius Rankings competition, was a cultivation level like that much of an advantage at all?

A sneer played at the corner of Murong Qiu's mouth. Jiang Chen

found the expression to be a little queer. With a series of crushing victories over his prior opponents, he'd shown at least a teaser of his strength, if not the full extent of it. So he couldn't figure out where Murong Qiu's confidence stemmed from. What was there to back up his smirk? His eighth level sage realm cultivation? The abnormality of the entire situation sounded an alarm in his mind.

As the scion of a great clan, it's quite possible for Murong Qiu to be the heir to a special heritage. Moreover, I am one of the biggest threats to Emperor Shura right now, so Murong Qiu might have received a treasure from him as well. Jiang Chen had no fear of a mere eighth level sage realm cultivator. He was much more wary of any hidden methods or tricks that his opponent had up his sleeve.

Still, given what kind of character Murong Qiu was, Jiang Chen wasn't particularly concerned about things after all. No matter how powerful a treasure was, it would be wasted. The young man before him was a buffoon. It would hardly achieve a fraction of its potential. Mulling these thoughts over in his head, he now had the inklings of a plan in his heart. No matter what kind of trump card Murong Qiu possessed, Jiang Chen was going to strike first. There was no reason to give his enemy an opportunity to use a possible trump card at all. "I remember telling you this already when we were outside, Murong Qiu, but whatever happened on that day wasn't the end of it at all."

Murong Qiu cackled. "Just what I wanted to say."

Jiang Chen nodded slowly. His formation disk suddenly sprang into action, eight statues materializing from the void to encircle his opponent. He had no plans of holding anything back against Murong Qiu. The power the eight statues carried shut down all of the other force fields within the arena.

Murong Qiu's face colored even as Jiang Chen leapt into the arena. His Featherflight Mirror swept upon his enemy. Murong Qiu's entire body locked up, and his evasive maneuver was

forcefully slowed by half a beat.

Jiang Chen took this gap in time to land a solid stomp onto Murong Qiu's chest. The abruptness of all of these developments caused an uproar in the audience.

A flurry of kicks landed upon Murong Qiu's body, as if Jiang Chen were kicking a sandbag. The continuous storm of thuds prompted no response from their target. Murong Qiu was punted off the stage like a dead dog, landing at its foot in a crumpled heap.

Bam!

What was formerly Murong Clan's young master was now white in the face, his frame splayed. There was no breath going into his nostrils.

The entire crowd was stuck in a state of open-mouthed shock.

Is he dead, just like that? Yes, Jiang Chen had decisively cut down Xiao Paohui earlier, but that opponent, though formidable, had also been relatively unknown. As such, what little surprise there was hadn't devolved into full-on hysteria.

But Murong Qiu was different. He was a recognized aristocratic dandy of Veluriyam Capital! The Murong Clan wasn't as top-tier of a faction as something like the Coiling Dragon Clan, but it still possessed quite the breadth of connections within the city. Pill King Zhen had murdered its young master in only a few blows in public. How great must the grudge be between the two of them?

Everyone from the Murong Clan who was present watched these series of events pan out, eyes wide, not entirely able to accept the reality before them.

"Qiu'er!" The Murong clan lord's voice was hoarse. The clan's experts swarmed out at the call to examine Murong Qiu's vitals. The young lord was entirely disfigured and inanimate at this point. No matter what they did, there was no response.

The Murong Clan Lord's face convulsed in fury, his eyes fixated

on Jiang Chen with rancorous obsession. “Pill King Zhen, why have you landed a killing blow in a competitive match like this?”

Jiang Chen was stoic. “Bouts in this arena offer no security for the lives of their participants. If anyone is scared, then they shouldn’t participate in the Martial Pagoda battles in the first place.”

The Murong clan lord knew of the grudge between Murong Qiu and Pill King Zhen. He was exasperated to the point of being speechless at the explanation. “Zhen, let’s be open about this. Do you have the guts to say that this wasn’t out of personal spite?” Staring daggers at the pill king, the clan lord looked ravenous enough to swallow him whole.

But Jiang Chen had never been one to fear such meaningless threats. “I only know that no matter who you are, you should be prepared to die in the arena,” he smiled faintly. “If you want someone to blame, clan lord, then blame your son’s lack of skill… and his collection of bad habits to boot. Rather than have a shouting match with me, you should set your house in order. The Murong Clan is a great clan, yes? But its young clan lord is—sorry, was—merely a lascivious lech. Even I’m ashamed for you, honestly.”

He walked offstage as he said this, not sparing the corpse another look. “Honored judge, don’t you agree with my words regarding the sanctity of this space? The arena is a cruel place.” He was now directly in front of the person he was addressing. The judge could only return a wry smile and a nod. Those were the rules.

“Good. So I’m perfectly within my rights to kill my opponent, no matter how harshly I do so?” Jiang Chen slowly went on.

The judge didn’t know how to answer. Everyone knew that the pill king was taking public vengeance for a private slight. He was using the opportunity to kill the heir of the Murong Clan without repercussion! But just as Jiang Chen had said, no rules had been

broken. Deaths were common in such a competitive environment, and in fact, the arena was the best place for past animosities to be settled.

Murong Qiu's death truly did have to be blamed on himself. Given the circumstances just now, if he had taken the upper hand, it was unrealistic to expect mercy in reverse. From the looks of it, the Murong heir had had an ace up his sleeve, but he'd been prevented from using it. It wasn't something the dead youth would have expected, to be sure. That was a tragedy in and of itself.

In his battles with the others before, Pill King Zhen hadn't been particularly aggressive. He had fought with poise and style. Therefore, nobody had expected that the pill king would land such a rapidly preemptive strike, delivering such a sudden and ferocious onslaught. Murong Qiu's lack of readiness had been his downfall.

Seeing everyone from the Murong Clan gazing at him hungrily, the judge's expression froze. "Murong Clan Lord, please leave the front of the stage immediately. You will be charged with threatening a participant otherwise."

The Martial Pagoda battles were strictly regulated. For the Murong Clan to make trouble because of a loss would be trampling upon public order. The Murong Clan Lord's eyes bulged with ire, but his subordinates' persuasion helped him retain his reason. With a huff, he took Murong Qiu's corpse away and retreated. His hateful expression just before departure was a clear tip-off, though. Jiang Chen knew that there was likely going to be a desperate struggle in the future between him and the Murong Clan.

Of course, there was no time to consider the ramifications of that right now. Even if Murong Qiu hadn't tried to molest Huang'er, he had still wanted to kill Jiang Chen. There was no reason for Jiang Chen to let someone who wanted to be at his throat at any given opportunity leave the arena alive.

This dramatic battle allowed Jiang Chen to pass through the second round. It was human nature to bully the good and fear evil. Jiang Chen's vehement killing of Murong Qiu served as an extremely compelling deterrent to any hidden adversaries. The remaining scions loyal to Emperor Shura were secretly alarmed and wary as well. Given the bad blood between the pill king and their own faction, each man felt a distinct insecurity. The pill king had killed Murong Qiu today. Who was to say that he wouldn't take a shot at a different target tomorrow?

At Emperor Shura's side, Moon Monarch was furious. "What a venomous brat! It's just a bout in an arena. Why such heavy-handedness?"

The emperor didn't chime in. He frowned instead. "This Pill King Zhen is quite perceptive. We didn't have many expectations for an insignificant character like Murong Qiu in the first place. However, to notice the hidden threat and attack only as a precaution... his boldness and decisiveness in the heat of battle are tenfold that of Murong Qiu. Murong Qiu was so pleased, too... how droll. I'm sure he certainly didn't expect to walk into an immediately fatal situation."

Murong Qiu carried little importance in the grand scheme of things. Emperor Shura had given him a small treat out of his desire to test Pill King Zhen's martial dao. Unfortunately, Murong Qiu had failed even the lowest of his expectations. He had died before having a chance to act, his death brisk and clean. The only qualities that Jiang Chen had displayed were the aforementioned perception and decisiveness, which even Emperor Shura had to respect.

Though some of the noble scions encountered miserable failure during this second round in unexpected ways, for the most part more and more wandering cultivators were eliminated. Those who remained were largely the elite. The following rounds of elimination would be increasingly difficult.

Chapter 940: The Number One Sword Dao Genius of Veluriyam Capital

After the end of the New Star Rankings battles and two consecutive rounds of the Genius Rankings, everyone in Veluriyam Capital found their recognition of Jiang Chen's martial dao talents completely refreshed. When it was time to draw lots for the third round, Jiang Chen once again drew a noble youth as his opponent. The latter looked gloomy when he discovered who his opponent was. His cultivation was even weaker than Murong Qiu's, so he knew that he was definitely going to lose to the powerful Pill King Zhen.

This noble youth didn't dare act too wantonly before Jiang Chen. In fact, he acted very gentlemanly and courteous. Jiang Chen knew from his attitude that the noble youth was only hoping to lose the fight with dignity. That was why Jiang Chen didn't put him in a difficult spot for too long. He kept the battle going for almost thirty minutes before defeating his opponent without hurting his dignity.

The three rounds were finally concluded. Other than the first round, Jiang Chen felt that the latter two rounds were rather fruitless. Although the contest had been dry and dull thus far, he didn't let down his guard. The greatest charm of an elimination-style contest was the possibility of sudden elimination. If a contestant was unfortunate enough to draw a powerful opponent, then they might be eliminated in advance. Although Jiang Chen didn't think that there was any participant in the Genius Rankings who could defeat him, he wouldn't allow himself to underestimate his enemy or become arrogant. The contest entered a short period of rest after everyone had fought three rounds.

Originally, the Eternal Celestial Capital had prepared three geniuses to snipe Jiang Chen during the Genius Rankings battles.

But after witnessing Jiang Chen's forceful killing of Xiao Paohui, they grew a little hesitant about these cultivators' chances of success. Two of the three geniuses they had sent were obviously inferior to Xiao Paohui in terms of both strength and talent. The last one was at best Xiao Paohui's equal. It wasn't that they had no chance of defeating Pill King Zhen, but the risk was quite high.

Their only advantage was that they were still in the shadows. Now that Pill King Zhen had revealed some of his methods and skills, he was easier to prepare against. Still, there were plenty of disadvantageous elements that might negatively affect the outcome. The brat had an unbelievable amount of tricks up his sleeves, so who was to say that he didn't possess more abilities and trump cards than what he had already shown? Of course, it was still the elimination stages. Everyone's opponents were random. It was only possible to fight Pill King Zhen during the ranking battles that followed the elimination rounds.

The Eternal Celestial Capital refused to accept this outcome, so they ordered their three geniuses to sound out Pill King Zhen's trump cards to the best of their ability without exposing themselves, even if they couldn't beat or kill him. Of course, their own safety was the higher priority.

When the short interlude was over, the fourth round officially began. This time, Jiang Chen drew a wandering cultivator as his opponent. This wandering cultivator was made of stronger mettle, and he refused to concede defeat without fighting. A difficult fight later, the wandering cultivator was ultimately mercilessly swept off the stage.

Jiang Chen knew restraint, however. He didn't use any fatal moves knowing that his opponent hadn't intended to kill him. In fact, he didn't even hurt the wandering cultivator. When the fourth round was finished, only eight hundred were left fighting in the Genius Rankings contest. Once two more rounds had passed, the top two hundred would be decided out of this group of eight

hundred. They would then enter the ranking battles.

Jiang Chen smiled wryly when the results of the fifth round's drawing came out. His opponent was a familiar face. He was Ji Zhongtang of the Coiling Dragon Clan. Jiang Chen and Ji Zhongtang weren't close to each other at all. They were, at the bare minimum, acquaintances who'd met each other several times in the past. Moreover, Jiang Chen found himself able to appreciate a character like Ji Zhongtang. At the very least, he was more pleasing to the eye than that Liuxiang.

His opponent's eyes actually glowed with eagerness when he saw that he'd drawn Jiang Chen as his opponent. Although Ji Zhongtang was younger than both Ji San and Liuxiang, he had long since reached the ninth level sage realm. It was true that he was incomparable to the two young masters who were both at the half-step emperor realm, but for someone his age, he was still without a doubt a genius amongst geniuses. Unfortunately, Ji Zhongtang's major focus was in martial dao, and everything else was of little concern to him. He wasn't particularly interested in the clan's welfare or becoming the clan's successor either. He was a man who was extremely faithful and loyal to martial dao.

On the stage, Ji Zhongtang spoke with eyes filled with wild passion. "To be honest, Pill King Zhen, I'd thought that your martial dao talent was ordinary at first. But now, I've realized that your martial dao talent isn't inferior to your pill dao talent in the slightest. It's my fortune to be able to meet an opponent like you, so I will do my utmost to defeat you. I request that you do your best too, and please know that I won't mind it at all if you beat me."

Jiang Chen laughed. "Good man! In that case, let us both do your best and show a good battle for everyone else, shall we?"

Ji Zhongtang chuckled. "That's exactly what I hope to do."

He rushed towards Jiang Chen like a horse free of its reins. When

he moved, he did so in an imposing fashion. He lifted a broadsword into the air and swung it at Jiang Chen, as if he was planning on cleaving the world. The slash was simple but mighty. It was the Coiling Dragon Clan's famous sword technique.

The Coiling Dragon Clan's sword technique was direct and fierce. Every hit was as powerful as a coiling dragon. Ji Zhongtang's stance portrayed him as a cultivator who preferred a strong, unyielding martial style. An opponent like this wasn't particularly difficult to fight, but if one only possessed ordinary skill, then they could become one's worst nightmare. It was because opponents like Ji Zhongtang feared nothing and nobody. The moment they entered the zone, they would transform into a war machine who feared neither life nor death. When the broadsword slashed down on Jiang Chen's head, the phantom of a coiling dragon also swiped through the air.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "Well met!"

Dragon-wise, Ji Zhongtang's coiling dragon was far inferior to Jiang Chen's own. His true dragon image didn't just possess the presence of a dragon, but also its blood and aura. The draconic phantom accompanying Ji Zhongtang's sword slash was just a supplement to the sword technique. Since he didn't possess the bloodline of true dragons, there was also no trace of the will of a true dragon in his attack. Naturally, a phantom that lacked the will of a true dragon couldn't pose a threat to Jiang Chen. However, despite being at the ninth level sage realm, Ji Zhongtang's special constitution and fierce martial style gave his sword technique power equivalent to Xiao Paohui's attack.

But that Xiao Paohui was already at the half-step emperor realm.

He truly is the noble youth of a great clan. The strength of this sword technique alone is as threatening as Xiao Paohui's attack. As a ninth level sage realm noble youth of a great clan, he certainly hasn't brought shame to his own clan. Jiang Chen praised Ji Zhongtang silently.

That being said, praise was no reason for Jiang Chen to let down his guard. Ji Zhongtang possessed extraordinary martial dao talent, and if he were to underestimate his opponent, he might actually suffer a regrettable loss. Seeing the ferocity and swiftness behind Ji Zhongtang's sword, Jiang Chen felt his interest piqued. He raised his Pentecolor Divine Swords and actually began dueling Ji Zhongtang.

Earlier when he'd killed Xiao Paohui with a single sword strike, he had only scratched the surface knowledge of the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique. Therefore, his strikes were powerful but lacking in depth. His understanding of the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique had since improved by leaps and bounds. It was why he was hoping to fight Ji Zhongtang in a duel of sword technique.

The Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique was without a doubt more sophisticated than the Coiling Dragon Clan Sword Technique. However, Ji Zhongtang had begun training in the Coiling Dragon Clan Sword Technique since he was child, so his understanding of the technique must have reached a legendary level. Meanwhile, Jiang Chen's understanding of the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique was average at best.

Beams of light and sword auras cut through the air. Both combatants were executing grand and fierce sword techniques, so it almost felt like two warrior gods were fighting on stage. Tremendous sword auras charged to and fro, and the brilliant light and power behind them made the battle look absolutely splendid. This battle was just as entertaining as Jiang Chen's fight against Xiao Paohui. In fact, the entertainment value of this battle was almost unparalleled to some sword dao geniuses. Even Ye Tianzuo's battle against Jiang Chen paled in comparison to this battle.

Ye Tianzuo had only executed three sword moves that day. All three sword moves had unique strengths, incredible depth, and

intoxicating points. But many had failed to understand how wonderful those three moves were. They thought that those moves must be weak since Pill King Zhen had defeated all of them. No such thing existed in this battle, however.

Ji Zhongtang was a well known sword dao genius of the Coiling Dragon Clan. He cultivated the Coiling Dragon Sword Technique, and it was rumored that the clan lord privately praised Ji Zhongtang as the best sword dao genius in the clan for almost a millennium. No one knew that Pill King Zhen was also a sword dao genius until today.Although Ji Zhongtang had executed the Coiling Dragon Sword Technique to an unbelievable level, he was still unable to take down Pill King Zhen.

Pill King Zhen was also deploying a sword technique, but the depth of this sword technique seemed to exceed even that of the Coiling Dragon clan technique. However, it would appear that Pill King Zhen wasn't able to execute the sword technique perfectly just yet. What they saw was but the tip of the iceberg. Still, the tip of this technique was so powerful that it drew everyone's attention.

"I didn't think that Pill King Zhen would be a sword dao genius too. Amongst the youths of Veluriyam Capital, there has been almost no one who could compare to Ji Zhongtang in terms of sword dao for many years, right? Excluding the geniuses of the seven emperors, Ji Zhongtang is undeniably amongst the top three cultivators out of all the great clans and aristocratic families, no?"

"Top three? According to the Coiling Dragon clan lord, Ji Zhongtang is the absolute number one sword dao genius amongst the youths of all worldly powers in Veluriyam Capital."

"That isn't necessarily true. It's true that his sword dao talent is extraordinary, but he is young and lacking in foundation. It's not unlikely for various sword dao geniuses to crush him with brute force."

“That is true. Ji Zhongtang hasn’t reached the half-step emperor realm yet after all.”

“Hehe, speaking of geniuses, shouldn’t we praise Pill King Zhen? He’s only at the seventh level sage realm, you know, but he’s actually managing to fight the ninth level sage realm Ji Zhongtang head on without falling behind. Now this is a true genius!”

“That’s true. This should have been a battle where Pill King Zhen attempts to surpass the gap of cultivation and challenge his better, but why do I feel like Ji Zhongtang is the one who is challenging his better?”

It was as the last person had just said, Jiang Chen’s consecutive victories and in particular, his forceful killing of Xiao Paohui, left everyone under the impression that he was an unchallengeable expert. This was why they subconsciously categorized him amongst half-step emperor realm experts. They subconsciously thought that the ninth level sage realm Ji Zhongtang was the one who was challenging his superior. It was only now that they realized in a daze that Pill King Zhen was only at the seventh level sage realm.

Chapter 941: There is Always a Better

The audience felt inexplicably shocked when they realized that Pill King Zhen was only at the seventh level sage realm. He was much too formidable when compared to other cultivators of the same level! Seventh level sage realm cultivators that hadn't been eliminated yet were far and few in between at this stage of the ranking list battles. In fact, Pill King Zhen might possibly be the only one left.

Even though Ji Zhongtang's sword technique was fierce and aggressive, it was evident that it wasn't something beyond the pill king's abilities to handle. It didn't seem like Ji Zhongtang had any advantage over the pill king at all. Ji Zhongtang was fated to lose if this were to continue because the pill king wasn't only adept at the sword. Ji Zhongtang didn't seem to have considered all of this; he was completely immersed in his own rhythm. He performed the Coiling Dragon Sword Technique to such an extent that his every move swept up powerful gales that moved the clouds. It was ferocious and powerful, and it seemed as if it would consume all of heaven and earth. The arena was suddenly filled with sword aura that was running amok. It was as though countless ancient dragons were soaring through the arena.

"War of Wild Dragons!" growled Ji Zhongtang. He grabbed his sword with his two hands and changed into another stance, emitting a monstrous aura. He had immersed himself fully into this sword stance.

"Good move!" Jiang Chen laughed heartily when he saw Ji Zhongtang charge towards him with his sword. He recited an incantation and activated his own sword technique's hand seals, "Qi is the origin of the gods, and gods the product of qi. The metallic might of the west originates from the lungs. Using the strength of the gods, I shall move the heavens!"

Divine Five Thunder Sword Technique, strike! Since Jiang Chen

possessed the magnetic golden mountain, he didn't lack the power of metal. He summoned the metallic might of the west, and embedded it into his current attack. A formidable sword arc shot towards Ji Zhongtang's War of Wild Dragons. It was evident that Jiang Chen wanted to make this a battle between sword techniques, as he hadn't even wasted a single movement. Only the brave shall be victorious in a war between two enemies! Both their swords were immovable and unwavering. Neither were willing to step aside, and neither were willing to lose its keenness.

Clang!

The two sharp edges struck each other with extreme force. The formidable cutting power sliced numerous holes in the void, making ghastly cutting sounds in the air as gales of wind battered the arena. All of a sudden, numerous sword marks appeared on the floor and on the pillars of the arena. Even though the arena was fortified by a powerful formation, the sword energy was so intense that the arena was soon riddled with cuts and slices.

Pfft pfft pfft! Sword aura was flying everywhere, and Jiang Chen and Ji Zhongtang's clothes were shredded. Strands of cloth flew everywhere like butterflies in the wind. However, Jiang Chen faced the gusts of wind head on, as if he were an immovable mountain. In fact, he had taken a few steps forward instead of retreating. The Golden Body of Demons and Gods engulfed all of the sword aura flying at him.

Ji Zhongtang wasn't a cultivator of the Golden Body of Demons and Gods. He could only sweep his sleeves around to deflect the violent sword aura. It wasn't long before one could easily tell who had the upper hand. He looked towards Jiang Chen, only to find that his opponent was looking back at him with a faint smile on his face. It was painfully obvious that Jiang Chen was already prepared to make his next move. Unfortunately, Ji Zhongtang was still busy deflecting sword aura from the previous clash. There was no question that Ji Zhongtang had lost. He was proud, but he

wasn't reckless nor was he a sore loser. Ji Zhongtang sighed softly after regaining his composure.

"Pill King Zheng, I never thought that you were so formidable in sword dao as well. Even though I still have a hidden trump card that would give me a small chance to defeat you. If I use it recklessly, that sword technique will be a great strain on my body as well. Even if I were to defeat you here, I would not be able to defeat my next opponent because I would be too exhausted from this fight. I would never do that, as it wouldn't benefit me at all. Thus, after great consideration, I concede the match."

He was rather straightforward. There was no way he could win when Pill King Zhen was able to directly battle against him in sword dao. After all, sword dao was his one and only expertise, and his opponent had many more abilities that he hadn't yet used. To put it more kindly, Pill King Zhen was only practicing with him. Ji Zhongtang might be young, but he knew when he should back off. He jumped down from the arena without looking back. He had no regrets of failing. Even though there was more that he could do, he had already learned a lot from this fight. What he had gained from this battle was more than just sword dao. He had learned that there would always be someone more capable and more powerful than he was. The sky was the limit.

Even though he was incredibly talented in sword dao and the clan lord had even evaluated him as the foremost expert in sword dao, Ji Zhongtang understood that there wasn't much meaning in gaining recognition from just a single person. After all, there were many sword dao geniuses under the seven great emperors. Furthermore, there were probably another few additional sword dao geniuses within the other great clans. His battle with Pill King Zhen today had widened his horizons. Because of that, he wasn't the least bit depressed after the loss. There was no doubt that Pill King Zhen was stronger than him.

Even though he had received some treasures and equipment from

the clan lord, there was no way he would use them. His opponent was Pill King Zhen after all. Moreover, he would not stand to gain much after using such treasures anyways, as it would also cause a great strain to his own energy. There was no way he could make it to the top two hundred even if he'd won. It was only logical to admit loss. Pill King Zhen was obviously a strong contender for a place in the top thirty. There was still a possibility that he could gain a second chance.

The clan lord was no longer feeling as conflicted after Ji Zhongtang's loss too. This matchup had caused a great amount of turmoil within him. On one hand, he hoped that his clan's disciple would gain the chance to showcase his incredible talent on the arena. Yet at the same time, he was worried that if Ji Zhongtang had won, Pill King Zhen would refuse to give the Pinecrane Pill to the clan lord. However, there was no way the clan lord could ask Ji Zhongtang to deliberately lose. Thus, he was most glad that the battle had ended this way.

At least Ji Zhongtang had been able to perfectly unleash his sword techniques. The fact that he couldn't win against Pill King Zhen was only because the pill king was simply too strong. He needn't feel much regret for losing to such a formidable opponent. He would never have admitted his loss otherwise. Ji Zhongtang might've lost, but there was still a chance that he could come back.

As long as they grasped this opportunity, there was still a possibility for all three successors of Coiling Dragon Clan to gain a spot in the final top two hundred. The clan lord breathed a sigh of relief upon that realization. Entering the top two hundred meant that they would qualify for the Ranking of the Young Lords battles. Earning a spot in these rankings would be an extremely difficult task. However, he too was a person with great ambition. He would need to have one disciple enter the rankings if he wanted to become the eighth great emperor faction in Veluriyam Capital. However, the decisive factor was still himself. If he could advance

to the next level and successfully transcend from the half-step great emperor realm into the great emperor realm, his clan would becoming the eighth great emperor faction. In the end, Pill King Zhen was his only hope of achieving this.

With the fifth elimination round coming to a close, Ji San, who had been relaxed the entire time, began to feel some pressure as well. The pressure he felt didn't come from his opponent, but rather, from the last round of sorting. The last thing anyone would want was to have two powerful foes battle each other too early on in the contest. A top genius would have to be disqualified if that happened. Even if there was a possibility for a comeback at the end, nobody would want to humiliate themselves in such a way. After all, entering the top two hundred via a second chance wouldn't wipe away the humiliation from a loss. A loss was a loss. Even if one were to come back and successfully enter the genius rankings, there would be a crack in one's own dao heart. The best thing that could happen was still to win every round consecutively.

Wei Jie had been quite fortunate for the previous five rounds, as he hadn't encountered any particularly strong foes. One could even say that he'd had incredible luck during the sortition. He now only needed one more victory to enter the top two hundred. Even though it didn't guarantee him a spot in the Genius Rankings, it still acted as a safety net of some sort. After all, there weren't all that many strong opponents that were waiting for a comeback. Even if there were a few, they might not actually choose to challenge Wei Jie. What were the chances that Wei Jie was the weakest one amongst the top two hundred?

The atmosphere had gotten a little heavier because this was the last round. The averagely-skilled cultivators were now feeling a mountain of pressure. Lose, and they would possibly have to return home, all their efforts effectively going down the drain. Win, and it might not guarantee them a spot in the rankings, but at least there was still a seventy to eighty percent chance of them

obtaining a spot. Those who weren't too confident in their own abilities were calculating and theorizing whether it would be better to admit defeat or try and win the round. They couldn't admit defeat either if they were paired against someone that was only slightly stronger than them. An opponent that was only slightly stronger than them was unlikely to place in the top thirty. Therefore, they would still have to give their all unless they were paired against an opponent that was incredibly strong. If the latter really did happen, giving up wouldn't actually be a bad decision.

Chapter 942: End of the Sixth Elimination Round

There was no reason for them to go all out against an opponent that was much stronger than them in the last round. They wouldn't win and they'd exhaust their energy. Worse, they'd be too worn out to compete, even if they were given a chance to make a comeback. The smartest thing to do was to give up if they were paired against an incredibly strong opponent to preserve strength and energy. It might not be the most honorable thing to do, but it was the most logical one. These were precisely Wei Jie's thoughts right now. Of course, he was also hoping that he wouldn't be paired against someone much stronger than him.

Unfortunately, life often didn't happen as planned. The more one was afraid of something, the more likely it was going to happen. Wei Jie's name was drawn from the lot, and his opponent's name soon followed.

Wei Jie versus Pill King Zhen!

Wei Jie is actually paired against Pill King Zhen! The audience was rendered speechless by the dramatic drawing. This was an incredibly huge coincidence. There were at least four hundred contestants, yet Wei Jie had somehow managed to find himself paired against Jiang Chen. What sort of twisted play of fate was this?

Pill King Zhen was still the guest pill king of House Wei in name. Also, Pill King Zhen's rise to fame had started from House Wei. This was a duel between host and house guest! Nobody would have thought that Pill King Zhen could win in this matchup during his initial arrival at Veluriyam Capital. But now, nobody seemed to think that Wei Jie could win instead.

Wei Jie couldn't help but smile wryly. His father Wei Tian also shook his head grudgingly. He already knew what Wei Jie's choice

was. The only thing his son could do when met with such a speechless pairing was to admit defeat. He'd been incredibly fortunate during the previous five elimination rounds, but the last one was a direct kick to the head. However, Wei Jie was still quite glad that he was paired against Jiang Chen, because the pill king was definitely going to end up in the top thirty.

There was still a chance for a comeback even if he admitted defeat. He was just as likely to get into the top two hundred as long as he made good use of the second chance he would soon be given. When they heard that Wei Jie had admitted defeat, many houses that had bad relations with House Wei began to disdain them. They felt that House Wei was being incredibly shameless. How could the host admit defeat against their own house guest?

Jiang Chen rather wanted to admit defeat himself to save House Wei some face. Unfortunately, with Wei Jie's abilities, it'd be difficult for him to gain a spot in the top thirty. If he admitted defeat, it was unlikely that Wei Jie would get a second chance. Thus, he had no choice but to let Wei Jie take the loss.

The sixth elimination round was supposed to be a nerve-wracking affair, but because Wei Jie had admitted defeat, he and Jiang Chen were able to relax and watch others fight instead. Wei Jie revered Jiang Chen greatly. Thus, he didn't feel that it was humiliating for him to admit defeat. In fact, he actually felt some relief instead, because he was the most afraid of encountering an opponent that was only slightly stronger than him. If that happened, he would have to put his life on the line to win the fight. There would be no second chance for him if he lost. Thus, Wei Jie genuinely believed that this wasn't the worst thing that could happen to him.

Ji San, on the other hand, was quite fortunate during the final drawing. He was paired against a cultivator from an aristocratic background. Even though that person was also at the ninth level sage realm, there was still a large difference in cultivation between

them, as he was already a half-step emperor. Of course, that didn't mean that there weren't any other notable matches in the sixth round.

For example, there was the genius wandering cultivator, Sunyu Xiaosheng, who had performed well during the formation trials. He defeated numerous powerful opponents and was definitely a dark horse in the battles. This time, he was paired against a disciple from one of the great clans, Miao Suo from the Spirit Branch Clan. Jiang Chen had seen Miao Suo before. They'd crossed paths when Ji San brought him to Sacred Peafowl Mountain to meet a girl. It was obvious that Ji San wasn't on very friendly terms with Miao Suo.

The Spirit Branch Clan was ranked sixth amongst the twenty-eight great clans in Veluriyam Capital. Thus, Miao Suo was actually ranked somewhere around fifteenth or maybe even within the top ten amongst all disciples from the great clans. On one side was a top disciple hailing from the great clans, and on the other was a dark horse from the wandering cultivators. It was only natural that the fight between the two would garner a lot of attention.

Jiang Chen looked through the matchups and concluded that while there were a few matches worth watching, he was most interested in the one between Miao Suo and Sunyu Xiaosheng. He had seen Sunyu Xiaosheng's performance in the formation trials. Because of this, he was paying a little more attention to the always smiling, frivolous lad. Even though Miao Suo was one of the top disciples of the great clans, it didn't necessarily mean that he would be able to crush Sunyu Xiaosheng.

Jiang Chen may not know much about the wandering cultivator's background, but he was certain that Sunyu Xiaosheng had received training and pointers from an extraordinary teacher. He could easily tell just by looking at the wandering cultivator's aura. Jiang Chen could also tell that Sunyu Xiangsheng was a

genuine wandering cultivator, as he possessed the same traits that many other wandering cultivators had. A wandering cultivator who's received pointers from an extraordinary teacher? He's probably much more worthy of note than a common disciple from a great clan.

"Wei Jie, don't challenge Sunyu Xiaosheng when you get the chance to," Jiang Chen warned.

Wei Jie was taken aback. "Sunyu Xiaosheng? Can he even beat Miao Suo?"

Jiang Chen smiled plainly. "Miao Suo only looks strong on the outside. He doesn't impress me at all."

It wasn't that Jiang Chen was looking down on Miao Suo. Sunyu Xiaosheng just seemed a little more enigmatic to him. The final elimination round officially began with the banging of the gong. Even though Jiang Chen was also looking at the other arenas, he was focusing most of his attention on Miao Suo and Sunyu Xiaosheng.

Confident in his abilities as a disciple from a great clan, Miao Suo started the bout with an extremely fierce strike. His attacks were incredibly powerful, as he was a disciple from a sixth-ranked great clan. The flurry of kicks and punches were like tidal waves, incessant and incredibly imposing. His fighting style matched his body type very well. He was like a ferocious bear; his attacks were crude and unsophisticated, yet somehow also very powerful. Miao Suo was planning on using the dark horse as a testament to his martial dao skills. He wanted to use this chance to show off and boost his own reputation.

However, Sunyu Xiaosheng was obviously a much smarter fighter than Miao Suo. He'd chosen not to follow Miao Suo's lead in battle, even though he was every bit capable of fighting head on. Instead, he chose to fight a guerrilla warfare. He was constantly switching up methods, sometimes harassing, other times

defending. Occasionally he would even lay an ambush. This only served to enrage Miao Suo greatly.

Miao Suo wasn't the kind of person that couldn't hold his temper, but it didn't take long before he was truly enraged by Sunyu Xiaosheng's battle tactics. It wasn't necessarily a good thing to provoke one's opponent during an exchange in martial dao. Sometimes, it would actually lead the opponent into gaining an extra burst of strength and power. However, it was soon evident that Sunyu Xiaosheng was very experienced in handling such situations. In the end, he was able to easily defeat Miao Suo and achieved victory in the sixth elimination round after incessant provocation.

This truly was an unexpected outcome! The audience booed and hissed after the fight. One had to understand that Miao Suo was firmly ranked in the top fifteen among all the great clan disciples! He was also a strong contender for the top ten spots in the Genius Rankings! Who could've known that he'd be defeated by a wandering cultivator? Wei Jie was also flabbergasted by the result. "Miao Suo was defeated? Who in the world is Sunyu Xiaosheng?"

Jiang Chen looked at Sunyu Xiaosheng, intrigued. He now had an even higher opinion of this mysterious wandering cultivator. The way the wandering cultivator had won might not seem honorable, but those with keen eyes and senses were able to see minute details that others couldn't. Even though it seemed like Sunyu Xiaosheng had won by despicable means, Jiang Chen believed that the reason why Sunyu Xiaosheng didn't fight Miao Suo head on wasn't because he couldn't win, but simply because he didn't need to.

Jiang Chen guessed that he probably didn't want to tire himself out by facing Miao Suo head on, and also because he didn't want to reveal his trump cards too early on in the ranking battles. One would stand to gain more advantage in the later stages of the tournament if one kept their trump cards hidden.

Revealing everything at the start would lead to satisfying wins at

the beginning, but the trump cards would become less effective the longer the fights dragged on. Sunyu Xiaosheng was quite smart. He'd utilized his brains better than most people in battle. He only used this tactic during the duel because he already had a good inkling of his and his opponent's abilities, and knew that there was a good chance of victory in doing so . Such a tactic would be meaningless otherwise.

Even though the results were within Jiang Chen's expectations, they'd served as a reminder for him that there were many hidden talents and geniuses within the Genius Rankings battles. A good example of such a talent was Ye Tianzuo, an incredible genius in sword dao. Sunyu Xiaosheng was obviously also a genius of such magnitude. The duels in the other arenas were a lot less interesting in comparison. Ji San had crushed his opponent easily and was successful in advancing to the next level.

The sixth elimination round soon came to an end. Two hundred finalists were finally chosen. The subsequent round were the battles amongst the two hundred. They were divided into twenty groups, with ten to each group. Not everyone was seen as equals in the ranking battles. For example, Jiang Chen was assigned to the first group because he was ranked first in the formation trials, had won every round in the New Star Rankings battles, and had also easily won every single battle in the six elimination rounds. Being assigned to the first group meant that he was already ranked within the top ten. This also meant that Jiang Chen only needed to participate in the battles between the top ten cultivators. There was no need for him to fight with anyone in the lower ranks.

Very intricate calculations had been made before ten geniuses were assigned to their own respective groups. This also took their previous battle records into consideration. If battle results were similar, then the judges would consider the time it took for them to achieve victory. There were many detailed rules and specifications to divide everyone accordingly. The entire process

was fair and just.

Chapter 943: The Ranking Battles Begin

Jiang Chen had to praise the organizers for their speed of analysis and competency. The group division had been done almost flawlessly. Most of the candidates in the other groups didn't raise too many objections either, as they'd found their allocated rankings acceptable as well. Of course, Jiang Chen didn't mind anything because he had already nailed a spot within the top ten in the first group.

Still, those who were ranked poorly were extremely concerned with their own rankings. But not everything was done and dusted just yet. For example, the candidates of the fourth, fifth, and sixth group had a chance to challenge the candidates above them. If they challenged their opponent and beat them, they could enter the top thirty all the same. For now, the fourth group could only fight for the fortieth spot up to the thirty-first spot, but they also had the right to challenge the geniuses of the first group. Moreover, they could only challenge the geniuses of the first group if they wished to bypass the rankings. This meant that they were allowed to bypass two groups and challenge the candidates there.

Just the same, the candidates in the fifth group could challenge the candidates in the second group, and the candidates in the sixth group could challenge the candidates in the third group. However, all the groups after the sixth group did not have the right to challenge upwards. What they needed to do was protect their own group ranking during the ranking battles. Finally, the forty people immediately following the sixteenth group had the right to challenge those ahead of them once and potentially increase their ranking.

This was because the last thirty-six spots of the Genius Rankings would ultimately be replaced. They wouldn't have the right to participate in the Ranking of Young Lords. They had to fight to enter the top 164 spots of the Genius Rankings if they wished to

compete in the next stage. This was because thirty-six geniuses beneath the seven great emperors would be competing for the Ranking of Young Lords, so the last thirty-six of the Genius Rankings would be automatically disqualified. It was a cruel, survival-of-the-fittest circumstance.

Experts were aplenty in the first group. Jiang Chen perused the names within the first group for a bit. Besides himself, Ji San and Liuxiang of the Coiling Dragon Clan were both present. Sunyu Xiaosheng was also on the list. There was actually another wandering cultivator besides Sunyu Xiaosheng. This wandering cultivator was even more mysterious than Sunyu Xiaosheng. Apparently, the referee announced him as Mie Chenzi. [1]

He sounded like a foreigner. However, Jiang Chen didn't seem to notice any traits that identified him as a foreigner. Still, the person had hidden himself very well, so he wasn't able to determine his background solely from observing his traits alone. Jiang Chen stopped observing the man after a moment's glance. He knew that there must be disciples of other great sects amongst all these candidates, excluding the noble youths of Veluriyam Pagoda and the wandering cultivators. They must have concealed their own identities to participate in the gathering. In fact, quite a few of them might be in the Genius Rankings right now.

Under the guise of wandering cultivators, they were here at Veluriyam Capital to sound out Veluriyam Capital's strength and determine how many young geniuses and heroes they had gathered to date. Sunyun Xiaosheng and Mie Chenzi were the only two wandering cultivators present within the first group for now. Currently, Jiang Chen was considered a Veluriyam Capital member with a slightly unusual identity. He was also close with Sacred Peafowl Mountain and a guest pill king of House Wei, so everyone thought of him as a member of Veluriyam Capital. With the aforementioned, there were only five spots left in the first group. The remaining five people were all Veluriyam Capital

cultivators of first-rate great clans.

While checking everyone out, the first person to catch Jiang Chen's attention was Luo Chuan of the Great Shura Clan under Emperor Shura. The two strongest great clans under Emperor Shura were the Majestic Clan and the Great Shura Clan. Naturally, the Majestic Clan was the strongest out of the two clans, possessing enough strength to compete even against the Coiling Dragon Clan. The Great Shura Clan itself was a clan powerful enough to be ranked in the top five.

The reason why the Great Shura Clan wasn't as well known was due to the Majestic Clan's existence. However, the young master of the Great Shura Clan, Luo Chuan, was in fact even more talented that the young master of the Majestic Clan, Wang Teng, in terms of martial dao.

Wang Teng was a young master who was better at considering things from a larger perspective and commanding tactics. Meanwhile, Luo Chuan was just as competent in these areas as Wang Teng was, even though he focused more on martial dao and was content with keeping a low profile. Now that Wang Teng had perished alongside the Majestic Clan, Luo Chan had naturally risen up in ranking to become the strongest clan youth to serve Emperor Shura. Besides Luo Chuan, there were another four youths from varying great clans in the first group. They were Guan Yuchan of the Zen Pursuit Clan beneath Emperor Petalpluck, Alchemist Xi of the Rising Tide Clan beneath Emperor Vastsea, Gongsun Yan of the Amethyst Fire Clan beneath Emperor Void, and Shen Hao of the Vast Sun Clan beneath Emperor Skysplitter.

These four young geniuses were all the cream of the crop within their respective great clans. They also represented the face of their chosen emperors. The only emperor whose young genius was absent among the top ten was Emperor Mountaincrush. The genius of the True Profound Clan subordinate to him was just as strong, but he had been unfortunate enough to run into Liuxiang

of the Coiling Dragon Clan. After a fierce fight, this genius had been disqualified and had no choice but to attempt a comeback later on.

Although these great clans' youths were undoubtedly geniuses, Jiang Chen wasn't particularly afraid of them. To be honest, he felt that these young geniuses of the great clans were at best equal to a true disciple of the Ninesuns Sky Sect. In fact, they might even be a tad weaker. After all, the Ninesuns Sky Sect's ten true disciples were comparable to the true disciples of great emperors. The great clan disciples could only be counted as second-rate geniuses within Veluriyam Capital. Even the absolute best of these great clans' youths still sat at the bottom of the barrel of first-rate geniuses. They were ultimately a few levels away from those cultivators who possessed the true inheritances of real first-rate great emperors.

That was why Jiang Chen didn't feel too threatened in these ranking battles. In fact, he had a rough idea of the strength of all these first-rate great clan youths, including Ji San and Liuxiang. Ironically, the two cultivators that Jiang Chen was a little unsure about were Sunyu Xiaosheng and Mie Chenzi. He felt that these two so-called wandering cultivators were actually the ones who had the highest chance of entering the Ranking of Young Lords. After the list was released, the rules of the battles for each group came out as well. The battles would take place in a round robin format. All ten geniuses within each group were required to fight everyone else within the group once. The final rankings would be decided after the battles were over.

If there were two candidates with the same score, then the results of their battles with each other would decide their rankings. Whoever beat the other candidate the most would have a higher ranking. The rules were tight enough to guarantee a ranking no matter what. Jiang Chen didn't even bother to research the rules. He only had one aim, and that was to win every match.

“Pill King Zhen versus Guan Yuchan!”

Jiang Chen’s first opponent was quickly decided to be Guan Yuchan of the Zen Pursuit Clan beneath Emperor Petalpluck. Guan Yuchan was actually a young genius who’d been tonsured. Dressed in pure white clothing, he gave off the impression of an elegant gentleman and appeared to be an immortal of legends. But although he possessed a kindly air between his brows, the fearsome image of a Buddha warrior flitted between them as well. It was obvious at first glance that he was a genius who had reached an extremely high level of martial comprehension.

Emperor Petalpluck himself was an extremely mysterious existence in Veluriyam Capital. He had been the second strongest great emperor in Veluriyam Capital for thousands of years. However, he stood aloof from worldly affairs. Just like a wild crane that flew among the clouds, his main interest lay in plucking flowers, listening to the rain, and pursuing zen. Therefore, Emperor Petalpluck’s faction, and even some of the great clans affiliated with him, all carried themselves with an air of zen. The martial arts and techniques they cultivated also embodied the concepts of Buddhism. For example, Guan Yuchan gave off an otherworldly feeling the moment he stepped on stage.

“Your fame precedes you, Pill King Zhen. I shall be learning from you today,” said Guan Yuchan calmly. He didn’t look affected in the slightest by Jiang Chen’s fame. It was almost as if all opponents who stood in the arena were the same to him.

Jiang Chen raised a cupped fist salute and smiled at Guan Yuchan. “Brother Guan, you definitely are one of the few with the greatest bearing out of all my opponents thus far.”

“One of?” Guan Yuchan smiled leisurely. “Who else?”

Jiang Chen smiled. “You may not know him, but there was a swordsman called Ye Tianzuo during the earlier Genius Rankings competition. His temperament impressed me quite a bit as well.”

“Ye Tianzuo? You mean that swordsman?” Guan Yuchan seemed to have a faint recollection.

Jiang Chen nodded. “Brother Guan, if you please.”

Guan Yuchan smiled. “Alright. Know that I, a subordinate of Emperor Petalpluck, am a stepping stone. If you can defeat me, then you are at least qualified to challenge the young geniuses of the great emperors. But if you cannot surpass even me, then I would suggest that you return to improving your cultivation.”

Jiang Chen knew that Guan Yuchan wasn’t joking. He answered seriously, “I will do my best.”

While saying this, Jiang Chen activated his golden body.

Guan Yuchan smiled a little. A trace of surprise finally appeared on his seemingly never-changing face. It would seem that Jiang Chen’s action had taken him aback. The Buddha’s art Guan Yuchan cultivated contained none other than a divine body protection art and an invincible golden body. They were both extremely powerful. While he had been accumulating his power, his opponent seemed to have predicted his move and activated the exact same body technique. This little detail alone proved that Pill King Zhen was extremely sensitive towards every little detail in battle.

When Guan Yuchan activated his golden body, a Buddha’s aura immediately rose thirty meters above his head. Guan Yuchan’s body also grew several times larger and turned him into an enormous Buddha warrior attendant. With a solemn look on his expression, Guan Yuchan grabbed the air and somehow pulled a great gada into existence.

Jiang Chen boiled with passion when he saw this. He cried out, “Well met!”

He activated his own golden body and grew nearly as big as Guan Yuchan. Suddenly, the arena battle became a battle between two

giants.

1. This literally means Death to/Annihilation to Chen.
2. This literally means Death to/Annihilation to Chen.

Chapter 944: A Well-Rounded Martial Dao Genius

The sheer enormity of both parties' images caused the spacious arena to feel crowded. Each punch and kick was exchanged with incredible frenzy and intensity. The sounds of bodies colliding resounded like an avalanche.

Rumble. Rumble. The two colossal figures crashed together and drifted apart seemingly on a whim, weaving around the arena like bolts of lightning. Blows were delivered with extreme speed, across distances varyingly vast and minute.

Thud, thud, thud. Guan Yuchan stepped forth like a Buddha warrior attendant. He smashed the giant gada in his hands boldy towards Jiang Chen once more. Each stride seemed to shake the entire arena.

Jiang Chen chuckled. Pressing his fingers into a fist, he jabbed fiercely towards the gada with no hesitation. A painful crunch sent out countless shockwaves. The very air about them rippled with the force of the impact.

Guan Yuchan had never met anyone who could face his weapon with their bare fists before. He frowned in displeasure. His arms felt slightly numb. His opponent was truly formidable, but his battle fever surged at the challenge.

"You're a surprising one, Pill King Zhen. It's refreshing to have a satisfying fight with an opponent such as yourself!" Despite his typical tranquility, Guan Yuchan was slowly becoming increasingly excited. His voice, deep and resonant, sounded through the sphere. Its echoes reverberated in the air surrounding the arena, and all who heard were stirred by the words. The muscles on both of Guan Yuchan's forearms flexed. Like bands of steel, their very form surged with power.

“Ascetic Slaying Demons, so I come!” With a swing of his giant gada, Guan Yuchan sent out a rumbling warrior’s image. The image had a certain undeniable dignity to it, pouncing upon Jiang Chen in a frenzy.

Pleased at the force behind the attack, Jiang Chen moved to make hand seals of his own. “Giant lizard’s image, break forth!” The image of a colossal reptile barreled forwards from nothingness, madly twisting its body. Trails of scarlet streaked behind it, as fiery as the clouds of a sunset.

Bam! There was another savage crash between Guan Yuchan’s warrior image and Jiang Chen’s reptilian image. Both scattered into infinite specks of golden light once more, diffusing into the void. Guan Yuchan was forced back a few steps, his eyes glowing with bewildered radiance. He was utterly fixated on Jiang Chen. This opponent had brought him exceptional surprise. It was his first time facing such a terrifying opponent. Guan Yuchan had naturally observed all of Jiang Chen’s bouts prior. In the competitions for the New Star Rankings, Jiang Chen’s defeat of a brutish man had showcased his superb close-combat abilities. Several of the battles that followed showed that he was a master of the sword as well.

Guan Yuchan couldn’t help but admit that Pill King Zhen, in the same sense that he was a well-rounded pill genius, he was also a well-rounded martial genius. Guan Yuchan’s image of the Buddha warrior attendant was the most intimidating of his abilities, one of his trump cards. If even that couldn’t buy him the slightest of an advantage, then the difference between this Pill King Zhen and himself was undeniable.

Until now, Pill King Zhen had played by his own rhythm. He hadn’t shown anything from his own hand yet. Considering the pill king’s frightening aptitude in the art of the sword, Guan Yuchan was uncertain that he would’ve been able to react to a strong assault. Pill King Zhen’s sword-strikes were far too

mysterious and unpredictable, Battling with images was the method of combat he was most proud of, yet he hadn't been able to take the lead in such a battle, either. His opponent even possessed a true dragon image that he still had yet to reveal. That didn't mean that Guan Yuchan was just going to give up on the spot, though.

Guan Yuchan's eyes were clear with honesty. Looking at Jiang Chen, he opened his mouth, "Pill King Zhen, I cannot win against you with martial abilities alone. But I'm not only representing myself here. I stand on behalf of both Emperor Petalpluck and my own clan. So, I'm going to use a few of the cards and equipment I have up my sleeve. Beware!" Guan Yuchan was a proud man. Despite all evidence pointing to him being no match for Jiang Chen in terms of martial dao, he couldn't give up the fight just yet. The honor and face of various factions hinged on these rankings. He had no say in the decision himself.

Nodding, Jiang Chen replied seriously, "This is a competitive match. It's natural to give it your all."

"Very well!" Guan Yuchan returned the gesture before abruptly opening his arms. A pair of golden cymbals flew out from the folds of his sleeves, growing into two huge golden gates. They soared towards Jiang Chen with the wind, their oppressive force tangible in the air. The atmosphere around the arena became claustrophobic at once. Two powerful currents of air separated inside from out.

Jiang Chen felt a nameless strength tugging at his body. The cymbals grew and grew. Within moments, they were already ten yards tall. The two golden plates came closer and closer to him, their obvious intent to enclose Jiang Chen within. The sight of such a treasure shocked Jiang Chen.

As a battle-hardened veteran, however, he didn't panic despite his surprise. Grabbing and throwing his defensive cauldron, he tossed it over his head to slow the cymbals somewhat.

Next, Jiang Chen called upon his golden cicada bloodline. The flash of a golden cicada's image transformed into a copy Jiang Chen. He had used the Cicada's Disappearance ability in order to instantly shift himself a vast distance away. Not a moment too late. The cymbals expanded once again, swallowing the obstructing cauldron whole. They were clearly a special instrument. The closer they were, the stronger their suction was. The cauldron resisted for only a brief moment before its defense failed entirely.

Clanggg! The two cymbals closed together with a vicious clang. The discordant noise brought despair to listeners' hearts. Guan Yuchan raised his eyebrows at the sight, cheered by the turn of events.

"Pill King Zhen, I admit that you're very skilled in martial dao. However, you cannot defeat my Yin Yang Cymbals." Guan Yuchan sighed with soft confidence. He had every faith in his treasure. Like a dual-poled magnet, their strength lied at close proximity. In this respect, the pair of instruments was quite a fearsome treasure.

However, no treasure was infallible. Though the Cymbals were quite potent, there was a way to counteract their influence. Just as similar poles repel one another,opposite poles in turn attract. The Cymbals had a positive and negative pole. If one could apply the same principle to them, then it was definitely possible to render the Cymbals useless. Therefore, there was a risk to using these instruments, even if it was negligible. Thankfully, it was improbable to have both a positively and negatively-charged treasure both ready to counter the Cymbals. Guan Yuchan was reasonably sure about this fact. Truthfully, he was almost ready to announce his triumph as the victor.

Suddenly, utter silence befell the entire arena. There was strangeness afoot. This sudden stillness was baffling to Guan Yuchan. His earlobes twitched. In the next moment, he came to an electrifying stop. The disbelief was transparent on his face, and his cheeks contorted. He rapidly tried to turn around, only to be faced

with a half-smiling Jiang Chen standing right behind him.

“You…” Guan Yuchan was stunned.

Jiang Chen smiled serenely. “The Yin Yang Cymbals are strong, but I’m a bit faster than they are, aren’t I?” Yes, Jiang Chen had witnessed the Cymbals’ power first-hand. However, his escape from their pull with Cicada’s Disappearance had gone entirely unnoticed. This difference between the two combatants would be fatal in any other setting.

Jiang Chen had just thrown away the opportunity to kill Guan Yuchan with ease. In a fight between experts, anyone that could make their way to their opponent’s back undetected had more than ten ways of putting down such an unwary rival. In his battle with Xiao Paohui a short while ago, Jiang Chen had used his Disappearance to great effect, evading a critical attack from the former. The spontaneity of the Disappearance was what allowed Jiang Chen to reach Xiao Paohui’s back unnoticed and deal a death-blow.

The Thundercloud Cicadas had no combat ability. The biggest advantage their heritage conferred was a mastery of escape, using the Cicada’s Disappearance and Cicada’s Wing. Of course, their immunity to lightning and poison were very helpful as well, both of which were rare traits in the heavenly planes.

Guan Yuchan’s expression instantly fell.

“Have I… lost?” At last, all his unspoken words transformed into a deep sigh.

Yes, he had lost. Even as he asked the question, Guan Yuchan tasted bitterness in his mouth. He had every expectation to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat upon deploying the Yin Yang Cymbals. However, he had been too naïve. Pill King Zhen was evidently a great deal stronger than he. How could he not have seen a trace of his opponent’s escape otherwise? His failure in perception proved only one thing—his opponent’s level of martial

dao far surpassed that of his own.

In that moment, Guan Yuchan lost all interest in fighting further.

“Pill King Zhen, congratulations. Having defeated me, you are absolutely qualified to challenge geniuses at the caliber of the great emperors’ heirs. Your complete victory here cannot be disputed.” Guan Yuchan wasn’t a clingy good-for-nothing. He knew that he’d been shown mercy. Otherwise, even ten lives wouldn’t have been enough to save him just now.

This battle was the second time Jiang Chen used his Cicada’s Disappearance, Xiao Paohui’s fight having been the first. Alas, there’s nothing for it. The ability was just too useful and deceptive. It was difficult to pick up on or think about. Thus, it was amazing at overtaking an opponent with the element of surprise. Unfortunately, an oft-used method meant that it would be more easily understood by others. Unless it possessed overwhelmingly crushing power, the likelihood of using it as a key to victory decreased exponentially with frequent usage. The first battle’s conclusion heralded Jiang Chen’s victory over Guan Yuchan. Despite his defeat, the latter acted with incredible grace. Guan Yuchan’s loss didn’t result in a soul-crushing mentality. “Pill King Zhen,” he even had the presence of mind to give some friendly advice, “You won against me because my strength is not yet perfected. If you want to compete in the Ranking of Young Lords, you’ll need to hone your own strength even further.”

There was a short break before the subsequent drawings were made for the second battle’s assignments. This time, Jiang Chen’s opponent was the brightest genius of the Amethyst Fire Clan, Gongsun Yan.

Chapter 945: I Will Make Only One Move

The competitions this time around were of the round robin format. Each section's ten geniuses were guaranteed to fight each other once, meaning each man had nine opponents. The organizers intentionally set it up in such a manner. Intense battle tested substance, ability, and improvisation. Unless a particular side exhibited an overwhelming advantage, continuous melee was a breeding ground for spontaneity. No matter how deep one's reserves of strength were, extended combat would eventually exhaust one's stamina. This kind of exhaustion was fair to everyone.

As the foremost genius of the Amethyst Fire Clan under Emperor Void, Gongsun Yan had the same bloodline and heritage as the other geniuses of his clan: the Amethyst Fire Bloodline. It was named as such because their innate constitutions were attuned to purple fire from birth. Gongsun Yan distinguished himself from his peers because his bloodline was a cut above the rest. The purple fire he carried within was equivalent to an innate fire constitution of medium order.

Mu Gaoqi had an innate wood constitution of high order, a bloodline that drew even Jiang Chen's respect. This was especially true since Mu Gaoqi's elemental alignment was wood, a true rarity. Fire and water constitutions were much more common. Nevertheless, Gongsun Yan's constitution was still very rare. Many people had fire or water constitutions, but far fewer of them were innate. Those that did for the most part had constitutions of a low order, barely enough to be counted as innate. Above medium order was high order, of course, and perfected above that; but ninety-nine percent of constitutions were low order only. A medium order constitution had the probability of one in a hundred thousand, if one were to speak optimistically.

As for high order? It would be lucky to find one in even a

hundred million people. And on Jiang Chen's part, the only person with an innate wood constitution that he had seen was Mu Gaoqi throughout all these years. This made his high order even more remarkable. Because Gongsun Yan had a natural born constitution, he possessed many fortuitous advantages. However, it was hard to exploit any of them against Jiang Chen.

If it wasn't for the fact that Jiang Chen couldn't publicly use his Bewitching Lotus, taking down Gongsun Yan would have been a piece of cake. Even so, Jiang Chen successfully defeated this opponent after a fierce battle. He was matched with Vast Sun Clan's Shen Hao in the third round. This opponent was viewed as the weakest amongst the top ten. Shen Hao wasn't much perturbed by it, though. He sparred against Jiang Chen with a learning attitude, not at all saddened by his loss. After three consecutive victories, Jiang Chen was greeted with his fourth opponent.

Young master Liuxiang from the Coiling Dragon Clan. Though Ji San had never mentioned Liuxiang's hostility towards him, Jiang Chen could nevertheless still detect a trace of antagonism. Jiang Chen knew the hearts of men well. The young master likely had a distaste of him because his appearance propelled Ji San into the stratosphere in front of the clan lord. Ji San had become the number one heir to the clan because of this. This was clearly detrimental to Liuxiang, who was forced to maintain an elegant and gracious façade despite his extreme antipathy for the pill king. Jiang Chen knew it was only pretense, but he found no value in dispensing with the charade.

"Pill King Zhen, you've hidden your abilities from us until now! Your martial talent is quite stunning. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to experience it personally, but please, do go easy on me," young master Liuxiang smiled faintly.

Jiang Chen nodded, "I've always heard that you are one of the best geniuses of this fine city, young master Liuxiang. Today is the perfect opportunity for a friendly fight."

Neither spared niceties for the other.

“Please, go ahead.”

“After you.”

Once the courtesies were over with, however, neither party held back either. Liuxiang’s cultivation level could definitely put him within the top three amongst the scions of the great clans. It was quite possible that he was worthy of first place. But the question had always been, who was stronger, Liuxiang or Ji San? That had always been inconclusive.

Still, Jiang Chen felt that aside from the mysterious large brute that he had faced during the New Star Rankings, this young master was definitely one of the most difficult opponents he’d come across. Liuxiang was at the half-step emperor realm, an impressive feat of cultivation. Moreover, he was cautious on both offense and defense. It was difficult for Jiang Chen to quickly defeat such an opponent.

Since he knew Liuxiang’s style of combat, Jiang Chen had no plans to rush into things. Instead, he matched Liuxiang in a series of unhurried, probing attacks. As a scion of the Coiling Dragon Clan, Liuxiang was sure to have a slew of aces up his sleeve—things like the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman, for example. Thus, Jiang Chen had no plans to use his strongest attacks straight off the bat.

If his opponent used a Talisman, none of his attacks would be of any use, aside from the restriction left in the palace abode. There was no conceivable way that he could actually use that. Doing so would give away his identity and bring unnecessary trouble. As Jiang Chen guessed, Liuxiang waited only a few moments before activating an Imperial Advent Defense Talisman. For the next two hours, his defense would be comparable to an emperor realm level’s. Though that didn’t mean it was necessarily the same as an emperor realm cultivator’s personal defense, the sheer rank of the

shield meant that it was difficult for Jiang Chen to break through it.

Watching from a distance, the Coiling Dragon clan lord didn't quite know what to say.

"Liuxiang isn't taking the bigger picture into account. He's using a Defense Talisman! That's tearing off the pretense of courtesy a bit, isn't it?" The clan lord was none too pleased with the turn of events. It wasn't that he didn't want the young master to win. With any other opponent, the clan lord would have been fine with him using every method at his disposal. But young master Liuxiang was facing Pill King Zhen! The pill king's value to the clan lord aside, there was a slight difference in raw ability between the young master and him. That much was evident from the battles prior.

"I hope Pill King Zhen won't be offended by this," the clan lord silently sighed. He saw as clearly as anyone that the pill king wouldn't give up the rankings so easily. Even if Ji San was onstage, the pill king would be unlikely to sandbag the match. This was the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering after all, a sacred stage.

Jiang Chen was unsurprised at Liuxiang's activation of the talisman. He found it pointless to attack in light of this, instead fighting very conservatively. A Jiang Chen in full defense was difficult for Liuxiang to do much about. Though his offensive power was decent, there was no hope of it being strong enough to overpower Jiang Chen, much less incapacitate him. Given this, the previously even-handed combat became slightly one-sided.

Young master Liuxiang was in full-out assault, while Pill King Zhen was focused on dragging out the conflict. Strangely, Liuxiang seemed to be at his wits' end. Despite exerting all his strength, Pill King Zhen remained unfazed at the onslaught, easily warding off attack after attack. No matter the method that the young master employed, the pill king on the other side of the ring effortlessly repelled it. Watching the anxiety building on Liuxiang's face, Jiang

Chen knew that while he was a genius, his combat strength couldn't even compare to Xiao Paohui's. There was no need for Jiang Chen to resort to any other methods. He'd been able to deflect sixty to seventy percent of the force behind any of the young master's attacks with the Featherflight Mirror alone. The remaining thirty or forty percent was hardly enough to endanger its target.

Two hours passed. The battles in the other arenas were generally concluded, but heated blows were still being traded here. Though young master Liuxiang tried using his various trump cards, it was as if he were punching cotton—completely fruitless. The Imperial Advent Defense Talisman was only effective for two hours. Two hours had since elapsed from its activation, and Liuxiang lost its benefits accordingly.

The corner of Jiang Chen's mouth moved. "Young master Liuxiang," he smiled, "you've been on the offense for so long! You must be tired. Why not try taking one of my attacks instead?"

To Liuxiang's ears, the pill king's joking tone was as harsh as the most mocking taunt. However, Jiang Chen had no desire to tangle further with the young master. He was tired of the youth. Since Liuxiang would always be one of Ji San's opponents, their differences were essentially irreconcilable. Therefore, there was no need to have any second thoughts. Sure, the Coiling Dragon clan lord might express his displeasure later, but this was a competitive fight in a proper arena. He stretched out his arms. At the gesture, the Pentecolor Divine Swords flew out in unison.

"I'm only going to make one attack." Jiang Chen smiled faintly. He made a hand seal, causing the swords to erupt in radiance. They turned into five streaks of light, bursting into the sky. In the next moment, they inflated into five dragon forms, turning the heavens into stormy skies with their presence. Lightning crackled and thunder roared.

In the style of the ancient celestial swordmasters, Jiang Chen

sang out, his sleeves fluttering in the wind.

“The first sword, shaking heaven and earth…”

“The second sword, moving existence itself…”

“The third sword, separating yin and yang…”

“The fourth sword, claiming dominion over the world…”

“The fifth sword, gathering the five elements and forming thunder itself. Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords, slewing the heavens themselves!”

Thunder rumbled in the firmament. The five-colored streaks of light gathered into an ocean of swords that culminated in an abrupt explosion. The sky was filled with sword aura. The momentum of myriad blades exerted an immense pressure on everything beneath it.

Another hand seal from Jiang Chen brought everything crashing down. In the next instant, the entire arena was filled with the shapes and shadows of swords. Sword aura snaked through the air, as if moving in harmony with the heavenly thunder. Behind the deafening crashes, there was an infinitely incomprehensible killing intent. An inexorable tide of swords flooded the world.

In that moment, a pervasive sword aura was the only thing that apparently remained. Like a hundred thousand divine soldiers, it enshrouded everything beneath the four corners of the sky. The fireworks display that the sword technique put on was blinding. The entire audience was dazzled by it. A common thought popped into their minds, What attack is this, that it can strike such madness into our hearts?!

Chapter 946: Eight Consecutive Victories, Battle for First Place

Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique, Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords! Jiang Chen had been trying to comprehend the sword technique for a few months, and this was actually the first time he'd truly executed the technique. Everything had gone better than expected. In fact, it had achieved the level of strength that he had been aiming for.

Countless sword auras rushed towards young master Liuxiang in unison, as though they were locked onto him. Liuxiang had faced many powerful foes since he'd stepped on the road of martial dao and had seen many powerful killer techniques, but he'd never seen one as savage as the one he was currently facing. A sudden inexplicable sense of doom rushed over him and made him feel like a fish on a chopping board. There was no way he could retaliate. Instinct instantly took over. Flee!

He would surely perish if he chose to meet the strike head on! He hesitated no longer after reaching that conclusion. His face aghast, he immediately shot off the arena. Wham!! The Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords viciously arrived the moment after Liuxiang had jumped down, turning half of the arena into ruins.

The arena was protected by restrictive formations. Many powerful attacks were only capable of causing a chip or two in its structure. However, Jiang Chen's sword strike had managed to destroy half of it! The might and power behind the strike stunned the audience. The area was so silent that for a brief moment, one couldn't even hear the sound of people breathing.

Liuxiang was also rendered speechless when he saw the half-destroyed arena after he got back on his feet. The area instantly filled with a tidal wave of applause. Even the Coiling Dragon clan lord was applauding Jiang Chen. He'd noticed that Jiang Chen had

retracted some of his sword intent and gave Liuxiang a chance to escape in that perilous moment. It was fortunate that Liuxiang hadn't been a fool and grabbed the window of opportunity that he was given. The clan lord was skeptical that Liuxiang would still be alive if otherwise.

Jiang Chen cut a dashing figure as he stood proudly with his sword in his hands. He was also in a very excitable mood right now. He'd finally made some small progress with this sword technique. Vastsky Divine Emperor, this junior will make your Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique renowned in the world! He was overcome with emotion. This was his idol's sword technique. He had cultivated this sword technique and executed it, all to show reverence to his most respected idol!

Liuxiang's defeat had made the other great clan's disciples lose their will to challenge Pill King Zhen. Jiang Chen easily achieved six consecutive victories after that. He was then paired against Sunyu Xiaosheng on the seventh round. Interestingly, Sunyu Xiaosheng actually decided to admit defeat instead. This was a surprise. Jiang Chen was actually quite interested in the dark horse. He thought initially that they'd have a gruelling match, but Sunyu Xiaosheng had suddenly admitted defeat. In fact, he'd even seemed quite good-natured while doing so.

Jiang Chen was extremely confused. He couldn't make out whether Sunyu Xiaosheng had thrown the match on purpose or if the other truly believed that he wasn't a match for Jiang Chen. In any case, this meant that Jiang Chen had achieved seven consecutive victories. On the eighth round, Jiang Chen was finally paired with Ji San.

Ji San was deeply immersed in his own thoughts before he smiled wryly, "That sword technique of yours... I've put a lot of thought into it, yet I still can't seem to find a way to defeat it. I think there's no need for either of us to waste our time here."

His opponent had admitted defeat yet again. This had put Jiang

Chen squarely in the spotlight. Every single round was pivotally important in the ranking battles. Every win or loss could determine one's final placement in the rankings. A single loss would mean that one had lost their chance for first place. Ji San hadn't thrown the match to his brother on purpose. He had only admitted defeat after lengthy consideration because he simply couldn't figure out a way to defeat Jiang Chen's formidable sword technique. Thus, Jiang Chen achieved his eighth consecutive victory without even breaking a sweat.

Normally, achieving eight consecutive victories would mean that first place was within reach. However, such was not the case this time, because Jiang Chen's final opponent was just like him and hadn't lost a single battle yet. His name was Mie Chenzi. This man had fought Ji San, Liuxiang, and Sunyu Xiaosheng and had won against all of them! Because of that, Mie Chenzi had replaced Sunyu Xiaosheng as the most talked-about and mysterious dark horse in the tournament. Everyone was extremely curious about this mysterious wandering cultivator. Where was he from, and how had he managed to defeat so many geniuses consecutively?

Ji San even gave Jiang Chen a warning after conceding, "Be wary of Mie Chenzi. This man's cultivation is beyond even mine. He's no ordinary wandering cultivator."

Jiang Chen also understood the other reason why Ji San had chosen to forfeit the match—Ji San wanted his brother to be in peak condition when he battled Mie Chenzi. They both had eight consecutive victories. Whoever won this round would be ranked first in the Genius Rankings. Thus, the final ranking battle was actually the battle with the most on the line. The winner of this battle would become the champion, while the loser would only be a measly runner-up. Even though the results of the other matchups would affect the rankings as well, they weren't even close to being as significant as the result of this battle.

The grand final of the ranking match was scheduled to take place

after all the other ranking matches so that everyone would have the chance to watch the match between the strongest two. Jiang Chen wasn't too bothered by that. He was even more curious about the origins of his opponent. He'd felt intense disdain for his opponent the moment he'd laid eyes on him. The opponent's name had annoyed him greatly too.

Mie Chenzi? Can this be a coincidence? My name is Jiang Chen while his name is a moniker for Death To Chen... He's obviously talking about me right? Could he be here for my life just like that large brute in the New Star Rankings? Jiang Chen was wary. The more he thought about it, the more suspicious he grew.

Even though he'd already become Pill King Zhen of Veluriyam Capital, he knew that there was a possibility that the Ninesuns Sky Sect and Eternal Celestial Capital could find the breadcrumbs that led back to him if they investigated closely enough. All he could do was try not to leave too many crumbs out in the open for them to find. If they suspected something, it was entirely within the capabilities of the two major sects to send out their genius disciples to scope things out.

Jiang Chen had long suspected that the mysterious large brute was a disciple from one of these two sects. This Mie Chenzi was probably another disciple sent to kill him. He began to laugh coldly upon reaching this conclusion. You want to kill me? Come then. It doesn't matter whether you're from the Ninesuns Sky Sect or Eternal Celestial Capital. I'll collect some interest from the both of you before I seek my revenge!

Chapter 947: A Strong Opponent

All the other battles ended after two hours. It was finally time for the penultimate round! Because Jiang Chen and young master Liuxiang's battle had been too destructive earlier on, the organizers had prepared a sturdier arena for this last round. This arena was usually brought out for emperor realm cultivators, yet here it was, making an appearance ahead of time.

This particular arena was twice the size of the others, and its various defensive restrictions very solid and airtight. Jiang Chen glimpsed various runes and glyphs carved onto the four pillars, further reinforcing this arena. On one side of the arena stood Jiang Chen, victor of a successive string of countless battles. He had grown entirely accustomed to the tempo and atmosphere of the Martial Pagoda battles by now. His emotions were completely at ease. No matter who his opponent was or where they came from, his tranquil mind had only one thought in it, Knock them off the arena! If his opponent really had come just for him, he wouldn't mind killing his opponent in the arena again as soon as he detected a hint of that kind of hostility.

Mie Chenzi was, in the likeness of his name, landing silently on the other side of the stage like a speck of dust. [1. Chen also means dust.] The final tussle over the top spot in the Genius Rankings would be decided right here, right now. Amazingly, neither of them was a great clan disciple from Veluriyam Capital. None of the highly favored candidates had made it to the finals at all. Instead, one of the candidates was Pill King Zhen, famed for his knowledge of pill dao, while the other was a wandering cultivator that no one had heard of before.

Mie Chenzi was of average height and had nondescript features. No matter what angle one considered him from, one would think that he was just an ordinary person in the vast world. There was no obvious edge to him, no dashing air, no hint of arrogance. He

really was, as his name suggested, a speck of inconsequential dust in the ground. Yet it was this kind of person who had achieved eight consecutive victories to finally stand on the stage for this last match.

For some reason, Jiang Chen wasn't particularly surprised as he looked at the opponent in front of him. He'd had a hunch the first time he noticed this person that he would be a tough rival. Indeed.

"Pill King Zhen, I've waited for this battle for a long time. I just hadn't thought that it'd come at the end of all the ranking battles and that it would be the decider of who is the champion," Mie Chenzi spoke in an unhurried voice, giving one the feeling of extreme steadiness. It was obvious that there were no ripples of emotion in his heart now. He was wholly focused on the battle to come.

Jiang Chen arched his eyebrow slightly and scanned Mie Chenzi with the God's Eye. "Whether you're anticipating it or have other plans, you have no chance of winning this battle," he spoke with an unprecedented assurance.

His opponent laughed without a flicker of change in his expression. "You've got that much confidence, hmm? I only know that there is always someone better in martial dao. You've had a consecutive string of victories only because you've yet to run into a truly strong opponent. I will end your legend with this battle!"

"Perhaps my string of victories will end, but you won't be the one to end it!" Jiang Chen laughed heartily.

"How arrogant!" Mie Chenzi roared with laughter as well. "I admit that you have the capital to be so full of yourself. But this is all just a joke to me."

This nondescript Mie Chenzi had actually been greatly gathering his aura as he spoke. Bizarrely, the light of someone superior blossomed on his ordinary face, instantly propelling him to a height where he could vie with Jiang Chen. The two geniuses had

already exchanged many rounds of blows as they spoke.

Clang! Mie Chenzi's arm suddenly shook slightly as a keen ray of light broke through the void, like a flash of lightning streaking across the horizon. A blade appeared in his hand, one brimming with killing intent! Mie Chenzi's bearing changed drastically when the blade appeared. What had once seemed like an ordinary cultivator was now akin to an ancient deity struggling to break free of its shackles, awakening in the mortal world. Similarly the blade in his hand embodied the likeness of an ancient beast, suppressed for millennia and full of an uncontrollable savagery, as if it wanted to swallow the very world.

Jiang Chen had fully deployed his God's Eye and Psychic's Head. All of his senses had entered a very delicate state of perception that allowed him to clearly evaluate his opponent's every move.

Mie Chenzi only needed to move his arm slightly to have that fierce blade churn up a sharp light. A bolt of lightning appeared out of nowhere, suddenly materializing and striking towards Jiang Chen. The air shuddered wherever the blade's edge passed, disturbing the very order of the laws of space. Jiang Chen's eyes moved rapidly as he lightly swept his arms with the Featherflight Mirror in his sleeve.

Pfft pfft pfft pfft! When the light hit the blade's edge, the previously impervious edge seem to crash head on into a wondrous power. A grating sound rang out as the cutting light broke up and dissipated into motes of light. Mie Chenzi had deployed this stroke in an exceedingly subtle fashion, and its greatest strength was in that the light would hide in the void after it was deployed, making people unable to even track where the attack was coming from.

But with Jiang Chen's Psychic's Head bolstering his senses to be many times stronger than that of the average cultivator, he could accurately grasp the path of the blade's light. Although it truly was very fast, on par with a shooting star's speed, slowing down swift attacks was the Mirror's specialty. It could take on all comers

unless the opponent's speed was faster than Jiang Chen's reaction speed.

Sadly for Mie Chenzi, although his attack was very discreet, it wasn't faster than his opponent's reaction time. The light from the slash broke up, scattering all over the arena. Impacts onto the four pillars in the corners also sounded. Marks from stray sword aura were left on them, causing the audience to suck in breaths of surprise. This arena was much more durable than the one prior. Its restrictions were several times stronger as well. However, Mie Chenzi's sword aura had still been strong enough to leave marks on the infrastructure. Though the marks weren't very deep, it was still shocking nonetheless. It would seem that even the remnants of this wandering cultivator's strike was stronger than many's geniuses' full strikes! After all, full hits from many of those participating in the Genius Rankings may not even leave such a deep mark on the pillars.

The audience was holding their breath out of nervousness and their hearts were in their throats. Many of them still wished that Pill King Zhen would win. Although the pill king wasn't a Veluriyam Capital native, he was still considered as one of them now. Who was Mie Chenzi? No one knew of him. Since he was a complete stranger, no one wanted him to win. They didn't want him to take the championship at all. It wouldn't be a loss of face for just the geniuses if a random stranger were to win that highest honor, but for the entirety of Veluriyam Capital too. Therefore, not only did House Wei, Taiyuan Tower, and Emperor Peafowl's faction wish that Pill King Zhen would win, but many of the other great emperor factions and other Veluriyam Capital cultivators did as well.. In this way, he could at least guard this last bit of face for them.

"Clan Lord, do you have any thoughts about this Mie Chenzi?" Ji San couldn't help but ask in the end.

However, the clan lord also shook his head. "No one's been able

to find out where he comes from; his background is hidden deep. However, I speculate that he's from a great sect. It's just that there are too many of such people in the Upper Eight Regions, and the young disciples of the various sects rarely get together. Everything is shrouded in mystery, so it truly is too hard to determine where he's from."

The various Upper Eight Region sects surely raised many geniuses in private, but they rarely showed their faces, even for an occasion like this. The sects wouldn't be willing to expose their trump cards either, so it was very difficult to find out anything about their geniuses without a special investigation. The Coiling Dragon clan lord wasn't able to glean much about Mie Chenzi. But of one thing he was certain, and that was that with this person's degree of strength, he would certainly be a true disciple, even in a first-rate sect. He'd be ranked within the top five or even within the top three.

Young master Ji San and Liuxiang had all crossed paths with this fellow before, so they were naturally aware of how frightening his strength was. Young master Liuxiang had left after his defeat to Jiang Chen, with only Ji Zhongtang staying with the clan lord. His eyes were fixated on the arena as he gave the fight his full attention. He was a martial dao fanatic. Although he'd lost to Jiang Chen, he wasn't in the least bit depressed. Defeat was nothing in his eyes. One moved forward on the path of martial dao only after repeated defeat. What he had to do was to observe his opponents and continuously aim for self-improvement with the hopes that one day, he'd be able to mount a comeback.

Back on the stage, Mie Chenzi didn't feel that he had suffered a setback after his move had been parried. Rather, he struck out repeatedly instead, forming sixty-four slashes, as if he had a dozen arms. They were completed in the blink of an eye, with the afterimages of arms being raised to deliver a sword strike appearing everywhere on the stage. In the next moment, they

actually formed an enormous eight trigram formation of sword shadows, sealing off all the space around Jiang Chen for a hundred mile radius.

The sword's light was like a dragon ravaging the void. It's most critical aspect was that each stroke was untraceable and unfathomable. They were akin to a meteor shower, suddenly here and then gone without a trace. These sixty-four strokes were the pinnacle of Mie Chenzi's essence of sword dao. He'd deployed its maximum speed and profound mystery.

Even those with the most confidence in Jiang Chen couldn't help but feel nervous in this moment. The sword light attacking from all fronts covered every angle of approach; there were no gaps whatsoever. When the formation closed in on ten meters away from Jiang Chen, the sword images suddenly all darted out of the void and shot out stunning splendor. The extreme bloodthirsty aura they exuded seem to carry the summons from hell itself. Ghouls and spirits howled, dragons and tigers roared, the very earth and sky itself was collapsing...

In that critical moment, all sixty-four beams of light landed solidly on Jiang Chen. Blood burst out of his body in the next second as his entire body exploded.

"What?!" The audience was stunned by the sight. A deathly silence descended, as no one was able to accept this cruel development. Shen Trifire and the others watching beneath the stage could barely remain on their feet. Ling Hui'er cried out, the two great mounds on her chest heaving as her eyes grew red and tears trickled down her face. Gouyu's strikingly fair face drained of all its color as she grasped Huang'er's arm, her entire body trembling uncontrollably. Huang'er eyes darted around rapidly. A trace of a smile suddenly appeared on her lips as she lightly patted Gouyu's shoulder. "Don't worry, sister Gouyu. Everything's fine."

A smile played about on Mie Chenzi's lips. However, he suddenly wavered as he seemed to detect something. His arm quickly

whirled in a backhand slash.

Pfft! This stroke was extremely sudden and it screamed through the air.

Bam! The powerful light hit nothing, however. It just crashed into the pillar.

“Hmm?” The candidate frowned. He’d felt the slightest twinge of danger just now, so why had his stroke landed on empty air? When he turned to view the location of his opponent’s destruction again, he found nothing in front of him. The so-called gory scene had just been an illusion.

“Cheap tricks!” He was finally certain that he’d been played. Pill King Zhen had an ability to disappear that he’d already used twice, so Mie Chenzi was surprised but not dumbfounded by this development. “Pill King Zhen, I’ll humor you since you’re afraid of fighting me face-to-face. I’ll have you know that these little parlor tricks are nothing in the end!”

He was fully displaying his domineering bearing at this moment, no longer emanating the demeanor of an ordinary wandering cultivator. It would seem that having his moves miss several times in a row had angered him. He reached out with a grasping motion, coming up with a bell in his hand. It was a sinisterly designed bell, as the handle looked like a sword’s handle, whereas the bell itself was designed as a grimacing monster with a pair of wings on its back. The item was accompanied by an eerie aura, instantly dampening the arena's atmosphere.

Chapter 948: Counterattack, Dragon Roar!

The handbell exerted a sinister influence upon the several thousand meters of space in the arena. A sense of disgust was universally felt; nausea, blindness, and a generally nameless malaise. A shadowy haze seemed to set in over the arena. The bright sun and blue sky were no longer, obscured by a billowing gray. Mie Chenzi raised his left hand high into the air and shook the bell.

Ring, ring, ring. The sound was best described as bizarrely magical. It resounded outwards from the stage. Nothing unusual about the noise appeared at first hearing. But when it echoed and resonated with the material of the arena itself, the reverberations created a strangely mesmerizing tune that filled up the space. The flow of air itself was altered. The atmosphere filled with a kind of disorientation and bafflement that couldn't easily be described.

Though he was both airborne and well-hidden, Jiang Chen nevertheless fell into a brief daze. His face colored in the next moment. The sound of the bell had the power to attack a person's consciousness! It brought discord to its listeners' hearts. It wasn't merely a mental attack, either. The clinking metal also disrupted its audience's biological functions. Even someone as composed as Jiang Chen had been affected by uncontrollable confusion! Many parts of his body simply became unresponsive. Steeling his heart with cold resolve, Jiang Chen brought his Boulder's Heart to bear in order to counteract the demonic percussion's effects.

The bell's cacophony was quite potent. It wasn't limited to merely disrupting one's body or consciousness. It also attacked one's dual nature, assaulting flesh and spirit both. For the typical soft-minded genius, the first attack would have been sufficient to confuse them completely. Once they were thrown into disarray, they would become a member of the living dead, entirely at their conductor's disposal. In order to combat the sound, Jiang Chen

exerted the Boulder's Heart to the fullest of his ability. In the meantime, he had a few reservations. Mie Chenzi has come amply prepared. A mere wandering cultivator couldn't possibly possess a bell like this. A treasure that can attack both the body and mind is hard to come by. He must be a genius from one of the top sects, and I am his goal. This revelation incensed Jiang Chen.

"Mie Chenzi, your sonic attack might work on others, but you'll have no such luck with me!" A faint humming from his mouth turned into a full-fledged roar. In the next moment, he pushed his bloodline to the maximum, making the image of an ancient dragon erupt from nothingness. It hurtled into the firmament, carrying rain and wind in its wake. The sounds of his roar became deeper and more intense with every passing moment. It was as if the dragon itself was roaring.

"Is that really the roar of a dragon!?" Ceaseless and piercing, the draconic cry evoked surprise from every observer present. Their expressions of amazement from the shift in the battle turned into shock. A dragon's roar!

Only a true dragon could produce such a feat. Jiang Chen's dragon image had already been quite startling, and there had been suspicions circulating whether he truly possessed the bloodline or not. This deafening display was far more substantial. It was as if a true dragon had descended onto the earth, as a resounding cry permeated the air surrounding the Veluriyam Pagoda.

Like a small stream being taken as tributary by a larger river, the sound of the bell was swallowed whole. A dragon's roar reigned over all, suppressing all. Mie Chenzi looked absolutely horrified. Having just unleashed his trump card, he felt as secure as Mount Tai. He was sure that his Souldrain Bell would guarantee him victory. There had never been anyone who could resist the Bell's lure, especially when used as an ambush. Certainly, anyone on or slightly above its level had no chance of resisting whatsoever against it. The Bell was a timeless treasure of the olden ages. Alas,

Mie Chenzi's calculations were awry this time.

His opponent hadn't lost himself under the Bell's influence. Neither consciousness nor flesh had been destroyed, or even damaged for that matter. That such a stalwart defense had been conjured up in a mere split-second... how could Mie Chenzi not be surprised? His opponent's instantaneous counterattack was what scared him the most, though. The overwhelming din of the roar ate up the tinkling of the Bell perfectly. The Souldrain Bell's strength lay in the peculiar cadence of its percussive notes, and it relied on these notes to disorient and distort. The instrument itself couldn't produce any kind of sound waves that rivaled a dragon's vocal chords.

Pill King Zhen's draconic roar was like a tsunami, encompassing and incorporating everything in its wake. It broke up and devoured the Bell's own sounds completely. The worst thing was that the roar itself was becoming a mounting threat. His eardrums and consciousness were both continuously assaulted by the strident barrage.

The pressure that came with the roar was dignified and grand, as broad and all-encompassing as the heavens and the earth themselves. A lofty sense of commanding contempt filled the space. Compared to this roar, the ringing of the Souldrain Bell was wretched, almost clownish. Though he'd ridiculed how outlandish his opponent was, Mie Chenzi was the one that felt like a clown after contrasting the two. He didn't have the time to think about much more than that. If he didn't respond now, the force of the roar would totally consume him, ripping his body and consciousness to shreds.

A dragon's roar didn't only attack through sound alone. There was another frightful component: its draconic aura, and the terrible, destructive energies contained therein. It was fortune among misfortunes for Mie Chenzi that Jiang Chen hadn't actually practiced the technique. He had acted on Long Xiaoxuan's

suggestion alone when he'd been forced into a corner by the bell. However, he did possess the blood of a true dragon. With this, even this inaugural roar shook its hearers to the core.

People several thousand meters out felt a mountain weighing down on their chests. They couldn't help but back off in order to avert some of its crushing weight. At the center of the storm, Mie Chenzi was fully surrounded by the dragon's roar. Since Jiang Chen was using the ability for the first time, it lacked both offensive and staying power. Still, it was a fearsome ability to contend with.

When it came to true dragons, even an ordinary ability was much more potent than anything that the average cultivator could muster. The true dragon race was one of the strongest races that had descended from ancient times, reigning above most others! True dragons could move unfettered throughout the entirety of the heavenly planes. A place as small as the Divine Abyss Continent couldn't hold a candle up to that.

Now that Jiang Chen had surpassed his opponent in terms of presence, it was time to press the advantage. With a few movements of his hands, the Pentecolor Divine Swords reappeared in the air. He began to chant once again. Verse called upon sword, and thunder rolled behind the clouds. The Divine Five Thunderclap Sword technique conjured a rainstorm of rushing swords, raining down on Mie Chenzi with a frightening vehemence.

Jiang Chen held nothing back this time. When he previously mobilized the strength of ten thousand swords against young master Liuxiang, Jiang Chen had kept some of his power in reserve. He'd given his opponent the option of withdrawing in the face of adversity. There was no such grace shown this time. He was going to utterly crush his opponent in a candid and forthright way! The roar and the Thunderclap Sword were both incredibly straightforward and aboveboard methods.

A terrifying sword aura flew out in every direction, cutting off all means of escape, all hope of life. Thunder and lightning served as the scene's backdrop. Like a hundred thousand divine warriors, the swords were overwhelming and relentless.

Having witnessed the restrained version of the sword technique used on Liuxiang, Mie Chenzi had judged it to be flawed and incomplete. He felt that Jiang Chen hadn't trained to the level of true perfection yet. He laughed to himself upon seeing Jiang Chen use the technique once more. It was a superb chance for him to reverse his odds. However, he quickly discovered his naiveté.

When Jiang Chen used the technique on him, the flaws he had observed earlier were no longer apparent. There were no weaknesses, be it big or small, that he could exploit. No matter which direction Mie Chenzi wanted to escape to, every path was closed off to him. The streaks of sword aura were absolutely endless; they became a network of interlocking blades, carrying lightning and thunder in their wake. Every side and corner combined to form an immaculate whole. He could find no advantage, no matter which place veered towards.

Mie Chenzi colored in fear. He knew that he couldn't evade the sword technique any longer. Hastily, he activated a talisman, crumbling it in his hand. Reddish-copper rays lit up over his entire body. In the next moment, a suit of armor appeared, covering his entire physique with iridescent fish-scales in defense.

"Facing it head on is the only option!" Mie Chenzi had a lot of confidence in the talisman. Though he'd rushed to activate it, he made it in time in the end. The countless streaks of sword aura plunged onto his body in the next instant.

Ping ping ping... Endless sounds of collision could be heard around Mie Chenzi, brutal in severity and volume. Sword aura sent him flying every which way, but the talisman's defensive fortitude was undeniable. It might not have been as effective as the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman, but it wasn't far from that. Despite

being immensely powerful, Jiang Chen's blitz of a countless number of sword strokes failed to penetrate the glyph-armor. Mie Chenzi was now coughing up blood at an alarming frequency, but his internal organs hadn't been pierced. His vitals were mostly in fine shape. However, his injuries were definitely serious enough to make him suffer.

Jiang Chen furrowed his brow at his opponent's strong defense. His hands didn't remain idle. He activated his formation disk once more, the eight statues within came blitzing out in a renewed assault. He'd taken the eight statues from the Prince of Shangping. Jiang Chen's modifications had brought out more of their abilities, further increasing their combat strength. The best thing about them was that there was no need to devote any resources to defense.

Controlled by Jiang Chen's formation disk, the statues encircled Mie Chenzi A little winded from the onslaught of sword strokes, Mie Chenzi had expected a window to retaliate. Unfortunately, the aggression he faced was dogged and implacable. No matter what he did, he was unable to free himself from the mob of statues. Most concerning was they they entirely ignored his attempts to damage them. Like mad tigers and frenzied hounds, they nipped at him, awaiting the moment to strike a finishing blow.

Chapter 949: Unexpected Forfeiture

Mie Chenzi was a veteran of countless battles. In every one of his past conquests, he'd maimed, crushed, and mercilessly tricked his opponents without mercy. There had never been a battle as unpleasant as today's. He'd been outmaneuvered at every turn, stifled at every move, and to top it off, he couldn't even begin to think of any solutions to his predicament. He had seen the eight statues before. Their previous owner had been a wandering cultivator known as the Prince of Shangping. But in his memories, the eight statues lacked both the terrifying offensive strength and the astonishing mobility that they currently possessed. The statues now had a new spirit to them along with several degrees of increased intelligence. They had become similar to real cultivators, both in terms of raw power and battlefield awareness.

That wasn't the most annoying aspect about them, however. The most irritating part was that the statues weren't of flesh and blood; they were inorganic objects! None of his retaliation had any effect whatsoever. The most a strike that landed did was leave a faint scar. Mie Chenzi's blade hacked at the statues again and again, but he had no way of totally annihilating them. As essentially puppets of their controller's will, the statues could not be counted as completely destroyed unless they were shattered. The problem with this proposition was that... puppets were unafraid of taking a beating, but he was.

Yes, he'd instantly increased his body's defenses several times over, but the torrent of attacks he'd experienced just now had already inflicted a few wounds. Though he would be fine in the immediate future if he allowed the statues to continuously land blows on him, it would surely be a problem if stretched over a longer period of time. Most importantly, the glyph's defensive boost had a time limit. Once its duration was up, he had no way to protect himself against the frenzied assault from the pack of

statues. His fleshly body wouldn't last long against the inorganic statues once a pitched battle ensued. Mie Chenzi's heart was aflame with anxiety.

This was a predicament that he'd never encountered before. He still possessed a final trump card, but it was difficult for him to draw it under the present circumstances. More importantly, if he did show it to the audience, his identity would be revealed, and that would bring disaster onto himself and his sect.

In this moment, Mie Chenzi was hopelessly uneasy. The match had three secret observers who were even more restless than him. The three holy kings from the Eternal Celestial Capital—Saint Holy Kings Mu and Ke, and Holy King Bei— were watching from a safe distance. The 'Mie Chenzi' in the arena was a top-ranked genius from the Eternal Celestial Capital, one of the sect's true disciples. Having seen all of Pill King Zhen's successive victories prior, they'd witnessed the brutal killing of someone who looked suspiciously like a similarly prestigious disciple from the Ninesuns Sky Sect. They'd already had second thoughts about whether they should send their own best genius in the first place.

The Eternal Celestial Capital had sent three geniuses in total. However, the other two were already useless. Even if they were to take the stage, the only thing that fate had in store for them was death. Only Mie Chenzi stood a ghost of a chance. When he'd produced the Souldrain Bell, all three holy kings were absolutely astounded. Truly, the head of the sect's favor for 'Mie Chenzi' knew no bounds.

Strangely, the Bell that they saw as a path to certain victory had little effect on Pill King Zhen. Quite the opposite, the counterblow that Pill King Zhen struck allowed him to gain the upper hand instead. Wave after wave, the pill king's barrage was inexorable. It seemed that Mie Chenzi was having a fair bit of trouble warding off his attacks. The trio was flabbergasted by this. They'd had their previous suspicions that Pill King Zhen was actually Jiang Chen,

but this time they started second-guessing themselves. Jiang Chen was extraordinary, sure, but all news of him indicated that this kind of capability was beyond his abilities.

Is... is this Pill King Zhen really not Jiang Chen? This was the question that each and every holy king had in mind. Given what had happened so far? It was honestly hard to tell. Pill King Zhen's abilities had surpassed their estimates to the point of absurdity. Could any of their true disciples overcome the man?

Likely not.

Was Jiang Chen a genius that could accomplish such a feat? Ultimately, Regal Pill Palace was only a fourth-rank sect, and Jiang Chen was just a genius from that sect. Being able to rise out of the Myriad Domain and amounting to anything in the Upper Eight Regions were two very different things. Even the most diehard Zhen-Chen theorist, Saint Holy King Mu, became uncertain.

Unfortunately, the current state of affairs was difficult to recover from. The sight of Mie Chenzi in imminent danger on the stage only increased the three holy kings' anxiety. Among the Eternal Celestial Capital's best disciples, Mie Chenzi easily made it into the top five and was even a reasonable contender for the top three. Furthermore, he was the grandson of the sect head. The latter heavily favored him.

"Brother Ke, shouldn't Mie Chenzi have more trump cards up his sleeve? He is the grandson of the sect head, after all. Is continuing to take Jiang Chen's beating the only thing he can do?"

"I don't think the sect head would've let Mie Chenzi take such a big risk by coming here without the necessary preparation." Saint Holy King Ke returned a wry smile. "My guess is on him waiting for a window of counterattack." With things as they were currently, that was the only thing they could hope for.

In the arena proper, Jiang Chen looked leisurely and relaxed. In actuality, he was constantly observing his surroundings. He was

waiting for a chance to land the killing blow. He no longer had any doubts that his opponent was an envoy from an enemy sect.

The Ninesuns Sky Sect, Eternal Celestial Capital, or Pillfire City… it had to be one of these. The Great Scarlet Mid Region was hostile to him as well, but he was confident that no genius from it could possibly reach the level Mie Chenzi was at, hence his hypothesis about the other's origin. As for exactly which one, Jiang Chen had no interest in finding out. He had only one thought in mind: to kill his opponent before he could leave the stage. The target of this murderous intent sensed Jiang Chen's motives, his disposition turning serious. For a time, his movements became more guarded, and he was almost able to maintain defensive equilibrium.

Jiang Chen started brainstorming how to break the stalemate when he saw this. He had many other methods, of course—formations, his Bewitching Lotus, his magnetic golden mountain… But he wasn't planning to use any of them for the time being. Flourishing his sleeves, he shot out an invisible ray from his Featherflight Mirror.

Mie Chenzi was already busy enough handling the eight statues. How would he be prepared for the Mirror's unforeseen intervention? His back swayed, and his step slowed a beat. This momentary delay caused two statues to collide into both his left and right shoulders. Bam bam! Though he had a strong defensive ward over his entire body, the attacks were fierce enough to cause him bone-splitting pain. His breath became ragged, his vitals disturbed by the impact. They weren't exactly lethal, but the attacks definitely did a number on him. Twenty or thirty of those swings would be enough to cause heavy trauma.

Jiang Chen repeated his previous gesture. Constant rays from the Featherflight Mirror beamed towards Mie Chenzi's body, perpetually opportunistic in their timing. Being constantly slowed by the mirror impeded him enough to be hit seven or eight more times in succession. None of them caused any critical bruises, but

the nonstop bashes only worsened his condition. The talisman's warding ability was formidable, but it couldn't stand up to an unbroken stream of blows.

Scrambling in panic, Mie Chenzi shouted at the top of his lungs, "Pill King Zhen, your methods are too strong. I admit defeat!"

He... admits defeat?

Jiang Chen hadn't at all imagined the possibility of Mie Chenzi's forfeiture at this crucial juncture. Had he just been shamed into submission by a volley of attacks? The very purpose of shaming him was in order to provoke him! Preferably so that in the heat of the moment, he'd blurt out something like, "I'll never surrender!" Alas, Jiang Chen had underestimated the thickness of this Mie Chenzi's hide. Surrendering! What a turn of events... at such a key time, too.

When all was said and done, this was only a competitive match. There was no justification for cutting down one's opponent after a public surrender. It was in the rules as well—upon a forfeit, the winning side could not pursue the losing side any further. Jiang Chen wanted more than anything to kill his opponent right then and there, but reason told him that victory was already decided.

Holding back his Mirror, Jiang Chen sneered. "Mie Chenzi, you talked so much smack about ending my winning streak. Shame that it's all bluster and no bite, huh?"

This was an attempt to aggravate Mie Chenzi anew. Mie Chenzi had a dark expression on his face. "The match is over. What's the point of saying anything more? Winners are always right, losers are always wrong. You're the former, so whatever you say is fine."

He was rather decisive about it all. Those were the words of a man with nothing left to lose. They were difficult to sink one's teeth into. Jiang Chen could only maintain his sneer, his God's Eye looking profoundly into the other man's soul. Mie Chenzi became impassive again. With an utterly undecipherable look, he appeared

perfectly ordinary once more.

“Pill King Zhen, nine wins in a row! First place in the ranking battles, top of the Genius Rankings!” The match concluded, the judge stood forward to loudly announce the result. The other groups’ ranking battles were over now as well. The chance to challenge others came next. According to the regulations stated previously, the fourth to sixth groups had the right to challenge the top thirty geniuses within the first to third groups.

Very few of them actually exercised the option, however. They’d been witnesses to the differences in strength firsthand. Clearly, everyone had a certain fear that issuing a challenge was equivalent to an open insult. As such, it could be the spark to further aggression in the arena. If by chance a higher-ranked person was challenged and took it as an affront, the lower-ranked person’s life would be in danger when he faced the full brunt of the higher-ranked person’s might.

Given this consideration, there were only six instances of such challenges. All of them ended in failure without exception. The last four areas had a similar opportunity open to them in order to enter the top 164 spots. The stakes were slightly different—they opened up the door to competing in the Ranking of Young Lords. It was an opportunity that almost none of the particularly low-ranked cultivators wanted to give up. Thus, the battles that occurred afterwards between the lower ranks were far fiercer.

Chapter 950: The Ranking of Young Lords

Thirty-six contestants from the last four groups were going to be disqualified because their places would eventually be taken by the thirty-six geniuses of the seven great emperors instead. Competition was very intense at the bottom of the rankings because of that, with eight geniuses launching successful challenges at the end of the battles.

The final segment came right after that. Some disqualified geniuses were now given their second chance. They had to have been beaten by a contender in the top thirty to qualify for a second chance, with this chance being their final attempt. They would have to challenge the 164 finalists for the Genius Rankings. There weren't that many unlucky cultivators worthy of a second chance amongst the disqualified, but Wei Jie was one of them. However, there was one more genius disciple from a great clan that had been even more unlucky than him. He was defeated when he was still talking.

Roughly a dozen contenders claimed their second chance, but only Wei Jie and the great clan disciple succeeded. Wei Jie had chosen his opponent very carefully. After a hard battle, he finally won and took over his opponent's place. He was now ranked 156th. With that, the Genius Rankings finally came to a close.

164 contestants from the Genius Rankings and thirty-six geniuses under the seven great emperors were now going to fight for a spot in the Ranking of Young Lords. Only thirty-six of them would qualify for the Ranking of Young Lords. Many contestants among the Genius Rankings were only lesser characters when compared to the true geniuses. Probably less than ten of them were actually qualified to challenge the Ranking of Young Lords. However, there probably wouldn't be more than three that would successfully enter the Ranking of Young Lords.

The Ranking of Young Lords battles had an entirely different set

of rules than the previous two ranking battles. Thirty-six successors of the seven great emperors were already listed in the Ranking of Young Lords. The other 164 geniuses were merely given the opportunity to challenge them. Each contestant only had one chance and one specific target to challenge.

Those in the first group of the Genius Rankings were only qualified to challenge the twenty-first ranked genius of the Ranking of Young Lords, while those in the second group were only qualified to challenge the twenty-second ranked genius. This pattern continued all the way down to the sixteenth group that could challenge the thirty-sixth ranked genius. The ten geniuses in each group were only given one chance, and they all had to face the same opponent.

Jiang Chen's first challenge was naturally the twenty-first ranked genius since he was in the first group. The top twenty geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords were not required to accept any challengers at this stage. Only those ranked twenty-first to thirty-sixth were required to defend their places in the Ranking of Young Lords as an arena lord. This stage of the tournament often ended with the total defeat of all challengers in past tournaments. In fact, it was commonplace for the geniuses affiliated with the great emperors to occupy all the places in the Ranking of Young Lords. This time, however, many were optimistic that a few could possibly overcome this challenge. Everyone had placed their hopes on the first group.

The rules of the challenge were quite brutal. If a genius within the first group was able to successfully defeat the twenty-first ranked candidate, the other geniuses in the first group would have to move up the list and challenge the twentieth ranked genius in the rankings. If two were somehow able to succeed, then the rest would have to challenge the nineteenth ranked genius. The same rules applied for the other groups as well. However, the possibility that the other groups could succeed was close to zero. Geniuses

who managed to win the challenge had historically come from the first group. Those who couldn't even manage to enter the top ten were unlikely to defeat their opponent in the Ranking of Young Lords.

The geniuses in the first group had already battled amongst themselves. Now, their common enemy was the twenty-first ranked genius. His name was Gu Zhenshan, a true disciple of Emperor Mountaincrush. [1. Gu Zhenshan's name also means Mountaincrush.] Gu Zhenshan possessed a very impressive cultivation level, and was ranked third amongst the geniuses under Emperor Mountaincrush. However, Jiang Chen didn't seem to know much about him.

Geniuses under the great emperors didn't often engage with the commoners. A great number of citizens in Veluriyam Capital weren't even familiar with these young lords. These young lords pursued their own dao and had their own plans. Those who kept a high profile were more well-known, but those who kept a low profile were so secretive that even their peers weren't sure of their cultivation levels.

The geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords were actually ranked by the seven great emperors after an internal discussion amongst themselves. However, this also meant that the rankings sometimes didn't precisely reflect their true capabilities.

The first genius to challenge Gu Zhenshan was Alchemist Xi from the Rising Tide Clan. Jiang Chen had a few impressions of Alchemist Xi. Alchemist Xi was actually quite talented in pill dao. However, the alchemist seemed to enjoy pill dao more, and was actually one of the weakest amongst the top ten in the Genius Rankings. This of course meant that he wasn't even capable of giving Gu Zhenshan a warmup. He was promptly kicked out of the arena in just three strikes.

It wasn't that Alchemist Xi was so weak that he couldn't even handle three basic moves from the young lord. Jiang Chen could

tell that Gu Zhenshan had used very powerful techniques right from the beginning to set an example. He wanted to scare the other competitors with his might and show the disparity between them. He had killed a chicken to scare the monkeys, so to speak. True enough, the few geniuses next in line after Alchemist Xi were also easily defeated. They couldn't even manage to last more than fifteen minutes.

Jiang Chen had begun to understand Gu Zhenshan a little more after these fights. He was worthy of being a true disciple of a great emperor due to his exceptional talent, but he was just a little too petty and narrow-minded. He was definitely not the one who would eventually succeed Emperor Mountaincrush. Of this, Jiang Chen was quite sure of. He was a fair judge of character. Gu Zhenshan wasn't fated to be the patriarch of a great emperor clan, but was rather a suitable elder candidate.

People continued to challenge him, but they all lost. It was soon young master Liuxiang's turn to challenge him, which he still lost after fighting a hard battle. According to the rules, the arena lord was allowed a few hour's rest after every three rounds. It was already Gu Zhenshan's sixth consecutive victory by the time he'd defeated Liuxiang. He decided to rest when he considered the difficulty of the battles from there on out. The four remaining contenders were Sunyu Xiaosheng, Ji San, Mie Chenzi, and Jiang Chen.

To prevent accumulation of fatigue from previous bouts, the arena lord was given an option for six hours' rest after every battle from the fifth round onwards. This was to prevent fatigue and also to prevent giving the person next in line an unfair advantage.

After six hours had passed, it was Sunyu Xiaosheng's turn. Jiang Chen had been paying close attention to the frivolous wandering cultivator. This was a matchup which Gu Zhenshan could possibly lose. As expected, Gu Zhenshan started the fight by trying to overwhelm Sunyu Xiaosheng with a flurry of attacks. However,

Sunyu Xiaosheng was able to suppress the attacks with his superior ability to control the flow of the battle. Gu Zhenshan felt like he was dishing out punches to a heap of cotton.

Sunyu Xiaosheng was able to control the flow of battle at an incredibly frightening level. Gu Zhenshan's tried-and-true method of overwhelming his opponents was rendered useless, as he simply couldn't bring out the full might of his punches. It could have been an incredibly entertaining match if Gu Zhenshan had been paired against a similar opponent to him. But unfortunately, he was paired against Sunyu Xiaosheng. Each strike only made him even more frustrated and depressed.

However, he was still a successor to a great emperor in the end. After a series of bitter exchanges, he finally decided to use the trump card of a great emperor's true disciple. Through the might of his equipment, he was able to suppress Sunyu Xiaosheng and defeated him in a moment of carelessness. Sunyu Xiaosheng earned the respect of everyone present despite his loss. A wandering cultivator was able to break into the top ten of the Genius Rankings and almost make it into the Ranking of Young Lords? If Gu Zhenshan hadn't overpowered his opponent through the might of his equipment, there was no say in how the fight might've ended.

Everyone present strongly believed that Sunyu Xiaosheng had caught the attention of the seven great emperors, even though he hadn't entered the Ranking of Young Lords. If he made good use of this opportunity, he could possibly have a meteoric rise and become a great emperor's true disciple. He wasn't beneath Gu Zhenshan in terms of pure talent and battle instinct. He'd only lost due to the discrepancy between their equipment. Such was the flaw of being a wandering cultivator.

This only made Jiang Chen even more curious. Sunyu Xiaosheng had obviously been taught by an incredibly formidable master, so why was his equipment so inadequate? It was obvious that he'd

only been using the type of equipment wandering cultivators had access to. Jiang Chen theorized that Sunyu Xiaosheng might have been taught by a formidable master, but he didn't belong in any powerful clan or sect. Since Sunyu Xiaosheng was defeated, it was now Ji San's turn to challenge Gu Zhenshan.

Gu Zhenshan no longer dared to belittle his opponents. He chose to take a rest instead of accepting consecutive fights, as his opponents were no longer slouches. Ji San also wasn't the kind of person to capitalize on another person's disadvantage. While his opponent was resting, he consulted Jiang Chen about Gu Zhenshan's martial methods and abilities. Jiang Chen managed to give very important pointers to Ji San, as he was extremely good at deduction. In order for Ji San to have a chance of winning, they agreed that he would have to suppress Gu Zhenshan's equipment advantage first.

Chapter 951: Jiang Chen's Martial Dao Knowledge

Jiang Chen had occasionally seen Ji San battle because he had known him for a long time, but this was actually the first time he'd ever seen his brother go all out. One could tell that Gu Zhenshan was no longer belittling his opponent. He'd chosen to draw out the fight against Ji San instead of throwing out a flurry of powerful attacks at the beginning like what he'd done in his battle against Alchemist Xi. He was showing his respect and veneration for the Coiling Dragon Clan successor.

Gu Zhenshan was a true disciple of a great emperor. By reputation alone, one would expect that he'd have a better upbringing and legacy than a young master of the Coiling Dragon Clan. However, he was only a mere third-ranked disciple under Emperor Mountaincrush while Ji San was a genius that was first in line to succeed the entire Coiling Dragon Clan. Gu Zhenshan was in no position to act all high and mighty towards him.

Jiang Chan grew more impressed as the battle went on. He'd always thought that Ji San was less of a tactician in battle than Liuxiang due to his easy-going nature. In fact, he'd always thought that Ji San was inferior to Ji Zhongtang in terms of raw martial dao talent as well. However, he soon realized that he'd underestimated his brother too much. Ji San was in no way worse off. Moreover, since he was a few years older than Ji Zhongtang, he was more proficient with the clan's martial method too.

The easy-going Ji San had become quite serious because he was facing a truly powerful foe. His defense was incredibly tight, his attacks equally as powerful. His impeccable timing for attacking and defending made him every bit worthy of his heritage. He wasn't showing any signs of inferiority against a true disciple of a great emperor! Jiang Chen never imagined that Ji San would

possess such a heaven-defying martial dao. He was actually a cultivator that adapted to his opponent's strength!

Odd geniuses like these would occasionally appear in the martial dao world. One could never truly see the full potential of these geniuses. However, they would often unleash an unimaginable burst of potential once placed in a difficult battle. The audience would often be shocked by their sudden increase in power. Ji San was definitely a cultivator of this sort. One could say that he was hiding his true abilities by playing a pig to eat the tiger, but this match alone was enough to prove that Ji San was no less talented in martial dao than Liuxiang. Jiang Chen had battled Liuxiang once. First hand experience had told him that Liuxiang was no slouch, but he wasn't an incredible talent either.

They were both successors of the Coiling Dragon Clan, but Liuxiang's martial dao path leaned towards the feminine side. Moreover, he was too reliant on his equipment and inheritance. His biggest flaw of all was the fact that his inheritance and equipment weren't completely compatible with each other. This meant that he wasn't able to fully utilize either of them. Ji San's martial dao path, on the other hand, encompassed a balance of both sides. A path like this would mean that he could attack and defend at will. He might not stand out in any way, but his potential in battle was limitless.

Ji San had given up the match against Jiang Chen. However, his battle today had made Jiang Chen believe that he would've had a difficult time defeating Ji San if his brother had gone all out against him and used all of his clan inheritance. Jiang Chen's opinion of this only solidified as the battle went on. It seems like the clan lord is already leaning towards Brother Ji. I probably won't be able to defeat Brother Ji if the clan's ultimate inheritance was passed down to him.

Jiang Chen might be strong, but he wasn't so strong that he could directly confront the Coiling Dragon Clan's ultimate

inheritance. A clan with the potential of becoming another great emperor faction definitely possessed an inheritance that acted as the clan's ultimate trump card. It could be a treasure, a martial technique, or even a mysteriously powerful totem. Jiang Chen didn't think he'd be able to suppress such a powerful inheritance unless he used the restrictions in his palace. Their battle would end with a tie at best.

It seems like the internal struggle to become the clan's successor has finally ended. Liuxiang must've lost. Ji Zhongtang wasn't suited to lead a clan, as his personality is only suitable for martial dao exchanges. He's a good candidate to be Brother Ji's right-hand man though. This was Jiang Chen's initial judgement about the current state of the clan. Meanwhile, the battle in the arena had reached its climax.

Gu Zhenshan was also shocked by Ji San's battle prowess. Ji San had been able to take all of his attacks head on regardless of any ability he used. He hadn't faced this situation in his previous bouts. The flow of battle had begun to make him feel anxious. He'd heard rumors that the Coiling Dragon clan lord was going to become the eighth great emperor in Veluriyam Capital. Because of that, he wasn't that much more superior than Ji San despite his identity as a true disciple of a great emperor. He was only ranked third amongst Emperor Mountaincrush's true disciples after all. He could tell that Ji San was challenging him as the first successor in line to the Coiling Dragon Clan.

He unleashed all sorts of abilities at the beginning, believing that Ji San would eventually cave to one of them. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. He couldn't even manage to gain the upper hand. This was a blow to his pride. It seemed like Ji San was no less capable than Sunyu Xiaosheng in terms of his ability to read the battle. He was also quite adept at controlling the flow of the battle too.

Gu Zhenshan tried to crush his opponent with a flurry of vicious

attacks, but Ji San nullified them all the same. This was his most difficult battle yet. Back then, Sunyu Xiaosheng had been prevented from dealing many fatal blows due to his inferior equipment. Ji San, however, was a successor to the Coiling Dragon Clan. Like a dragon, he was capable of dealing a fatal counterattack any time by soaring through the skies at any moment's notice. The battle between the two great talents was incredibly eye-opening.

Liuxiang, now next to the clan lord, was feeling incredibly unamused. He'd always thought that he was superior to Ji San. However, he could now tell that this had been his personal delusion all along. He'd thought that the frivolous Ji San was only a lucky good-for-nothing, but it was evident that Ji San's talent in martial dao was above his own. He was unwilling to accept such facts, but there was no way he could deny it after watching the battle taking place before his very eyes.

"I didn't know that third brother possessed such talent in martial dao. I've been underestimating him all this time," Ji Zhongtang quietly commented.

The clan lord laughed. "Ji San has a unique personality. He is able to adapt himself to the strength of his opponents. Zhongtang, you should strive to be as creative and malleable as him." The clan lord was overjoyed. He was very proud of Ji San's performance in this battle. The result of the match no longer mattered. What mattered was that he'd brought out the Coiling Dragon Clan's heart, pride, and soul. Moreover, he'd calculated that Ji San had a fifty percent or more chance of winning this match .

"Liuxiang, this battle might serve as a good inspiration for you," he said plainly after taking a brief look at Liuxiang.

Liuxiang had no choice but to nod bitterly. Flames of jealousy were raging inside of him, but there was nothing he could do. It was just the reality of things. During his battle against Gu Zhenshan, all he could do was put up a brief period of resistance before he'd been defeated. Still, he'd managed to put up a better

fight than the other competitors before him had. But in the end, it was still an uneven matchup. Gu Zhenshan was the only one on the offense. The only reason why he was able to put up a resistance for such a long time was due to his equipment and inheritance. He was truly no match for Gu Zhenshan in martial dao.

Ji San was also using his equipment and inheritance to put up a good fight against Gu Zhenshan, but there was no doubt that his innate talent for battle was above Liuxiang's. The clan lord was a little surprised by that too. He already knew that Ji San was full of potential, and that he was even more capable in a real battle, but after watching the match, he realized that Ji San was even more talented than he'd ever imagined.

Ji San's control over the entire battle was beyond that of Gu Zhenshan. However, the clan lord didn't exactly know why. The lad might have incredible innate talent and battle senses, but his opponent was a true disciple to a great emperor! How had Ji San managed to seize control of the fight?

There was actually a reason behind this. Seizing control of a battle was entirely different from winning the battle by luck. If one were to win a match by luck, it could be due to one's equipment, a small accident, or maybe even the opponent's mistake. However, seizing control of a battle meant that the opponent had been completely dominated and had nothing to do with luck. The clan lord couldn't comprehend how Ji San had managed this. He knew the lad's talents, but what Ji San was doing was obviously beyond his abilities. How could the clan lord know that this was all due to the few hours rest that Gu Zhenshan had taken after his battle with Sunyu Xiaosheng?

Jiang Chen and Ji San had been busy analyzing Gu Zhenshan's abilities and fighting methods during the short break. They had almost fully comprehended his battle style. With Jiang Chen's memories and martial dao knowledge from his previous life, he was able to easily point out the flaws in Gu Zhenshan's martial dao

and give Ji San the relevant pointers to achieve victory. This wasn't a privilege that others had.

Jiang Chen was more knowledgeable about martial dao than anyone present, including the great emperors. After all, he had been surrounded with heaven realm geniuses in his previous life. He'd read countless heavenly books and taught countless geniuses despite being unable to cultivate himself. He'd also had numerous disciples under him. If Jiang Chen claimed that he was second in martial dao knowledge, then nobody in the Divine Abyss Continent could ever be first. Gu Zhenshan's martial method no longer held any secrets after his analysis and conjectures. It was no surprise that Ji San was able to claim the upper hand when he possessed such knowledge. However, those who had no idea as to what was going on would naturally find this situation very bizarre.

Chapter 952: Veluriyam Capital Needs a New Idol

The seven great emperors were also shocked by Ji San's performance. There had been many successful challengers to the Ranking of Young Lords in previous Martial Pagoda battles, but their victories were mostly due to various accidents and mishaps. A disciple from a great clan who could suppress a true disciple of a great emperor in battle was extremely rare. The seven great emperors had previously felt that Ji San was slightly inferior to a true disciple of a great emperor, despite his fame. However, that slightly inferior Ji San was now suppressing Gu Zhenshan in battle!

This dealt a great blow to Gu Zhenshan's conviction. He ended up losing to Ji San after a long and hard-fought battle. Ji San was the first successful challenger to enter the Ranking of Young Lords! He had replaced Gu Zhenshan as the twenty-first ranked genius in the Rankings. Gu Zhenshan would lose his position in the rankings from henceforth. Ji San's victory in the rankings caused a great commotion in Veluriyam Capital. The clan lord was also incredibly pleased by the result. His face glowed with happiness.

The Coiling Dragon Clan had become a topic of various rumors and discussions in recent years because they'd been keeping a low profile due to the clan lord's condition. The Majestic Clan had even encroached upon them. It seemed like they were going to overthrow the Coiling Dragon Clan at any moment. They only had the opportunity to catch their breath when the Majestic Clan caused their own destruction after a fateful encounter with Pill King Zhen.

Pill King Zhen had then showed the clan lord the means to temporarily halt his cultivation dissipation, which temporarily stabilized their situation. However, following these series of

events, the clan still continued to be the topic of various chatter and rumors. Ji San's victory today had finally turned the situation around by showing everyone the clan's strength and power. The clan lord understood very well that the victory hadn't just stabilized the clan's position; it was also a stepping stone for his plans to turn the clan into the eighth great emperor faction. The only thing left for him to do was to reach the great emperor realm, catapulting him and the clan up to the next level.

Ji San's victory disappointed many of the other clans. They'd thought that the Coiling Dragon Clan was no longer to be feared as their days were numbered. However, Ji San's victory had proven that the heritage of the leading clan was nothing to be scoffed at. He was now officially recognized by the great emperors as an equal to their disciples after achieving victory in the Ranking of Young Lords. An achievement in the Genius Rankings was nothing compared to this.

All of Veluriyam Capital celebrated his victory. All allies of the Coiling Dragon Clan were also overjoyed. They'd suffered through a great deal of stress in recent years, but now it seemed like everything was worth it in the end. The Coiling Dragon Clan had finally bared its teeth and revealed its towering might to the world.

Mie Chenzi was next in line after Ji San. He had to challenge the twentieth ranked young lord since Ji San had achieved victory. The crowd expected Mie Chenzi to be the next victorious challenger, but their hopes were dashed when he suddenly announced that he would withdraw from the challenge. This had caused another great commotion in Veluriyam Capital. Nobody had expected that he'd withdraw from the challenge!

Everyone was aware of Mie Chenzi's strength even though he'd admitted defeat to Pill King Zhen in the Genius Rankings. Many experts believed that he was more than capable of challenging the Ranking of Young Lords. His winning chances were higher than that of Ji San. For what reason did he have to withdraw from the

challenge when even Ji San had managed to achieve victory?

Had he become disheartened and lost his fighting spirit after the battle with the pill king? What other reason was there for him to withdraw? Jiang Chen was deep in thought after Mie Chenzi withdrew from the challenge. He was disappointed, as Mie Chenzi seemed to have decided to run away with his tail between his legs. Jiang Chen could no longer cause any trouble for him. Mie Chenzi left the arena and disappeared into the crowd without a care for the crowd's reaction. Jiang Chen wanted to get to the bottom of his true identity, but now was unfortunately not the time to do so. It was his turn to challenge the Ranking of Young Lords.

The twentieth ranked young lord was a disciple of Emperor Vastsea. His name was Zhuang Jie.

"Brother, be very careful of Zhuang Jie. This man has an innate water and wind constitution. His cultivation encompasses both the towering might of the raging sea and the swiftness of the wind. He's definitely a lot harder to deal with than Gu Zhenshan," Ji San couldn't help but remind Jiang Chen before the battle. He was hoping that Jiang Chen would win so that they would join the Ranking of Young Lords together and become the hot topic of choice in Veluriyam Capital. After all, every single person in Veluriyam Capital knew that they were sworn brothers by now. The entire capital would be singing them praises and there was even a possibility that they would make the annals of history as legendary figures!

The rankings were given after extremely strict considerations. The higher the ranking, the stronger they were. What Ji San had said confirmed Jiang Chen's estimations that Zhuang Jie was much stronger than Gu Zhenshan was, despite having only a one rank difference between the two of them. However, Jiang Chen seemed unperturbed by this information.

He theorized that Zhuang Jie was only roughly as strong as Mie Chenzi because Zhuang Jie was only one rank higher than Gu

Zhenshan, and Mie Chenzi was slightly stronger than the latter. However, one had to consider factors other than cultivation level to measure an opponent's strength during a martial dao battle. Jiang Chen was also prepared for the unexpected. He was deep in thought as he climbed the spiraling brick stairs to make it to the top of the arena. It was as though he'd comprehended something new with every step he took. The arena for the Ranking of Young Lords was extremely spacious. There were enough seats for two to three hundred thousand spectators.

Everyone was content with the fight the previous challenger had put up just now. However, they were hungry for more, as they also knew of Pill King Zhen's immeasurable talent. They hoped that the pill king's challenge would be equally as shocking as it was entertaining. The audience was incredibly passionate, but Pill King Zhen seemed unperturbed. It was almost like he felt no pressure from the challenge. He was mentally prepared for a great battle.

To the many cultivators in Veluriyam Capital, the geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords were all existences beyond reach. They were dragons and phoenixes among men. These geniuses were eminent figures that they could not hope to approach. They were as mysterious as they were godly. However, this didn't mean that the people worshipped them. It was actually quite the contrary. Everyone was hoping for a common cultivator to pull down these young lords from their high pedestals, to bring them down a notch.

These young lords were so high and mighty that they weren't even willing to breathe the same air as the commoners of Veluriyam Capital. They often acted as though it was an insult to mix with the commoners when they were forced to show their faces. Their actions attracted quite a bit of envy and jealousy.

They very much preferred young lords that didn't put on airs like Emperor Peafowl's true disciple, young lord Fan. Young lord Fan had been a peerless genius but he hadn't been proud or

condescending. In fact, he had been incredibly friendly and would exchange pleasantries when others greeted him. He would even occasionally offer pointers to the slower cultivators. He had been a very reputable person and the role model for many young cultivators in Veluriyam Capital.

Jiang Chen had filled in for this need for a new figure to idolize with his Pill King Zhen persona. He'd numbed their regret from losing a great figure like young lord Fan. They hadn't known who he was at the beginning, but the people slowly came to recognize him after the series of issues that had arisen during Taiyuan Tower's opening. His name spread throughout every corner of Veluriyam Capital like wildfire after he'd defeated Pillfire City. He soon became the new venerated figure amongst the younger generation.

The pill king then partook in the Martial Pagoda Battles as a martial dao cultivator and breezed through the New Star Rankings, even ending up first in the Genius Rankings. How could the people not look forward to his attempt at the Ranking of Young Lords challenge? Forget about a measly twentieth ranked young lord, many young cultivators were certain that the pill king could defeat even the top five ranked young lords! This prediction hadn't come from a methodical analysis, but from a strong emotional yearning for his victory. They were rooting for the pill king to topple all the geniuses and become the foremost genius in Veluriyam Capital. They wanted him to become their new idol! Only someone as famous and charismatic as him was qualified to be the leader of the younger generation.

The young lords were incredibly powerful, but not a single one of them was as charismatic as young lord Fan. Veluriyam Capital needed a new young lord Fan, and the pill king was no doubt the best candidate. Because of that, the younger generation cheered him on with all the fervor that they could muster. They even held up signs and chanted words of encouragement.

Chapter 953: Provocation

“Pill King Zhen, the rising star!”

“Pill King Zhen, our biggest idol!”

“Pill King Zhen, sweeping the competition!” Different catchphrases sprouted up all around the arena. Under such an exciting atmosphere, anyone who broke the stifling silence was rewarded with a throng of followers. In that moment, at least a hundred thousand members of the audience shouted in unison. They spoke words of encouragement almost entirely in unison. The clean uniformity of the chant, coming from mouths of the hundred-thousand-strong, carried an astonishing force with it.

It had a kind of magic to it, spreading out from the arena proper into every nook and cranny of the city’s streets. In the next moment, the entire Capital was infected by the wild fanaticism in the air. Young and old shouted with one voice from every corner. Veluriyam Capital was like a pot of boiling water. Waves of cheers passed through the air above the city again and again, scaring the birds in the trees into flight.

Jiang Chen was bewildered by the cheering crowd as he walked up the stone steps. He’d always been at the forefront of cultivating his dao heart. The fortitude of his Boulder Heart allowed him to remain calm in midst of any turmoil. At this particular moment, however, he had trouble holding back his emotions. He cycled through surprise, shock, then affection. Currents of warmth ran through his chest, filling his heart. When else in either of his lives had he received such support and approval?

As the son of the Divine Celestial Emperor, he had been the object of respect by many in his previous life. However, the only reason for this respect had been the loftiness of his station—or rather, his father’s. But at this moment, Jiang Chen could feel the people’s sincere and heartfelt blessing. There could only be one

reason: as a representative of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, he had defeated Veluriyam Capital's long-time enemy, the provocative Pillfire City. That victory had won him widespread devotion in the Capital.

Anyone lucky enough to be a resident of the city was proud of that fact. They had no tolerance towards those swaggering outsiders from Pillfire. Pillfire City did surpass Veluriyam Capital in many pill-related matters, history and ability both, but that didn't mean that anyone from Veluriyam Capital was simply going to take the humiliation lying down and totally ignore their harassment.

Jiang Chen had defeated Pillfire City with his strength alone. In fact, his appearance had ended in the utter demolition of Pill King Ji Lang's unconquerable myth, sending the other pill king packing with ease.

The events surrounding this had been propagated as a legend, becoming the storytellers' favorite tale. In Veluriyam Capital's hour of danger, Pill King Zhen had answered fate's call! He alone had come to turn the tide, the destined hero and savior of Veluriyam's fortunes. That was perhaps a little exaggerated, but the battle had propelled Pill King Zhen's fame into the stratosphere when told from the multitude of accounts present. It had directly led to his idolization by the masses. Even yesteryear's young lord Fan hadn't held such a glorious record. In light of this, how could Pill King Zhen's emergence as a martial genius at the Veluriyam Pagoda Meeting not fill everyone with anticipation?

Zhuang Jie's carefree figure was already waiting in the arena. He had arrived earlier than his opponent in order to give a strong impression of intimidation. He wished to overwhelm his opponent with his superior presence from the onset. Though he didn't want to admit it, the pill king who'd hailed from unknown origins was definitely one of the toughest enemies he'd ever face. For someone whom everyone had perceived as only a pill genius, coming so far

was no mere coincidence.

Zhuang Jie had no fear of any other genius on the Rankings, even Ji San. There were only two exceptions: Mie Chenzi and Pill King Zhen. Before the battle, Emperor Vastsea had urged him not to underestimate Mie Chenzi, to take him on with complete seriousness. The latter's unexpected forfeiture had surprised everyone. This immediately put Zhuang Jie up against the number one cultivator in the Genius Rankings, Pill King Zhen.

To tell the truth, he would have rather faced Mie Chenzi than Pill King Zhen. Everyone had bore witness to Pill King Zhen's string of countless victories, but no one could see where his limits lay. Not even Emperor Vastsea could make heads or tails of it. However, Zhuang Jie was still the heir to a great emperor at the end of the day. He attached a great deal of mental importance to Pill King Zhen, but he also believed that he had a chance.

A thorny challenger like Pill King Zhen had to be rallied against with every little advantage. Even the respective senses of presence during their entrances were part of that. Thus, the mass cheering on all of his sides devastated him as he stood upon the arena. They were applauding and encouraging the pill king more and more as time went on! Almost the entire city was in on it. It caused Zhuang Jie's readied bearing to collapse instantly.

None of it could be of any use given the amount of people vocally supporting Pill King Zhen. No matter how tough of a demeanor he put on externally, there was no way he could hope to surpass an entire city's worth of support. Zhuang Jie felt a little sour internally. He refused to accept it! He refused to accept even the pill king in question. How could a mere outsider steal so much thunder? How long had it been since Pill King Zhen's arrival in the Capital? What was the basis for the man's status as the beloved of thousands? It was so unfair.

He was the heir closest to Emperor Vastsea, a noble and a young lord. What did Pill King Zhen do to deserve his accolades, hmm?!

Under more ordinary circumstances, Zhuang Jie might not have been so jealous. But because this was happening just before their battle. Zhuang Jie felt victimized and like he had been sent into the background as a result of it.

It was a supreme mockery of him, without question. He was a young lord genius, the heir to a great emperor... but he had to be the background material to this Pill King Zhen? The humiliation sank its fangs into Zhuang Jie like a venomous snake. He was extremely irritated beneath the surface. Most of all, he wanted to decimate his opponent in the arena. He wanted to stomp on the pill king underfoot and mercilessly shame him. Only after that could his hatred be abated!

These short-sighted rats are cheering for a mere pill king! I suppose the only reason for it is because he defeated a so-called genius from Pillfire City? Do they not know that pill dao is insignificant in the grand scheme of things? In the world of martial dao, force of arms is the only eternal truth. I will absolutely steamroll him today. When he's helpless beneath my heel, maybe then these fools will see how useless their object of adoration is before a young lord genius! The thunderous cheering unquestionably incited Zhuang Jie to anger ahead of time. It burned more energetically within him with each passing moment.

Jiang Chen, on the other hand, finally stepped onstage amidst universal ovation. He had never been in such a transparently cheerful mood before. The sounds of cheering and applause enlivened his heart. His horizons were broadened all of a sudden, greatly expanding both his heart and mind. The only thing I did was defeat Pill King Ji Lang in self-defense. I'd only wanted to protect the Longevity Pill that was rightfully mine. I've never done anything for these people, yet they're showering me with adoration. If I'm still going to carry on hiding myself and caring only for my own well-being, how am I supposed to live up to that?

Jiang Chen hadn't treated Emperor Peafowl's call with particular

enthusiasm before now. He'd always been running from it, unwilling to shoulder the responsibilities that hadn't originally belonged to him. But he suddenly understood, in this moment, what kind of responsibility was conferred to a real genius. Emperor Peafowl had said this about him: he had a talent that others lacked, but he lacked something else in turn—the vigor of a youth, a certain kind of duty and verve.

Jiang Chen did possess these traits, but he'd always been wary about displaying them. He realized now, though, that he could not shirk the responsibility given to him by fate and fortune. He could not allow himself the cowardice, if only for these people who admired him. When he finally made his way onstage, Jiang Chen felt the final lock sealing his heart click open. He returned a wave to the surrounding crowd, his smile plain and candid. He had made his decision.

Unfortunately, Zhuang Jie took the gesture to be the greatest insult of all. What do you really amount to, Pill King Zhen? That you're posing so pretentiously in front of a young lord genius like me? All of their support is supposed to belong to me. What gives you the right to just come here and take it?

"You're enjoying this, aren't you? A sensationalist, fishing for compliments," Zhuang Jie's tone was cold. His reptilian-like gaze snaked over Jiang Chen repeatedly.

This was when Jiang Chen finally noticed his opponent, his expression freezing with incomprehension for a moment. He tossed his opponent a glance. As a young lord genius, Ji San had rated the other man as someone who was significantly more difficult to deal with than Gu Zhenshan.

"So you're Zhuang Jie?" He frowned when he saw the open hostility present in his opponent's eyes.

Zhuang Jie sneered. "Your pride has been spoiled by only a sliver of favoritism. You're just a puffed-up scoundrel. My name isn't fit

to be called by someone as shallow as you."

He was very displeased. Even the act of Jiang Chen saying his name offended him. A genius from the Genius Rankings should have called him 'senior brother Zhuang'. As for whether he needed to grace such an address with a response... that depended on his mood. Even the scions of great clans had to follow that rule when they saw the emperors' true disciples. It was considered discourtesy to do otherwise. In stark contrast, this Pill King Zhen was calling him directly by name! Zhuang Jie dispensed with all civility.

Jiang Chen had evidently not expected his opponent to be fixated on such trivial matters. They were already in the arena, yet Vastsea's young lord was still holding on to every inch of his pride. He could see the steel in his opponent's look. Evidently, Zhuang Jie was not a fan of him. There was no need for him to pretend to be amiable towards someone who treated him with such open hostility. Jiang Chen saw all in the windows to the other man's soul. Moreover, he knew that it was entirely unrealistic for someone who flew beneath Emperor Vastsea's banner to harbor any positive sentiment towards him. It was common knowledge that the Emperors Vastsea and Shura were in cahoots together. Jiang Chen became stern. There was no need to waste words on someone who spouted such abusive language anyway.

"You don't have anything to say to that, huh? I guess you're playing dumb." Raising an eyebrow, Zhuang Jie snickered. "I can't deny that you're reasonably skilled, and you're a master showman to boot. But today, I'm going to tear away your façade. I'll make it clear to everyone that the number one cultivator in the Genius Rankings is useless before a young lord!"

Chapter 954: The Terrifying Power of an Innate Water Constitution

Though he didn't know why, Jiang Chen had been curious about Zhuang Jie during Ji San's review earlier. But after seeing the man in person and hearing him speak, he now had a much lower opinion of him. Jiang Chen actually understood his opponent's displeasure. After all, the other youth was a genius in the Ranking of Young Lords, and therefore deserved more support and encouragement from the spectators as a person of a much higher stature. Reasonably speaking, he wanted more of the cheering and applause that should be naturally accorded to him. Unfortunately, Jiang Chen had a monopoly over all of these things presently. His opponent had become a mere foil. It would be an awkward situation for any man to face. Being somewhat embarrassed or even angry was understandable. But, at the root of it, none of this was his problem. Even if Zhuang Jie was secretly dissatisfied, he still should’ve stuck to a certain bearing.

No matter how upset one was, the arena was always the outlet for it. If his opponent could beat him fair and square in the ring, Jiang Chen would only respond with utmost respect. The fight hadn’t even begun yet, but the other man was already spewing poison everywhere. Jiang Chen only looked down on this kind of petty behavior. No fighting was required to see the narrow-mindedness in this person’s heart.

Master showman? Useless? Jiang Chen didn’t know whether to laugh or scowl at being labeled as such. If the geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords were all like this, then there wasn’t much to be impressed about.

“Your fangs are so sharp, Zhuang Jie. I wonder if the dog is your zodiac sign? You know, your vicious tongue is remarkable, but I’d be a lot more impressed if you could actually beat me in the arena.”

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, not deciding to squabble in the same way that his opponent was doing. He didn't have any interest doing such a thing.

Zhuang Jie's face contorted. He had thought that it would be easy to rouse Pill King Zhen's anger, but his words had turned out to be entirely ineffective. However, he didn't tone down his behavior. "My victory against you is assured," he jeered, "but that's not the only thing I'm going to do today. I'm going to humiliate you, and crush the myth surrounding you once and for all. The whole world should know—you're just fame-chasing trash!"

Verbal provocation was clearly Zhuang Jie's forte. Having lived two different lives, though, Jiang Chen found it no more irksome than a cloud of noxious air. Aside from placing a hand at his nostrils, it warranted no reaction from him.

Seeing the visible disdain on Jiang Chen's face, Zhuang Jie knew his ultimatum had failed. He was truly furious now. He clapped both hands together. Rays of light burst forth from his palms, the very air around them quivering at the radiance.

"Moonflower Mirage!" Both hands moving in guidance as Zhuang Jie conjured the image of a boundless, rippling pool. It resembled an enormous mirror, smoothly enveloping all. As someone with an innate water constitution, he had a lot of practice and ease with water-attribute arts.

Jiang Chen treated the attack with due importance. He swiftly activated his Cicada Wings, his body soaring into flight. He brought himself above the oscillating waves at once. There would certainly be much more trouble if he was tangled up in the water.

"Running?" Zhuang Jie's eyes were derisive. Another hand sign commanded the pool to swirl, transforming from a mirror into a current in reverse. It swept upwards, roiling in an aqueous chain. It had every intention of vacuuming Jiang Chen into its influence.

Jiang Chen's wealth of experience told him that this was no

ordinary chain. If he really was trapped by it, escaping would be laborious. The essence of water contained in the chain was very potent. Its ability to restrain was unrivaled, able to bend the laws of physics themselves. It was widely known that water was yielding, supple, and flexible. However, these were only some of water's traits. In actuality, the essence of water ruled over a very complicated and vast realm. Water was sometimes the exact opposite. It could be firm and unyielding. Water could destroy all, and yet nourish all. Attack all, and yet defend all. There was nothing that surpassed water in how multifaceted it was.

As someone who possessed an innate water constitution, Zhuang Jie clearly understood the intricacies of the element well. For him, using a water attribute ability came second nature to him. The coiling chain sailed upwards, taking flight like a gigantic, watery dragon. It aimed to constrict Jiang Chen within its rings, then swallow him whole.

With utmost haste, Jiang Chen fled its area of control just before the water pillar snapped him up. Watching his escape filled Zhuang Jie with scorn. Making another hand seal, he clapped once more. Two white pillars of water flew in the air. One went left, the other right, and both acted in unison to seal off every means of escape.

The water pillars surrounded him from both flanks. Jiang Chen could only shift up and down, the evasive airspace available to him becoming more and more limited. The audience held their collective breaths at the scene. Everyone knew that the emperors' true disciples were strong, but no one had expected the extent of strength that was currently being displayed.

Since his first competitive match, Pill King Zhen had faced many a tenacious enemy, but none of them had been able to put on such an oppressive show. None of them had been able to achieve the spectacle that Zhuang Jie was demonstrating. Under the entanglement of the water pillars, Pill King Zhen seemed to be

tired to death.

Spectating the battle, Ji San looked positively restless. His lips were pursed, muttering something darkly under his breath. But no matter what his inaudible remarks were, his worry was palpable. Zhuang Jie's prowess had surprised him greatly as well. He'd always thought that Vastsea's young lord was only a little stronger than Gu Zhenshan, that there wasn't much of a difference between the two. On a cultivation level, that was probably true. However, if present indications were accurate, Zhuang Jie's practical combat ability far surpassed Gu Zhenshan's. If Ji San were to go up and face an attack as preposterous as the one that Zhuang Jie was currently displaying, he too would have a headache.

"No way! This Zhuang Jie is quite strong. He's not letting Pill King Zhen have a moment's rest!"

"What do you mean? Pill King Zhen is just feigning weakness. It's not like that hasn't happened before."

"That's right. There were a few opponents before that looked like they were about to overpower Pill King Zhen, but the pill king came through in the end."

"It looks a bit different this time, though..."

"What's different about it? I'm sure Zhuang Jie's capable, but I have every faith that Pill King Zhen will win."

"Yeah, Zhuang Jie is only number twenty in the Ranking of Young Lords. There's no reason for Pill King Zhen not to win."

"You've got that right, eh? I'm still waiting to see him challenge the Young Lords' top five!" Jiang Chen's historically tough battles with Xiao Paohui and Mie Chenzi cemented the audience's conviction. Though it looked like he was currently at a disadvantage, there wasn't much worry coming from the peanut gallery. It had looked worse than this several times prior, but Pill King Zhen always prevailed without fail. This time was surely no

exception!

The audience could accept the possibility of Pill King Zhen's eventual defeat, but losing this early on? That was ridiculous. In the public perception, Pill King Zhen was definitely competent enough to face the top five of the Ranking. Zhuang Jie was only a genius in the top twenty. He wasn't worthy to be the pill king's stumbling block.

Jiang Chen didn't have it as easy as others thought. At the same time, he wasn't as helpless as he looked, either. He'd tried several ways to tackle his current plight, such as using sword aura to cut the water. No matter how he tried to slice the water, however, the most he managed to do was slightly obstruct the water's movement. Its upward flow would not be hindered for long. Magnetism also failed to do anything against the pillars. The power of metal was effective against both metal-attribute attacks and physical blows, but it wasn't of much use against the permeating power of water. None of Jiang Chen's methods yielded much return.

Of course, he had various other untested approaches, the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice being one of them. In particular, the ice lotus had exceedingly absorbent power. But using the Lotus would give him away immediately. If he were to use it, the entire world would know tomorrow that Jiang Chen and Pill King Zhen were one and the same.

Jiang Chen had no fear personally of that happening, but Taiyuan Tower was still experiencing budding growth. Many of the people close to him still needed its umbrella of protection. If he gave away his secret early on, it would be disastrous for those people. They would definitely need to find new hiding places. Jiang Chen wasn't willing to break that particular status quo.

The water pillar was very threatening, but Jiang Chen's speed was enough to counteract its harassment. He couldn't quash it just yet, but it also had a hard time getting anywhere near him. He

wanted to use Cicada's Disappearance to escape, but the pillars seemed to have some sort of consciousness. Locking onto his very soul, they allowed him no opportunity to use the ability. Things were looking a little grim for Jiang Chen.

Even as Zhuang Jie continually directed the water pillars to strike at Jiang Chen, his eyes gleamed in thought. Evidently, he was looking for a way to snag the pill king with one final push. Jiang Chen never let his guard down for a second. More than half of his attention rested upon his opponent. Ji San had told him that Zhuang Jie didn't only have an innate water constitution; he possessed an innate wind constitution as well. An enemy with two elemental constitutions should not be underestimated. The attribute of wind in particular held a certain fleetness and unpredictability. Any arts that originated from it were extremely tricky to deal with. Still, staying embroiled in the fight was no solution.

Continually evading the water pillars, Jiang Chen devoted his thoughts wholly towards solving the problem at hand. Suddenly, a voice cursed near his ear, "What are you scared of, you idiot? They're just pillars of water. In terms of protectiveness and ensnarement, elemental water is unfathomably formidable, but it's not like it has no weaknesses!"

Eh? Jiang Chen's ear wiggled. The one who'd called him an idiot just now was Long Xiaoxuan. Though Long Xiaoxuan had always remained at his side, for the most part he generally stayed hidden. Why was the dragon giving him advice now? Did he have a way to deal with his current predicament?

Chapter 955: Devoured with a Single Mouthful

“Brother Long, do you know of a way to deal with this?” Jiang Chen communicated through his consciousness.

“Deal with what? You have dragon blood coursing through your veins! Don’t you know that us true dragons possess the art of devouring?”

Art of devouring? Jiang Chen seemed to have instantly caught his drift. Unfortunately, he’d never cultivated the devouring ability before. This was a very different ability from a dragon roar. To imitate a dragon roar, all he needed to do was open his mouth and activate his true qi. It wasn’t a difficult ability to master since he possessed the true dragon bloodline. He wasn’t entirely sure that he could learn the devouring ability in such a short time.

“Brother Long! I haven’t learned that art yet!” Jiang Chen replied without beating around the bush.

“You haven’t, but I have!” Long Xiaoxuan proudly stated. “You just make a pose and I’ll materialize myself to the upper corners of your mouth.”

Jiang Chen was amused by the thought of that. He’s telling me to cheat! Well, beggars can't be choosers! With Long Xiaoxuan’s guarantee, he increased his speed and leaped onto one of the arena’s pillars. He stood motionless like a mountain atop the pillar and looked down upon his opponent.

Ah? Why has he stopped? The audience was curious. This was clearly not the right time to stop moving.

Zhuang Jie was overjoyed when he saw Jiang Chen perch on the pillar. It seems like the brat has finally lost his patience. Is he planning to use brute force to shove his way through my Dragon Waterspout? He was sure that he’d win if that was the case. He’d

never seen an opponent at an equal cultivation level push their way through his attack using brute force alone. There were countless geniuses who thought they could do so, but every single one of them was crushed by the two Dragon Waterspouts.

Those who were aware of the might of Zhuang Jie's attack were thinking that the pill king had gone mad for making such a bold move. Ji San was so worried that he wanted to shout some reminders to Jiang Chan. However, it was already too late for that. Changes in the battlefield happened in an instant. The battle would probably be over by the time he opened his mouth.

The clan lord gripped the armrests of his chair tightly. Disbelief was written all over his face. He couldn't understand why Jiang Chen had made such a reckless move when he was normally so calm and composed. The audience's heart skipped a beat as well as their breathing began to hasten.

A victorious smile had appeared on Zhuang Jie's face as well. He was certain that he'd won. There was no way the idiot pill king could deal with his Dragon Waterspout through brute force alone!

"Die!" The two water pillars became thicker and thicker. The cyclone had also increased in intensity and sucked in the surrounding air into its vortex. The two waterspouts had turned into water dragons that swept across the void.

Jiang Chen remained incredibly composed. His eyes didn't waver even one bit. He suddenly opened his mouth wide and a thunderous dragon roar shot towards the two enormous water pillars. The crowd was dumbfounded then they saw what Jiang Chen had done. They simply couldn't comprehend what he was trying to do. However, the smarter ones soon realized something.

"Is he planning to devour the two water pillars?" one of them suddenly asked hoarsely.

"It can't be! Even the air is being shredded by the water pillars! How could his body possibly withstand such power?

“It’s true! He’s going to devour it!”

“No way! There’s too much power within the two water pillars. He’s seeking his own death!”

“The pill king has overestimated himself.” Some of Jiang Chen’s supporters sighed. They were not supportive of his reckless move. The two water pillars were simply too frightening. Everyone could sense the furious power contained within the vortex. How big was his stomach? Even if he could manage to nullify all of the power within the vortex, how was his stomach supposed to hold such a large amount of water? However, they were soon dumbfounded yet again.

A strong suction appeared as soon as Pill King Zhen opened his mouth. It appeared as though a dragon was devouring the two water pillars. Whoosh! A mocking smile appeared on Zhuang Jie’s face when he saw what was happening. He was almost certain that the pill king was missing most of his brain. There was nothing he himself could do in face of such powerful water pillars even though he’d cultivated a separate space in his abdomen. His attack hadn’t just encompassed the power of vortex, but also the power of water origin. The pill king’s stomach was going to be grinded into dust.

“You ignorant cretin! Do you truly wish for a quick death?” Zhuang Jie smiled coldly and made a few more hand signs. The two water pillars then descended towards Jiang Chen with the power of nine heavenly waterfalls. Its strength had increased even more now.

Rumble! Rumble! Zhuang Jie continued to inject the power of water into the pillars and brought the attack to its full might. However, the pill king’s feet remained firmly planted to the top of the arena’s pillar, even though he had taken the full brunt of the attack. The force behind the pillars hadn’t even managed to make the pill king budge an inch. The two water pillars gushed into his mouth as though they were being controlled by an invisible force. Jiang Chen’s body was becoming increasingly large and sturdy.

He'd grown a hundred foot tall and was emanating a golden glow from his body. He seemed like an ancient god that had descended upon the world.

"He really devoured everything!"

"That's impossible! How did he manage to perform such a feat?"

"His hundred-foot-tall golden body can't possibly hold that much water! There was enough water in that attack to fill an entire lake! How did all that water fit into such a small stature?" What shocked everyone even more was the fact that Jiang Chen's body seemed unperturbed by the two furious torrents of water entering his body. He didn't move at all or give off any signs of discomfort. The audience stared at his stomach, wondering what it was made of. Why was his stomach not expanding after taking in so much water?

This wasn't logical at all. Did he have an alternate dimension inside of him as well? Zhuang Jie's face turned ashen as he stared at Jiang Chen. The smirk was wiped off his face, replaced with shock and distress. How did he devour my water pillars? He couldn't believe his eyes. He could've accepted the reality of things if Jiang Chen had sucked away his two water pillars with some kind of treasure, but he hadn't!

Pill King Zhen had devoured it simply by opening his mouth! This was something that went against logic! He wasn't willing to accept this. Not even the other geniuses under the seven great emperors could manage such a feat. What irked him the most was the pill king's reaction. He was so casual about the whole thing that it seemed like he had merely drunk two cups of water.

Zhuang Jie had the ability to control water and strengthen its power, yet he couldn't even manage to penetrate his opponent's defense. The product from all his hard work and struggles had turned out to be like a pebble that had been thrown into the sea. He'd merely created a ripple instead of a large wave. Despair

flooded his mind.

Jiang Chen had just devoured the water pillars whole in front of tens of thousands of people. Nobody understood what had happened, nor did they know how Pill King Zhen had managed to accomplish such a feat. Zhuang Jie's ashen face was an indication that he was similarly in disbelief like everyone else. There wasn't even a bulge in the pill king's stomach after he'd devoured the water. It was as though the two water pillars had disappeared into the void after entering his stomach.

Jiang Chen's hundred-foot golden body slowly returned to its original size. "Thank you. That was refreshing," Jiang Chen said mockingly.

Refreshing? The audience quickly broke into raucous laughter. The pill king had used Zhuang Jie's incredibly frightening water pillars as a thirst quencher? This was clearly a slap to the face!

Zhuang Jie was incredibly resentful as he stared at Jiang Chen standing on top of the pillar. He had never felt so much shame in his entire life. Laughter from the hundred-thousand-strong audience was the biggest slap to his face. His opponent's words were like a sharp knife to the heart. A furious blaze began to surge in Zhuang Jie's heart. However, the anger soon turned into calmness and deep thought.

How did Pill King Zhen manage to devour the water pillar? His ability to control water was his biggest asset in battle. He would have to go on the defensive if water abilities were useless against his opponent. Even the Coiling Dragon Clan was shocked by what he'd done.

"How did he do that?" Ji San muttered to himself while looking bewildered. Unfortunately, not even the clan lord had an answer for him. He was a half-step great emperor, yet he still couldn't figure out how Jiang Chen had managed to perform such a feat.

Many geniuses amongst the audience, including the subordinates

to the seven great emperors, were in deep thought. It was evident that they had no idea how Pill King Zhen had managed this feat either. Their guess was that the pill king had cultivated some kind of palace in his stomach. However, it wasn't easy to possess this skill. They'd heard about similar martial techniques as well, but none of the cultivators of such techniques were able to devour Zhuang Jie's water pillars as easily as the pill king had done.

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Chapter 956: Attaining Eighth Level Sage Realm

Jiang Chen had thoroughly flabbergasted the audience yet again. Everyone knew that Pill King Zhen was a martial dao genius after watching his battles. Even so, Jiang Chen's heaven-defying abilities never seem to fail at shocking the audience time and time again.

Jiang Chen had made a truly risky move just now because he trusted Long Xiaoxuan. After all, Long Xiaoxuan was capable of instantly killing Zhuang Jie, as he'd already broken through the emperor realm. If Long Xiaoxuan said he could do it, then he definitely could. There was an unconditional trust between them. It was a small gamble that worked out incredibly well in the end. Jiang Chen was overjoyed when he saw the horrified look on Zhuang Jie's face. He hadn't just physically defeated Zhuang Jie, but mentally as well. The overweening young lord was obviously taken aback when his water pillars were devoured. He tried very hard to hide this fact, but the sense of defeat was already deeply ingrained into his mind.

Just as Jiang Chen had expected, Zhuang Jie's attacks were no longer as powerful after a crack had appeared in his dao heart. His attacks were still very ferocious, but they were no longer as effective as before. It didn't matter how strong his water elemental abilities were, as they were all nullified by the heaven-defying Long Xiaoxuan. His strongest attacks were no longer of any use. Without any other choice, he had no choice but to rely solely on wind elemental attacks. The fundamentals of wind elemental attacks lay in speed. Blinding speed.

However, Jiang Chen had never been concerned when it came to a competition of speed. His Featherlight Mirror was the archenemy of all speed cultivators. Zhuang Jie wasn't able to fully

utilize his two killer abilities. The battle between the two geniuses had become lopsided all of a sudden. Zhuang Jie grew incredibly frustrated as the battle continued. There was no doubt that he had his own special abilities, as he was a true disciple of a great emperor. He'd lived through thousands of battles, big and small. However, this was the first time he'd ever encountered such an opponent.

His original plan was to crush his enemy though the use of his incredibly powerful abilities, but things had gone out of his control. His opponent seemed to possess a counter to every single move he made. He had no doubt that his enemy was the bane of his existence, an emissary sent by the heavens to destroy him. His confidence was shredded to pieces after such a one-sided battle.

Emperor Vastsea frowned when he saw what was happening. He never imagined that his third-ranked true disciple would meet such a potent adversary.

"Honored master, what is Pill King Zhen's background? Why do I sense such limitless potential in him? Even Junior Brother Zhuang is about to lose to him." The person who had spoken was Emperor Vastsea's foremost true disciple. He was amongst the top five of all the true disciples of the great emperors.

Emperor Vastsea frowned slightly. "The pill king's true identity is still a mystery to Veluriyam Capital. I've tried asking Emperor Peafowl but he wasn't willing to disclose the truth. I highly suspect that he is a chess piece planted by Emperor Peafowl long ago to be used as a replacement for young lord Fan."

"A replacement for young lord Fan?"

"Yes. Emperor Shura even theorized that Pill King Zhen was Emperor Peafowl's true successor. Young lord Fan was merely a front so that Peafowl could nurture his true successor away from everyone's sight. He was the genius that Emperor Peafowl had truly wished to nurture all along."

Emperor Vastsea's subordinates were flabbergasted when they heard what he'd just said. This was simply too much! Emperor Peafowl's would need to have powers of extreme foresight to plan such a thing. It was beyond what was humanly possible.

Young lord Fan had been an incredibly talented genius back then. However, some unknown occurence had claimed his life. The reason for his death was still a mystery to this day. Many had conjured their own theories to explain young lord Fan's death, and a majority of them had blamed Emperor Shura. Everyone knew that Emperor Shura was trying to overthrow Emperor Peafowl. He had every motive to murder Emperor Peafowl's incredibly talented successor.

As Emperor Shura's greatest ally, Emperor Vastsea was certain that Emperor Shura had nothing to do with young lord Fan's death. Young lord Fan was such a genius that he'd dominated every other great emperor's disciple. His death had caused a great deal of commotion amongst all the other disciples. Many were secretly glad that the great mountain on top of their heads was finally gone. These people suddenly realized that another frighteningly powerful mountain replacing young lord Fan had arisen under Emperor Peafowl's side once again.

The young lords had occasionally talked about Jiang Chen when he participated in the Martial Pagoda battles, but none of them had taken him seriously. Jiang Chen still hadn't attracted their attention even after his series of victories consolidating his position in the New Star Rankings. After that, he became the champion yet again in the Genius Rankings. The high and mighty geniuses of the Ranking of Young Lords no longer had a choice but to notice the champion of both rankings. They'd begun to notice him, but they still weren't concerned about the threat he posed.

They were cream-of-the-crop geniuses! Every single one of them possessed incredible talent and a superior cultivation base. They owned trump cards and battle techniques that no one else had.

However, their confidence and pride had begun to crack a little as they watched the current battle. They still didn’t believe that Pill King Zhen posed any sort of threat to them, but they had no choice but to admit that he was at least qualified to challenge them. The fact that he could dominate Zhuang Jie in battle was proof of that. The result of a battle was normally set when one side was dominated by another side.

Zhuang Jie put up a struggle to the very end, but he still eventually lost. There was now another successful challenger in the Ranking of Young Lords! Ji San leapt with joy. He was even happier than the time he’d won the challenge himself. There wasn't any other upsets from the challengers in other groups. The young lords behind the rankings were slightly weaker, but only in comparison to the other young lords. They were still unapproachable existences to the cultivators from the Genius Rankings. All challengers apart from Ji San and Pill King Zhen failed in their attempts in the Ranking of Young Lords.

The only exception to this was Mie Chenzi. Everyone believed that the mysterious cultivator was capable of challenging the young lords. However, he had withdrawn from the challenge and disappeared without a trace. With that, the thirty-six finalists of the Ranking of Young Lords were set.

Next were the battles. Everyone was given a short two week period of rest before the ranking battles. This two week period was incredibly important for Jiang Chen. He'd gained a lot ever since he’d joined the formation trials and fought through the many battles to become the champion of both the New Star and Genius Rankings. Now, he had finally claimed a spot in the Ranking of Young Lords. He felt signs that he was now ready to break through to the eighth level sage realm. These two weeks would be a perfect time to do so.

He'd basically shown all of his available trump cards in the previous battles. The remaining ones were either off limits or too

heaven defying to be shown, like the palace. Every single battle was going to be extremely challenging from now on. He wanted to continue fighting and moving up the ranks. However, the advantage his trump cards gave him was becoming smaller and smaller. He would have to rely on his abilities and foundation in martial dao to achieve victory from now on. Innate strength was going to be very important from this point onwards.

His cultivation level was without a doubt the lowest amongst the geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords. This wasn't his fault, as he had a lower start in position than most, not to mention that he was also younger than all of them. It hadn't even been ten years since he'd reincarnated in the Eastern Kingdom. Becoming an eighth level sage realm cultivator from the true qi realm in such a short time was already incredibly heaven defying. His body's original foundation in martial dao was extremely weak. His knowledge and foundation of martial dao from his previous life was the only reason why he was able to become what he was today. Because of that, Jiang Chen wasn't too critical of his own achievements.

Even though the difference between his cultivation level and the young lords' cultivation levels was quite big, he was comforted by the fact that they were cultivators who had grown up with a golden spoon in their mouths. They had a hundred or perhaps even a thousand times more resources than him. Jiang Chen was very satisfied with his own achievements after putting all of this into consideration. He could definitely climb the ranks for a better ranking if he broke through to the eighth level sage realm.

He wasn't terribly concerned about his rank. He was more worried about being able to have a clash with the top geniuses of this world. He was finally able to encounter the strongest geniuses now that he'd climbed to the top of the rankings. He could finally validate the essence of his cultivation through these geniuses!

Jiang Chen enclosed himself in a secret room for the entire two

weeks of interlude. He was going all out to break through to the eighth level sage realm. He had a sufficient number of Heroic Sage Pills, but they were no longer enough to satisfy his cultivation appetite. His primary source of inner energy now came from Long Xiaoxuan's dragon crystals. The Heroic Sage Pill was used as a supplement instead. Jiang Chen had many sources of energy; there were many heaven-defying treasures and sources of energy in his possession. There was a large possibility that he would successfully breakthrough to the eighth level sage realm since he had accumulated a large number of Heroic Sage Pills and also possessed dragon crystals.

Chapter 957: A Revitalized Taiyuan Tower

For the Ranking of Young Lords, it was impossible to decide the specifics via round robin.

Geniuses who competed at this level were able to fight for over seventy-two hours without a decisive victor. If each contestant had to fight every other, the entire competition could take more than a year and a half to conclude. Moreover, the aftermath of the battles would undoubtedly be disastrous.

The numerical placements of the Ranking of Young Lords were preliminary, with the seven emperors' factions ordaining the positions. Strictly speaking, it didn't particularly mean anything, but it was still somewhat useful for reference. Most possessed rankings that were close to their true placements, but this appraisal was untested by the rigor of combat. It was actual fighting that would decide the final ranking. Thus, the battles were an outlet for geniuses who were dissatisfied with their placements to confront those with higher standings, as well as an opportunity for those in the reverse circumstance to prove their caliber.

The staff of Taiyuan Tower congregated outside of Jiang Chen's secret room. The competition for the Ranking of Young Lords was about to begin, but the head of the Tower still hadn't emerged from seclusion. Everyone was worried to some degree. It was common knowledge that this year's Veluriyam Pagoda gathering was particularly crucial. If Jiang Chen distinguished himself in the Martial Pagoda battles, it was likely that he would be made young lord by Emperor Peafowl. Originally surfacing as an insubstantial rumor that circulated amongst a few people, this particular piece of news had made broader and broader rounds as the battles proceeded. Thanks to Pill King Zhen's increasing fame, the story was supported and corroborated by more and more people. Now, it was the most popular topic of conversation for the entire town.

Those who worked at Taiyuan Tower treated the gossip with

some suspicion. They'd never heard Jiang Chen bring up such a thing. Aside from Huang'er who'd received a passing hint, no one else had a clue about its veracity. The news understandably energized them completely. Whether it was legitimate or only hearsay, it was enough to bring them happiness all the same. The young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain! Even thinking about the possibility made their blood boil.

If the news was truly authentic, it would be a momentous occasion for Taiyuan Tower. Though it was growing more and more in scope, the Tower was still nominally only a pill faction in collaboration with House Wei. It still lacked a heavyweight backer. But if Jiang Chen could become Sacred Peafowl Mountain's heir,Taiyuan Tower would skyrocket in status because of this association. They would become Veluriyam's foremost faction without contention. Every member of the Tower would benefit from the change.

Taiyuan Tower's core membership consisted of Jiang Chen's companions. Ten hand-picked slave attendants were also part of the group. When they'd first been rescued by Jiang Chen a while back, they had been forced to agree to serve the Tower for three decades as its protectors. The Tower's lively growth had changed their minds. Its master, Pill King Zhen, was the recipient of an increasing amount of acclaim. Beneath him were Pill King Lu Feng, Pill King Bu, and Lin Yanyu—three eminent pill masters, all top-ranked experts of their craft. The store's prosperity was evident. The unwillingness in the ten attendants' hearts had disappeared completely, replaced with a deep gratefulness and pride. As Taiyuan Tower's brand grew stronger and stronger, so too did their prestige grow with it. They saw hope, a future, and a wonderful road ahead.

Before, they'd been bent on carrying out their agreements as quickly as possible in order to leave. Now, they wouldn't leave even if the Tower held them at knifepoint. Even they themselves

had to admit that they were unreservedly aboard the Taiyuan Tower ship. The Tower's glory, future, and prospects were unquestionably tied together with their own.

Aside from these ten servile protectors, Taiyuan Tower's main force included Regal Pill Palace disciples as well. They had places of honor at the Tower—Shen Trifire most of all—and comprised the core of the store's power. They lived beneath Taiyuan Tower's wing and were the establishment's biggest beneficiaries. Without Jiang Chen's salvation, they would have all been slaves by now, soulless zombies under the command and direction of others, estranged in strange lands. Out of all their peers from the Palace, they were undoubtedly the luckiest.

Most of the others from the sect had died. A few more were scattered to the winds, their livelihoods uncertain. That these people had safe and steadily-recovering lives wasn't simply good fortune, but rather, a luxury. Jiang Chen and Taiyuan Tower had given them everything they had.

Describing these disciples as fellows drowning in bliss would be a bit much. However, they were assuredly fixated on Jiang Chen as their benefactor and mental bulwark. He was a figurative tree that provided the canopy beneath which they sought shelter. Thus, they were entirely invested in Jiang Chen's own future. If senior brother Jiang Chen could become Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord, Taiyuan Tower would definitely become more prominent as a result. The future effort put into rebuilding Regal Pill Palace, whenever it occurred, would be relatively painless. Neither the Eternal Celestial Capital nor the Great Scarlet Mid Region would be able to stop it, given Sacred Peafowl Mountain's clout. All of these hopes lay with Jiang Chen! As the foundation of their existences, he gave meaning to their work at Taiyuan Tower. Without him, any self-improving endeavors undertaken by the rest of them were mere busywork. Given their talents and skills, no amount of personal development would allot them the necessary

strength to oppose the aforementioned hostile factions. Everything was different with Jiang Chen.

The possibility of his advancement to Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord merely sweetened the deal. With all this in mind, Jiang Chen's half-month seclusion was everyone's concern. And he was still in it! If Jiang Chen stayed in seclusion for much longer, he would miss the battles for the Ranking of Young Lords. It would directly affect his actual placement, and thus, Emperor Peafowl's judgment of him. From their perspectives, the ranking battles were an outstanding stage for his skills to be showcased. Missing it would surely affect his stature.

"Everyone, please return to what you were doing," Huang'er suddenly spoke up. "Whether it's about the Ranking of Young Lords or Sacred Peafowl Mountain's heritage, Jiang Chen has everything under control. What's the point of standing around here? Returning to your responsibilities is the best thing you can do."

The girl was typically demure, but the entire Tower knew that the mysterious Miss Huang'er was Jiang Chen's partner. Her words carried a lot of weight.

"Let's disperse," Gouyu agreed. "The young master knows the limits of everything. So what if he misses the ranking battles? If his strength continues to increase, he will overshadow the rest of the young lords later on regardless. There's no need to use a single competition to prove his absolute ability."

Her words were echoed by many others.

"Yeah, we should go back."

"Okay, okay." The surrounding crowd gathered themselves slowly for departure.

It was at this moment that the secret room's door gently opened. A reinvigorated Jiang Chen greeted those present with a sanguine

smile. “So, everyone’s here, huh?” His tone was serene.

“You’ve finally left seclusion, young master?” Gouyu was overjoyed.

“Greetings to the young master!” The ten guardians came forward to salute Jiang Chen as well. These old coots were each more cunning than the last. Their prior unwillingness had transformed into pure, unbridled worship. They almost wanted to take their hearts out in an attempt to put their loyalty on display.

Jiang Chen gave them a small nod and looked over the ten codgers with some vexation. He knew that they’d always been a bit resentful and unruly about working at the Tower. A bit of dejection about their situation was understandable. There was something different about them today, though. Why were they so freshly enthusiastic? Was the short span of fifteen days enough to produce such mind-boggling change?

Shen Trifire and the Regal Pill Palace disciples also came forward in greeting, as did Liu Wencai and company. Just like the protectors, they were greatly encouraged by the sight of Jiang Chen leaving seclusion.

“Young master, there’s been a rumor circulating in the city during these past few days. Apparently, His Majesty the Emperor Peafowl has plans to make you Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s young lord? Is that true?” Ever the hasty youth, Qiao Shan couldn’t help but blurt out the question. It was a question that everyone wanted to know the answer to, with preferably a clear-cut response from Jiang Chen himself. It was an answer that could determine the destinies of both Taiyuan Tower and themselves.

All eyes were on Jiang Chen, aglow with anticipation. Sweeping his own gaze mildly across each person’s face, Jiang Chen suddenly understood the ten codgers’ unusual fervor. It was because of this rumor, of course! Eyes unaverted and grinning a little, Jiang Chen decided to be very direct. “Does everyone know about it already?”

Gouyu's pretty eyes widened. "Then, it's true?"

The lack of refusal from the young master jolted everyone's hearts into action.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "You people knowing about it internally is enough, I think. There's no need to announce something like this. Let's try to keep a low profile, hmm?"

Emperor Peafowl had mentioned the matter to Jiang Chen many times before, and they even had an agreement in place. Nevertheless, Jiang Chen distinctly wanted to avoid blabbering about it before the emperor's own announcement. He only let a little bit slip because of Taiyuan Tower's collectively intense interest. His listeners were smart. Jiang Chen's words were verification enough. It simply wasn't time to reveal something like this to the public yet.

In the midst of conversation, the sound of loud footsteps came from outside. "Brother, you're certainly a calm one. The ranking battles are about to begin! Even His Majesty has asked you why you're not there yet." It was young master Ji San. Pushing to the front of the crowd, he blinked when he saw Jiang Chen. "Aha! Have you broken through into the eighth level sage realm now, brother?"

Ji San had very sharp eyes. He saw the improvement in Jiang Chen's cultivation level in an instant. Everyone else was shocked by this, their gazes echoing their reactions. Another breakthrough? He's doing that way too often, isn't he?

"The half-month's work wasn't wasted, thankfully. Let's go. I... I've waited for the ranking battles for quite a while." Jiang Chen was chomping at the bit for blood. His attitude brought new heights to the excitement of Taiyuan Tower's staff.

Chapter 958: Jiang Chen Challenged

After a half-month interlude, the ranking battles for the Ranking of Young Lords recommenced. This final set of ranking battles didn't have any complicated rules. The thirty-six cultivators currently on the Ranking of Young Lords each had three opportunities to challenge someone else. The battles began from the 36th ranked contestant. The 36th ranked cultivator could challenge someone at most three ranks ahead of him, so he could only target geniuses from ranks 35 to 33 in his first match.

If he won the first bout, he would earn the right to challenge someone up to six ranks ahead. Similarly, if he succeeded in the second bout, he could then proceed to challenge twelve ranks above him. On the other hand, if he lost in the first match, his remaining opportunities would be taken away, and he would be forced to stay in the Ranking's last place. No matter how much the rankings ahead of him changed, he would have no part in them. Moreover, the cultivators who were ranked ahead of the challengers could only be challenged once per day. If a challenge was successful, then the challenger and the challenged would have their rankings swapped. Someone who lost a challenge would be permanently placed in the challenger's spot, and there would be no further change to his ranking.

Being defeated by a challenger was the automatic mark of a loser. According to the regulations of the Ranking, after a loss, their right to issue challenges would be taken away. Take Gu Zhenshan and Zhuang Jie as an example, both of whom had been defeated by Ji San and Jiang Chen, respectively. The result of their losses had been even more severe. They'd been outright eliminated from the Ranking of Young Lords. Thus, a defending cultivator who couldn't protect his ranking had no choice but to settle at the bottom.

Since the initial ranking incorporated many considerations from

the seven emperors, its accuracy was generally quite reliable. One or two places' difference was of course a surprise, but an error of three or six ranks' difference was unlikely. If someone higher lost to someone lower with a three or even six-rank difference, then he could blame nothing aside from his own inadequacy.

The seven battles from ranks 36 to 30 carried few surprises. Though each initial challenge spanned only three ranks, there were no instances of success. Following these initial battles, the 29th ranked genius challenged the 26th. After a grueling battle, this challenge became the first instance of a successful challenge. His opponent was unceremoniously shifted back to the 29th place and was given no opportunity to contest the result while the now 26th ranked genius had the privilege of continuing his challenge. The second time, he could challenge across six ranks. The other contestants' thoughts became more lively as a result.

Clearly, the guy had quite a few choices ahead of him. If he wanted to challenge someone five ranks up, there was young master Ji San. Six ranks? Pill King Zhen. Compared to challenging other geniuses, Ji San and Pill King Zhen were two dark horses who'd come from the Genius Rankings. Due to this fact, there was a greater chance of defeating them. Though they'd exhibited great strength in their qualifying matches, the common opinion was that they still lacked in both fundamentals and fame.

On paper, a fight against them could work out. If the now 26th ranked contestant could challenge either of them and win, it'd be a great coup for him. The result would be a climb that started from 29th place and ended at 21st, or even 20th. It was a shockingly large gap to bridge. For the Ranking of Young Lords, even the space of one or two ranks was exceedingly difficult to surmount for prospective challengers looking to move upwards.

"Should I challenge young master Ji San or Pill King Zhen?" The genius was named Fang Yuan, hailing from Emperor Void's faction. He had a difficult choice ahead of him. He probably had a

higher chance of winning against young master Ji San, but if he picked Pill King Zhen and was successful in his challenge, it would result in a larger outcry. His final ranking would be a bit higher as well. After some consideration, Fang Yuan finally decided to make full use of his opportunity. He would challenge Pill King Zhen! It was the highest number of ranks he could jump, as someone ranked 26th. Pill King Zhen was ranked 20th.

Jiang Chen was unsurprised at the challenge. Chances like these were hard to come by, and it was logical that his opponent would want to maximize such an opportunity to its fullest extent. He wasn't afraid of battles. His victory over Zhuang Jie had shown him the approximate depth of the heirs to the emperors' ability. The formerly 20th ranked Zhuang Jie was at the half-step emperor realm. There was a sliver of difference between him and a true emperor realm cultivator. Likewise, Fang Yuan was at the same level, at the half-step emperor realm.

Though Fang Yuan and Zhuang Jie were nominally on the same level, there was a marked disparity between the two. It was impossible for Fang Yuan to surpass Zhuang Jie in terms of strength. Jiang Chen had been able to defeat someone like Zhuang Jie while he was still at the seventh level sage realm. Now that he'd broken through to the eighth level sage realm, he wasn't optimistic about his new opponent's chances. But, it was a convenient excuse for him to test just how much he'd improved. In his personal opinion, he'd reaped great rewards from breaking through to the eighth rank sage realm. The extent of his rewards' benefits, however, was yet to be determined. He'd have to verify his growth through actual combat.

Fang Yuan's preferred weapon was a black spear for missile attacks. He pointed its head at Jiang Chen from afar. The pressure the spear exerted melded into his own aura.

"Pill King Zhen, I know how powerful you are as an opponent. Even so, I've worked many decades on honing my skill with the

spear. All of the glory I've accumulated in my life thus far hinges on this battle. I'm willing to burn my lifeforce for the sake of victory. I'm going to go all out today and show off the full extent of what this spear can do!"

Manners maketh the man. Though Fang Yuan probably wasn't actually stronger than Zhuang Jie, he certainly surpassed the latter in terms of both character and demeanor. Jiang Chen nodded slightly, the look in his eyes heating up as well. "Brother Fang, there is no need to speak of win or lose in the arena. Seek only peace and satisfaction with yourself. Please, go ahead."

Fang Yuan's own eyes shifted rapidly. He inclined his head in response. "Then, as a lower rank challenging a higher, I will make the first move!" He was perfectly candid, offering no further pretense or elocution. With a shake of his arm, he stuck out with the yard-long spear. Its projected point surged like a black serpent of lightning, almost extending past the boundaries of space itself. The weapon was in front of Jiang Chen in the next second. Most importantly, the spear's intent had no flair or flourish to it. The action was simple rather than complex and showy. Each and every detail and movement had been clearly displayed in this lethal spear-strike.

Jiang Chen had given Fang Yuan his full attention from the instant the man jumped on stage. He felt a sense of threat from the spear. It was entirely instinctual, a kind of sixth sense shared between experts. Thus, Jiang Chen reacted instantly to the attack with a flash of his own sword. He deflected it aside in a single smooth motion. Clang! Sparks erupted forth from the point of collision between his Pentecolor Sword and the spear's head.

The forward thrust of the spear carried terrifying power behind it, but Jiang Chen's sword swing parried it with surprising facility. Both combatants' bodies swayed from the impact. Fang Yuan's heart sank. His attack had merely been an opening strike. Things would have been very different if his opponent had decided to

evade or deal with the attack head on. The ensuing flood of pressure from his spear would have swelled like the tide, each blow more powerful than the last. That was the most potent thing about his spear. Each form flowed into the next, their relentless assault pushing ever forward. Additionally, each successive movement was accompanied by a sizable increase in power. In this way, his opponents would be exhausted and dismantled by the endless aggression.

But this time, Jiang Chen hadn't dodged the attack or tried to take it with his tempered body head on. Instead, he had deflected both the spear and the pressure behind it. It had looked like a simple turn of the blade, and certainly that was what the audience thought. There was no evidence whatsoever of the mastery behind the gesture to the untrained eye. Only true experts with an extremely keen eye could discern the truth. As for the opponent himself, well, Fang Yuan was devastated. Jiang Chen's casual riposte directly disrupted the momentum of his spear. It unsettled his offensive tempo, cutting a string of future attacks at their knees.

Whenever momentum was disrupted like this, the attacker had to build it up all over again. All of Fang Yuan's prior posturing and preparation was wasted, meaningless. Though it had looked simple, the deflecting blow actually contained a lot of martial dao wisdom. Was it a coincidence? Or did his opponent see through to the attack's substance? Fang Yuan was both dismayed and uncertain.

Again! Brandishing his spear, Fang Yuan began to work up a storm once more. In the blink of an eye, he'd thrust his weapon forth eighty-one times. Like a shower of meteors, the eighty-one thrusts transformed into a piercing storm. In the fight prior, Zhuang Jie's wind constitution had granted him supernatural haste. Thus, it was remarkable that Fang Yuan matched Zhuang Jie bit for bit in terms of speed. Moreover, the haste of his

movements were incorporated much better into the impetus behind his spear.

Jiang Chen's eyes moved. The Divine Pentecolor Swords split from one blade into five, their kaleidoscopic radiance dispersing through the air. "Reverse Heaven and Earth!" he cried. Just like the Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords, this was also part of the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique. Though it wasn't as flashy as the former, it possessed a subtle power all its own. Five colorful streaks of sword light transformed into a dazzling air current. Distorting the fabric of space itself, it sucked in all eighty-one strokes.

The technique pitted sword against spear, and yet crushed its competition utterly. As its name suggested, 'Reverse Heaven and Earth' warped natural order itself. It twisted space in such a way that no technique, whether offensive or defensive, could continue operate any longer wherever it went. This was a technique that could rival an emperor realm cultivator's domain technique. A half-step emperor realm genius could barely grasp the basics of domain power. Jiang Chen's sword strike, on the other hand, possessed prototypical characteristics of an emperor realm technique. In terms of how esoteric and arcane the ability was, ordinary emperor realm domains couldn't hope to match up to it at all.

Most of the time, emperor realm domains required an expert's own power and the formation of a force field taken from that power. They typically required a certain amount of time for setup. But Jiang Chen had demonstrated an emperor realm domain power with just a mere sword technique! All seven emperors showed expressions of slight astonishment at this sudden turn of events.

Chapter 959: The Grace of a Strike

It was beyond common sense for a sword technique to have the same effect as an emperor domain. Even eminent figures like the seven great emperors had never heard of such a thing. After all, an emperor domain was commonly formed by combining an emperor's inner energy with his own will. A non-emperor realm cultivator could never generate such incredible energy. Even a half-step emperor could only barely create an emperor realm domain. Moreover, it would merely be an imitation and not a true domain. In fact, it was already an incredible achievement if they could create a defective domain. To imitate an emperor domain with a sword technique was unthinkable even if it wasn't a true domain.

However, the crowd also knew that Pill King Zhen was only a sky sage cultivator. He wasn't even a half-step emperor yet, let alone a true emperor! Yet he was already able to fight above his level with his ability to imitate an emperor domain! Or at the very least least, he was now capable of putting up some resistance against the restraining powers of an emperor's domain. Not a single sage realm cultivator in Veluriyam Capital was capable of such a feat.

A sage realm cultivator would never have the ability to fight an emperor realm cultivator on equal footing. This was common martial dao logic. Talent or cultivation level didn't matter. Even a peak sage realm cultivator could never win without relying on equipment or other factors. The strongest and most incredible sage realm genius would never claim that they could defeat an emperor realm cultivator barehanded.

An initial emperor realm cultivator was definitely capable of taking on five to ten peak sage realm cultivators or three half-step emperors at the same time. The reason for such a discrepancy in strength was due to the emperor domain. It was truly that potent a tool in battle. It might not seem so when watching a battle

between two emperors, but the advantage was much more evident when an emperor was battling a sage realm cultivator. This was the reason why Jiang Chen's simple-looking technique had rendered the crowd speechless.

Fang Yuan was flabbergasted when Jiang Chen deflected his spear. This was one of his most potent attacks, one that encompassed his insight of heaven and earth! This was a spear attack that even Emperor Void's foremost disciple wouldn't dare receive head on! Pill King Zhen hadn't only received received the attack head on; he'd deflected it with an unbelievable method as well!

Is he... really a sky sage realm cultivator? Fang Yuan's heart had begun to waver. He couldn't help but think that he was facing a monster. A formidable monstrous genius that nobody had ever heard of. A crack appeared in his wavering dao heart. He'd finally begun to regret his brashness. He should've jumped only five places and challenged Ji San instead. Judging by his own skills, there was a fifty percent chance he could win. Challenging the pill king was the worst decision he'd ever made in his life! He could no longer see himself winning after the pill king had deflected his spear.

Even the seven great emperors were shocked by what had just occurred, let alone Fang Yuan. How can a sage realm genius execute a technique on par with an emperor's domain? Was he an emperor realm cultivator hiding his abilities all long? However, such thoughts were shot down as quickly as they arose. It didn't seem possible that anyone could possibly suppress their emperor realm cultivation all the way down to the sage realm. Even if were possible, someone would've noticed by now. But how could one explain Jiang Chen's emperor realm strength? Fang Yuan wasn't the only one having such questions. The seven emperors themselves also were wondering how Jiang Chen had managed such a thing.

The six of them had even begun to feel a little concerned. They'd more or less viewed Jiang Chen as Emperor Peafowl's successor and also a chess piece that the emperor had secretly placed before. They were even more certain of their theories after they saw Jiang Chen's heaven-defying performance. Based on their understanding of Emperor Peafowl, they were certain that he would never be so quick to accept a genius that had appeared out of nowhere and make him the successor to Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

He had done such a thing because this was all part of his elaborate plan. He already knew Pill King Zhen like the back of his hand. The cautious Emperor Peafowl would never allow a foreigner that had only arrived for less than three years become the successor of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Due to how widespread the rumors were, everyone had arrived at this tacit conclusion, even though it hadn't been made official yet.

The other six emperors had taken the rumor with a grain of salt when it had just begun spreading. It was common knowledge that the pill king was talented in martial dao, but he wasn't a towering talent, nor did he have an overwhelming advantage over the other geniuses at that time. They were certain that the geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords were stronger than the pill king in every single aspect. Sacred Peafowl Mountain might've lost young lord Fan, but would the other true disciples show allegiance to Pill King Zhen who had appeared out of nowhere? Everything was still up in the air. The other six emperors really didn't think too highly about the pill king, nor did they truly believe the rumors. They theorized that it was just sleight of hand that Emperor Peafowl, his subordinates, or maybe even Taiyuan Tower had purposely created. However, everyone now suddenly began to believe in the authenticity of the rumors after what had just happened.

Pill King Zhen was simply too monstrous! His peerless sword technique alone was enough for the world to clearly see his talent and potential. Maybe he still wasn't strong enough to garner notice

from the seven emperors or dominate multiple formidable foes with just his strength alone, but the talent and potential within that sole sword technique had overthrown the beliefs of everyone present.

Jiang Chen had caused a great commotion when he was crowned champion in both the New Star and Genius Rankings. However, his fighting style and abilities hadn't been truly acknowledged by many cultivators. This was also partially due to Jiang Chen purposefully suppressing his powers to hide his true talents. He was an incredible fighter with a keen eye for details, but his strength was still limited by his sky sage realm cultivation. It was inevitable that some would suspect that he'd won those battles due to cheap tricks. Some even believed that he hadn't perfected his battle skills yet. That wasn't too far from the truth. After all, Jiang Chen hadn't been able to cultivate in this previous life. He was finally able to in this new life, but he wasn't able to achieve perfection in every step.

Moreover, he hadn't displayed his true capabilities due to a multitude of reasons. The seven emperors viewed him as a flawed jewel because of this. However, he had inadvertently showed his true talent when he executed his last move. That sword technique was testament to Pill King Zhen's peerless talent in martial dao as well. People realized that he was equally talented in both paths. He also possessed an incredible sense for battle. He'd already grasped Fang Yuan's fighting style after only a few exchanges.

Fang Yuan excelled at using the spear, with it being his most powerful trump card. The special characteristic of a spear was its ability to dominate and overwhelm the enemy. Unfortunately, Jiang Chen specialized in controlling the flow of battle. It didn't matter how dominating the spear was. It could never work up a storm when the battle was under Jiang Chen's control.

Fang Yuan couldn't bring out the spear's full potential due to the constant disruption. The sense of defeat within him was growing

by the minute. He held many powerful methods, yet he hadn't been able to fully utilize any of them. It would be a gargantuan task to win against an opponent of the same level without his spear techniques.

"Ole Third. Your brother's talent in martial dao is simply inconceivable." The Coiling Dragon clan lord sighed. He was now thoroughly convinced of Jiang Chen's talent in martial dao.

"If I was the one receiving Fang Yuan's spear techniques, I'm not sure that I would have the necessary strength and skills to deflect his spear, even if I knew how to. Yet the pill king seemed to have already made countermeasures before Fang Yuan even moved. I can't help but be impressed by his judgement," Ji Zhongtang murmured quietly. Ji Zhongtang was a man of few words. However, it seemed like he had to speak those words this time. He'd already begun to admire Jiang Chen greatly after his own battle with him, and now his reverence had reached greater heights after witnessing this fight.

Ji San smiled wryly. "I'd thought that it was just a careless swing of the sword in the beginning. Never did I imagine that it was actually all part of his plan. It's as though he saw through Fang Yuan's spear before the fight had even begun. Fang Yuan isn't able to bring out the full potential of his spear at all. The flow of his attacks have been thoroughly destroyed by my brother."

"What he did was actually a testament to his eyesight and foresight, as well as his decision-making skills, all of which are at a level that should only be attainable at the great emperor realm," the clan lord commented with a solemn expression. Jiang Chen's sword technique was now the hottest topic amongst all factions in Veluriyam Capital, including the wandering cultivators.

Chapter 960: Brotherhood

Fang Yuan's spear technique was the only reason he was able to challenge the higher-ranked young lords. His power and lethality were greatly reduced once this was out of the equation and the rhythm of his attacks disrupted. No longer able to attack, he resigned himself to fate and went on the complete defensive.

Jiang Chen wasn't in a hurry to use his ultimate moves, as he didn't have a bad impression of his opponent. It was impossible for Fang Yuan to withstand the Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords now that Jiang Chen was at the eighth level sage realm. The Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique contained much profound meaning and encompassed exquisite sword techniques. However, he didn't have the time to polish these techniques due to the tightly-packed schedule of the tournament. He felt Fang Yuan could be used as validation of his mastery over the technique.

How would Fang Yuan ever have imagined that he'd become Jiang Chen's sword-testing dummy? An hour later, he was finally brought to his knees. The results had already been set in stone when Fang Yuan's spear was countered. However, his loss had still caused some commotion within the crowds. After all, he hadn't even been able to put up the slightest fight.

The crowd was also incredibly awestruck by the profoundness of the techniques used within the battle. This was a different kind of battle. There was no use of heaven-defying equipment or trump cards. It was purely a clash of martial methods and martial dao. Clashes like these were the most entertaining and sophisticated of battles.

The audience much preferred exciting battles like these over displays of trump cards. Trump cards and heaven-defying equipment didn't necessarily correlate to a cultivator's cultivation, nor did it reflect a cultivator's true talent and skills. It was only a reflection of the strength and power of the cultivator's patron. Not

only was a pure clash of martial dao the most rewarding, but it also provided them with inspiration for their own cultivation. This was the reason why the crowd hadn't jeered at Fang Yuan after his loss. In fact, they even gave him a huge round of applause. He had lost this battle honorably without losing his temper or resorting to underhanded tricks. Jiang Chen naturally received an even larger round of applause. He too had defeated his opponent honorably and used no underhanded tricks.

Geniuses were greatly revered in the world of martial dao for their talent and finesse. They weren't revered for their heritage, and definitely not for the power behind their backs. Jiang Chen hadn't just won over the crowd; he'd won over their respect and adoration. The entire Veluriyam Capital, including those who had criticized him in the past, now admitted that he was definitely a worthy successor to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. The rumors began to seem substantial after this battle.

Jiang Chen's victory meant that this was the end of Fang Yuan’s climb in the ranking. His placement at the 26th rank in the Ranking of Young Lords was now set in stone. The ranking battles continued. Jiang Chen didn’t have to entertain another challenger today. Every young lord was only allowed to be challenged once per day. This was done to protect them from being endlessly challenged by multiple opponents. None of the subsequent challengers were able to create another miracle.

This situation continued all the way until the 23rd ranked young lord. He picked Ji San, who was the 21st ranked young lord, as his opponent. Ji San seemed to have expected this as well. He entered the arena with the fires of battle burning inside of him. There was no doubt that he possessed incredible talent since he was able to defeat Gu Zhenshan.

Jiang Chen could also tell that the clan lord had also given his brother some special training during the short period of rest. He was immediately impressed by the might of Ji San’s attack as soon

as the battle had started. Brother Ji's battle potential is extremely startling. His chances of winning are definitely higher now that the clan lord has given him some pointers. With his potential, I'm optimistic that he can obtain a position within the top half of the rankings. Jiang Chen's deep familiarity with martial dao allowed him to conclude after less than ten rounds of exchanges that Ji San had a sixty percent chance of winning.

The odds were quite reasonable. After all, the Coiling Dragon clan lord had set his sights on becoming the eighth great emperor faction in Veluriyam Capital. A powerful successor was needed for this goal. Liuxiang had proven to be less than useful during crucial moments, while Ji Zhongtang was too young to bear such heavy responsibilities. Ji San was his best choice for a successor.

It was only natural that Ji San would improve greatly now that the all-powerful clan lord had decided to focus all his efforts into guiding him. He was no longer the same person that he'd been two years ago. Jiang Chen thought quite highly of his battle methods as he watched further. There was no hesitation at all in the young master's attacks. His fighting style was a little harder to fathom. The stronger his opponent, the more powerful he became. There were times where his strength would even exceed his innate talent!

This was only bolstered by his brazen, yet meticulous nature. His attacks would often seem impulsive, but he always seemed to plan for every contingency. Most importantly, his dao heart was extremely firm and resolute. Ji San's opponent was also very strong, but he wasn't as confident in himself.

None of the young lords were easy to deal with. Ji San's biggest disadvantage right now was the fact that he was not as experienced in fighting young lord ranked geniuses. Even though he was genuinely stronger than his opponent, the lack of experience had caused him to miss many opportunities that would have otherwise won him the fight. Thus, it became a drawn out battle with a great deal of back-and-forth exchanges.

Ji San wasn't afraid of prolonged battles. The reason the Coiling Dragon Clan could become the foremost clan in Veluriyam Capital was due to the special lineage they possessed. Their lineage allowed every clan descendent to maintain their strength and power during lengthy engagements. In the end, Ji San managed to squeeze out a win after a long and arduous battle.

The sky had darkened by the time they were finished. The battles were done for the day. Jiang Chen immediately visited Ji San to praise his brother for what he'd done right, and to give advice on his errors. Ji San gained much from the conversation, and his martial dao knowledge reached new heights. His high comprehension won Jiang Chen's praise and surprise. They'd had many conversations with each other as sworn brothers, but they hadn't conversed much about martial dao.

Jiang Chen had only just realized that Ji San's talent and comprehension of martial dao was actually no less than that of the young lords. He was surprised, but not as much as Ji San was. Ji San had seen many of Jiang Chen's battles and therefore knew about his monstrous talent in martial dao. However, his knowledge and foundation in martial dao surprised the young master even more so.

"Brother, how were you taught by your master? Why does it seem like you are no less knowledgeable than my clan lord in martial dao?" Ji San couldn't be blamed for being so surprised. Jiang Chen had inadvertently revealed his monstrous knowledge and observation skills when giving advice.

Jiang Chen smiled but said nothing else. He handed a small bottle over to his brother. "Brother Ji, I will give this to you on the grounds that we're brothers. It's very important that you don't tell anyone."

"What is it?" Ji San seemed a little startled.

"The blood of a true dragon."

“What? Blood from a true dragon? You’re joking!” Ji San thought that he’d heard misheard him.

Jiang Chen took back the bottle and smiled wryly. “You don’t want it? Never mind then.”

Ji San quickly grabbed his arm. “S-stop fooling around! Is it... really true dragon blood?”

“Your Coiling Dragon Clan possesses a dragon lineage. However, the bloodline is no longer as pure as it used to be due to the passage of time.”

“That’s our clan’s secret! How did you know?” Ji San was astonished.

“Is your Coiling Dragon Clan’s bloodline a secret?”

Ji San laughed. “The outside world has always had their conjectures, but we’ve always denied them. The truth is, we really are a dragon clan lineage. However, as you’ve said, our bloodline is no longer pure due to the passage of time."

“The thing inside this bottle should be of use.” Jiang Chen nodded.

“The blood of a true dragon?!” Ji San stared at the bottle with his eyes wide open. He was still arrested by disbelief.

The blood of a true dragon! Such rumors had once circulated in the Upper Eight Regions, but nobody had truly heard about it for the past few thousand years. How could a young person like Jiang Chen possess true dragon blood? Did his teacher give it to him?

“The true dragon blood can cleanse and increase the strength of your bloodline. You will also be able to summon the heritage of a true dragon. If you manage to awaken these powers, you will definitely surpass every genius in Veluriyam Capital one day. This is absolutely no exaggeration,” Jiang Chen said confidently.

Chapter 961: Geniuses of Emperor Peafowls Line

There was no need for Jiang Chen's explanation. Ji San himself knew what true dragon blood meant. A family with a dragon bloodline understood the meaning behind that much better than most, regardless of how thin that bloodline happened to run. This was especially true for Ji San, since he'd read a plethora of ancient tomes on the subject. He was no stranger to the legends and myths surrounding true dragon bloodlines in particular.

In ancient times, the dragon race was one of the few races that reigned above all others. The bloodline that flowed through their descendants was diluted after generations of inheritance. It was one of the most depressing and helpless truths for the concerned parties. Both actual dragons and humans with dragon bloodlines had no solution whatsoever to the age-old problem of blood dilution; it was simply part of the natural order. It was impossible for bloodlines to become purer over time without genetic mutation.

The appearance of true dragon blood was a kind of ancestral reversion. No matter the race, true dragon blood was the best way for draconic descendents to attain bloodline reversion. 'Bloodline reversion' was the process through which a descendant with a diluted bloodline could return their level to the same level of their ancestors, or even surpass it in some instances. It was almost impossible for such a reversion to occur without at least discovering a pureblood true dragon.

Was the thing in Ji San's hands really the true dragon blood of legend? Something that hadn't appeared for the past thousand years? He wasn't intentionally appearing incredulous, rather, it was just that he had never even dreamed of such a possibility happening to him. Even after Jiang Chen showed off his dragon's

roar and devouring art, Ji San had thought that it was his brother's teacher who'd altered his bloodline. Thus, the young master's reaction to the bottle of true dragon blood was understandable.

At this point, Jiang Chen had given out several portions of true dragon blood already. Ye Chonglou had received one, his good friend Tang Hong of the Precious Tree Sect had been given another, and Liu Wencai of the mysterious bloodline powers a third. Young master Ji San was the recipient of the fourth. Ye Chonglou aside, the other two lacked any substantial knowledge about the rarity of the blood. They knew that it was precious, but how uncommon was it really? That hadn't been part of their considerations. They just knew that anything Jiang Chen gave them would be treasure.

Young master Ji San, on the other hand, knew even more than Ye Chonglou did about how valuable the substance before him was. He opened the stopper to take a whiff but was greeted by a wild aura that rushed from the bottle into his face. The aura felt like it could engulf him instantly. It called to every pore in his body, bringing the youth to a shuddering point. In the next moment, his entire body began to resonate. His bloodline began to awaken, down to every extremity of his capillaries. Ji San was shaking all over. Usually a carefree jokester, he couldn't contain the fervent thrill in his eyes. He almost dropped the bottle he was holding.

Ji San wasn't inexperienced, nor was he easily agitated. The blood of a true dragon was many times more crucial for him than for others. This was probably true even in comparison to Liu Wencai. Jiang Chen smiled, but didn't say anything more. He was nonplussed by Ji San's reaction. As the possessors of a draconic bloodline, the Coiling Dragon Clan knew exactly what the blood of a true dragon meant for them. Ji San recovered his wits after a long while.

“Pardon my bout of foolishness, brother.” Ji San paused. “No words can express my appreciation. Between brothers…” His voice was a little hoarse. He wanted to express a great deal more, but could not despite his eloquence.

Jiang Chen gave him a pat on the shoulder. “We’re brothers, aren’t we? Let the rest of your words remain unspoken. I just hope that after your bloodline reversion is complete, you can stomp all of these so-called geniuses underfoot.”

“All of them? Including you?” Ji San chuckled. He finally had the opportunity to make a joke, adjusting his emotions in the process.

“I’ll accept the loss… if you’re able to do so.” Jiang Chen grinned meaningfully, trailing off the sentence.

Ji San sighed. “You’re quite the piece of work, alright. Even if I defeat every genius under the heavens, you’ll still be an insurmountable mountain in front of me.”

“To completely assimilate the blood into your own will take a long time. I wouldn’t count on it for the Ranking battles.”

After some consideration, Ji San nodded in agreement. “There’s no point to them after obtaining true dragon blood. Why chase something so pointless?” He turned to Jiang Chen, eyes ablaze with expectation. “With that being said… I’ll leave the rest of the Ranking battles to you, brother.”

Jiang Chen’s gift of true dragon blood only increased Ji San’s hopes for him. Jiang Chen truly seemed to him like a god among men now. Each time he thought he had seen his brother’s limits, some new surprise would appear. There hadn’t ever been an exception to that observation. The Pinecrane Pill that Jiang Chen had talked about prior, and now the true dragon blood. If either of these made their way into the public eye, there would be a great deal of bloodshed. But for his brother, they were simple presents. It was not due to magnanimity and generosity alone, but rather, a kind of trust in him. In Ji San, the person.

If Jiang Chen didn't have faith in him, why give Ji San any of these things? Precious treasures like these had the tendency to set their bearers aflame. It threatened the very lives of the people through whose hands it passed. But Jiang Chen seemingly had no reservations about the matter. Rather than the true dragon blood, what Ji San valued more was his brother's trust. What did being brothers mean? This was the answer. He told himself many a time in his heart that this was the kind of secret that he could divulge to no one else. Not even the clan lord could know. Ji San had no possible way of repaying all of Jiang Chen's help. The only thing he could do was preserve the secrets he knew.

"You should use the true dragon blood I've given you well, Brother Ji. Who knows? Maybe you'll be the one who rules Veluriyam Capital in the next three thousand years."

"What, me?" Ji San was perplexed. "But I heard that His Majesty Peafowl wants to make you the young lord. You don't need to say anything else. We're brothers, and there's no reason for me to not support you as the ruler of the city. I'll listen to you all my life."

A promise was all he could do in the face of his brother's generosity.

Jiang Chen smiled. "Even if I do become Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord, it's not possible for me to stay here a whole three thousand years. If everything goes well, I hope that you can prop up the city's future in my stead."

Ji San was stunned. The leader of Veluriyam Capital was one of the most powerful positions in the Upper Eight Regions. It was a paramount existence. Did Brother Jiang Chen's ambitions exceed that?

Jiang Chen didn't explain what he meant. He merely maintained his smile. "You'll know more about it, one day. I just hope that you don't let the blood I gave you down."

Burning blood surged through Ji San's veins. "If I waste an

endowment like this, then I really do deserve to be called a piece of trash. Don't worry. I'll show you what I can do!"

The next day, the ranking battles proceeded once more.

It was Ji San's turn to issue challenges. To everyone's surprise, he surrendered the opportunity. Though he'd informed the Coiling Dragon clan lord of the choice beforehand already, the clan lord still felt that it was a bit of a shame. He had asked Ji San the reason for it, but the young master had not given him one. He only told the clan lord to trust his judgment, and that he would give him a full and appropriate explanation in the future.

The Coiling Dragon clan lord had been mentally prepared, but no one else had. The ferocious young master Ji San had given up! Everyone was bewildered at this unforeseen outcome. In their opinion, someone with Ji San's strength could at least fight to boost morale and show flair, regardless of victory or loss. But before he was even able to do so, he'd already signed away the chance. He hadn't given up on only the consequences of this battle, but perhaps also the strategic movements of the Coiling Dragon Clan in the short term.

However, the young master was entirely expressionless. He had none of the dejection that one would expect to see. Those who'd always thought Ji San was a bit impulsive suddenly found themselves unable to understand him. For most people, Coiling Dragon's young master had always been somewhat eccentric, a mold-breaker, and perhaps a bit too playful for his own good. This kind of added depth to his character was something new. The change was vexing. Where had his confidence come from? Why was he so impassive about it? Didn't he know how much of a hit it would be to the Coiling Dragon Clan's plans?

The other clans that wanted to replace Coiling Dragon gloated a little. They were the ones who'd had the highest hopes of Ji San ending up with a low ranking. A higher ranking meant a bigger gap between his clan and the rest. Some thought that young master Ji

San might have had cold feet, and that he was probably scared of entering the arena once more. No matter how others perceived him, Ji San's expression revealed nothing about his intentions. After Ji San came Pill King Zhen. With the Coiling Dragon young master's example before him, there was the curious sentiment going around regarding whether Pill King Zhen would give up his chance to challenge as well. Would he be satisfied with staying number twenty on the rankings?

The three-ranked geniuses immediately above Jiang Chen were especially anxious. His fierceness in the prior rounds had been seen by all. The three geniuses had mentally substituted themselves into the battles and done some inference. They had to admit that their own chances of victory in the same spots were equally slim. They had no hope against the worldly genius who'd apparently come out of nowhere. Thus, they wanted Jiang Chen to also give up from the bottom of their hearts.

Unfortunately for them, Jiang Chen clearly had no intentions of doing so whatsoever. He challenged the 17th genius straightaway. The 17th ranked was a genius from Emperor Peafowl's faction, named Yang Sheng. It was the first time Jiang Chen was fighting against a genius aligned with Emperor Peafowl. Yang Sheng was one of the four top geniuses under the emperor's command. Yes, he was technically last place amongst the four, but nobody took him lightly nevertheless. Jiang Chen's direct challenge lit an angry flame within Yang Sheng's heart.

Chapter 962: A Jealous Genius

The anger hadn't been because of Jiang Chen's challenge in particular. The Ranking of Young Lords had clear-cut rules. As the 20th ranked, Jiang Chen could only issue a challenge to someone three ranks above him at most. Yang Sheng was at the tail end of that gap, so challenging him made complete sense. Yang Sheng's fury was rooted somewhere else. Pill King Zhen had only come to the Capital less than two years ago. How could he be allowed to steal so much thunder? What did he do to deserve so much adoration? The news of Emperor Peafowl's plans to make him the next young lord was just icing on the cake. Bestowing the title of young lord wasn't a big deal in and of itself. Any true disciple studying under Emperor Peafowl was automatically eligible.

However, as one of the four most intimate disciples of His Majesty, Yang Sheng had pride and ambition. Ever since young lord Fan's death, only three out of the four disciples remained, with little difference in ability between them. Given the circumstances, he saw an opportunity for advancement. Thus, he viewed Veluriyam Capital's future leadership as his own domain, as a possible future he could carve out for himself. Pill King Zhen's sudden appearance and widespread acceptance by the city greatly threatened that prospect.

His hostility in light of that was quite natural. It was a primal instinct to protect one's own territory. He wasn't at all satisfied. He didn't want Jiang Chen to be listed as one of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lords, period. The trending gossip didn't only state that Pill King Zhen would be made young lord, but also that he would be young lord Fan's replacement. This only served to make his enmity explode.

Yang Sheng was an ambitious man. If Pill King Zhen was indeed young lord Fan's replacement, then the chance at future leadership of Sacred Peafowl Mountain would be lost to him once more. The

young lord Fan of yesteryear was undeniably number one compared to his peers. There was no question about who would inherit the faction. They had envied the young lord too back then. The disciples had enough self-awareness about the significant distance between Peafowl's then-foremost disciple and themselves. But young lord Fan had not collected the popularity and position due to him overnight. That was why they had kept their eventual resentment bottled up.

Pill King Zhen, on the other hand, had made a name for himself by blazing a meteoric trail. He'd become Veluriyam Capital's most-beloved star in a matter of moments. Yang Sheng was not the most tolerant of individuals. He was very upset, in fact. The arena was the final catalyst for his emotions to erupt. His thin eyebrows upturned, Yang Sheng looked his competitor up and down with undisguised contempt. His gaze was both critical and provocative.

"I'm impressed that you're able to stand here, Pill King Zhen." However, he kept his tone impassive. The pill king was an associate of the Mountain, after all. Regardless of how jealous he was in private, he could not imitate Zhuang Jie's lack of decorum.

Despite its concealment in Yang Sheng's voice, the hidden hostility from Jiang Chen's opponent was still easily detectable. The expression in the other man's eyes gave it up right away. Jiang Chen spared no polities aside from a cupped-fist salute.

"I await your tutelage in the fight," he replied with a faint smile. If his opponent had been anyone else, perhaps he would have bit back with a snappy retort. However, Yang Sheng was one of Emperor Peafowl's true disciples. Though there was no need to accord respect to the student in this case, the teacher still deserved full dignity. It was better to give Yang Sheng the cold shoulder. The best kind of retaliation lay in an onstage victory.

Yang Sheng was a little startled at Jiang Chen's unresponsiveness. An aggravated opponent was easier to deal with, but there was a factor of intimidation as well. His position as

one of the true disciples under Emperor Peafowl was the perfect club. He wanted to scare his opponent into performing more poorly than usual. But the pill king hadn't fallen for it at all. Yang Sheng had been outright ignored. He smirked. "You'll have something to look forward to, alright."

With a shake of his arm, he produced a black-and-white whip in his hand. "You know, Pill King Zhen, the news is everywhere these days. People are saying that you're a genius among geniuses, a master of both pill and martial dao. Let's test that rumor out and see how true it really is!"

The twirling whip induced cracks in the fabric of its surrounding space. Countless specks of dust came out of the broken space, kicking up a storm of reduced visibility. In the next moment, the monochrome whip moved into action. The air crackled vibrantly, as if heralding an oncoming storm. Numerous bolts of silver lightning appeared in the skies over the arena, snaking through the air with a dangerous vehemence.

"Monochrome Lightning Seal!" Yang Sheng's hand drew a circle in the air. At the gesture, countless airborne energies collected themselves into two poles: positive and negative, forceful and docile. The two extremes formed an encircling approach.

Jiang Chen had met a strong opponent called Guan Yuchan during the Genius Ranking battles. That fellow favored a pair of golden cymbals. The percussive instruments, acting as positive and negative poles, had been able to create a strong suctioning force between them. This Yin Yang Whip seemed to have the same sort of ability, though the actual technique was probably more complicated and difficult to deal with. After all, the whip's power purely came from Yang Sheng's personal skill. It was different from the cymbals, which had been intrinsically strong.

Jiang Chen dared not underestimate his opponent. This kind of power was troublesome in general. Thankfully, his breakthrough into the eighth level sage realm had increased his martial prowess

greatly. In his battle against Fang Yuan, Jiang Chen had been filled with boundless inspiration by the mystery of his Reverse Heaven and Earth technique. After some soul-searching consideration, he realized that the sword-strike had contained energies similar to those of an emperor realm cultivator. Therefore, his solution against a martial method such as the one he was currently facing was also to sunder it with his sword.

His Pentecolor Divine Swords swept through the air, combining blade and finesse into one. The chaos in the air marked the upending of laws governing the surrounding space. The two whip images were fragmented into a thousand pieces.

Yang Sheng harrumphed with evident displeasure. He'd observed his opponent's prior match with Fang Yuan. The power behind this particular sword technique was known to him. Still, he'd been confident that the forcefield from his Yin Yang Whip wouldn't lose. The simple motion with which the pill king shattered his offense caused his heart to sink. He began to re-evaluate the power of Jiang Chen's sword.

Is Pill King Zhen actually one of His Majesty's hidden pawns? Saved for the sole purpose of shining brightly in the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering? A strange thought couldn't help but pop into Yang Sheng's head. There was no other explanation for the absurdity of the situation. In face of the fact that he'd only been here for less than two years, Pill King Zhen's accomplishments were incredibly absurd. Someone like that couldn't have stayed so nameless. A wandering cultivator? Completely out of the question.

Yang Sheng was fully roused by now, his ire flaring. His whip twisted and wove at will, the constricting force brought to a crescendo by the movements. On the stage, Jiang Chen looked like a raft weathering an ocean tempest. Each and every wave appeared calamitous to the raft. Afterimages from the Yin Yang Whip filled the air. The weapon carried a might that split space itself, and left gashes of nothingness in its wake.

Jiang Chen had fought many geniuses in the past. But as simple as Yang Sheng's whip looked, it was the first time that Jiang Chen felt the pangs of a challenge. In terms of both power and expertise, his current opponent surpassed the two he'd just taken down by a fair amount. It was fortunate that he'd broken through to the eighth level sage realm already. Otherwise, he would have needed a lot more effort to take down the youth on the other side of the ring.

Although Yang Sheng's whip was quite potent, it failed to find any gaps in the defenses woven by Jiang Chen's Pentecolor Swords. As time went by, more and more people were clued into the reality of the battle. Those who were the keenest already had the following impression: no matter how flowery Yang Sheng's whip attacks were, they were never going to catch Pill King Zhen in their coils. On the other hand, Pill King Zhen was goofing around a bit. His sole purpose seemed to be dismantling his opponent's offense, having no intention of apparently mounting any counterattack.

"Tch. This Yang Sheng is really shameless. Pill King Zhen is giving way because of his status as one of Emperor Peafowl's closest disciples. Why is he taking a mile when he's only been given an inch? Does he really want to be stomped upon?"

"Don't say it like that. Yang Sheng is one of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's four true disciples. His techniques with the Yin Yang Whip are pretty impressive. In the world of martial dao, it's difficult to judge what technique will come on top. Maybe he has an advantage of some sort?"

"That's a load of bull. I think Pill King Zhen is going easy on him on purpose. Like you said, Yang Sheng is one of Emperor Peafowl's best students. If the pill king took him out with just a couple of blows, wouldn't that be really embarrassing? People have reputations, you know."

"You're probably right about that. Pill King Zhen is going to be

Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord, right? He probably knows it by now. He and his opponent will both serve the same master soon, and Yang Sheng might even be his lieutenant someday. You have to look out a bit for your second-in-command, no?" A variety of different conversations was buzzing all around the arena. Evidently, Jiang Chen's superb performances so far had caused the residents of the Capital to begin mythologizing him. He was being eternalized as someone unbeatable. Even though his opponent was one of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's finest youths, everyone believed in Pill King Zhen's victory to be a matter of course. The unconditional trust signaled a kind of common sentiment.

The battle neared the one-hour mark. Booing began to be heard all around the stage. Public dissatisfaction at Yang Sheng's behavior was palpable. The man clearly had no chance! What was he still brawling it out for? Look at how refined Pill King Zhen was being! He'd loyally cooperated with his partner all this time, never retaliating even in a slightly dangerous way. Nobody knew what Jiang Chen was actually thinking. He had taken the defensive for one purpose alone: he wanted to figure a few more things out about martial dao through battle and wanted to confirm some of his theories regarding the sword.

Chapter 963: Switching Between Attack and Defense

Yang Shen had run out of new tricks with his Yin Yang Whip. The execution of his attacks today had been perfect. Some might even say that he'd gone beyond his limits. Despite all that, he still wasn't able to penetrate the momentum created by his opponent's sword. Yang Shen was feeling quite aggrieved. He'd always been incredibly confident in his whip. Even though it wasn't sufficient to defeat the strongest of foremost geniuses, he was certain that he could at least put up a decent fight. It seemed that all this had been his own wishful thinking. How could he aim to challenge the unrivaled geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords when he couldn't even handle a mere cultivator that had come from the secular world? He'd been too naive.

The audience could easily tell that Yang Shen was only hanging by a thread. The disapproving jeers were getting louder by the minute. The Veluriyam Capital audience was actually quite fair. The fact that he was a true disciple of Saint Peafowl Mountain didn't mean that he was going to be spared from the jeers. One's identity didn't matter. The crowd was willing to jeer at anyone that they disapproved of. However, those who had made great contributions to Veluriyam Capital would be spared from such treatment. A good example of this was Emperor Peafowl. He'd been protecting Veluriyam Capital for thousands of years. All the citizens revered him greatly. They were even willing to get into a dispute if somebody spoke badly about the emperor. Sometimes, it would even escalate into a fight. This was out of pure reverence towards the emperor, which he duly deserved.

Young lord Fan had also received such treatment when he was alive. Pill King Zhen was the next person to receive such treatment. Unfortunately, the same couldn't be said for Yang Shen. Many in Veluriyam Capital actually knew who he was, but

there wasn't much to say about his contribution to the capital. He was someone who rarely showed his face to the world. His time was simply too precious to be used on anything other than cultivation. It was only natural that the citizens would feel distanced towards him, as he wasn't willing to improve his own public persona.

Jiang Chen had done the exact opposite of that. He had contributed to Veluriyam Capital by giving out all sorts of lectures on various topics. He'd also defeated Pillfire City on behalf of Veluriyam Capital and made an incredible contribution by founding Taiyuan Tower. House Wei couldn't take the credit for that. It was the pill king who'd changed the pill dao situation in Veluriyam Capital. Suddenly, it seemed like the entire city was shouting at Yang Shen.

This further enraged Yang Shen, and his whip became fiercer and stronger than ever. He'd been trying to maintain his poise and composure, but he could no longer care less after the crowd started to jeer at him. All he wanted to do was expel Jiang Chen from the stage in one breath. Unfortunately, one couldn't win a martial dao bout with just anger and fury alone. Strength was still the deciding factor in the end.

Yang Shen was definitely a formidable foe, as he was ranked 17th. He was stronger than Fang Yuan and Zhuang Jie by a notch. And yet, Jiang Chen was also someone could adapt to the strength of his foe. The Yin Yang Whip relied on the power of force fields to control the flow of the battle, but Jiang Chen's Reverse Heaven and Earth was a sword technique that destroyed all force fields and reversed the flow of battle. The sword technique was the bane of the Yin Yang Whip. Jiang Chen's technique wasn't just effective against the Yin Yang Whip. It was actually effective against all techniques that attempted to control the flow of battle.

Yang Shen refused to give up. "Pill King Zhen! You've been using the same technique the whole time! Don't you find that

meaningless in an exchange of martial dao?" he said while gritting his teeth.

Jiang Chen laughed when he noticed the expression on his opponent's face. "You say that it's the same technique, yet you've failed to notice its ever-changing nature. Come at me with everything you've got. I'll take you down with just one technique!" Jiang Chen had begun to feel a little annoyed. He had tried giving Yang Shen some leeway, but said person was too conceited to notice it.

Yang Shen cracked his whip and turned it into a long and erect spear. "Yin Yang Void Piercing Spear! Destroy!" He had finally switched up his moves. A spear was a completely different weapon compared to a whip. A whip was meant for constricting and inhibiting movements, but a spear was purely meant for piercing and destroying its target. As the name would suggest, the Void Piercing Spear contained an incredible piercing power.

Fortunately, Jiang Chen was using a sword technique that was destructive first and controlled the flow of battle second. They were now both using using destructive attacks, which made the match a lot more captivating. Yang Shen had thoroughly angered Jiang Chen. Fury was slowly building up inside the pill king. He'd wanted to save Yang Shen some face, as he was a true disciple of Emperor Peafowl. However, Yang Shen only cared about winning. He didn't seem to care about his own dignity at all. Moreover, Jiang Chen could sense some hostility from his opponent. This too, angered him greatly.

How dare you bear such fierce hostility towards me when I've given you so much face? If I don't take you down a notch, how will I make people submit to me when I become the successor to Sacred Peafowl Mountain one day? He no longer held himself back after such thoughts.

Even a young lord would feel intense pressure when Jiang Chen went all out. The Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique was

as ever-changing as it was unstoppable. Celestial radiance from rainbows appeared in the skies when he deployed it. Thunder rumbled, and the crowd was stunned by the countless profound meanings of the sword contained within.

“Remember this move. Moving Heaven and Earth!

“And this! Yin Yang Divide!

“And also this! Sword of the Allking!” Jiang Chen revealed multiple sword techniques from his toolbox in one go. These were his most powerful attacks, if one were to ignore the equipment and heaven-defying items in his possession.

The arena was instantly flooded by a sea of sword dao, turning it into a sword dao realm. Yang Shen was poking left and right, trying to find a way out of the sea. Unfortunately, he soon realized that it was a futile attempt, as his Void Piercing Spear wasn’t able to locate a weak point at all. The audience broke into rapturous applause when they saw what had happened. They were clearly enthralled by the flashy yet dangerous sword technique.

The geniuses at the top of the Ranking of Young Lords were all in a somber mood. They were feeling intense pressure. However, their hearts were also filled with awe. Not because of Jiang Chen’s flashy sword technique, but because of his ability to control the fight. The battle had begun to feel like a one-person show due to how great he was at it. The pitiful Yang Shen was now forgotten in the background after such an intense showing.

There was normally a lot of back and forth during a battle between two geniuses. It was always an intense conflict for superiority. It was rare to see one side fully dominate the other side in such battles. Battles like these were no longer battles between equals. It would be best described as a one-sided torture. This was precisely what Yang Shen was facing right now. Fortunately, he was quick to realize how futile the Void Piercing Spear was, and transformed it back into the Yin Yang Whip. He

then formed a yin yang barrier to protect himself from the piercing sword aura. The whip was a gift from Emperor Peafowl himself. It was a treasure that could be switched into many forms. It could switch between a whip or a spear, but its biggest specialty was its frightening defensive power.

The Yin Yang Barrier was able to keep most of the sword aura at bay. The scene was now one of Yang Shen turtling in and stubbornly hanging onto his defense. He had originally planned to overwhelm the pill king with his whip, but the pill king was able to deflect his advances with a sword technique. The crowd was impressed that he was the first to go on the offensive against someone as powerful as Pill King Zhen. However, the situation had instantly turned against him. He'd become a turtle that had tucked his head in for dear life.

Jiang Chen noticed that the whip had turned into a barrier with tadpole-like runes squirming around the outer surface. He instantly knew that this wasn't Yang Shen's doing. It was the formidable whip. However, he refused to give up. He continued escalating the sword aura and condensed its slashing power. One after the other, he continued to bombard Yang Shen's defenses with sword strokes.

The 'Severing Sword' was another move from from the Divine Five Thunderclap technique. It was a move that specialized in destroying all kinds of barriers. It was an incredibly powerful attack, formed by condensing and materializing sword aura into the shape of a sword.

Yang Shen was situated in the middle of the barrier and surrounded by numerous sword aura from all sides. He had become incredibly nervous, as the sword barrage continued to hammer away at his barrier. However, the defensive power of his whip had given him some inner solace.

"You won't be able to hold out forever!" Jiang Chen was thoroughly enraged at this point. He was sending furious barrages

of sword images at his opponent. Sword light upon sword light stacked on top of each other and sliced at the Yin Yang Barrier continuously.

A crack appeared in Yang Shen's confidence when he noticed the monstrous power of the sword barrage. Emperor Peafowl had once warned him not to rely on the defensive capabilities of the whip too much, as the whip was only as powerful as its user. It was evident that Yang Shen had relied on it too much! Visible cracks had appeared in his dao heart when he noticed that Jiang Chen was about to break through the barrier. His mind was instantly flooded with a sense of dread.

Chapter 964: A Small World for Enemies

A crack in his dao heart would naturally mean a crack in the Yin Yang Barrier as well. Jiang Chen's attack almost seemed like it had a mind of its own. It went on a frenzy and concentrated at the barrier's weak point. Yang Shen was now trembling with fear. He could sense that the barrier was on the brink of shattering. The sword aura hadn't penetrated the barrier yet, but the killing intent had already seeped through the cracks. He understood how weak his innate defense was. His body would be sliced into two if the sword aura managed to break through the barrier.

"Yang Shen, you are already on the brink of death. When will you admit defeat if not now?" A stern voice suddenly appeared from the skies. It was Emperor Peafowl!

The crowd instantly broke into rapturous applause when they heard the voice. Emperor Peafowl had spoken! He had publicly told his own true disciple to admit defeat!

Jiang Chen smiled wryly when he heard Emperor Peafowl's voice. The ties between master and disciple are strong indeed. It may seem like he was asking Yang Shen to admit defeat, but he was actually telling Jiang Chen to show some mercy.

Jiang Chen was peerless in martial dao. His vision was actually sharper than many of the great emperors. It hadn't taken him long to notice the weak point in Yang Shen's barrier. The barrier was a much greater toil on the body than any of the whip's attacks. Jiang Chen kept increasing the power and speed of his attacks because he'd noticed this flaw. He focused his attacks solely on the weak point to further increase the barrier's toil on Yang Shen's body.

Emperor Peafowl may have exaggerated a little when he claimed that Yang Shen was on the brink of death, but it wasn't too far from the truth. Yang Shen was actually in extreme danger even though he was still barely able to scrape by.

Yang Shen immediately fell down from the stage after Jiang Chen slackened his sword aura slightly. It was as though something had sucked away all of the strength within his body. All he could do was gasp for air while sitting beneath the stage. Defeat! He'd lost in the end. There was no longer any pride or arrogance to be found within his eyes. It had been replaced by exhaustion and disappointment. Jiang Chen didn't plan on kicking his enemy while he was down. All he did was wave his hands at the crowd to enjoy the victory, instead of making snarky remarks to his opponent. Yang Shen watched the scene unfold with a blank look on his face. He was feeling a little depressed and also a little helpless. He wasn't a person without ambition, but his memories of young lord Fan had begun to surface yet again. That person had been equally as insurmountable as he had been unfathomable.

Yang Shen had begun to sense something similar from Pill King Zhen. The pill king was definitely no less mysterious than young lord Fan. Young lord Fan may have possessed a higher cultivation than the pill king, but the pill king was definitely above young lord Fan in terms of potential and unpredictability. But, no one ever cared about the thoughts of the defeated. Everyone was only curious whether the pill king would continue his challenges

According to the rules, every young lord was given three challenge opportunities. Jiang Chen had defeated the 17th ranked young lord. This meant that he still had two opportunities left. He was now allowed to challenge a young lord six places higher than him. Since he was 17th, he was now allowed to challenge the 11th ranked young lord.

11th. This was the strongest genius outside of the top ten ranked young lords. A cultivator of this rank was definitely capable of holding his own against the top ten.

"Pill King Zhen, will you be continuing the challenge?"

"Challenging the 11th ranked genius is no small matter."

“If he manages to defeat number 11, he could climb to the top ten!”

“Is there anything Pill King Zhen cannot do? I truly believe that the pill king is capable of anything, even challenging the young lord of the first rank.”

“Haha! I’m so excited for that! How exhilarating would it be to watch the pill king challenge the champion of the Ranking of Young Lords? If he manages to win, wouldn’t he be first person in Veluriyam Capital’s history to become champion of all three rankings?”

“The champion? You’re asking for too much. I’ve heard that there’s an extreme climb in difficulty with each rank in the upper half of the rankings. Why don’t we wait and see if the pill king is going to continue climbing the ranks? See who he picks to challenge?”

“I’m certain that the pill king is going to challenge the 11th ranked young lord. He’s not the type to back down from a good challenge.”

Jiang Chen’s each and every move was now under scrutiny. People had become very expectant of him. He was the only dark horse remaining in the Ranking of Young Lords. The other challengers had very little hope of climbing the ranks. None of the other battles in the first half of the rankings identified any other dark horses. Because of that, Pill King Zhen was widely regarded as the only remaining dark horse. Many were hoping that he’d charge through the ranks and become the champion.

Even though the pill king had dominated previous matches, those with a logical head on their shoulders understood that it was going to be an uphill battle from now onwards. The power discrepancy between each rank was only going to become greater and greater. Everyone stared at Jiang Chen, waiting for him to make a decision. Was he going to remain at this rank, or was he

going to continue the climb?

It didn't take long before they finally got their answer. He chose to continue. 17th wasn't enough to satiate his appetite. He was going to challenge the 11th! His words caused a great commotion within Veluriyam Capital. He'd chosen to fully utilize his rank-jumping qualifications. The seven great emperors were somewhat surprised by Jiang Chen's decision. Some factions were even privately discussing how Jiang Chen had finally worn shoes too big for his own feet.

Consecutive victories didn't count for much at this point of the tournament.

They all knew that the duels between the top ten were ones between the strongest in the Martial Pagoda battles. And to be more precise, only seven geniuses were in the run to become champion. The other geniuses were mostly just side dishes in the Ranking of Young Lords. Every great emperor would only have one true disciple that would inherit their legacy and stand heads above the others. Because they had multiple disciples, each of them were trained like eagle younglings. In an eagle's nest, only the strongest and fiercest youngling survived.

Every single great emperor had multiple true disciples, but only one would truly inherit their legacy. These seven disciples were the true main characters in the ranking battles. Even though the pill king had won every single battle up to this point, many were certain that he wouldn't win against them, save for a few optimists.

The 11th ranked genius laughed angrily when Jiang Chen had challenged him. He was the second-ranked disciple under Emperor Vastsea. His name was Zhuang Min, the older brother of Zhuang Jie and another true disciple of Emperor Vastsea. They were brothers from the same mother.

Zhuang Min was incredibly furious at Jiang Chen for eliminating

his younger brother. He understood that his brother's loss was all due to his own inadequacy, but it was all the pill king's fault that his brother no longer held a rank within the Ranking of Young Lords! There was no way he wouldn't blame the pill king for this. He shook his head in disapproval when the pill king decided to skip six ranks to challenge him. Is Pill King Zhen truly that formidable? How dare he challenge my authority after eliminating Zhuang Jie?

Zhuang Min was certain that he was qualified to make it into the top ten. He had only been ranked 11th due to certain reasons. He didn't believe that he was any worse than the other geniuses in the top ten. Being challenged stoked the fires of his rage even further.

"Brother! You have to teach him a lesson! I may have lost against him, but something seemed a little off about him. I strongly believe that he managed to devour my water pillars by using some sort of cheat! Otherwise, how could I be defeated by a mere sky sage realm bastard?" Zhuang Jie was being incredibly rude. He'd been in a bad mood ever since he was eliminated. Losing a great deal of face in front of Emperor Vastsea didn't help either. Fortunately, he had an older brother that was even more formidable than him. Things were still salvageable since his brother was around. This was his chance for revenge!

"Even if he was cheating, it's his accomplishment for not being caught by the seven emperors. Zhuang Jie, learn to humble yourself after a loss. You should try to learn from him.This is the only way you can hope to defeat him and trample him under your feet in the future." Zhuang Min gave a stern lecture to his slightly irreverent brother.

"Brother, can we talk about this later? You have to teach that bastard a lesson and take him down a notch!" Zhuang Jie said in an agitated manner.

Zhuang Mei frowned. "Since he dares challenge me, I'm certain he's not as simple as you say he is."

“Who cares if he’s simple or if he’s complex! You’re an initial emperor realm cultivator! Your domain alone will make this match a cinch!” Zhuang Jie smacked his lips in an excited manner. He hated Pill King Zhen for eliminating him and was incredibly excited when he saw a chance for revenge appear.

Chapter 965: Second Encounter, Waterveil Prison

The top twelve in the Ranking of Young Lords were all emperor realm geniuses. Zhuang Min was a feminine name, but the person was not the least bit feminine. He was a very meticulous and far-looking strategist. His wits were only complemented by his power, making him heads above his younger brother in strength. His younger brother viewed this battle as a chance for revenge, but Zhuang Min was able to keep his calm. He wasn't arrogant, nor did he think that he'd definitely win due to his emperor realm cultivation.

No. He was being extremely cautious instead. He'd been paying close attention to the pill king ever since his brother had been eliminated. The closer he tried to look, the more mysterious the pill king became. He couldn't afford to underestimate the enemy even though he was already an emperor realm cultivator.

"Next match, Pill King Zhen versus Zhuang Min! Please take your places in the arena!"

Zhuang Min leaped from his seat and landed on the arena after the judge's announcement. Jiang Chen followed suit and climbed up the stairs to the arena. Jiang Chen already knew that Zhuang Min was Zhuang Jie's elder brother, and that Zhuang Min was at the first level emperor realm.

It was common knowledge that a first level emperor was at least twice as strong as a half-step emperor. It wasn't difficult for a first level emperor to defeat two half-step emperors. In fact, three might not pose a problem either. However, one couldn't just rely on theory alone to measure one's winning chances in a martial dao exchange.

Jiang Chen felt a glare as soon as he stepped into the arena. The glare contained a strange intent within it. It was like a formless air

current, making him feel as if he were walking inside of water. There was an invisible force hindering his movements. Hmm? Since Zhuang Jie had an innate water constitution, his older brother Zhuang Min must have the same bloodline as well. Can it be...

He instantly realized that his opponent was trying to put on airs. Thankfully, Jiang Chen was no longer a weakling that could be shoved around by others. He criculated his inner energy throughout his body. The speed of his footsteps increased instead of slowing down.

Zhuang Min remained calm when he noticed that Jiang Chen had broken through his Oscillating Ripple technique. He'd only wanted to show his superiority through his technique, not take down his enemy. It was impossible that the opponent could eliminate his brother if he couldn't even handle such a basic ability. His blue eyes were like deep chasms. It made him seem extremely nefarious. He stared at Jiang Chen meaningfully and gave a half smile. "Pill King Zhen, I'm surprised that you've made it this far. I believe you know who I am. Do you still think that you have a chance to win?"

Jiang Chen understood that his opponent was only attempting to attack his heart. He smiled back faintly without the slightest hint of fear. "I will only know that after a fight. If I can defeat your younger brother, I'm sure I can do the same to you."

"Hahaha!" Zhuang Jie burst into raucous laughter. "I bet you've yet to realize the disparity between a half-step emperor and a true emperor!" He nodded before continuing. "If that's the case, then let me put an end to your consecutive victory streak! I'll admit that you're a dark horse in this tournament, but everyone knows that a dark horse never makes it to the end!"

Jiang Chen's dao heart was already as solid as a boulder. A few jeering words from Zhuang Min would never work on him. He snorted with laughter. "Zhuang Min! You might have a slightly

higher cultivation than your brother, but you are truly no match for him in the art of ridicule!”

At their level, the confrontation between words was no longer mere child’s play. It was an intense conflict for superiority.

Zhuang Min wasn’t depressed when he failed to gain the upper hand. All he did was smile noncommittally and applauded. “I’m impressed. What a sharp tongue.” A hint of arrogance appeared in his eyes. “Since you’ve challenged me, I’ll let you make the first three moves.”

He was truly making full use of the situation. He’d shown his magnanimity as an emperor realm genius by giving his opponent the first few moves. It was also a way for him to deride and trample on his opponent.

Jiang Chen grinned when he heard this and didn’t back down. “Only three moves? How miserly! How about this? I’ll give you the first ten moves!”

Zhuang Min’s face darkened and his brow arched. “How delusional.”

Jiang Chen laughed. “Not true. My mind is clearer than ever before. Make your move! Ten moves was what I said, so ten moves is what I’ll give! However, that’s under the assumption that you can make it past ten moves.”

“Such arrogance!” A hint of rage had appeared in Zhuang Min’s eyes despite his calm demeanor.

The arena had fallen silent. The audience couldn’t believe their ears.

“Pill King Zhen is letting Zhuang Min make the first ten moves? Is he for real? It doesn’t sound like a joke.”

“It doesn’t matter if he’s serious! It takes great courage to provoke an emperor realm genius!”

“An eighth level sage realm cultivator is giving an emperor realm genius ten moves? Only the pill king is capable of saying such a thing.”

“That’s true. No other sage realm genius in Veluriyam Capital is capable of this except for the pill king.”

“Tsk tsk. I truly am impressed by his audacity.” The crowd was hot in discussion.

Zhuang Min was genuinely tempted. His instincts were telling him to make a move. However, logic stopped him dead in his tracks. If he won after accepting his opponent’s offer, people were going to say that he’d taken advantage of the situation. He wanted to win, but didn’t want to have a flawed victory. A grave expression appeared. “Pill King Zhen, I’m worried that you’ll no longer have a chance to make your own move after I’ve made mine.”

Jiang Chen smiled. “Is that so?

“Want to try?” Zhuang Min replied coldly.

“I don’t see why not? Give me your best shot!” Jiang Chen retorted confidently.

Zhuang Jie nodded angrily. He lifted his hands and started flicking his fingers. Whoosh! The sound of rushing water appeared out of the thin air. Steam began to appear in between his fingers. It transformed into strange, transparent water droplets upon touching the air. The water droplets began to bounce around the air like tiny marbles. The transparent marbles flew rapidly through the air, sealing off the area.

Jiang Chen was slightly bewildered by the sight before his eyes. However, his instincts told him that these weren’t ordinary water droplets. He brandished his sword and summoned multiple torrents of air currents to disrupt this motion. Sword light emerged wherever the sword traveled to and shot towards the

water droplets.

These water droplets were incredibly strange. They deflected any light they came in contact with, deforming slightly and then bouncing away. They were like indestructible marbles that possessed very strange trajectories. The sword didn't seem to affect them in any way. A barrage of sword intent was able to knock them off their trajectory, but it wasn't able to thoroughly destroy them. Whenever Jiang Chen slightly slackened his sword intent, the water droplets deviated from their trajectory and shot straight towards him.

Zhuang Min's fingers were moving nonstop while this was happening, creating even more tiny water droplets. The arena was soon filled with thousands of flying water droplets that were incredibly difficult to see with the naked eye.

There was no order or rhythm to their trajectory. Jiang Chen was in a difficult spot. All he could do was try to deflect the droplets with his sword aura. Their trajectories were simply too chaotic. His 'Reverse Heaven and Earth' wasn't able to effectively disrupt their trajectory. It was like pushing water uphill with a rake. His feet suddenly sank into the ground. A fist-sized water drop had landed on his feet. It was so monstrously sticky that it'd stuck his feet to the ground. His heart sank. He tried moving a little, but even more water swarmed towards him and stuck to his right foot. Water drops continued to swarm towards his arm, shoulder, and didn't stop until his entire body was enveloped.

The water drops seemed inseparable. They continued to congregate until they became a veil of water. Jiang Chen had seen someone use a similar water cloak technique when he visited the wood spirit spring. Wei Wudao, an elder from the Walkabout Sect of Myriad Domain, had used a Skywater Talisman to form an aqueous prison. However, Wei Wudao's Skywater Talisman was much weaker than the one Jiang Chen was currently facing.

Back then, he'd used his Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice to

tunnel into the ground and escaped from the imprisonment. Zhuang Min's Waterveil Prison was incredibly formidable. Water continued flooding towards Jiang Chen. His entire body was soon enveloped by its mysterious power. Escaping by tunneling into the ground was out of the equation since there was no gap in the water.

The power of water origin operated on very mysterious laws. It was as though it could permeate into the body and form a mysterious power of enchainment. Jiang Chen's body suddenly felt a thousand times heavier. He couldn't break free from the water imprisonment no matter how hard he tried to struggle.

Zhuang Min smiled with both his hands linked behind his back. It was as though he'd already won. He stared upon his creation with a big delightful smile on his face. Zhuang Jie was celebrating below the arena as well. He was obviously very liberated by the scene. So what if the pill king is a dark horse? So what if he's ranked 17th? He's nothing but a bug when facing the domain of an emperor realm expert! The emperor's domain rules over all! The audience had begun to lose hope. In the end, even the greatest genius was helpless when facing such a great discrepancy in cultivation.

Chapter 966: A Quick and Forceful Counterattack

Zhuang Min was very cautious. He kept his guard up even as he admired his handiwork. He knew about the Cicada's Disappearance ability that Pill King Zhen possessed. Many previous opponents had made the mistake of assuming that the pill king was already in their clutches, only to be deceived by a mirage. He was worried that this was more of the same. Thus, he was perfectly wary even as he observed his enemy's movements. But the sight of Jiang Chen struggling beyond the veil was extremely reassuring. His opponent looked soundly trapped this time.

"Pill King Zhen, how do you like this living coffin?" Zhuang Min's faint sneer barely contained his obvious derision. To the victor went the spoils. He could do as he liked.

Within his aquatic prison, Jiang Chen could barely contain his surprise. It was extraordinary to be able to perform such a feat with a water-attribute art. Zhuang Min was a force to be reckoned with. No wonder why he was ranked 11th. His prominence and fame were well-earned. The Waterveil Prison could not be struggled against nor could it be cut by steel. It was entirely supple, constructed out of a mysterious force. Both qualities made it almost indestructible. Water-attribute arts typically had specific characteristics. Pervasiveness and elasticity were two such qualities chief amongst them. Jiang Chen tried a variety of methods to pry open his jail, but all were fruitless. He held back an internal sigh when he saw Zhuang Min's half-smile through the watery bars.

As expected of an emperor realm cultivator. The Waterveil Prison has an emperor realm domain behind it. That, coupled with how impenetrable his ability is in its own right, makes it difficult for me to try to break it open.

If the person using the ability had been a sage realm cultivator, Jiang Chen could easily force it open via his body alone, tempered by the Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods. There would have been no need for these pointless attempts. Alas, that was not the case. As an emperor realm cultivator, Zhuang Min's Waterveil Prison was at least ten times as strong as one that a sage realm genius could set up. The domain and aura of the emperor realm were truly exceptional. Feeling the aquatic cell pressing in all around him, Jiang Chen sensed the water-attribute energy crushing him in its tightening grip. He would be smashed to a pulp any moment now.

"If you forfeit now, Pill King Zhen, maybe I'll show you some mercy. But if you intend on resisting, then enjoy the agonizing fate of being slowly sucked dry!" Zhuang Min cackled. As the clear winner, he was not obliged to show compassion. Rather, the achievement of defeating the pill king cheered him up greatly. No one else had been able to stop the man's advance but him! He felt motivated enough to make it into the ranking's top ten now. However, his expression froze in the next moment. His jaw was slack in absolute disbelief.

"How can this be possible?" Zhuang Min's eyes were glued to his prison. The Waterveil Prison's water energy was turning into water vapor, evaporating into thin air! His opponent seemed to be completely unharmed. He moved as languidly as if he'd just woken up from an afternoon nap.

Jiang Chen stretched. "Is this all that you can do, Zhuang Min? I seem to remember you being very proud of your abilities. You're very brave to have said what you did, given... this. Am I supposed to be unable to counterattack now?"

His smile was extremely wily. Zhuang Min's hairs stood on end.

"Eat my blade!" Not allowing his opponent a moment's notice or thought, Jiang Chen took advantage of his opponent's momentary sluggishness. His sword surged forth in offense. The Pentecolor

Divine Swords stirred up the air. A strike that rent heaven and earth asunder swept towards Zhuang Min, leaving faint afterimages behind it. The haste and ferocity of the attack allowed its target no time to react.

Though his rhythm had been disrupted, Zhuang Min was still a very competent cultivator. Seeing the incoming sword strike, he rubbed his hands in self-defense. In the next instant, a rippling curtain of water filled the air about him with indistinct ripples. Pfft! Sword connected with curtain, leaving a deep gash in the defensive veil. The curtain was pushed to its breaking point, persisting only after wavering for a long period of time. Leaving no rest for his opponent between attacks, Jiang Chen stormed forth once more.

“Yin Yang Divide!” Once more, it was a technique derived from the marvels in nature. As a poet once wrote of a mountain, ‘Ethereal beauty springs from creation distills. There, yin and yang split dusk and dawn.’ so too, did the sword technique aim to slice existence itself. On one side of the edge was yin, the other yang. The mystery contained within the cut was almost incomprehensible.

The light of the sword rushed through the air, creating two swathes of color. The contrast of endless night and brilliant day sent onlookers back to the genesis of the universe, viewing the moment in which earth and sky first came to be. Bringing the power of yin and yang in its wake, Jiang Chen’s sword was almost at his enemy’s throat once more.

This time though, Zhuang Min was prepared for it. Despite scrambling a little to do so, he managed to activate two Skywater Talismans at once. Two series of rippling waves blocked the terrifying attack—just barely, but it was enough. However, the defenses mounted by the watery ripples were soon ripped open. At the same time, Zhuang Min leapt out of Jiang Chen’s range of attack with a small bounce.

What a pity. The two attacks Jiang Chen had delivered were a progressive series, but he hadn't expected his opponent to react so quickly or use such powerful Skywater Talismans. He had seen Wei Wudao use the same kind of talisman earlier. In fact, he had firsthand experience of them. They hadn't been much to write home about at the time. But Zhuang Min's Skywater Talismans were more than ten times stronger than Wei Wudao's. His yin-yang dual assault was barely able to do more than break open its defenses.

This Zhuang Min is a lot more difficult to deal with than Zhuang Jie. He has real expertise in the use of elemental water. Zhuang Jie, on the other hand, only has unexcavated talent. No wonder why this one's number eleven while Zhuang Jie is only twenty. As a true expert, Jiang Chen could see the difference between the two very easily. His inability to take down Zhuang Min in two swings made him a little annoyed. Allowing Zhuang Min to escape meant his opponent was going to use stronger abilities than the Waterveil Prison he'd used before.

Jiang Chen was on his guard. Belittling his opponent at any point could be fatal. He'd had a leisurely time fighting cultivators who were at the half-step emperor realm. Nothing they did could really threaten him. Cultivators who were at the true emperor realm, on the other hand, were entirely different. There was no room for error against such opponents. Any slight blunder was an invitation for them to launch a lethal counter strike. Though Jiang Chen was capable and possessed numerous trump cards, emperor realm cultivators did indeed have the raw strength to surprise him. Merely someone at the first level emperor realm was enough. As he thought things through, he felt something strange on his face. The backs of his hand and neck both felt the same thing.

"Is it raining?" Jiang Chen raised his head. The space all around him was covered in a dense drizzle, watery needles pattering onto the ground below. When had the weather changed? The timing of

the rain was very strange. A blazing sun still hung overhead in the skies over the arena. Suddenly, Jiang Chen realized something. His eyebrows moved in anticipation and he hurriedly called his golden body to action.

In the twinkle of an eye, the countless needles of rainwater began to glow with a despairing brilliance. Tss, tss, tss, tss, tss! The threads of rain became a deluge of sword auras, inundating and fine. They enveloped the entire arena in their coverage.

Swords of Rain Mist! The sword auras could cut the very air like invisible needles. They slashed against Jiang Chen's tempered body in a frenzy. He'd steeled himself just in time. Even so, the raindrop sword auras permeated into his skin with ubiquitous force. Thankfully, the durability of his golden body shielded him from the majority of the damage. The effect that the sword auras had was minimized. That aside, it was still a harrowing experience.

Jiang Chen's formation disk moved into action. The Prince of Shangping's eight statues emerged one by one from thin air. He held nothing back this time. His hands skillfully manipulated the eight statues via the disk. He had them to assume the Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation, a battle formation that he'd taught to Xue Tong and company a long time ago. Back then, his personal guard had only grasped some rudiments of the formation. With only average cultivators manning it, the formation itself was just ordinary. Since the eight statues had a strong innate martial will, they could move as one unit in either an offensive or defensive stance. Though Jiang Chen wasn't able to scratch past the surface of their full potential, their value had nevertheless been greatly improved in the formation.

In the Prince of Shangping's hands, the eight statues had been largely useless. With a formation disk in hand, Jiang Chen was able to control them with significantly better fluidity and efficiency. He had needed to expend considerable effort in its creation, of course, but that was the way of the world. The Eight

Trigram Assimilation Formation allowed the eight statues to absorb the brunt of the raindrops' offense.

It relieved a lot of pressure off of Jiang Chen himself. His God's Eye and Evil Golden Eye both deployed to their maximum, Jiang Chen began to scan his surroundings for his opponent with eyes ablaze. Although Zhuang Min could not be seen, he was definitely concealing himself using a water-attribute method. He'd made himself as transparent as water energy itself, completely translucent in the air, and was waiting in ambush somewhere. Zhuang Min was getting more and more on his nerves. Even so, his Evil Golden Eye had never failed to find any of his enemies before.

Jiang Chen's eyes came to a still. "Why are you so busy smuggling yourself away, Zhuang Min? You're worse than your younger brother." His tone was unkind and unrelenting.

Zhuang Min did indeed have a technique called Waterveil Illusion, which used water energy to hide his figure within the space behind the veil. He had wanted to use two sword auras to attack Jiang Chen before attempting a more covert approach. After he was in position, he could then humiliate Pill King Zhen with a powerful ability in one fell swoop. The pill king's proficiency was entirely unexpected. His Swords of Rain Mist had been unable to break through his opponent's defense. On top of that, his own presence had been detected.

Locking eyes with Jiang Chen's own, Zhuang Min felt his body slow down. There was a vague excitement in his heart, like his soul was being tugged on by an indescribable power. For a moment, his mind had been on the edge of disarray. He was secretly shocked. This Pill King Zhen is a freak! The average sage realm cultivator would lose instantly to my Waterveil Prison and Swords of Rain Mist. I could say the same for the majority of cultivators who were halfway to the emperor realm. But he's only, what, at the seventh or eighth level sage realm? The power he holds doesn't match up to his age.

Chapter 967: Windrider Wings

The power of Jiang Chen's Evil Golden Eye had risen with his level of cultivation. The gaze he'd exchanged just now had almost unsettled his opponent's mind entirely. However, he hadn't counted on winning in a single look. He only wanted a moment's hesitation. In that small window of opportunity that Zhuang Min offered, his eight statues leapt into the fray, thoroughly encircling his opponent.

Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation, Offensive Mode! With wind and lightning in their steps, the eight statues began their frenzied onslaught towards their master's enemy once again. Fortunately for Zhuang Min, his defensive capabilities were above-average. Though he was being pressed in upon, there was no struggle. The statues' dogged assault didn't affect him very much. He opened both hands, slamming his palms down four times each. Four beads of water turned into four sprays of foam, draping towards the eight statues like a shower of glass.

Jiang Chen smirked at the effort. Zhuang Min was trying to use his Waterveil Prison to lock down the eight statues. However, water-attribute abilities had no effect whatsoever against him. He had been released from the Waterveil Prison prior not by his own hand, but by Long Xiaoxuan's. The dragon was superbly stealthy, nesting himself away in Jiang Chen's vicinity without even the seven emperors taking notice.

Sure, there was the faint scent of dragon's blood, but there was plausible deniability. It made much more sense for the scent's origin to be Jiang Chen himself. In several of his previous battles, Jiang Chen had used many draconic powers. The dragon's roar was one of them, the ability of devourment was another... In actuality, though Jiang Chen had a grasp of the former, he wasn't yet equipped in many respects to learn the latter.

All eight veils of water dissipated into nothingness, as if ripped

apart by an invisible, giant hand. Zhuang Min began to panic a little. Water-attribute abilities were what he was most well-versed at. Moreover, they lacked an obvious weakness. They weren't the strongest offensively, but opponents had a hard time piercing their line of defense in the heat of the moment. Well, in most cases anyway. Today was an exception.

This Pill King Zhen had some kind of natural advantage against his water-attribute abilities. Even using the power of his emperor realm domain did nothing to salvage that fact. Pill King Zhen... what kind of monster is he? I know my domain isn't the strongest, but it gives a significant boost to my Waterveil Prison. Why is he able to counteract it so effortlessly? Is my domain actually unstable and weak?

It was clearly an anxious topic for Zhuang Min. During casual bouts with his fellow geniuses, his water-attribute domain had always proved to be quite useful. Many higher-ranked geniuses had a difficult time breaking through his reliable defense. How could Pill King Zhen crush his defenses so easily? He couldn't let things go on like this. If he couldn't get the appropriate usage out of his domain, then the outcome of the battle became much more uncertain. Zhuang Min simply couldn't accept it. The entire affair was beyond strange.

This kid must have some kind of legendary treasure that naturally counters water-attribute abilities. How can he negate my domain power otherwise as a sage realm genius?

First level emperor realm geniuses didn't necessarily have the most established domains, but having one at all allowed them to significantly surpass the geniuses that did not. Zhuang Min repeatedly called upon his water veils in defense, but they were torn apart by the same mysterious force each time. He was so distressed that his heart was on fire. There was a final card that he hadn't played yet. His original intention had been to use it in order to challenge someone higher in the rankings, but it was possible

that he'd lose here if he hid it any longer.

He didn't have much more time to mull over the choice. The eight statues' attacks became more and more impenetrable, the deployment of their formation's might improving with each moment. After his rippling water veils were dispelled, Zhuang Min had only his physical evasiveness to rely on. But trying to combat a formation with his body alone was folly. There were eight statues, but only one of him.

The few always had trouble against the many. In the world of martial dao, that was one of the simplest rules. He was currently being hit over and over again by the statues. Because his body was much stronger compared to someone halfway to the emperor realm, he received no critical injuries. Still, he knew better than anyone else that continuing in this same manner would only lead to him wasting away.

I don't care anymore. Let's deal with the current crisis first. Zhuang Min hadn't expected to be pushed to this point. His emperor realm domain was supposed to have steamrolled his opponent with ease. It turned out that he was the one being rolled into a pancake instead!

Offstage, Zhuang Jie watched the proceedings with wide-eyed amazement. He sneaked a glance at Emperor Vastsea. "Your Majesty, this Pill King Zhen... is he cheating with a treasure of some sort?" he couldn't help but ask. "Not even my brother's domain power can stop him."

"In the world of martial dao, geniuses are given all sorts of opportunities all their own. No matter what kind of legendary treasure he has, only the result of the match matters in the end," Emperor Vastsea replied coolly. There was a hint of dissatisfaction in his tone.

However, the emperor could see as plainly as anyone else that it was not Zhuang Min's fault. The youth was capable and had

exerted himself fully for the occasion. It was his opponent that was beyond the comprehension of mortal men. If this Pill King Zhen managed to defeat Zhuang Min as well, then he was a genius that few under Vastsea's command could hope to match. Thankfully, the first-ranked genius in the faction was still undefeated. Even someone as strong as Zhuang Min had to bow down his head before him. The provisional heir of Emperor Vastsea, the young lord of young lords. His name was Ye Piaoling, ranked within the top five in the Ranking of Young Lords. One of the most elite in the list, a brilliant nova amongst a sea of stars.

"How do you think Zhuang Min's doing in this battle, Piaoling?" Emperor Vastsea asked, a spontaneous test for his best pupil.

"He has thirty percent odds, at best." Ye Piaoling's voice was cold and aloof. There was no compassion in it, almost as if the subject of the conversation was a stranger rather than a peer.

"What? Thirty percent at most?" Zhuang Jie wasn't happy to hear the conclusion. "Are you kidding, senior brother Ye?"

The senior brother in question didn't even turn his head. The only answer Zhuang Jie received was a lukewarm smile. It was depressing being the target of such frivolous treatment. However, Ye Piaoling's temperament was well-known to both Zhuang brothers, and Zhuang Jie didn't dare act up in front of the senior disciple. The only thing he could do was close his mouth. He was filled with a thousand disagreements, though. In his heart, he considered his emperor realm brother to be a true top-notch genius.

How could someone who possessed so much fortune lose? Less than thirty percent? He couldn't accept it at all. Ye Piaoling was just boosting the morale of others and lowering their own for no reason at all. This senior brother was probably scared that his older brother would beat him! Why not beat down his strongest competitor's morale while he can, hmm! But Zhuang Jie felt bad nevertheless when he saw how passive his brother was being in the

arena. He'd thought that it would have been easy for his brother to avenge him, a naïve sentiment in retrospect. His brother was embroiled in a tough fight as well, now.

"What kind of weirdo pill did this weirdo Pill King Zhen eat? A sky sage realm cultivator facing off evenly against an emperor realm... how can this be?" No matter how unhappy Zhuang Jie was with the situation, Jiang Chen had the upper hand in the duel.

Zhuang Min's heart was resolved. He shook both arms. Tunes filled the air all around him, ripping open the clothing on his back. The muscles on his back bulged and expanded. A moment later, the flesh ruptured open to reveal two expansive, feathery wings.

"Windrider Wings?" There was a collection of gasps from the crowd.

"Zhuang Min has managed to develop Windrider Wings? Tsk. Looks like his wind constitution is of even higher caliber than his younger brother's!"

"Both brothers have such special constitutions... it's truly formidable. Zhuang Min seems a lot more talented than Zhuang Jie."

"The Windrider Wings move as quickly as lightning. They can even cut open space itself, producing chaotic windstorms from the gaps."

"Chaotic windstorms are fearsome indeed. The most powerful ones can even drag people into the darkness of voidstorms."

Voidstorms were named as such because they were storms that occurred in the void between the folds of space and time. Though the fabric of space and time rarely had rifts between its threads, any that did form always had peculiar constructions. The most masterful of experts had an easy time upending mountains and draining oceans. Reaching the moon and the stars were trivial for them. They traveled by tearing apart the seams of space, entering

different dimensions by surpassing the limitations of material existence. Space torn apart in such a way often created terrifying voidstorms in their wake.

Zhuang Ming's Windrider Wings originated from an ancient, mysterious wind bloodline, specifically, a mythical divine beast of some sort. It was one of his secrets, one of his trump cards.

The cries of surprise all around clued Jiang Chen in to the Windrider Wings' marvel. In truth, he had heard of these wings before, and knew their capabilities to an approximate extent. That didn't mean he was scared of the wings. Dragons themselves rode the cloud and wind. Given his draconic bloodline, Jiang Chen had no fear of any kind of bad weather. He feared neither their speed nor might, confident that his own bloodline would surpass them in both aspects.

Whoosh!

A trail of afterimages marked Zhuang Min's escape from the eight statues' encirclement. The Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation couldn't entrap that kind of reality-warping speed.

Jiang Chen's heart itched at the sight of it. He'd refined a pair of wings like that as well: Emperor Featherflight's Featherflight Wings. It was a shame that he couldn't use them openly in public. He still had his Cicada's Wings, though. They weren't as impressive in broad strokes, and didn't possess a ridiculous elite speed either, but they excelled in maneuverability. Thus, he maintained perfect calm in the face of the Windrider Wings' newly-posed threat.

Chapter 968: The Darkest Amongst All Dark Horses

“A match of speed eh?” Jiang Chen activated his Golden Cicada Wings and shot towards the air. He hid the Featherflight Mirror within his sleeves and aimed it at the disturbances within the void. The Mirror was truly formidable. Zhuang Min’s speed was greatly reduced even though he possessed the Windrider Wings.

“How can this be?” His body suddenly sank due to the great reduction in speed. It was as though a great invisible force was pulling at him. He looked towards Jiang Chen with a solemn expression. He wanted to see how his opponent had managed such a feat. The Windrider Wings’ biggest advantage was their overwhelming speed. With it, he could tear apart the void and summon voidstorms. This was his ultimate move and also his greatest trump card. Unfortunately, he was unable to fully bring out the Windrider Wings’ full might due to the suppression of his speed.

Absolute speed was required to tear the void apart. Without enough speed, he couldn’t even manage to fulfill this basic requirement, let alone summoning voidstorms. It was evident that Jiang Chen was well aware of what Zhuang Min’s thoughts, and also clearly knew why the Windrider Wings were so formidable. There was no saying who would end up the victor if his opponent had managed to slice open the void to produce chaotic windstorms.

I must suppress his speed. I cannot afford to let him summon voidstoms. Jiang Chen remained resolute as he fully understood the weight of the situation. The formation was activated again, separating the eight statues. He then brought the Golden Cicada Wings to their maximum capacity and barely managed to catch up to the Windrider Wings. This was all done while he continued to shine the Featherlight Mirror on Zhuang Min.

This extremely depressed Zhuang Min and made him incredibly anxious and mortified.

“You bastard! What have you done? How are you managing to keep me from my top speed?!” Zhuang Min was now at the verge of vomiting blood.

This amount of frustration was exactly what Jiang Chen wanted to see. The eight statues would immediately surround Zhuang Min if he slowed down ever so slightly. The great emperor disciple had begun consuming his inner energy after a few more attempts, but he still wasn’t able to reach the limits of his speed. Maintaining this battle state was a great burden on his body. He was well aware that this could not go on, but he simply couldn’t break free from his opponent’s bindings.

The Featherlight Mirror was Emperor Featherlight’s heirloom after all. If Jiang Chen could manage to fully utilize its full potential, it could even suppress peak level emperor realm cultivators, let alone Zhuang Min. Because of it, Zhuang Min had become the passive side in the battle. The effects of overconsumption of inner energy was also evident. After about an hour of battle, his strength was no longer what it was initially.

Jiang Chen had suffered greatly during the entire clash as well. He had consumed all of the energy within his body just to keep up with Zhuang Min’s speed and to increase the efficacy of the Featherlight Mirror. Fortunately, Jiang Chen had an abundance of inner energy. Moreover, Long Xiaoxuan had been secretly offering his assistance as well.

Even though Zhuang Min had already exerted his inner energy, Jiang Chen remained spirited and energized. He didn’t seem the least bit exhausted. The eight statues were becoming more and more coordinated as well. The Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation’s power was fully on display. Zhuang Min was out of options. He no longer had a winning chance unless he was willing to consume his life force to continue the battle.

“Zhuang Min has lost.” Ye Piaoling sighed while shaking his head. “Pill King Zhen is truly a monster. Does Sacred Peafowl Mountain specialize in producing monsters like his? They’ve had young lord Fan back then, and now they have Pill King Zhen. Are they truly the luckiest amongst the seven great emperor factions?”

Ye Piaoling’s comment had left a bitter taste in Emperor Vastsea’s mouth. He wasn’t happy that Sacred Peafowl Mountain had possessed such great luck. Emperor Vastsea was allied with Emperor Shura after all. It would be more preferable if Emperor Shura were to govern Veluriyam Capital instead of letting Sacred Peafowl Mountain continue their reign. If Pill King Zhen were to become heir, he would take over the throne after Emperor Peafowl’s retirement. Wouldn’t that mean that Emperor Shura’s previous work had been all for nothing?

Zhuang Jie’s face was as white as sheet. He kept muttering profanities as he couldn’t get over his resentment towards Jiang Chen. “This bastard! Damn... even the Windrider Wings are no match for him? No. Brother wasn’t even able to bring out its full potential. Oh how I wish that this is all just a bad dream. Maybe I will still be ranked 20th, and my brother 11th when I wake up...”

The arena fell silent when Zhuang Min was thrown off the arena by the statues. Clearly, everyone was shocked by the result of the match. Pill King Zhen had put on yet another great show as a dark horse. The pill king was now ranked 11th, while Zhuang Min was ruthlessly sent all the way back to 17th! He no longer had the chance to fight his way back up the ranks as he was defeated by someone of a lower rank. His ranking was set in stone.

The results of this battle caused a great commotion. The news of Jiang Chen’s victory instantly spread throughout Veluriyam Capital. A miracle rarely seen throughout the history of Veluriyam Capital of a sky sage realm cultivator defeating an emperor realm cultivator had occured! Winning or losing in itself didn’t really matter as it was just a difference of ranking at the end. However,

watching a sky sage realm cultivator defeat an emperor realm cultivator in spite the odds was no doubt the most sensational thing ever.

Pill King Zhen had created a legend for himself within Veluriyam Capital yet again. He always seemed to be accompanied by some sort of miracle. While still anonymous, he'd foiled the Majestic Clan's plot which ended in their expulsion from Veluriyam Capital. With that, he was able to end the argument on which was the foremost clan in Veluriyam Capital. After that, he took on the identity of the owner of Taiyuan Tower and defeated Pill King Ji Lang on behalf of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He was able to put an end to Pillfire City's undefeated legend. And now, he'd made triumphant progress in the Martial Pagoda Battles as well. He was able to fight all the way to 11th on the Ranking of Young Lords and made a marvelous comeback. Even 'miracle' was no longer the best way to describe the great amount of heaven defying things that he'd achieved.

"Liuxiang, you've felt somewhat resentful over losing to Pill King Zhen right? What about now?" Ji San asked sarcastically.

Liuxiang snorted. "It's not like you're the winner. Besides, what right do you have to lecture me when you don't even have the courage and bravery to continue fighting after you've made it into the rankings?"

He was very frustrated due to his poor performance in the Martial Pagoda Battles. Because of this, the words that he had bottled up inside suddenly came bursting out. He no longer maintained his usual courteous front.

Ji San would've called Liuxiang out for getting angry, but all he did was continue laughing this time. "How can the sparrow know of the greatness of a swan?"

Liuxiang snorted and laughed coldly. It was obvious that he was irked by how Ji San was tooting his own horn. The Coiling Dragon

clan lord's eyes were glued to the arena. He seemed to be in deep thought. Jiang Chen had surprised him time and time again. He was now convinced that the pill king was fully capable of concocting the Pinecrane Pill. After all, he was the very personification of the term 'miracle' itself. The Pinecrane Pill no longer seemed too far a reach anymore.

Emperor Peafowl's faction were also very astonished by Jiang Chen's performance.

"Your Majesty is truly far-seeing. Your subordinate is now thoroughly convinced." Cloudsoar Monarch was also flabbergasted by Jiang Chen.

Emperor Peafowl burst into laughter. "Cloudsoar, you've been wondering if Pill King Zhen is truly up to the task of becoming the heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. I'm sure that you no longer possess such doubts?"

Cloudsoar Monarch was remorseful. "Truly. I am sure my other three fellow daoists are the same as well?"

He was referring to the other three great emperor realm experts of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. They were Chronobalance Monarch, Plumscore Monarch, and Wildfox Monarch. These four were the four great protectors of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, and also Emperor Peafowl's most trusted advisors. Emperor Peafowl naturally hoped to gain their approval in the matters of the heir. It wasn't because he had no authority, but because he didn't wish that the four monarchs would disapprove of his heir.

Wildfox Monarch flashed a witty smile. "The child seems to possess bottomless talent. There's no end to the surprises that he brings. It'd be our loss if we don't make him the next heir."

Chronobalance Monarch nodded in agreement. "That is true. Nobody can ask for a better successor than him. If we miss this opportunity, others might snatch him away from us."

This was no exaggeration. The amount of skill and potential that the pill king had revealed was more than enough to influence the structure of Veluriyam Capital's future. Every faction would be more than willing to accept such a talent into their banner.

However, Plumscore Monarch, the only woman among the four monarchs, had her doubts. "Pill King Zhen truly has limitless potential. However, this also makes him incredibly suspicious. Your subordinate can't help but have some doubts. Since his background is still a mystery, I wonder if this child is truly reliable?"

She was a towering figure amongst women. She had always been a cold and incisive person. Someone who always spoke her mind. She didn't hesitate to voice her concerns.

Emperor Peafowl smiled gently. "Everyone need not worry about this child's background. In my opinion, you can only encounter such talent once in every three thousand years."

Emperor Peafowl had meant young lord Fan. In truth, the loss of young lord Fan wasn't really a pity at all. Emperor Peafowl had recognized the young lord's demon bloodline, but he wanted to use this opportunity to test the four monarchs. Unfortunately, not a single one of them managed to realize the truth. This had made Emperor Peafowl give up the notion of handing any of them the power.

Chapter 969: The Most Essential Battle

The Ranking of Young Lords had become incredibly suspenseful after Jiang Chen's victory. The appearance of an outlier like Jiang Chen had caused a great disruption in the clear-cut rankings of the top ten. He was like a butcher's knife suspended in midair. The question was... who was he going to strike at next? Would the pill king choose to continue challenging ranks above his own? Would there be a change within the top ten? The various possibilities threw an interesting twist into things. Everyone was certain that the pill king wouldn't give up his final challenge after so many battles.

According to the rules, he was allowed to challenge six ranks ahead in his second challenge. In his third challenge, he was allowed double of that. He could now challenge twelve ranks ahead. Since he was ranked 11th, he was now qualified to challenge the champion of the Ranking of Young Lords. However, was he really going to do that?

Jiang Chen was in deep consideration as well. Since he had replaced Zhuang Min as the 11th ranked young lord, he clearly understood what sort of challenges awaited him in the ranks ahead. Defeating Zhuang Min would have been an incredibly difficult task if Long Xiaoxuan hadn't quietly dealt with his water abilities. Every single opponent from henceforth would be even more powerful than him. According to his optimistic calculations, there was no chance of him defeating anyone in the top three if he couldn't utilize the rest of his trump cards. In fact, making it into the top five was only a pipe dream as well. Those monsters were all third level emperor realm geniuses.

Even the overweening Gong Wuji from yesteryear was only a third level emperor. Back then, all Jiang Chen could do was flee when he'd encountered him. The Divine Befuddlement Miasma in Infant Shriek Valley was the only reason why Jiang Chen had

managed to eliminate him in the end. It had all been due to fortunate timing and favorable conditions.

Jiang Chen was certain that he could challenge a young lord within the top five if he could use all of his trump cards. There was a possibility that he could win as well. Unfortunately, there were just too many restrictions preventing him from doing so. His current goal was to make it into the top nine. Only the top thirty-six finalists of the Ranking of Young Lords were qualified to enter the Martial Pagoda to cultivate.

There were all kinds of legacies from the ancestors of Veluriyam Capital and all sorts of encounters waiting to be stumbled across within the Martial Pagoda. Most importantly, a single day of cultivation within the Martial Pagoda was equivalent to ten days outside of it. And of course, not all thirty-six young lords were treated equally. Only the top nine would receive the best treatment. They were granted access to the highest region in the pagoda that allowed for the ten day equivalent cultivation. The rest would be allocated to other lower levels in batches of nine. Since Jiang Chen had fought his way up the rankings, he was going to aim to finish in the top nine even though he was temporarily incapable of challenging the top five. He made the decision to continue the climb. However, he wasn't going to challenge twelve, or even six ranks ahead of him. Instead, he was going to challenge the eighth rank genius who was only three ranks ahead of him. Of course, there was a proper reason for why he had decided to challenge the eighth rank genius. His target was actually a disciple from Emperor Shura's faction that went by the name of Gao Zhan, but he preferred for others to call him the Beheader. [1]

He was ranked second amongst Emperor Shura's true disciples, and he had a cold and ruthless personality, as he was focused on the ways of demonic slaughter. He was a genius in the art of killing.

People were mildly surprised when Jiang Chen challenged Gao

Zhan. Nobody had expected this. After all, Gao Zhan was a famous killing maniac! He possessed the aura of a demon hailing from the depths of hell due to the cultivation path he chose to pursue. Ordinary cultivators would collapse just from the might of his killing intent alone. Challenging Gao Zhan was like challenging a young lord ranked within the top five.

Jiang Chen could have challenged the ninth ranked young lord if he had wanted to make it into the top region of the pagoda. The latter was equally as powerful, but there was still some disparity between him and Gao Zhan. Moreover, Gao Zhan had cultivated the path of demonic slaughter. Even the higher-ranked geniuses were reluctant to go face to face against him.

Gao Zhan was in slight disbelief. “You’re challenging me?” he asked while licking his lips. A cold smile flashed across his face as killing intent came bursting out of his eyes. There seemed to be no limit to his thirst for blood.

“Gao Zhan, don’t belittle your enemy. His opponents have all thought that he had overestimated his capabilities, when in reality it was quite the opposite.” Emperor Shura reminded blandly. The emperor had a very deep impression of Jiang Chen. Pill King Zhen was actually the perpetrator behind Majestic Clan’s downfall during the battle that took place in Veluriyam Capital. It hadn’t been Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Rumors that Jiang Chen would become heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain that had recently arisen definitely spelled bad news for Emperor Shura. The heir was very likely to gain reign over Veluriyam Capital after Emperor Peafowl’s retirement, meaning that he would be sidelined yet again. He disdained Jiang Chen because of this. However, despite his hatred, he couldn’t just ignore an incredible young genius that had come from nowhere, especially since said genius had just challenged his own disciple! Emperor Shura was certain that this was no coincidence. The pill king had done it on purpose as a demonstration of Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s power.

“Esteemed master, please set your mind at ease. Your disciple is not the same as those other simple fools. This pill king may be somewhat abnormal, but your disciple is already familiar with his tricks. My demonic slaughter emperor domain will shred him to pieces once we get into the arena.” Gao Zhan’s cold voice was filled with killing intent.

Emperor Shura was quite pleased with his disciple, as he had inherited the emperor’s thirst for blood along with his path of demonic slaughter. Unfortunately, his young disciple was too focused on the pursuit of martial dao to be interested in anything else. Thus, Emperor Shura had no choice but to train him as a second rank true disciple instead. Gao Zhan didn’t care about all this. He was more interested in improving his martial dao and breaking through to higher levels.

“Fool!” Emperor Shura yelled as soon as he heard Gao Zhan’s words. “This child is as unfathomable as he is obscure! You will not win if you think that this is all there is to him!” Emperor Shura didn’t often scold Gao Zhan like this. However, the importance of this match had caused his mood to sour. He could tell that Gao Zhan had already belittled his enemy in his mind.

Gao Zhan was much stronger than Zhuang Min. There wasn’t much he could study from Zhuang Min’s match, as it was far too beneath him. However, there was a high chance that he might be tricked by the pill king if he went into the match with that kind of mindset. The pill king was much too cunning.

Fortunately, the sky was already getting dark. The match would have to be held on the second day. Emperor Shura believed that there was still time to alter his disciple’s mindset by giving him a small lecture.

Upon nightfall, Emperor Peafowl left the Veluriyam Pagoda to visit Jiang Chen.

“Your Majesty?” Jiang Chen was surprised by Emperor Peafowl’s

sudden arrival, as the emperors were usually in the pagoda at this hour.

Emperor Peafowl had a smile on his face. “Good lad. Your climb is a lot more aggressive than I’d imagined! I thought you’d stop when you reached the 20th spot, but you didn’t! You just keep surprising me again and again. I can still hear the entire capital talking about you even after covering my ears.”

“What are they talking about?” Jiang Chen laughed.

“What? Are you asking for praise from me?” Emperor Peafowl laughed. “You are now the biggest idol for all the youths in this Capital. Even the five strongest young lords are no match for you in terms of popularity.”

Jiang Chen smirked. “Those geniuses are high and aloof. How can they gain the adoration of the city’s citizens when they won’t even bother stepping on the same soil as commoners?”

He felt that young lord Fan had done a great job in this regard. The late young lord was similarly adept at gaining the adoration of the masses even though he possessed a status just as high and beyond reach as that of the other young lords. It was truly a pity that the demon race’s bloodline had coursed through his veins

Emperor Peafowl burst into laughter. “Kid, you’re so unorthodox compared to them. By the way, how do you plan on challenging Gao Zhan? Do you not know that Gao Zhan is said to be the most likely candidate to break into the top five?”

“Who else in the top twelve doesn’t possess that same potential? Potential is one thing, but reality is another. He should be in the top five if he truly was that powerful. Potential is nothing but empty talk.” Jiang Chen made a great point with his argument. Competition was intense, as there were only so many places within the rankings. True strength was still the most important factor in the end. There was still a legitimate reason why seven people were ranked higher than him.

“Seeing as how you could say such a thing, I’m sure that you’ve thought this all through. However, the reason why he is said to have such high potential is all due to his focus on the path of demonic slaughter. He will be a lot harder to deal with than the common enemy.” Emperor Peafowl paused for a moment before he continued with a smile. “If I’m not mistaken, Emperor Shura must be giving him a small lecture right now. He isn’t willing to lose this match. He believes that he cannot afford to.”

“Emperor Shura has no choice but to spend an eternity as runner up as long as Your Majesty is around,” Jiang Chen replied with a laugh.

“An eternity in second place? Haha! What an amusing thought!” Emperor Peafowl burst into laughter. “Since Emperor Shura is giving a lecture right now, it is best that I grant you some knowledge as well. Let me tell you a little something about this path…”

Jiang Chen had only just realized the motive behind Emperor Peafowl’s sudden visitation. He was here to offer him advice. He appreciated Emperor Peafowl’s good intentions even though he had no need for the advice. The emperor hoped that Jiang Chen wouldn’t lose this crucial match, as he was about to announce the lad as his heir.

1. Gao = high. One of the characters for Zhan is kill/behead.

2. Gao = high. One of the characters for Zhan is kill/behead.

Chapter 970: Wrath of Demons and Gods

The curtain rose on the most anticipated battle of the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering. After a night of tutelage from Emperor Peafowl, Jiang Chen had a much better understanding of the path of demonic slaughter. It made him a lot more confident in his odds. But still, he knew how troublesome his opponent was going to be. Not that his opponent's style was anything to write home about, but a cultivator who was at the peak of the first level emperor realm naturally dominated a majority of the other geniuses. As strong as Zhuang Min was, he probably couldn't hold half a candle to this Gao Zhan.

The difference between the first level emperor realm and the peak of that level was marked. The possibility of stepping into the second level emperor realm was present in the latter and absent in the former. Garbed in red, Gao Zhan was like a fiery ball of crackling flame. His wild and fierce eyes stared Jiang Chen down. The corner of his mouth was slightly upturned, its curvature a little uncanny. His entire person appeared unceremonious and unrestrained, filled with a primitive vigor.

"Are you the Pill King Zhen who's been hopping around lately?" Gao Zhan raised an eyebrow. His voice was as grating as a sharp blade, filled with an uncomfortably spiteful edge.

Hopping around? Jiang Chen snickered internally. He cast a cool sidelong glance at Gao Zhan, his face emotionless. "Is the foremost genius in demonic slaughter as second rate as everyone else? The only things you seem to possess are empty words."

The foremost genius of demonic slaughter. This phrase was particularly sinister. It goaded Emperor Shura's entire faction. Gao Zhan was actually the number two genius under his emperor's command. That notwithstanding, his martial cultivation capably rivaled that of number one in every way. He leered back at his opponent. "Genius or second rate, I only have one goal for coming

here... anyone who provokes me shall die under a single stroke of my blade!”

“I’ve heard meaningless statements like those so many times that I’ve lost count.” Jiang Chen casually picked at his ears, his tone playful. “Spit out anything fresh you’ve got. If not, then let’s get to it. Time’s a-wastin’.”

“Very good, very good!” Gao Zhan grinned with fury. “I’ve seen my share of thrillseekers, but I’ve never seen someone so keen to seek out their death. I’ll make sure to satisfy that desire.”

The corner of Jiang Chen’s mouth curled up. “You talk too much.” He drew the Pentecolor Divine Swords as he spoke, his voice’s volume ascending as he did so. “Then I’ll go first!”

He wanted to launch a preemptive strike in this particular battle. “Qi is the origin of the gods, and gods the product of qi. I summon the five thunders with my five attributes. Five thunders of calamity, a divine hymn of my sword!” The forces of heaven and earth congregated at his beck and call. The sky darkened, thunder rang in the firmament, and his sword aura burst forth in the likeliness of a geyser.

It was one of the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique’s most powerful moves, Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords. Whenever it was used, even heaven and earth were moved. The Torrent mixed the five thunders and sword aura into a veritable tempest of thunderous swords. As the primary target of this assault, Gao Zhan dared not underestimate the attack. His expression was serious as he activated a defense glyph. It shimmered into place around him. Evidently, even someone as competent as him was unwilling to face such a force directly.

He clapped his hands together. Billows of red-hot air appeared around him, condensing themselves increasingly with each passing second. Like a geyser of gushing flame, they enshrouded the image of his silhouette within. All of the momentum generated by Jiang

Chen's sword was eaten up at once, consumed by the fiery domain.

"A domain of fire?" Jiang Chen frowned. He hadn't studied Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords for long. Thus, his level of understanding for it remained at the stage of 'strong, but unrefined'. He could produce the intended effect the technique was supposed to, but couldn't yet manage to condense it into a line or a point. It was effective against large groups, but less so against single individuals. In particular, some of its flaws emerged when dealing with stronger opponents. His understanding was rudimentary, after all. In a perfected state, any arbitrary attack from the Thunderclap Sword Technique was lethal.

"Hmph. An attack like this is only good against cultivators who are at the half-step emperor realm. It's completely useless against the ones who possess domain power like us!" A sneer played at the corner of Gao Zhan's mouth. He rushed forward with remarkable haste, the enormous aura of flame still surrounding him. A malevolent saber materialized in his right hand, the entire length of steel shimmering with a bloody light. As soon as it was drawn, a potent aura of bloodthirst cascaded forth in every direction. It was as if an opening had appeared to the lowest depths of hell, and an atmosphere of demonic slaughter permeated the air.

"What an evil weapon!" The aura of slaughter rammed into him, possessing enough piercing force to penetrate one's mind and soul. Thankfully, Jiang Chen's Boulder's Heart rendered him immune. Though the feeling shook his heart a little, there was minimal actual damage.

"Eat this, brat!" Gao Zhan cackled strangely, his voice as grating as metal scratching against a wall. He flourished his arm a little. The accompanying attack carried no exaggerated motion, but the simple cut made its way in front of Jiang Chen in the blink of an eye. The technique's speed and simplicity were simply masterful.

Jiang Chen was no slowpoke either, however. He casually flipped his Pentecolor Divine Swords upward. "Reverse Heaven and

Earth!” The sword light reversed the reality of the surrounding space.

Though the saber looked like it had reached Jiang Chen, it in fact had veered off to the side, missing him by two or three feet. The result of the first-traded blow was that the combatants appeared to be evenly matched.

Gao Zhan was a little surprised. Though his attack had looked simple, he had actually fused his own domain power into the stroke. During the movement, he had placed an ample amount of the space from the stage into his own domain. In this way, he was able to essentially ignore the constrictions of distance. The saber went from far to near instantly, as if it had happened in the blink of an eye. But in the end, such a seemingly simple maneuver like that had been broken by an equally seemingly simple sword strike.

Gao Zhan wasn’t someone who needed to fight over an extended period of time. He usually finished his opponents off in anywhere from one to three saber strokes. It was pitiably rare that he met an enemy who required him to dole out five or more. In other words, anyone that could remain undefeated after five of his attacks meant that he was definitely much stronger than Gao Zhan. The angry saber wielder grinned, revealing a row of humorlessly white teeth. He hadn’t gained an advantage with his first strike, but he was not discouraged. “One more!” he yelled.

A crimson edge rolled backwards off the saber’s physical edge, a jet of bloody air hot on its heels.

“Blood Drinker’s Banquet!” The power behind the attack did not lie with the saber edge itself, but rather, in the profound mystery behind it. The bloody air was thickly seasoned with a consuming power, outright stunning any cultivator with a slightly weak will.

The saber stroke blended splendidly with the air, the entire attack possessing an unbroken form. Feeling the full brunt of the flood of bloody air, Jiang Chen was not cowed in the slightest. His

consciousness was more than a match for any emperor realm cultivator in the lower levels. In fact, even mid-emperor realm cultivators couldn't necessarily beat him in that regard. Fixing his God's Eye on the boldly oncoming attack, Jiang Chen began to move.

He didn't avoid the wave of bloody air at all. Like a bird flying to its home, he swept into its midst with his sword. The weapon flashed with light before colliding with the biting edge. Jiang Chen halted for a brief moment, then accelerated his body once more. His left hand pointed several times into the air.

Tss, tss, tss, tss. His Supernova Point sliced towards Gao Zhan's vitals with powerful, space-slicing force.

The counterattack caught Gao Zhan completely unawares. Normally, the bloody air from his attack would easily drive his opponents aside, even forcing them to flee. His saber edge would then proceed to chase them down to their deaths. But Jiang Chen had done quite the opposite. Rather than fleeing, he had charged towards the air instead. There was no reward without risk. His maneuver aimed to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Fundamentally, he was willing to go through with such an action because he didn't fear the bloody air's corrosive influence.

Because of his misstep in judgment, Gao Zhan was forced into a defensive stance by Jiang Chen's Supernova Point. Lacerating force after force slashed his body with unbelievable speed. Despite his ironclad defense, Gao Zhan still felt a stream of agitation in his chest thanks to the cuts.

What a pity. If Jiang Chen's point had been just a bit stronger, he would have been able to cleave his opponent in half with just that move alone... well, as long as his opponent didn't have any special defensive strength either.

Gao Zhan's eyes flared with ferocity. All of his savagery was brought to the forefront. He took a few steps back to steady

himself, staring daggers at Jiang Chen. He looked as if he could spit out furious balls of flame at any moment. More than anything, he wanted to burn the pill king to a crisp.

“Okay, kid. I’ll admit it. Congratulations on not dying to my attack. Congratulations on making me suffer. But I’ll let you know right now: that technique hasn’t been perfected yet. I originally decided to kill you in five strokes, but I’ve changed. My. Mind.” Gao Zhan’s tone was ominous. He raised his vicious saber high into the air, a sanguine radiance blazing into existence all about him. It was as if something living had awakened from a long slumber. “You did it; you made me angry. I’ll use my strongest blade technique to send you to your grave!”

His voice grew colder and colder, like a demon god freshly emerging out of hell. “Know your place!”

The saber, too, became inexplicably brilliant. By now, it had practically become a living spirit, filled with demonic energy and charm. The giant image of a demonic deity flickered into existence behind it.

“Demon God’s Bloodthirster—Demonic Wrath!” [1] The weapon struggled like a primordial beast, attempting to break free of its prison. Gao Zhan was forced to use both hands to maintain his grip. At the same time, the image of the demon god accumulated more and more power. It was no longer blurry, growing in both clarity and terrifying pressure with each passing second.

Jiang Chen stared seriously at his opponent opposite him. He knew that his Supernova Point had incited his opponent to anger, resulting in many stages of the battle being skipped. It was time for their most powerful attacks to clash head on.

1. Bloodthirster, a must for all ADCs!

2. Bloodthirster, a must for all ADCs!

Chapter 971: The Long Anticipated Lord of the Golden Seal

His Psychic's Head fully active, Jiang Chen monitored the battlefield's every detail. Gao Zhan's terrifying saber emitted not only that noisome bloody air, but a hidden slaughtering aura behind it as well. It was an aura that knew only sharpness and edge.

"Is that... the essence of metal?" Jiang Chen's heart shook. "It can't be. No, I suppose it makes sense after all. Gao Zhan's strongest talent is his inborn mastery over the essence of metal. That gory air nonsense is just a façade. With metal energy like that, no wonder he can take up the path of demonic slaughter."

The essence of metal lay in its utter invincibility and irresistibility. Nothing could withstand it. Amongst the five elements, metal represented a keen sharpness, a force that could sever all. The path of demonic slaughter was a path of killing. Such keenness was what it exactly needed.

Jiang Chen suddenly understood. Gao Zhan hadn't picked the path of demonic slaughter. It was the other way around. That path in particular was assuredly the most appropriate for a genius like him. Jiang Chen was suddenly fired up for a fight.

Essence of metal? What was there to be scared of? He'd had his magnetic golden mountain for ages, and it was still not fully refined. He had gotten it by refining the magnetic heart all those years ago. Although he'd discovered more and more of its hidden strengths, its most powerful treasure remained untapped.

The magnetic golden mountain gave him control over magnetic force, the ability to create magnetic storms, and various others such as the Evil Golden Eye. In a larger brawl, he could even summon golden weapon-shaped monsters to fight for him, though his Soldier Rosary Beads rendered them rarely used. The monsters

were much weaker in one-on-one combat than the soldiers from the beads.

However, the greatest treasure was none of these things. Its ultimate prize was the Lord of the Golden Seal. The Lord of the Golden Seal was truly a miraculous being. If allowed to awaken without outside stimulation on its own behalf, it was quite ordinary. Very likely weaker than an origin realm cultivator, even. If stimulated by a powerful outside force and summon by similar, the Lord would become immensely strong. The magnetic golden mountain's latent power could be tapped into. Therefore, the usefulness of the Lord depended entirely on its summoner and conditions of summoning. More latent power tapped into meant a stronger Lord.

In a fight among men, it was best for the combatants to go head-to-head. Gao Zhan's aggression was almost overbearing. Using his Demon God's Bloodthirster as a medium, he was calling on its master's wrath. Through his Evil Golden Eye, Jiang Chen was able to see what that actually meant. The time for holding back was over.

Flipping his palm upwards, he summoned his magnetic golden mountain. His consciousness flooded into it like a powerful deluge. Summoning the Lord of the Golden Seal required making forceful contact with it with his consciousness. Waiting for it to wake on its own was a fool's errand. Therefore, he decided to take on the maximum amount of risk in order to summon it directly. From his last memory refining the mountain, the Lord was the final guardian of the mountain, essentially fused to the mountain itself. At the same time though, it had its own intelligence, and wanted to struggle free of the mountain's binds.

Jiang Chen knew that his magnetic golden mountain had remarkable origins. The Lord of the Golden Seal's final form could be nothing short of absolutely terrifying. Abruptly communicating with his consciousness like this was actually quite dangerous. If

the Lord was angered by the gesture, it was possible that it would swallow his consciousness outright.

The Lord of the Golden Seal's consciousness was very different from a human's. It was in a chaotic and muddy state, and the possibility of normal communication was uncertain. Indeed, the magnetic golden mountain in his hand shuddered violently. In the next moment, an awe-striking aura blasted out from the inside. Countless rays of light shot forth from the glittering mountain, all of them shooting into Jiang Chen's consciousness. His thoughts were completely refracted outwards by the beams. In the next moment, a voice filled with age called out. "Are you summoning me, human?"

"Long time no see, Lord of the Golden Seal. I thought you were going to stay asleep forever," Jiang Chen communicated.

"Kid, I wouldn't be so impudent if I were you," the Lord snickered. "Our agreement isn't quite that reliable. Killing you is like swatting a fly for me... wait a moment, this can't be right. How are you sky sage realm by now? Hasn't it been only a few years?"

Jiang Chen smiled coolly. "Haven't you heard of the saying, 'a gentleman who's been away for three days should be seen in a different light?'"

The Lord of the Golden Seal smacked his lips. "Not bad. I almost did just swat you to death, but it looks like our agreement has some chance of being realized after all. You're progressing pretty quickly, huh? Well, out with it. What have you summoned me this time for?"

"For you to show off your magnificence, of course." Jiang Chen grinned.

The Lord cackled. "So, you're saying you want free labor?"

Jiang Chen didn't deny it. "I'm just worried that you're not up for much just after waking up." He knew that spirit creatures like

the Lord of the Golden Seal weren't as quick or smart as the average human. Though this particular brand of reverse psychology was a bit simple, he didn't mind applying it occasionally.

As expected, the Lord growled. "Are you doubting my ability? Hmph. What grade of opponent is it? Eh? There's concentrated essence of metal... is there a spirit here that's just like me, hmm?"

"Maybe not the same," Jiang Chen chuckled, "but there's definitely a fearsome opponent that also holds the essence of metal. How about it, interested?"

"If I say no, will you be disappointed?" The Lord's mind was clearing up. It noticed that it'd fallen for Jiang Chen's trick.

"I won't be disappointed, but our agreement will be null and void." Jiang Chen smiled serenely.

"I'm sure you know already, kid, but how strong I am in a fight depends on you," the Lord of the Golden Seal cackled once more. "How terrifying I am is directly correlated with how much you can get out of the mountain. Still... this opponent seems somewhat interesting, at least."

The desire for battle was palpable in its tone. For something as hawkish as he was, asking for a fight was pretty likely even without the reverse psychology.

Jiang Chen nodded. Time waited for no man. Gao Zhan's pressure was building up to a peak. If he acted any later than this, he'd be a sitting duck. Jiang Chen wasn't some kind of passive masochist. Out of his mouth came a draconic roar. In the next moment, he tossed the mountain out of his palm. Pushing constantly with both palms, he sent two magnetic storms rolling outwards. Like two black holes, the golden magnetic storms swallowed everything in their path as they rushed towards Gao Zhan.

At the same time, Jiang Chen pushed his consciousness to its limits as well. The more he squeezed, the larger the magnetic golden mountain became. Slowly but surely, it expanded in size more and more. The magnetic golden mountain was also known as ten thousand yards high. Its strength was apparent even in the name. A golden mountain hovering above the stage was painfully dazzling. Its light shone everywhere, the very image of a divine descent. The sheer grandeur of the scene caused a renewed wave of murmurs in the crowd. Each and every person in the audience was shocked once more by the mountain's majesty.

"Wow, what is that? A mountain? An enormous golden mountain?"

"Pill King Zhen has a treasure like this? How unnerving! I guess he's never given a match before his all, huh?"

"Is this Pill King Zhen's real trump card?"

"Do you feel it? This golden mountain is strangely magical. It seems to have an infinite amount of edges... it makes me quiver to even look at it." Even the people who were familiar with Jiang Chen couldn't sit tight anymore. Very few knew that he had a treasure like this at all. He had used the mountain against a large number of enemies, true, but anyone that he'd used it against was also dead.

Jiang Chen wasn't holding anything back this time. The magnetic golden mountain was out in force, and the pressure it exerted was absolutely devastating. It was natural that it would stir up an uproar. Even the people from the Coiling Dragon Clan were goggle-eyed at the gigantic golden mountain floating in midair. None of them could speak for quite a while.

"Is this... a mountain? Pill King Zhen refined an entire mountain as a treasure?" The Coiling Dragon clan lord couldn't contain his excitement.

"This mountain also possesses immense metal energy. It's going

to go toe-to-toe with Gao Zhan! This battle is supremely exciting!" Ji San was completely taken by the mountain.

"Hmm. This battle is definitely the most splendid match so far between young lord-level combatants. Yes, they haven't actually fought much, but simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. There is a lot more skill involved in the blows that actually are exchanged, and they're both fighting on a higher level," the clan lord remarked.

Huang'er stood in a corner quietly beneath the stage. Watching her beloved fight like a god amongst mortals filled her heart with pride. After finding such a remarkable man in the wide world, what was there left to regret about life? Every girl had a wonderful prince of her dreams. The only difference with Huang'er was that her noble birth elevated her outlook a great degree. Even the geniuses of Myriad Abyss Island couldn't meet her expectations. She'd met Jiang Chen in the realm of the mortals. He was a man that hadn't deliberately preened his feathers in front of her; nor had he tried to win her over with flattery. And yet it was a man like this who had slowly won her over.

"In only ten years, the son of a duke of an ordinary kingdom has become the equal of the Upper Eight Regions' best geniuses. How many people like that are there in this world, really? A rare occurrence, truly, even in a hundred thousand years." Emperor Peafowl was stirred up by the performance as well. The heart of a man on his level rarely wavered. Still, he found it hard not to in this moment. It was often said that true geniuses answered the call of fate. With respect to Jiang Chen, Emperor Peafowl believed it completely. True geniuses were born by the decrees of heaven and earth, in an hour of need.

No matter whether Jiang Chen won or lost this battle, Emperor Peafowl firmly believed that the youth was the one he was looking for. There was no mistake about it. Cloudsoar Monarch and his peers exclaimed in surprise as well. Judging from the looks they

exchanged demurely, they were clearly impressed. His Majesty had the sharpest eyes of all. No one else could possibly dig out such a relative unknown from a crowd and expect immediate results from the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering alone!

Chapter 972: The Pinnacle Of The Battle

A great towering mountain bore down on the arena, suppressing Gao Zhan's demonic aura. A grave expression appeared on Gao Zhan's face, obviously also extremely shocked by the sight. However, a faint leer soon emerged. "Brat, you won't be able to win just by summoning a golden mountain alone! You want to see who's stronger? I'll grant you that wish!"

He brandished the Demon God's Bloodthirster, flaring out its aura. An image of a demon god appeared from the bloody mist. It immediately grew to a few hundred feet tall and charged at the magnetic golden mountain.

"Turn to dust!" Gao Zhan muttered. The demon god image tried to grab onto the mountain with its thirty meter long limbs.

Jiang Chen smiled and made a downward hand gesture. "Crush it!"

The magnetic golden mountain expanded in size again and bore down on the image. The image stopped grappling the mountain and tried to bear the brunt of the force with its shoulder instead. It tossed the mountain away with its massive arms. Jiang Chen made another hand seal and held the mountain in place.

Gao Zhan didn't show any sign of weakness. He immediately tossed the Demon God's Bloodthirster towards the demon god image. The image grabbed hold of the weapon and struck the mountain with full intensity. Crack! The force within the strike was enough to split heaven and earth. It had an aura that seemed like it could split the mountain in half.

Jiang Chen could clearly see great amounts of magnetic force that emerged from the mountain to encircle the demon god image. It so happened that the force intercepted the descending strike. The sword was able to cleave the magnetic force apart, but the mountain itself was not the slightest bit harmed. He however, was

dumbfounded that even the magnetic force was split into two. He quickly collected his thoughts before he pushed his consciousness to the limit and yelled, “How can I let it have all the fun in this battle? Come on out!”

He made a few more hand seals and summoned an enormous golem that emerged from the golden aura of the mountain. The Lord of the Golden Seal had finally awakened after many years. Jiang Chen was taken aback by the Lord’s enormously stalwart body. It was currently ten times more majestic than before and didn’t look any less impressive than the demon god image. Moreover, the Lord’s body was a truly material body formed from an amalgamation of essences. While the demon god image’s true body might be an ancient demon god much stronger than the Lord’s, it was currently just an image. As such, it was impossible for it to be stronger.

The two metallic giants begun to brawl in the air, shaking the very earth and sky. Jiang Chen and Gao Zhan had become supporting characters in the battle. Summoning the demon god had taken a great toll on Gao Zhan’s body. Jiang Chen was in no better condition either. Both of them were extremely focused. They couldn’t afford to be distracted for even a second. Jiang Chen already understood the extent of Gao Zhan’s abilities, but Gao Zhan couldn’t say the same about Jiang Chen. His opponent had just countered his ultimate move with a summon similar to his. How could he not be surprised that both their summons were neck to neck in strength?

Zhen! Are you truly a chess piece nurtured by Emperor Peafowl? The future heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain? He had begun fostering such thoughts even though he wasn’t the sort to care about these issues. It wasn’t as though he’d never fought geniuses from Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He’d never thought that anyone was truly more capable than him, except for young lord Fan. However, that young lord no longer existed. Because of that, Gao

Zhan was certain that he would one day trump over every single Peafowl genius. Perhaps one or two would be able to put up a fight, but he would crush all the others. This would be a good thing for Emperor Shura's faction. However, Gao Zhan was no longer as optimistic as before. The Demonic Wrath was already his strongest move.

There was still a few other moves in his arsenal, but none as powerful as this one. Victory wouldn't be possible if he failed to end the fight with this move. The very most he could manage was end the fight with a draw after exhausting all of his energy. What do I do? A crack had appeared in his dao heart despite his calm demeanor. The thought that his ultimate move could fail to dominate his opponent had never crossed his mind.

I can't believe how powerful that brat is. Even the Demonic Wrath is no use against him. If this goes on any further, both of us will be heavily injured by the time I've exhausted my inner energy. He wouldn't be satisfied with that ending. He wanted to win. He wanted to take down his opponent. Victory wasn't the only thing at stake here. The foundation of his dao heart and the glory of Emperor Shura's faction was all on the line. He was driven to extremes after such thoughts.

Using his index and middle finger, he stabbed continuously at a few acupoints on his body. A human body contained many acupoints, each with its own specific purpose. After poking himself, a purplish-red miasma began to exude from his body. It looked extremely sinister. His entire body began to transform. Hands, neck, face... drastic changes occured all over them. It was an extremely dramatic transformation that made him beyond recognition. His muscles turned metallic and his face a rictus of violence. He was a vile demon that crawled out from the depths of hell. The surrounding air was filled with killing intent.

"Demonic transformation?" Jiang Chen recalled Emperor Peafowl's advice on the path of demonic slaughter. Those who

cultivated this path had the ability to conjure a demonic form. They would gain a temporary increase in strength for the duration of the transformation. Fortunately, Jiang Chen had made preparations in advance to deal with such an eventuality He didn't run nor did he cower. His hands moved quickly from one seal to another, summoning two magnetic storms from the Magnetic Golden Mountain. Both of these storms shot towards Gao Zhan, flanking his opponent.

These magnetic storms weren't originary attacks. They were capable of devouring the surrounding air and tearing everything into dust. Gao Zhan roared violently, causing his image to grow several magnitudes larger. Bam! Bam! He launched two fists towards the storms. The storms had an immensely powerful vortex. The fists failed to destroy them, but was able to deflect them towards the arena instead. Wham! The arena would've been devoured by the storms if it hadn't been specially fortified for such an event.

"Die brat!" Gao Zhan no longer cared about the Demonic Wrath. He began to consume the energy within his very blood to continue the fight. His only goal right now was to defeat his enemy as quickly as possible.

Jiang Chen snorted coldly. He understood that his enemy's strength had doubled due to the demonic transformation and this was no time to fight him head on. He quickly recited a mantra, causing a dazzling light to emerge from his back. It meandered above its head before it materialized into a true dragon image.

"Go!" He commanded with a wave of his arms. The true dragon image contained a great amount of true dragon's presence. It brandished its claws and charged towards Gao Zhan's demonic body. Well, it looks like Jiang Chen had chosen to fight head on after all.

The demonic body was incredibly strong, but the true dragon image was no slouch either. It was difficult to say who would win

when a demon met a true dragon. The dragon image's strength almost seemed to defy all logic. Gao Zhan's body was filled with a great amount of savagery, yet it struggled to break free from the true dragon's harassment. They were two fated enemies, colliding and pounding each other endlessly. The Lord of the Golden Seal was engaged in intense battle with the demon god image. It was still slowly growing in strength as he had just awoken from slumber. They were very equally matched as the image didn't even contain a tenth of its body's true capabilities.

However, the Lord had an endless source of energy thanks to the magnetic golden mountain. It only grew stronger as time went on. The image had no such abilities as it was merely a conjured artifact. Jiang Chen was aware of the situation. He further called upon the mountain to provide the Lord of the Golden Seal with endless amounts of power. The lord was an entity over a hundred thousand years old after all. His power had continued to rise as he regained more of his consciousness. It didn't take long before the demon god image started losing.

Bam! Bam! Bam! The image had taken the full brunt of the lord's fists. It was about to be extinguished like a candle flame under a strong gust. The Lord continued to pummel the image like a punching bag, causing it to shrink as it lost strength. The image's power was even being absorbed by the Lord via the pummeling. It was evident that the battle in the skies was about to come to an end.

"Smash it!" Jiang Chen commanded through his consciousness when he realized that the Lord had gained the upper hand.

The Lord grinned. "Don't worry. It's done for."

It had been sealed in the magnetic golden mountain as its guardian for over a hundred thousand years. A great amount of negative emotion had built up inside of it from the countless years of monotony and boredom. A fight like this was its best chance to vent its frustrations. How would it not take advantage of this

opportunity when it was handed to it?

The demon god image continued to shrink as the lord continued to pummel it with his fists. Gao Zhan was overwhelmed by anxiety when he saw what was happening. He was caught between a rock and a hard place. The demon god image was in great danger, while his demonic body had failed to gain an upper hand due to the constant harassment from the true dragon image. Domination crept in from all sides!

Chapter 973: Overwhelming Victory

Jiang Chen further called upon the magnetic golden mountain once the Lord of the Golden Seal had fully gained the upper hand. The Lord's aura continued to strengthen as the mountain grew bigger.

"Destroy it!" Jiang Chen waved his arms, focusing all his strength into a single strike. The Lord did as commanded and viciously pounced towards the wavering demon image with everything it had. It grabbed the image with its great pincer-like hands and tore it apart as though it was nothing but rotten rags. It then raised his colossal arms up high like a triumphant champion. Its victorious roar could be heard throughout the capital. The audience was rendered speechless by its dominance.

Gao Zhan's heart spasmed when the demon god image was destroyed. The Lord laughed as it transformed into a flash of light and rapidly descended down towards the arena. It wanted to crush Gao Zhan's demonic body with its palms. The enormous golden palm made the situation much more dire for the young lord as his demonic body was already being besieged by the true dragon image. The sky was crashing down as a great force of destruction from above. He could feel an immediate danger to his life. He was very sensitive to danger due to the path he cultivated.

He couldn't afford to waste any more time with the true dragon image. He rolled on the ground, attempting to escape the palm strike. He was very quick, but the Lord was even faster. Gao Zhan was fortunate that he didn't try to bear the full brunt of this attack as he was focused on escaping. However, he was still struck by the palm.

Bam! The heavy strike caused him to vomit blood as he was already at the end of his string. He was slapped mercilessly like a housefly and flew off the arena. He landed squarely in the dirt off the stage. The impact of his devastating fall kicked up a plume of

dust.

The arena was briefly filled with silence. It was as if the world had frozen and all sound was muted. Everyone was thoroughly surprised by what they saw. The audience only broke into uproarious applause after a few breaths. Their faces turned beet red from the exertions of their excitement. It had been an incredibly thrilling match. Veluriyam Capital's idol hadn't failed to live up to expectations! His victory was a testament to his immeasurable strength! Even the top ten young lord geniuses were no match for the pill king! He was still capable of dominating the battles!

Every cultivator in the martial dao world dreamed about becoming a hero. Since it was unlikely for them to realize their dreams, they often placed their hopes and dreams on their idols and prayed for their success. The pill king had become a hero of Veluriyam Capital after an overwhelming series of victories. He had gone from a pill dao hero to a martial dao hero, solidifying his legacy within the capital. The entire capital was taken by a celebratory mood. Young lord Fan had been tossed into the back of their minds. Who was young lord Fan? He was truly lacking when compared to the pill king. Sure, he was stronger and more adept at martial dao, but he had less earth shattering achievements than the pill king. The former young lord was also older. The pill king would surely reach greater heights once he'd reach the young lord's age! His achievement of defeating the Pillfire City was something the young lord could never hope to mimic, and so was fighting countless uphill battles as the ultimate dark horse. Everyone was certain that given time, the pill king would eventually surpass young lord Fan in martial dao.

"Long live Pill King Zhen!"

"Pill King Zhen!! Pill King Zhen!!"

"Make Pill King Zhen heir! We support Pill King Zhen!"

“Veluriyam Capital needs Pill King Zhen!”

“The pill king will only lead us a greater future!” The audience yelled with everything they had. They were shouting their lungs out in hopes that the seven great emperors would hear their heartfelt wishes. They wanted the leaders to know the people’s choice!

News of the pill king’s victory immediately spread throughout the capital. Many citizens left their houses to celebrate in the streets. Not all of them were familiar with Pill King Zhen. In fact, many couldn’t even recognize him. However, there wasn’t a single person that hasn’t heard his legendary stories. The fact that he’d single handedly defeated Pillfire City had already made him a worthy hero to the Capital. Greatly revered heroes were essential in the martial dao world. Rumors ran rampant amongst the commoners, naming the pill king as the Capital’s hero. His duel with Pill King Ji Lang was even said to be a duel of national pride and status.

The citizens of Veluriyam Capital had always been more united than those of other places. They needed another great hero to rise from the youths to fill the gaps in their hearts after the loss of young Lord Fan. Jiang Chen seemed to have done just that. Emperor Peafowl had also played a small part behind the scenes, but Jiang Chen had been able to conquer the hearts of the citizens through his own abilities and talent. The crowds’ cheers have made Jiang Chen feel like he had fully assimilated into their society. He was being seen as one of them. A man was of flesh and blood, how would he not respond to this outpour of affection?

A warm feeling coursed through Jiang Chen’s veins when he saw all these unfamiliar faces celebrate in his stead. They were applauding, cheering, shouting, and sharing all of his ups and downs. So this is what it feels like to be loved and revered by others. It’s every bit as great as I’ve imagined. He was revered in his previous life because he was the son of the Celestial Emperor.

This time however, he had earned it through his own efforts, strength, and charisma. The sense of fulfilment was vastly different.

“It’s unfortunate that everyone was only given three challenges in these rankings. Otherwise, the pill king might still have a chance to move up to an even higher rank."

“Yeah. The pill king must’ve chosen Gao Zhan because he was unfamiliar with the geniuses within the top ten. He would’ve had a good winning chance in the top five.”

“No worries. Eighth place puts him in the first group to enter the Pagoda. He is still young. He will definitely surpass the other geniuses on the ranking in a decade or two. They might even have to make way for him voluntarily by then!”

“Mm! I’m looking forward to it. Maybe one day, the pill king will represent the capital to conquer all of the Upper Eight Regions! We will be unbeatable!”

“Heh. The Upper Eight Regions has all kinds of geniuses. But only Pill King Zhen from Veluriyam Capital is exemplary in both martial and pill dao!” Everyone in Veluriyam Capital was proud of the pill king’s achievements. There was no doubt that he’d become a person of utmost eminence here .

The top seven were all stunned by Jiang Chen’s battle. There were a few that was even secretly glad that he was limited to only three challenges. Since he had used up all three of his chances, their position within the rankings was no longer threatened. They were also glad that the pill king had chosen to challenge Gao Zhan instead. They were almost certain that things would’ve ended the same if they were in his shoes. They reckoned that the pill king was actually capable of fighting his way into the top three!

“Ah... it’s a shame that he chose a little too conservatively. I feel that there was at least a fifty percent chance that he could beat the fifth rank young lord!” Ji San exclaimed in pity and la long sigh.

“Ole Third, the significance of eighth place is a lot bigger than you think. He started from the very bottom and won every single match to get to where he is now. Not even the top five can ignore him anymore.” The clan lord was seeing the bigger picture.

Ji San grinned. “That much is true, but it would look nicer if he was ranked fifth instead!”

The clan lord sighed gently. “Some people are meant to be geniuses from the moment of birth. Even without fame or prestige, they will shine as long as there is a stage for them to showcase their skills. Ole Third, becoming his sworn brother is truly your greatest fortune.”

Everyone was certain that Emperor Peafowl was going to declare the pill king as heir by now. Ji San puffed his chest up. “Don’t worry, clan lord. I will work hard to make sure that the world acknowledges me as a worthy sworn brother to Pill King Zhen!”

He had become increasingly confident ever since he’d obtained the true dragon’s blood. Without it, he would never have had the assurance to say such a thing. The clan lord had no idea where this confidence had come from, but he was very satisfied with his reply.

“There probably isn’t much left to see in the Ranking of Young Lords. I reckon there won’t be any more dark horses like the pill king.”

It was very unlikely that anyone else would have an impressive climb like the pill king.

Emperor Shura had nearly failed to contain his rage when he saw Gao Zhan slapped off the stage. He’d lost yet again! Nothing seemed to have gone right ever since the pill king appeared in the capital. Even the disciple he was most proud of had lost to that brat. His thousand year long plan would soon go up in flames if this were to continue.

Chapter 974: End of the Ranking Battles

Gao Shen wasn't dead after being thrown off the stage. He wasn't even heavily injured. But for someone who walked the way of demonic slaughter, only two outcomes were possible when he was physically and mentally injured. Either he found inspiration from humiliation and made more progress, reaching new heights in his martial dao, or this spelled his doom and he was never able to recover. The former required a strong dao heart and resolution to sweep away the demons of yesterday, whereas the latter happened to roughly eighty percent of this path's cultivators.

Although Emperor Shura burned with fury, he didn't lose his composure as he swept a glance around his camp. Beneath Emperor Shura's command were the three monarchs: Sun, Moon, and Star. Below them was his most treasured disciple, Li Jiancheng. The monarchs were the emperor's most trusted lieutenants, holding positions similar to those of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's four monarchs. Li Jiancheng, on the other hand, was Emperor Shura's favorite student and heir: similar to the late young lord Fan.

Young lord Fan had been a youth who'd sought magnanimity, perfection, and popularity. In stark contrast to him, Li Jiancheng valued swagger, dominance, and authority. Thus, he rarely did anything in the pursuit of a wider following. In the public perspective, he was a lofty character high above the clouds, a genius beyond comprehension. Almost untouchable, in a sense. Young lord Fan, on the other hand, was thought of as a more sincere and down-to-earth individual.

Still, if one had to find geniuses among the city's younger generation who could match the late young lord, the first choice would be Li Jiancheng. He had a martial dao that was oppressive to the point of being tyrannical. Even young lord Fan at peak performance could barely overcome it.

Rumor had it that Li Jiancheng had been honing a very powerful technique in the last few years. Once completed, it would have been potent enough to force even young lord Fan to give it proper respect. Having spent so much time refining the technique in recent years, Li Jiancheng had been surpassed by his junior brother Gao Zhan in notoriety. However, it wasn't that his martial dao talent was inferior. Though it tended to manifest itself in imperious, dominant techniques, Li Jiancheng was actually fairly discreet. He was a bit of an opportunist, infinitely ambitious and without scruples. Because of this, the younger generation within Emperor Shura's inner circle all called him 'crown prince' in private. The title made his pretensions self-evident.

"What do you think about Gao Zhan's loss, Jiancheng?" Emperor Shura rested his gaze upon his pupil, his tone austere.

Li Jiancheng was impassive. "Gao Zhan did not lose because of ineptitude, nor did he lack the intrinsic qualities needed to win. Pill King Zhen had too many trump cards up his sleeve. The sheer resourcefulness he displayed disrupted junior brother Gao Zhan's rhythm. It'd be more accurate to call it crushed it outright. "

Emperor Shura acknowledged the analysis. "Pill King Zhen's origin remains a mystery, but the fact that Emperor Peafowl wants to push him to the forefront is crystal clear."

"Your Majesty, why does Emperor Peafowl want to make Pill King Zhen the new young lord? Does Sacred Peafowl Mountain want to maintain control of the city for another few thousand years? Are they that unwilling to hand over their current authority?" The Moon Monarch couldn't help but ask. No one in Emperor Shura's faction was happy with their current position– third in prominence nominally, second-in-command in actuality. They prepared every waking moment to take the reins from Emperor Peafowl, down to the preparations of the great clans and houses. The Majestic Clan that was now history, for example. They'd pressured Coiling Dragon Clan step by step as a show of

force. They wanted to create the impression that Sacred Peafowl Mountain was under siege from every direction. Alas, the entire faction had sustained loss after loss after Pill King Zhen's appearance. It had begun with the fall of the Majestic Clan, continued with the rumor about replacing young lord Fan, and been supported even further by the decisive victory over Gao Zhan just now...

This series of defeats had dealt a fatal blow to the faction's machinations. Their painstaking designs were shattered overnight. Moon Monarch's question resonated with everyone else present. Was Emperor Peafowl going to pass the throne to Emperor Shura, or not? Leaving such a question unanswered for so long was absolutely heartbreaking for the latter's entire faction.

Emperor Shura was grim. "Emperor Peafowl has never acted with any kind of predictability. Rumors often have a grain of truth to them, and I think there's a fair bit of veracity to this one in particular. Pill King Zhen is an unknown quantity, so anything is possible."

"So... have our plans been for naught, then?" Moon Monarch was frantic.

"Our plans have been stalled temporarily, but it's not as grave as you say," Emperor Shura explained coolly. "Emperor Peafowl has his heart on the wider world. There must be a deeper reason for his hurry to select a new young lord. Furthermore, there's no way that the emperor will simply leave the awakening demons alone. No matter how extraordinary this Pill King Zhen is, he'll still need another century or two to shoulder the burden of the capital at large. If we can't find a breaching point for that long, then we deserve to fail."

Each listener sank into thought at the emperor's words. Before long, Moon Monarch smiled once more. "You're right. No matter how astonishing that Pill King Zhen proves to be, he's only a youth. He has a long way to go before he's able to inherit the

throne. Who knows if there'll be some accident before then?"

The other two monarchs nodded in agreement. Emperor Shura glanced towards his favorite disciple. "It seems, Jiancheng, that the young lord Fan of yesteryear and the Pill King Zhen of present have chosen similar paths. They've both invested themselves into winning over the hearts of the people. If you really wish to pursue the throne, you should think about doing so as well."

His student's biggest merit was his willingness to think. He accepted the criticism of others in a constructive fashion. After a few moments of consideration, Li Jiancheng inclined his head. "I will ponder the matter seriously, master."

"Following this, Pill King Zhen will be in the limelight for quite a while. Maintaining the proper state of mind is key for us. The game for power is not played over days or weeks. Remember how glamorous young lord Fan was, and how suddenly he fell!" Emperor Shura smiled faintly. As the leader of his faction, he had to raise his subordinates' morale.

"Master is correct. These recent engagements are insignificant in the grand scheme of things. As long as Emperor Peafowl is around, the situation in Veluriyam Capital will not change. When that changes, so will the order here." Li Jiancheng nodded in vehement agreement.

"Well said!" Emperor Shura showed a satisfied smile. "No matter what, you're still first in the Ranking of Young Lords. Nobody can deny that fact."

Because of young lord Fan's death, there was no contest in Li Jiancheng's position at the head of the Ranking. The second-best disciple under Emperor Peafowl was Zhou Yan, a genius of sword dao. Because of his youth, his renown didn't quite match either young lord Fan or Li Jiancheng. After the loss of the former, he could still only be placed behind Li Jiancheng as a close second.

Even his current position was held in some doubt. Some said that

the spot had been yielded to him out of respect because he was one of Emperor Peafowl's students. There was some plausibility to that. Shui Rutian, in third place, was the foremost disciple of Emperor Petalpluck. His zen dao had reached the point of forming realms, and it wasn't a stretch to call him Li Jiancheng's equal in this regard. Many thought that he was more qualified than Zhou Yan to take second place. Naturally, the ranking battles that followed would reveal the truth to that opinion.

Sitting squarely in eighth place on the Ranking of Young Lords, Jiang Chen became strangely prominent. Ninth and seventh around him didn't dare entertain the thought that it was undeserved. Quite the opposite: they felt a sliver of pressure just by being next to a genius like him. It was common for people to compare closely-placed things, after all. Under that magnifying glass, even the best of geniuses couldn't help but be a little self-conscious.

The ranking battles continued. Jiang Chen had begun his challenge from the 20th position. After his set of challenges concluded, it was the 19th ranked genius' turn.

The proceedings continued another ten days before everyone below the top ten finished their challenges. Jiang Chen's eighth-ranked spot was entirely secure during this period. Nobody issued a challenge against him. His neighbors were both challenged for their spots. Jiang Chen himself, though, was entirely separate from the conflict, with not a single contender in sight.

His victory against Gao Zhan had sealed his station. His talent and ability had been made known to everyone else in the running for the Ranking of Young Lords. All of them understood how difficult this Pill King Zhen was to deal with. Only the internal struggle among the top ten remained.

There was little ambiguity in the matter. The tenth-ranked genius chose to challenge the ninth-ranked, losing by a hair's difference. The ninth-ranked skipped Jiang Chen, choosing the

seventh-ranked. He lost with a similar breadth of discrepancy, failing to move up in the rankings. This marked the end of Jiang Chen's work in the Ranking of Young Lords. Since he'd attained his spot through challenging higher-ranked opponents three times, he no longer had any such opportunities remaining. It was, then, the seventh-ranked's turn to consider his own chances at upward mobility. Because the challenges were restricted to higher-ranked opponents, Jiang Chen no longer needed to have anything to do with them.

After a momentous battle between seventh and sixth, the latter won a pyrrhic victory. He paid a heavy price: he had no strength remaining to contend with the fifth-place genius. Everyone expected there to be fierce competition in the top five, but the result was actually quite peaceful. The fifth-ranked genius, Wang Dongyu, decided to give up his three chances.

Fourth place, Ye Piaoling, was a disciple of Emperor Vastsea. Challenging Zhou Yan in second place, he was soundly defeated by a mighty sword technique.

Third place, Shui Rutian, chose the first-ranked Li Jiancheng as his target. After a vicious fight, the latter came out slightly better in the end.

The second-ranked Zhou Yan met the same fate. His challenge to first place took place three days afterwards, when Li Jiancheng had sufficiently rested. Just like Shui Rutian, his loss was narrow but certain. With that, all of the challenge battles in the Ranking of Young Lords concluded.

The top seven were exactly the same as the preliminary rankings. The eighth was Pill King Zhen, the darkest horse of this year's entire Ranking! The second-darkest horse was young master Ji San, finishing at twenty-first place. He was the only scion of the great clans to make it into the Ranking of Young Lords.

Chapter 975: Proclamation of Young Lord

With the battles for the Ranking of Young Lords finished, the months-long Veluriyam Pagoda gathering was almost at an end. The next order of affairs was awarding the victors their spoils. The top 36 of the Pill Pagoda battles were eligible to study within the Pill Pagoda. The top 36 of the Martial Pagoda battles were permitted to cultivate within the Main Pagoda, and those in the Genius Rankings, the Martial Pagoda.

There were three pagodas in the Veluriyam Pagoda complex. The Main Pagoda was flanked by the Martial and Pill Pagodas. Martial geniuses had a slight edge in the competition: those in the Ranking of Young Lords could enter the Main Pagoda, but those in the Genius Rankings had the Martial Pagoda as a consolation prize. The benefits and opportunities available in the Martial Pagoda were inferior to those in the Main Pagoda's, but they were still quite attractive for those in the Genius Rankings.

The three pagodas opened only once every sixty years, and many people competed for only a few chances at entry. The three hundred were chosen out of countless cultivators were recipients of utmost honor. Their attendance and victory represented the entire Veluriyam Capital on this occasion. Of course, there were still a few ceremonies to go before the pagodas actually opened. It would be slightly anti-climatic to go without, given the event's rarity. It was also a time where all seven emperors would make an appearance.

There were at least three hundred thousand congregated upon the enormous square in front of Veluriyam Pagoda. All the geniuses who'd been able to stand out from the crowd had their own place in the center of the square, ready to receive the emperors' examination and plaudits. Aside from the seven emperors' factions, the twenty-eight great clans and a few of the more powerful aristocratic houses had places as well. In addition

to the recognition that came with the event, there were a few rewards ready to be gifted as well.

Compared to the prize of being able to cultivate and study within the Veluriyam Pagoda, these rewards were only symbolic. Nevertheless, they still represented a hard-fought glory that no one would refuse. Dressed in opulent, five-colored robes, Emperor Peafowl was in high spirits. His commanding presence revealed the head of Veluriyam Capital's style in full. Their breaths held, the audience awaited the emperor to give his speech.

Smiling serenely, Emperor Peafowl began to speak. "We at Veluriyam Capital have many traditions both ancient and sacred, and the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering is one of the oldest, most splendid, and liveliest! This year's gathering has brought us another wave of promising geniuses and was an extremely successful festival. It's been a show unmatched for almost a thousand years! Whether pill or martial dao, we have seen abundant talent in both fields. More notably, two dark horses have made their way into the Ranking of Young Lords. Their stirring of the pond has set a wonderful example that I hope more are able to follow. Relating to this, I have an exciting announcement to make..."

The emperor took an intentional pause at this point in the speech. The bubbling chatter everywhere around the square ceased at once. Heavy silence set in instantly. The audience's collective gazes burned in the emperor's direction. An exciting announcement? Was there finally going to be a clear statement about Pill King Zhen? Was his ascent to Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord decided at last? The collective expectations of the common people rested upon Emperor Peafowl.

As for the seven emperors: some were surprised, some thoughtful, some looked like they'd expected it all along, and some furrowed their brows in abject sullenness. Emperor Peafowl didn't seem to take note of any of that. His expression remained as laid-

back as ever. “I believe that you’ve all been troubled by a rumor lately. So, I have a formal declaration to make. On Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s behalf, I appoint Pill King Zhen as my foremost successor. Thus concludes the conflict over our Mountain’s heritage.”

These words reverberated in everyone’s ears as if a bell’s gong, hammering on their very hearts. Thunderous applause came from every direction. Tides upon tides of cheering rushed forth.

“Young lord Zhen! Young lord Zhen!” Countless cultivators shouted the name aloud with all passion and emotion. They were happy, wholeheartedly happy, for both Pill King Zhen himself and the wisdom of Emperor Peafowl’s decision.

Despite being informed beforehand, Jiang Chen still felt a small quake in his heart when he heard Emperor Peafowl utter the words aloud. He locked eyes with Emperor Peafowl across the square, the two minds mingling for just an instant. Rising from his own seat, Jiang Chen cupped his fist in greeting to the entire square. He’d received only the utmost support, only the best treatment, from the entire Veluriyam Capital.

He’d heard their encouragement and applause in each and every battle. Though it had displeased his opponents, it was also the highest of honors for him personally. How could they support him with such heartfelt abandon without truly holding him in love and esteem? Waxing emotional, he felt the immense pressure on his own shoulders. The better the treatment, the weightier the responsibility. Jiang Chen knew that as well as anyone. The four monarchs of Sacred Peafowl Mountain strode up to offer their goodwill.

“Congratulations, Pill King Zhen! I am simply astounded by your skill,” Cloudsoar Monarch exclaimed. “A genius skilled in both pill and martial dao! It’s hard to find more than a handful in Veluriyam like that, even in a thousand years.”

Chronobalance Monarch was a rough man. “Work hard! I expect great things from you,” he boomed.

“Don’t let His Majesty down,” Wildfox Monarch said.

As the only woman among the four monarchs, Plumscore Monarch stared at Jiang Chen the longest. “It’s hard to find youths who’ve accomplished things as great as you have. I only hope that you don’t let it get to your head too much.”

Jiang Chen smiled and nodded politely at all of their words. As the number one disciple at Sacred Peafowl Mountain after young lord Fan’s fall, Zhou Yan had the most mixed of feelings of anyone present. He had hoped for a chance at becoming young lord himself, one day. Alas, it turned out that the title was passed to Pill King Zhen instead. Depressingly, Zhou Yan remained second place. As someone deathly loyal to Emperor Peafowl however, he hailed every decision from the emperor as a stone-set law. This was no different. Though it was very harsh to him, he convinced himself internally to give his blessings anyway.

“Senior brother Zhen, I wish you all the best. Even though I have a few doubts still about His Majesty’s choice of you as the new young lord, I hope that all of them will be dispelled in the coming days. When that happens, I will absolutely be one of your staunchest aides. I promise that our relationship will be a problem-free one.” Zhou Yan was quite honest about what he thought. There was no false courtesy in his speech.

Jiang Chen exchanged a long look with the youth. The sword dao genius’ gaze was plain and honorable. “We’re going to spend many of the coming days together. There’ll be many opportunities to prove ourselves to each other, no?” He inclined his head, smiling.

Returning the smile, the second-best disciple returned to his seat. Zhou Yan wasn’t the biggest conversationalist, but his heart was cloudless and lucid.

“My compliments to you, Pill King Zhen! It can be said that I was

your guide to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, so I still find it hard to believe that you're one of them now. You're really making your way up the world!" This was the Coiling Dragon clan lord .

"I sincerely thank the kindness of your recommendation." Jiang Chen grinned in acknowledgement.

Wei Tianxiao edged over shakily as well. As a member of a ninth-ranked aristocratic house, he wasn't usually permitted to speak on occasions like this. However, Pill King Zhen was still nominally the guest pill king of House Wei. Thus, the house's young master worked up the courage to go up and put in a word. "Pill King Zhen, House Wei thanks you from the bottom of our hearts. You were the one that rescued us from a perilous situation and improved our outlooks so much over these past couple of years. Our house will pass down the tradition of our cooperation with you over many generations."

It had been only three winters and summers since Jiang Chen's initial arrival in Veluriyam Capital. He had needed to watch his actions and words in front of Wei Tianxiao, back then. But now the latter had to call himself subordinate in front of the former. Such was the way of the world. It often changed in the blink of an eye. Still, it was clearly a desirable change for House Wei's young master. There was only good in it. If House Wei could receive Pill King Zhen's continued assistance, what was there to worry about the house's future?

No matter whether they had any relations with the pill king prior to this, all the great clans allied with Emperor Peafowl came to congratulate Jiang Chen as well. No matter what they thought internally, it was hard fact that Pill King Zhen was Sacred Peafowl Mountain's new young lord. Nobody wanted to leave a bad first impression. Even those who weren't necessarily aligned with Sacred Peafowl Mountain stepped forward in greeting. Their words were warm and affectionate.

Jiang Chen had received a formal title today, directly from

Emperor Peafowl's own mouth. This act carried significant meaning.

Before, he had been Pill King Zhen, the guest pill king of House Wei. Now, he was elevated far above that, into the company of Veluriyam Capital's loftiest. In terms of position and status, his current and former states could not be compared. Beneath the seven emperors themselves, even the great clans and monarchs had to accord a measure of respect to a young lord. Though it was slightly exaggerated to say the young lord was second only to the emperor, he was definitely more than equal to just about anyone else. Moreover, besides Emperor Shura and Vastsea, every other emperor and their corresponding faction was largely supportive of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's decision to name a new young lord.

At the end of the day, Veluriyam Capital under Emperor Peafowl had always been stable and strong. What was wrong with letting Sacred Peafowl Mountain continue their rule over the city? Yes, Emperor Shura was very powerful, but he was still missing something compared to Emperor Peafowl. On the other hand, Pill King Zhen had many of the same qualities as Emperor Peafowl himself: mysterious, indecipherable, and full of surprises. He also had an advantage that Emperor Peafowl lacked: he was skilled in both martial and pill dao! If Pill King Zhen really did come to power after another few centuries, Veluriyam's pill industry would surely be taken to a higher level. There was more than a little hope of being able to challenge Pillfire City. It was no wonder that a young lord like this would receive so much approval from the entire city.

Chapter 976: The Most Popular Young Lord

Emperor Shura and Emperor Vastsea had no choice but to present their congratulatory speeches to Jiang Chen as well. They congratulated him with a smile even though it was the last thing they wanted to do. After all, one was expected to show poise and respect at all times when one reached the level of a great emperor. Cordiality had to be maintained even if there was some conflict behind the scenes. Things were finally settled after they had given their felicitations.

Emperor Peafowl smiled at Jiang Chen. “Big events like this don’t happen too often. Go give a speech or two so that people can familiarize themselves with you.”

Jiang Chen didn’t decline. He made his way onto the stage and waved his hands in all directions. “Ever since the first day I’ve stepped foot in this capital, I’ve had an intense feeling that this was no ordinary place. That day was also the very day which all of you were grieving over the loss of young lord Fan. I could immediately tell that the citizens here are all of one heart and possess faith just by the amount of sadness and grief in the air. That was the exact moment when I decided that this place was worthy of a longer stay.”

Jiang Chen speech was immediately interrupted by the crowd’s deafening applause. His voice was drowned out by the crowd. The eyes of some of the older cultivators were red. They busied themselves wiping tears off their cheeks. It was evident that Jiang Chen’s speech had touched them. It was true. Veluriyam Capital was full of believers. Every single one of them was proud to call this place home. They were family. Everyone worked hard for the betterment of this place.

Jiang Chen calmly waited for the applause to die down before he continued. “I’ve only received great hospitality and support ever since I’ve opened Taiyuan Tower. There have been some obstacles

along the way, but all of you have been impartial and took the side of justice, instead of discriminating an outsider like me. Such traits are incredibly rare. That was the precise moment that I fell in love with this place. I am proud to be of Veluriyam Capital."

"After that, I was fortunately able to overthrow Pillfire City's scheme and defend the pride of our capital. To be honest, I only did what I thought was right as a pill master. However, what I received in exchange was an incredible amount of love and respect from all of you. To this day, I still stand by my view that I've received too much for what I've given. What have I done to deserve such undying support in the Martial Pagoda battles?" His voice began to tremble at this point. What followed next was endless applause. Emperor Peafowl had to raise his hands to temporarily quiet the crowd.

"I could feel the amount of support and care just by looking at your expressions and your actions. I will not speak empty words now that I am crowned heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. All I wish to say is this. As long as I am alive, I promise to never bend at a task and spare no effort for the sake of Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Veluriyam Capital. I will never betray the trust and support I've received from everyone!" Jiang Chen bowed deeply after he was done with the speech. The crowd applauded yet again. There had been three segments to his speech and he'd received three rounds of applause, each one longer than the previous one.

"Young lord Zhen, don't be modest! You've already done plenty for the capital!"

"Yeah! You've defeated Pill King Ji Lang and Pillfire City! This reason alone is enough for us to cheer for you!"

"Not only that, but the Longevity Pill is also a very important contribution to the capital. It is a ray of hope for sage realm cultivators, and also greatly increases the appeal of our Capital!"

"That is true. Taiyuan Tower has released many new pills and

broken much ground. Their contribution to the pill market here shouldn't be ignored."

"Mm. And what about the numerous lectures? He has also taught us a lot about the demon race. Isn't that a great contribution as well?"

"Yeah! Young lord Zhen, you definitely deserve our hospitality!"

"Young lord Zhen! We support you!"

"We will forever be your supporters!" They were shouting their lungs out, as though worried that Jiang Chen might not hear them. Emperor Peafowl was pleased by what he saw. He been silently helping Jiang Chen build his reputation so that the crowd would support the pill king when he was announced as heir. His plan was an evident success. Jiang Chen's contributions had truly added up over the years. The citizens of Veluriyam Capital greatly revered their heroes and also respected people with much contributions to the place. A high position within the capital didn't guarantee respect from the citizens. It was the bigger the contribution, the greater the respect they would receive. This was also the most important factor in Emperor Peafowl's strategy.

It was supposed to be Emperor Peafowl's speech, but Jiang Chen occupied the limelight instead as he'd just been made heir. Nobody thought that it was inappropriate except for Emperor Shura and Emperor Vastsea's factions. However, they didn't want to dampen the crowd's spirits with their opinions. They would surely become public enemy number one if they chose to criticize the pill king now.

"Alright. It's time that we move on and show recognition to all the winners..." Emperor Peafowl finally decided to bring the crowd back onto topic. The crowd had yet to regain their senses after the announcement.They weren't done expressing their joy yet. Show recognition to other geniuses? The other geniuses were of little importance to them. The pill king was the only worthy existence in

their minds.

Emperor Peafowl made another announcement after the ceremony. “The 36 finalists of the Pill Pagoda Battles shall enter the pill pagoda. You will enter your respective regions according to your rank. Three months, six months, one year, and 2 years. That’s the amount of time you’re respectively allowed in the pagoda according to your ranking.”

The lower the ranking, the less time one was given within the pagoda. The same rule was applied for the Genius Rankings, as well as the Ranking of Young Lords. Their identities were thoroughly looked into before they were allowed into the pagoda. The investigators were much more thorough with the young lords, especially since the integrity of the main pagoda was at stake. Jiang Chen had no issues whatsoever with the investigators as he was now the young lord of the capital.

The three pagodas would open three days days later. The geniuses were given that window of time to make proper preparations before entering the pagoda. The shortest anyone would be in one was three months. The ceremony could finally end after the proper arrangements were made. However, the crowd didn’t seem to want to leave. The gap between each Veluriyam Pagoda gathering was simply too big. They didn’t want it to end so quickly. Excitement still lingered in the air. Numerous cultivators swarmed towards Jiang Chen to greet him. He waved at them in appreciation of their support. He couldn’t afford to be too discourteous now that he was the heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. His status was no longer the same as before. He remained there for over four hours before finally returning to Taiyuan Tower. It would be difficult for him to frequent Taiyuan Tower from now on. He would have to oversee Sacred Peafowl Mountain now that he was heir. Also, he would need to familiarize himself with the people there.

He summoned the Wei father and son before he left. It was now

incredibly difficult to speak to them as equals. It wasn't his fault. The other two simply couldn't do it. A young lord should always be respected as a young lord, even if Jiang Chen was easy-going by nature. They simply couldn't act casual around him.

Jiang Chen knew that he couldn't force this matter after seeing their expressions. "House Lord Wei, Sir Jie, I hope that Taiyuan Tower's plans remains unchanged," he said sincerely.

Wei Tianxiao hesitated before he spoke. "Young lord, you are now the venerated heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. We are merely your subordinates. Taiyuan Tower has always been your own venture. Truth be told, House Wei hasn't contributed much to the business at all. All we have ever done is provide a place of business for you…"

Wei Tianxiao felt ashamed of himself. He understood that it'd be best that he lowered himself in front of the young lord. It was the smartest move he could make right now. He'd spoken nothing but the truth. Moreover, Jiang Chen was the one who'd won the shop across from them after a bet with the Majestic Clan. He could easily have a change of heart and cut all ties with House Wei by moving his business to the opposite shop.

However, Jiang Chen didn't do any of that. What did it mean? It meant that Pill King Zhen was a man of loyalty. However, this was not a good excuse for them to take advantage of him. Taking advantage of a young lord was the last thing they would ever do. Jiang Chen smiled. He'd instantly discerned what Wei Tianxiao was worried about. "Don't overthink it. We will always be equal partners of Taiyuan Tower. The one across the street is mine. It's a good time to give my subordinates a place of residence as well."

Jiang Chen was no longer a loner. He was now responsible for the livelihood of many. The ten sage realm slave protectors, Pill King Lu Feng, Pill King Bu, Lin Yanyu, the disciples from Regal Pill Palace, and also some other followers. Even though Jiang Chen was going to bring some of them with him to Sacred Peafowl

Mountain, he still needed an outpost in the secular world so that he could collect information, increase his web of influence, and make preparations for the reconstruction of Regal Pill Palace.

Wei Tianxiao nodded. “We will listen to your every word. Without you, House Wei would never be what it is today.”

“Young lord, my father has said nothing but the truth. The family elders are a lot more restrained now thanks to you. They no longer bare their fangs at us,” Wei Jie added.

Jiang Chen laughed. “That’s proof that both of you have finally gained some authority. Alright, I suppose everything is settled. You need not worry about the Taiyuan Tower matter. House Wei should keep on working hard and set your sights on becoming a great clan one day.”

It wasn’t too difficult for House Wei to join the ranks of a great clan now that they have a powerful backer. However, the foundations of their clan was slightly lacking for now. The internal conflict from back then had caused great damage to the clan. House Wei would surely be on the decline if it wasn’t for Taiyuan Tower’s rapid growth. All members of the clan was well aware of that fact. The clan’s future was only going to become brighter as long as they followed the young lord’s footsteps.

Chapter 977: Who Stays And Who Goes

“Huang’er, I’ve neglected you during this time.” Jiang Chen looked at Huang’er as the two were alone in the rear gardens of Taiyuan Tower. He always let his guard down around her.

Huang’er smiled delightfully. “I’ve been so happy during this time, seeing your momentum on the stage and witnessing everyone’s support and love for you. I’m deeply touched as well.”

She wasn’t exaggerating. She’d seen a great deal of exemplary geniuses during her time on Myriad Abyss Island. However, Huang’er had never cared for any of those so-called geniuses. She’d always felt that they were somehow frivolous. Jiang Chen didn’t have a hint of that at all. He had the unique charisma of a young man that was indescribable, but it helped him win over whoever he encountered. He always occupied the limelight no matter where he was, becoming a central figure and venerated by all. In Eastern Kingdom, he’d been one that fought to save the kingdom against all odds. He’d been a kingmaker in the shadows in Skylaural Kingdom, offering critical help for fourth prince Ye Rong. In the Precious Tree Sect, he was a top genius that directly affected the sect’s fortunes. In the Regal Pill Palace, even the palace head depended on him. When the sect had fallen and the palace head’s whereabouts unknown, only he had survived and had searched high and low, rescuing many fellow disciples and leaving behind a spark of hope for the sect.

Now at Veluriyam Capital, Jiang Chen was once again the center of attention, whether in House Wei or later taking the field for Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Later on in the desolate wildlands, his every move had unknowingly impacted an entire region and even a race’s fortunes. This level fo charisma was able to impact the greater picture with everything he did.

“Huang’er, I’m afraid I’ll have to move to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Will you go with me?” Jiang Chen asked gently.

Huang'er laughed softly, her gaze clear and pure. "I'll be with you wherever you go. I'll be by your side even up mountains of blades and oceans of fire." Her tone was genuine and sincere. Although soft, it was suffused with moving resolution. The two locked eyes, time seeming to stop in this moment. Everything in the world seemed to be holding its breath.

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In a secret room Taiyuan Tower, Ling Xiao and Ling Hui'er were arguing over something. The girl was much different from her older sister, Ling Bi'er. The younger sister had a cute and innocent personality suffused with a few hints of stubbornness.

"Daddy, I'm senior brother Jiang's junior sister. Why can't I go with him to Sacred Peafowl Mountain?" Ling Hui'er pouted as her chest heaved, her cheeks pink with emotional exertion.

Ling Su smiled smiled wryly. He knew that his younger daughter had simple thoughts and had been spoiled throughout her entire life, making her a bit oblivious to how the world worked.

"Hui'er, your senior brother Jiang bears great responsibility after moving to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. It won't do to follow him. Not to mention, Miss Huang'er…" Ling Su sighed. He was well aware that both of his daughters quite liked Jiang Chen, but the youth already had such an outstanding Miss Huang'er by his side. Even with his wide breadth of experience and pride in his excellent daughters, he had to admit that Miss Huang'er's bearing was one that of which no other could reach. His daughters may have feelings, but they were doomed to not receive any reciprocation.

Perhaps his innocently naive younger daughter wouldn't do much as she didn't understand much of relations between man and woman, but his older daughter would never falter or waver once she'd given her heart. Therefore, he was more worried about Ling Bi'er. Because her personality was colder and her self pride stronger, she was more restrained as well and would keep these

matters to herself. When it came to love, she would only fall deeper with the passage of time.

Ling Su knew that matters of the heart were the most difficult to resolve. He was powerless even though he was their father. Therefore, he wanted to convince Ling Hui'er not to go to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Time would make everything distant. But judging from her attitude, she would go no matter what.

"Daddy, big sister Huang'er's not going to eat me. Besides, we're of the same sect as senior brother Jiang. It's completely natural and fine if he takes us with him. Why would big sister Huang'er protest?" Ling Hui'er continued.

Ling Su felt a headache throb as he dealt with this daughter who thought too simply. "Hui'er, some things must be avoided. Miss Huang'er and your senior brother Jiang are already a couple and are dao partners. Don't you think she'll take it amiss if you just follow her like this?" Ling Su decided to lay things out clearly for his daughter. He knew that she had a one track mind and likely wouldn't even understand why her father was opposing this course of action if he didn't explain things.

Ling Hui'er widened her eyes and looked at her father in confusion. "Daddy, you seriously are conservative! I'm not going to steal big sister Huang'er's man, why would she take it amiss? Besides, isn't it common or a man to have multiple dao partners in the world of martial dao?"

"You!!" Ling Su suddenly discovered that he was at a loss for words. His daughter wasn't just your typical straightforward, single-minded person. A man with multiple dao partners? Ling Su grinned ruefully. Judging from his daughter's tone, she didn't mind sharing her man with another at all. It was rather the parent who couldn't accept this. He wanted to protest, but couldn't say anything. Disagree? Force her to stay?

Girls couldn't be kept at home once they grew up, and his

stubborn daughter might break out into a tantrum if he use strong methods to force her to stay. By then, something rather innocuous would become part of the Capital's gossip mill.

Support her? Ling Su doted on his two daughters the most in this life. If two girls wanted to share a husband, he'd manage to bear it as Jiang Chen really was extraordinary. But... he didn't dare think further. He readily admitted that Jiang Chen was very distinguished. So exemplary that he wanted to marry off his daughter to the lad straight away to tie down this son-in-law. However, reason told him that the lad already had a dao partner and the two very much in love. It'd be incredibly awkward if his daughter forced her way in. Besides, although Jiang Chen was a fellow disciple with his daughters, there was no rule that said peers had to become dao partners. Ling Su suddenly felt incredibly muddle headed and didn't know what to say.

"Daddy~" Ling Hui'er swung Ling Su's arm. "Big sister Huang'er isn't as miserly as you say. Don't think too much. Besides, if you have me stay, I'll be able to only talk to those stinking men everyday."

"What only men? Isn't there Miss Gouyu and Wen Ziqi?" Ling Su's comeback was quite weak.

"Big sister Gouyu and Wen Ziqi are all senior brother Jiang's followers!" Ling Hui'er cried out. "They'll definitely be going to Peafowl Mountain! Daddy, are you at ease in leaving just me at Taiyuan Tower? Hui'er isn't used to being around so many stinky men!"

Ling Su was at a complete loss for words and incredibly irritated. He waved his hand. "Hui'er, I can't convince you, so just do as you will in this. No matter what you're thinking, don't forget that you're a Ling daughter and have the dignity of our family."

Ling Hui'er giggled. "Daddy, are you worried that I'll force senior brother Jiang to accept me? You're really thinking too much. It's

not as complicated as you think.”

Contrary to Ling Bi’er, Hui’er simply admired Jiang Chen and felt greatly reassured whenever she was close to Jiang Chen. She didn’t have the urge to hang onto Jiang Chen no matter what, and didn’t feel that he was the only one she’d marry. She didn’t even have the strongest understanding of these kinds of matters.

……

Shen Trifire and the others were also feeling very conflicted. They really wanted to go to Sacred Peafowl with Jiang Chen, but they had a multitude of duties at Taiyuan Tower. There was much to be gained if they went to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but likewise if they stayed. In fact, they would undergo more experience if they stayed and have many more opportunities to strike out solo.

Jiang Chen also had his own plans. After chatting with Huang’er for a while, he summoned all of his people. He knew that everyone had their own thoughts, and that matters at Taiyuan Tower needed to be stabilized first. “Apart from my personal guards, everyone else should remain at Taiyuan Tower first. All of you have your matters to attend to, and Taiyuan Tower also needs all of you to continue expanding.”

“Honored master, you should at least bring your disciples, no?” Pill King Lu Feng frowned worriedly. He was a pill king of Emperor Shura’s faction after all, so he was too embarrassed to bring up that he wanted to go to Sacred Peafowl Mountain as well. After all, his identity was a bit awkward.

“Yanyu will also come with me. However, you need to make a stay in the Pill Pagoda, so let’s talk when you emerge.” Lin Yanyu was young and had a great deal of potential, so Jiang Chen decided to keep the fellow by his side for further guidance.

“Senior brother, what about me?” Ling Hui’er’s timid voice sounded from a corner. She looked rather aggrieved as her little face was flushed red, almost to the point of tears. “Hui’er wants to

go to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. I want to spend time with big sister Huang'er , Gouyu, and Wen..."

Jiang Chen started. He really had forgotten about this junior sister.

"Senior brother, it'll be only men left here. How depressing would it be for me to be without companions! Senior brother can't leave me behind before we find our sister... Wahhh..." Ling Hui'er started sobbing profusely.

Jiang Chen didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He looked at Ling Su, wanting to see the man's intentions. But Ling Su only responded with a wry small, obviously having no idea what to do. Huang'er laughed softly at this point. "Younger sister Hui'er is innocent and a delight. We'd have another to keep us company if she comes with us."

Ling Hui'er was overjoyed and immediately stopped crying. She sidled up to Huang'er and latched onto Huang'er's arm. "Big sister Huang'er dotes one me the most. Teehee, then it's settled! I'm going to Sacred Peafowl Mountain!"

Everyone started laughing when they saw Ling Hui'er thus.

"Don't worry, Uncle Ling. I'll take good care of Hui'er if she comes with us." Jiang Chen comforted when he saw the worry in Ling Su's eyes.

Chapter 978: Taking Up Residence in Sacred Peafowl Mountain

Jiang Chen had no plans to bring Liu Wencai and Lu Yali with him. The former, especially, would benefit from further tempering in the outside world. Though talented, Liu Wencai lacked a degree of necessary experience. Jiang Chen had no need of his assistance around Taiyuan Tower. The only task he delegated to the budding swordsman was for Liu Wencai to refine his own strength. The quicker he unearthed his talents and perfected his skills, the better. Jiang Chen firmly believed that Liu Wencai had it in him. He would pull it off sooner or later.

Fatty Lu Yali, on the other hand, was decidedly average in all aspects. His potential was far outstripped by Liu Wencai's. Jiang Chen gave him a post at Taiyuan Tower that was both comfortable and had a little authority. It was a place to stay, and a comfortable arrangement. The little fatty did not have any particularly lofty goals. He was quite happy with this kind of lifestyle. Because Taiyuan Tower was on the path to become Veluriyam Capital's leading pill faction, his own status would increase accordingly. He was living much more enjoyably than he had at Myriad Spirit Sect, at any rate.

After finalizing the list of people that would leave with him, Jiang Chen took Shen Trifire aside separately for a few extra words of encouragement. "You have a lot of responsibility on your shoulders, Trifire. Many things are not accomplished in a day, but you must also have a clear purpose in mind that you can work towards. I hope that someday soon, you can take the reins yourself."

Shen Trifire was a man that Jiang Chen valued greatly, beginning from the day of the former's arrival at the Tower. He knew that the weighty assignment in his hands was there to forge

him through future trials. There was no way he could refuse. He nodded to Jiang Chen, “Senior brother, do not worry. It is all thanks to you that my life is even my own right now. Whatever you ask, I will do it.”

“I rescued you because we are peers of a single sect. If you want to repay me, do it by working towards our common goal of resurrecting our sect. I hope that you all pitch in good effort, no matter how hopeless re-establishing and rejuvenating the sect might seem.” Jiang Chen did not want the disciples of Regal Pill Palace to be lost in Veluriyam Capital’s decadence. After all, the Palace was a sect with its own beliefs and tradition. Jiang Chen wanted his peers to reflect it through their actions. Unfortunately, the others lacked somewhat in that regard. If Shen Qinghong or Ling Bi’er were here, the hope of restoring the sect would be much improved. Of course, Mu Gaoqi could be counted among that number as well. Jiang Chen was a little sad when he thought of his old friend. After his business in the Veluriyam Pagoda was finished, it was time for a trip into the Upper Eight Regions’ various places.

He had two things to do there: one of them was to rescue Mu Gaoqi, and the other to find his father Jiang Feng. His father’s whereabouts was one of the heaviest things on his mind over the past few years. A spirit realm cultivator daring to wander the Upper Eight Regions... Jiang Chen didn’t want to think of the possibilities, sometimes. The more he did so, the more they scared him. But as a fellow man, he understood his father’s decision.

No hot-blooded man could simply stand around when his wife was taken away forcefully by another. Anyone who could remain impassive in the face of such a tragedy wasn’t fit to be called a real man. As for rebuilding Regal Pill Palace, Jiang Chen knew that it wasn’t something to be done overnight. When his strength was perfected and he could finally reveal himself in broad daylight, only then would the time be ripe. Where were the others from the

Palace now? Palace Head Dan Chi and Elder Yun Nie? He harbored no small concern for them, thinking of them now and again.

The palace head had treated him with generosity and kindness. He'd been one of the visionaries regarding the Myriad Domain's fate. He had even prophesized that the future of the entire palace lay in Jiang Chen's hands. Jiang Chen felt mildly apologetic towards the palace head whenever he remembered the past. Yes, Eternal Celestial Capital and the Great Scarlet Mid Region's invasion had been wholly unrelated to him, but he still felt that he'd let the other man down. It wasn't out of moral reasons, but emotional ones. That was why he rescued Regal Pill Palace's disciples at any cost. Doing so soothed his guilt, if just a little.

After putting Taiyuan Tower's matters in order, Jiang Chen headed towards Sacred Peafowl Mountain with his guards and attendants. This was a mythical place, and a sacred existence for many. Before now, they'd never even dreamed that they would one day have the chance to stay there long term. Cloudsoar Monarch was awaiting him outside the Mountain. "Young lord Zhen, His Majesty is occupied for the moment. That is why I have been sent here to greet you."

Jiang Chen had met the monarch several times before. "Is His Majesty not in at the moment?"

The monarch sighed. "He's here, but His Majesty is... taking care of some business." As if to avoid misunderstanding, Cloudsoar Monarch explained further. "His Majesty is speaking with the Spirit Branch clan lord. Apparently, the clan lord is here to arrange a marriage... one that His Majesty is none too pleased about."

"Arrange a marriage?" Jiang Chen was flabbergasted. "With whom?"

Cloudsoar Monarch smiled wryly. "You haven't been here much before, young lord, so you may not know. His Majesty has a foster daughter that he's raised as his own. Not many know, to tell the

truth, but anyone under our wing generally does."

"Are you talking about Miss Dan'er?" Jiang Chen suddenly remembered something. Hadn't he visited someone like that alongside Ji San? There'd been a quarrel with Spirit Branch Clan's young lord, Miao Suo, as well.

Cloudsoar Monarch was stunned. "Young lord Zhen, you know Miss Dan'er?"

"I've both heard of her and paid her a visit with young master Ji San, but we haven't actually met. Doesn't she have a maid called Cui'er?"

"Yes, that's her. The Spirit Branch clan lord has overestimated himself a little. He thinks that just because Emperor Peafowl found Miss Dan'er in the outside world, Miao Suo is somehow qualified enough to be her match. His Majesty doesn't intentionally interfere with others' relationships, but Miss Dan'er has no interest in that young master whatsoever. Personally, I think Miao Suo is trying to reach a bit beyond his grasp." Cloudsoar Monarch seemed a little unhappy about the affair.

Jiang Chen smiled, but stayed silent. Miao Suo was tall and burly. It was unlikely that someone would fall in love with him based on his looks alone. Because he hadn't actually seen Miss Dan'er, much less made her acquaintance, he wasn't in a position to judge her opinions on things. Still, from his point of view, there was no way Miss Dan'er would find Miao Suo attractive. Even someone like young master Ji San was outside her consideration. How could Miao Suo have any hope whatsoever?

"Hah, well, sometimes His Majesty has to deal with some pretty minor things. Anyways, you can come with me."

Nodding, Jiang Chen followed Cloudsoar Monarch into Sacred Peafowl Mountain's interior grounds. Sacred Peafowl Mountain occupied a huge expanse of land. Though it was secluded from the outside world here, there was no atmosphere of desolation. There

were many residences available within. Naturally, the one reserved for Jiang Chen was one of the best. The conditions therein were ten times that what Regal Pill Palace could offer, all those years ago.

“Young lord Zhen, are you satisfied with your new home?” Cloudsoar Monarch chuckled. He was here to guide Jiang Chen around a while.

The new young lord returned the laugh. “If I say no, I would be a liar.”

The monarch nodded. “Good, good. His Majesty instructed me to help you settle down, so come to me if you need anything. Ah, that’s right, you’re a young lord now. Besides the guards and attendants that you’re bringing in yourself, you can also buy a few slaves. It does not fit a man of your station to not have a few hundred at your beck and call.”

Jiang Chen smiled. He knew that Veluriyam Capital, as many places elsewhere, demanded ostentation and grandeur. Personal guards were only brought along on excursions, being otherwise free in terms of day-to-day tedium. Most menial jobs were assigned to slaves. The term ‘slave’ was one of the more undignified ways to address such people, and they were typically called ‘servants’ instead, or perhaps ‘laborers’. Though followers and servants were both servile in nature, they were actually quite different. Followers just followed one around, but servants were basically slaves, with little autonomy as to their work.

Staring at his enormous residence, Jiang Chen knew that the few followers he did have weren’t going to cut it. He didn’t like to keep slaves around, but he had to bring in new people somehow. Seeing that his charge was satisfied, Cloudsoar Monarch hurriedly waved goodbye. “Young lord Zhen, there’s not many things left for me to do here. His Majesty will host an audience with you tomorrow. Please, do rest awhile before then. I have other duties I must attend to, so I will not disturb you any longer.”

Though he found it a little strange, Jiang Chen didn't probe the monarch further. He was perfectly happy with his new home. It was ten times better than his old place at Regal Pill Palace, and he had been content with it even back then. Thus, his satisfaction was magnified tenfold here as well.

"This residence is enormous, Gouyu. I'd like to task you to manage the details of our accommodations, just for the next while. Let's try to fill this place up in the next couple of days."

Gouyu nodded. She was an expert at dealing with such matters. "Young lord, how many slaves and servants do you intend to acquire?"

"Cloudsoar Monarch said at least a few hundred, but I think that's a bit too much. One or two hundred is enough." Jiang Chen grinned.

"So, we'll have to make another trip off the mountain, right?" Gouyu giggled. "I wonder what particulars we have to pay attention to when buying them?"

Jiang Chen inclined his head. "We'll talk about the details later. Let's settle everyone in first."

Not many people had accompanied him to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, so the task of settling them down wasn't difficult. Still, the residence seemed a little empty. On the plus side, it was quite a well-designed home. There were specific areas for growing spirit herbs, refining pills, and cultivating martial dao. Living areas were abundant as well, with no function missing from the complex.

After his friends were settled in, Jiang Chen wanted to take a short break before he went to visit Emperor Peafowl. Surprisingly, the first guest knocked at his door as soon as he was done. It was the eternal second-place of Sacred Peafowl Mountain: Zhou Yan. He had been second when young lord Fan was around, and he was second once more now that Jiang Chen had moved in. Zhou Yan clearly had a strong mentality, though. There was no hint of

sadness on his face.

“Senior brother Zhen, my arrival may have been a little hasty. Is my visit an inconvenience, perhaps?” The other young lord was the image of politeness.

“We are sect brothers, Brother Zhou. There is no need for so much courtesy. Please, come on in.” Though he hadn’t expected Zhou Yan’s visit, Jiang Chen returned the civility in equal measure nonetheless.

Chapter 979: Miss Daner

The two walked outside and headed for the rear mountain. Zhou Yan sighed as he looked down at the residence. “Senior brother Zhen, you probably don’t know that this is the residence His Majesty lived in when he was young. No one’s lived here since. Even senior brother Fan didn’t have the honor of living here.”

“Oh?” Jiang Chen had no idea. Cloudsoar Monarch certainly hadn’t mentioned it to him.

“Haha, His Majesty has high hopes for you. Higher, I think, than what he’d had for senior brother Fan. Many people believe that my choice of master is unfortunate. If I weren’t studying under Emperor Peafowl, perhaps I would have been another emperor’s heir. Understandably, there’s no shortage of provocations both open and concealed... they want to make me jealous.” Zhou Yan laughed as he said this. He glanced at Jiang Chen before he went on. “To tell the truth, I do feel a little frustrated. However, just like I said onstage, my feelings of relief are far stronger. There’s no one else in my position. I always have a powerful genius that I can challenge just in front of me, a mountain that I can try to climb. Don’t you agree?”

Jiang Chen gazed across at his junior brother, silent but smiling. Zhou Yan’s way of thinking was rather unique and remarkable. Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s second-best genius sighed softly again. “I have no doubts whatsoever in His Majesty’s prudence or vision. That’s why I’m here to tell you this. I’m a disciple of Sacred Peafowl Mountain first, your rival second. There’s no need to worry about any backstabbing from me, nor will I hold you back.”

“Oh, I’m not worried.” Jiang Chen smiled placidly. “You have His Majesty’s confidence, so what need is there for worry?”

Zhou Yan evidently hadn’t expected his new senior brother to be so easygoing. Jiang Chen clapped his shoulder. “We both seek to

advance the interests of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. I wouldn't be so fixated on empty titles given by others. If I say that I'm not interested in being the young lord, you'd think me a hypocrite. Honestly though, I couldn't care less who the young lord is—you or me, it doesn't matter. His Majesty may think that I'm better suited for it in the short term, but who knows what'll happen in the future?"

Zhou Yan was amazed. He thought that his words had been candid enough, but his counterpart was even more direct about things. Moreover, his new senior brother's words were nothing short of abnormal. Anyone else acting like this was probably a faker, but he found it hard to disbelieve the clarity in Jiang Chen's eyes. No, he instinctively wanted to trust the other youth.

"Oh, yes, er, Sacred Peafowl Mountain seems quite lively today. What's happening?" Jiang Chen was inquisitive.

"The same as always, hah." Zhou Yan laughed wryly. "A herd of imbeciles that want a quick path to the top. Miss Dan'er has no interest in any of them."

"Them? I thought there was only Miao Suo?" Jiang Chen blinked.

"There was only Miao Suo at first, but more and more clans showed up. Now there's even two emperors! All here to ask for Miss Dan'er's hand for their young geniuses, of course." Zhou Yan groaned. "If it were only Spirit Branch Clan, His Majesty would have sent them packing long ago. The presence of two emperors warrants serious treatment, however."

"Which two emperors?" It was impossible for Jiang Chen to imagine that two emperors would be drawn out by a matter as simple as marriage. Two emperors!

"One is Emperor Vastsea, the other Emperor Void." Zhou Yan exhaled. "Those two majesties got into a pretty heated fight. His Majesty can't take either side, so he's been trying to put out the

fire instead."

Jiang Chen didn't know what to say. Wasn't it better for marriage to be proposed between two willing parties? If Miss Dan'er has zero interest in marrying, what were they even going on about?

"Have you seen Miss Dan'er, senior brother Zhen?" Zhou Yan queried.

"No, I haven't." Jiang Chen shook his head. "Have you?"

Zhou Yan nodded. "A single glimpse. Admittedly, Miss Dan'er is both charming and graceful. Like the fair ladies that poets speak about, she is simply extraordinary."

Jiang Chen was speechless. Did Zhou Yan secretly admire Miss Dan'er as well?

His senior brother's strange look made Zhou Yan uncomfortable. "Senior brother Zhen, please don't misunderstand. The only thing I seek in my life is the paramount dao of the sword. I, ah, I'm not going to waste my days on lesser matters like this. It's just that a thought crossed my mind. Given Miss Dan'er's high standards, perhaps only a genius like senior brother Zhen can meet her expectations?"

Jiang Chen didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Was Zhou Yan planning to play the role of a part-time matchmaker? He hadn't even seen Miss Dan'er in person. He had no energy to consider such things. As the two young lords spoke, a beam of light cast down from the clouds. It was a message glyph, landing squarely in Jiang Chen's hands. Opening it, he grinned. "His Majesty is calling for me. Shall we go see His Majesty together, Brother Zhou?"

Zhou Yan wanted to decline, but mulled it over for a few moments before changing his mind. "Alright," he nodded.

Leaving the residence, the two of them hurtled through the air towards Emperor Peafowl's palace. The emperor was in a bit of a

bad mood. Around him, the four monarchs had complicated expressions as well.

Plumscore Monarch was particularly indignant. “What a bunch of ridiculous morons!” She smacked her hand on the table. “They have no right to lust over Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s noble miss! What a bunch of immodest buffoons.”

Cloudsoar Monarch smiled wryly. “Daoist Plumscore, there’s no need to be so angry. Hasn’t His Majesty sent them packing just now? Maybe this is the best we can do for now.”

“Rubbish. What part of it is ‘best’, or even good?” Plumscore Monarch would not relent in her fury. “Those bastards know no shame. Why else would Dan’er announce that she’s locking herself away in closed door cultivation for the next three years?”

It was at this moment that Jiang Chen and Zhou Yan walked in. The youths’ appearance wiped away some of the female monarch’s anger from her face.

“Ah, you’re here.” Emperor Peafowl let out a soft sigh.

“Your Majesty.” Jiang Chen and Zhou Yan came forward, bowing.

“No need for such formalities. Make yourselves at home.” Emperor Peafowl waved a hand. “Today was a bit sudden, I think. I definitely didn’t expect that Emperors Vastsea and Void both would come asking for my daughter’s hand in marriage. If things had gone differently, I think it could have had a positive influence on Dan’er. It’s a pity that it turned out so poorly. Instead of undoing the clasp over her heart, this has only tightened it.” The emperor was not fundamentally opposed to an arranged marriage. If he were, he could easily have scared everyone off merely by darkening his face. As a matter of fact, he hadn’t pressured anyone he’d spoken with today. He wanted Dan’er to open her heart once more. Meeting Veluriyam Capital’s young geniuses was an undemanding social activity that might have served as the first

step to recovery. Alas, Dan'er would not loosen the knot sealing her heart. She couldn't cast aside the shadows of her past at all.

The propositions of marriage quickly turned into a farce, concluding with Dan'er's declaration that she would shut herself away for three years. It taught Emperor Peafowl a valuable lesson: The troubles of youth weren't things that he, a senior, could simply counsel away. Emperor Peafowl commanded the fate of Veluriyam Capital and the lives of many, but he had no power over passion and love. Casting aside the awkwardness in the air with a sweep of his arm, Emperor Peafowl broke the silence once more. "Feel free to take your leave for now. I'd like a moment with young Zhen alone."

Saying their farewells, the four monarchs withdrew from the room. After a courteous salute, Zhou Yan wisely followed suit.

"Shall we take a walk, lad?" Emperor Peafowl smiled.

Jiang Chen knew that something was on the emperor's mind, nodding in agreement to the request. The image of young and old, strolling side by side, had the savor of an intergenerational friendship. The two of them slowly toured the palace's corridors, gradually ascending higher and higher. The increase in elevation gladdened their hearts.

"This isn't like you, Your Majesty. Love and affection are the passions of youth. Such emotions cannot be forced. No matter how much you dote on Miss Dan'er, shouldn't you steer clear of running this particular show?" Jiang Chen was different from everyone else. Even the four monarchs dared not speak so in front of Emperor Peafowl, but he had no such reluctance. He knew that the emperor saw him as a friend and confidant. He hadn't been kept behind for mere flattery and praise!

Emperor Peafowl smiled wryly. "You're certainly fearless in your words, young man. To tell you the truth, I've always been the lighthearted type, but Dan'er in particular hangs on my heart.

She’s not my biological daughter, but might as well be… I certainly treat her like my kin. Perhaps this too is the machination of fate. No matter how strong a person is, he always has some small flaw or weak point. Maybe the girl is mine, hmm?”

Jiang Chen listened to the emperor quietly. A lump formed in his throat. He suddenly thought of his father from his previous life. He hadn’t perceived it all those years ago, but thinking back on it now, perhaps he was his father’s only weakness back then? It was this sole weakness that prevented someone as noble as the Celestial Emperor from being able to stop that world-shattering catastrophe. If his father hadn’t had that single vulnerable spot, would the results have been different? If he had been able to exert the full extent of his power, the Celestial Emperor would have had ample leisure to deal with the disaster. But reality did not have room for ‘what ifs’. Jiang Chen’s heart spasmed at the very thought. Emperor Peafowl’s words cut him to the bone. He didn’t think that the emperor was simply moaning and groaning over nothing.

“Fate decrees all, Your Majesty. Miss Dan’er isn’t your real daughter, but perhaps a filial thread ties her to you regardless?”

“Perhaps.” Emperor Peafowl’s look softened, his eyes full of the kindness that only a father could have. He was showing a soft side that no onlooker could have imagined he’d possess. Despite holding the title of Veluriyam Capital’s strongest for the last three thousand years, the emperor was still a mortal man. Suddenly, a thought seemed to strike him. “That’s right, you’re from the Myriad Domain, no? She says that she’s from there as well. Do you know if there’s a sect in the domain that had someone called Dan’er in it?”

“Dan’er?” Jiang Chen frowned. His own mind was roused in remembrance of an elegant figure—Dan Fei. He took a deep breath before he posed the question. “Your Majesty, are there any other clues besides her name?”

“She has a daughter, called Nian’er.” Emperor Peafowl furrowed his brow as well.

“She… has a daughter?” Jiang Chen broke into a wry smile. The sliver of curiosity he had was gone. Dan Fei had been an unmarried girl. Where would she have gotten a daughter from? He was thinking too much. Surely, there was a myriad of girls called Dan’er from the Myriad Domain.

Chapter 980: The Main Pagodas Secret

Emperor Peafowl laughed. Was he searching for a needle in a haystack? How could there be such a big coincidence? Was every person from the Myriad Domain supposed to know Dan'er? He was certain Jiang Chen didn't know who Dan'er was after seeing his expression.

"Your Majesty, do you have information that's more substantial?"

Emperor Peafowl smiled wryly. "She refuses to tell me anything. She only told me that she's from the Myriad Domain. Her identity, background, and the sect she originated from are all but a mystery to me."

"She's probably a girl who's suffered heartbreak." Jiang Chen sighed gently.

Emperor Peafowl shook his head. "No she hasn't. Her heart still seems to be occupied by a man who I imagine is the father to her daughter. I wonder how many tragedies like hers have occured due to the destruction of the Myriad Domain? To think that the Eternal Celestial Capital is behind all this suffering."

Emperor Peafowl knew not of Dan'er's origins, but his instincts told him that the man in Dan'er's heart had probably lost his life during the destruction of the Myriad Domain. Dan'er had shut herself off to the outside world because she was unable to escape from the traumas of her heart. Her love for that man had been too deep.

A vicious light flashed through Jiang Chen's eyes when he heard the Eternal Celestial Capital's name. It triggered his memories of the past and reminded him of the catastrophe that had befallen the Myriad Domain. He'd passed through the domain during his journey to the Desolate Wildlands. The place was filled with the scars of battle. Devastation was extremely widespread. It was no

longer the same vibrant place of yesteryear. Emperor Peafowl was right. The Eternal Celestial Capital had simply caused too many tragedies like the one Dan'er had experienced. How many tragedies had occurred in just Regal Pill Palace alone? The Eternal Celestial Capital and the Great Scarlet Mid Region were the perpetrators behind all this suffering.

The emperor realized that his words had touched a sore spot. He quickly spoke words of comfort, "Tragedies like hers occur almost everyday in the martial dao world. However, the destruction of an entire domain is so rare that it only occurs once every few hundred to a few thousand years. The Eternal Celestial Capital and the Great Scarlet Mid Region only do evil and no good. They will surely pay for their sins one day and find themselves in the same spot as the Myriad Domain."

Jiang Chen smiled in response. "Their fortune may soon run out, but a true cultivator will never wait for the heavens to punish their enemies. One day I will make them pay for what they did."

The emperor laughed. "You might not be able to destroy the Eternal Celestial Capital yet with your current abilities, but the Great Scarlet Mid Region should be an easy target."

"I don't want to preemptively alert my enemies." Jiang Chen could tell that this was a test by Emperor Peafowl. He immediately cast away such thoughts. He was going to temporarily refrain from seeking revenge. His wings had yet to harden. He wasn't strong enough. Even though he was the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, he was not going to abuse his power for the purpose of his own personal revenge. It wasn't that he couldn't; he just simply didn't want to misuse his authority at Sacred Peafowl Mountain as soon as he became the emperor's heir. Moreover, it was not yet the opportune timing for such matters.

The emperor was pleased when he saw how calm Jiang Chen was. What he said earlier was indeed a test. He wanted to see if power was going to influence the young man into making a brash

decision and was glad it didn't. He smiled for a while before he went back on topic. "I've summoned you today to talk to you about the main Veluriyam Pagoda."

"Oh?" Jiang Chen looked at the emperor curiously.

"The main pagoda has over a hundred thousand years of history. There was only one during ancient times. The Martial Pagoda and Pill Pagoda were both built by powerful cultivators from a later generation. Because of that, the inheritance found within those two towers are all from a later generation. Only within the main pagoda can one find ancient techniques and inheritances. The empyrean decree from the progenitor of Veluriyam Capital is also found within the main pagoda. It bears the fate of this several hundred-thousand years old capital."

"Within the main pagoda is a separate world. You may view it as a world built upon by formations or a secret quadrant. But to sum it up, it is a place where not even I can do as I wish. The great ancestors who built it are the only people who know all the secrets that lay within. Many powerful cultivators have been inside since then, but every single one of them reported a different experience. Moreover, everyone is only given one opportunity to enter, and they must be below sixty years of age. The tower will repel anyone that is over that age. For that reason, I've only been in there once during my youth."

Jiang Chen was confused. "Is that so? But didn't the seven great emperors watch the ranking battles from within the main pagoda?"

"Haha! That was indeed the case, but we were limited to the outer regions of the pagoda. We aren't able to enter anywhere beyond the main pagoda's formation. One will have to go beyond the formation to enter the pagoda. There are four different quadrants within the pagoda. The nine strongest young lords are allowed entrance into the quadrant of the highest grade. I don't know what you might encounter in there, but it is a place where a

day's cultivation is equivalent to a month in the outside world. Even the lowest grade quadrant is equivalent to five days in the outside world. This is the reason why everyone competes for a spot in the Ranking of Young Lords. After all, every Veluriyam Capital citizen is only given one chance to enter the pagoda when they are younger than sixty years old. This is an opportunity that will change their fates forever." The emperor looked at Jiang Chen at this point. "Do you understand now?"

"A day inside is equivalent to a month outside? If that's the case, then entering the highest grade quadrant for two years would be like cultivating for sixty years!" Jiang Chen was flabbergasted.

Emperor Peafowl laughed. "This is true only in theory. Your progression will be extremely quick during the first few months, but your progression will begin to slow down somewhere around the third month. In reality, two years inside is slightly more equivalent to thirty to forty years of cultivation. However, if you can make good use of your time, it isn't impossible to fully make it equivalent to fifty to sixty years. However, the world inside isn't entirely peaceful. You will be met with dangers that could threaten your life. Of course, danger will also come with all kinds of accompanying fortuitous encounters. In conclusion, I want you to view the pagoda as a separate world or a secret realm. Think of it as training. Do not be careless or expect everything to go your way. But at the same time, do not fear everything either."

"Mm." Jiang Chen nodded.

"The world inside is huge, but there are still possibilities that you could come across others. You should be mentally prepared for that. The human heart is ugly and full of evil. The geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords are not as harmonious as you'd think." The emperor reminded.

Jiang Chen smiled in response. He didn't need the emperor to tell him how much competition there was between the young lords. Emperor Peafowl had been inside the main pagoda of Veluriyam

Capital, but he had gone inside a few thousand years ago, and he had only been in there once. Thus, he could only talk about it in general terms. Jiang Chen would have to find out the rest of the details himself.

"Alright, three days of preparation isn't exactly the longest time. Your residence is very big. You better start looking for servants to take care of it."

He threw a medallion over to Jiang Chen as soon as he was done speaking. "That is the Progeny Feather Medallion. Its authority is only second to my Progenitor Feather Medallion. There are only two such medallions in Sacred Peafowl Mountain. The one in my hand is first, and I've just given you the second. The owner of these medallions have the authority to mobilize the Peafowl Guard, including the four monarchs. Also, you have power over every great clan that has sworn allegiance to Sacred Peafowl Mountain."

Including the four monarchs? Jiang Chen was surprised. He never thought that he would suddenly gain so much authority. No wonder Cloudsoar Monarch had been so courteous just now. Jiang Chen immediately took the medallion without any reserve. Being reserved would hold no merit since he had already become Sacred Peafowl Mountain's heir. Back then, the Majestic Clan and the Shura Guard had been incredibly arrogant during Taiyuan Tower's reopening. The Peafowl Guard's appearance had quickly taken them down a notch. Even the Majestic Clan's father and son duo had been arrested. The Shura Guard didn't dare stop them. The Peafowl Guard was definitely a strong faction in Veluriyam Capital.

"Go make your preparations. There is still a lot you need to learn about Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but time is of the essence. Preparing for your entrance into the main pagoda is your biggest priority right now. The rest can wait for when you return two years later." Emperor Peafowl was so worried about the demon

race that he'd already begun to make all kinds of preparations. However, two years was still an acceptable wait. The same couldn't be said if it had been eight or ten years.

Jiang Chen cupped his fist. "If that's the case, then this junior will be taking his leave. I intend to visit the market to purchase some servants."

His residence was too empty. He needed a few more people to liven up the place and perform the menial tasks. He wasn't going to let his trusted aides do those tasks. They had been loyal followers throughout his journey. He planned to train them and help them further their cultivation accordingly.

Emperor Peafowl didn't have anything else to say. He nodded and gave Jiang Chen a reminder. "Remember that you are the owner of the Progeny Feather Medallion from now on. You represent the Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Your medallion will reflect your identity no matter where you go. We are now your greatest ally and your most powerful support."

Jiang Chen nodded. He understood the hidden meaning behind the emperor's words. He returned to his residence to make proper arrangements before he left for the Fish and Dragon District to purchase some slaves. Gouyu and Xuetong accompanied him there. Ling Hui'er made a huge ruckus and wanted to follow along when she heard that they were leaving.

Jiang Chen didn't have a good impression of the Fish and Dragon District. He had stolen a few thousand slaves a while back, but he secretly returned all but a few to House Sikou's Myriad Puppets Pavilion. It wasn't that Jiang Chen didn't want to rob them blind, but because the slaves had all been branded by the Myriad Puppets Pavilion. If he didn't return them, the Myriad Puppets Pavilion could crush their jade tokens, instantly killing every single one of them. He simply didn't want to implicate the innocent.

Chapter 981: The Influence of a Young Master

The Fish and Dragon District was a quagmire of a place. Jiang Chen had no desire to stay there for long, nor did he want to bring a group of pretty girls there in any capacity. Thankfully, a man of his current station was unlikely to encounter any problems. The last time he'd come here, he'd been accompanied by Wei Jie. Despite that, he hadn't been taken very seriously by most of the people they'd come across. Back then, House Wei had still been a typical ninth-rank house on the brink of destitution. It was the very definition of insignificant. This time, Jiang Chen wasn't bringing anyone notable with him on his revisit. Both Wei Jie and Ji San were as busy as he for the next short while, having to make various preparations before entering the Veluriyam Pagoda. Nobody in their right mind would waste the three days of prep time allotted to them. These two were no exception.

Moreover, given Jiang Chen's current prominence in Veluriyam Capital, there was no one here that would dare lay a hand on him. The burning ire of Emperor Shura's faction could not manifest itself either. Emperor Peafowl's perceptiveness knew no bounds. Who knew if he was watching in secret? Anyone who schemed against the new young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain risked being made an example of by its master. Jiang Chen also had no interest in stirring up trouble. A few attendants in tow, he came quietly to the Fish and Dragon District.

However, after weathering the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering, Jiang Chen was a mysterious pill king no longer. He was the idol of the town! As soon as he arrived in the district, he was recognized by huge swathes of people. All of them came up to greet him. Even the most unruly of ruffians acted with modest and humility in front of him. Evidently, it wasn't his status but his performance that had conquered their hearts. Their support of him was sincere.

“Young lord Zhen, do you still remember this lowly one?” A person suddenly emerged from the throng. He was dressed in flowery clothing that could almost be described as gaudy. Such garments would be par for the course for a woman, but it was a bit over the top for a man.

“Aren’t you Lin Ming?” Jiang Chen remembered the guy. When Wei Jie had brought him to the district, the first thing he did was look for Lin Ming’s store. The merchant had been polite enough, but not particularly enthusiastic. He’d given Wei Jie a measure of face without being too eager to do so. Still, he seemed more than happy to cozy up nowadays. Here he was now, sidling towards him.

“Young lord Zhen, I heard that you became Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s young lord! I surmised that you would need some high-quality slaves, so I’ve been turning my pockets inside out recently… I’m happy to report that I’ve managed to cobble a reasonable batch of goods together. May I invite you to my store to take a look?”

Jiang Chen’s impression of Lin Ming was indifferent at best. The merchant had been comparatively distant back then, but that was normal. It was unreasonable to expect someone to be thrilled about dealing with a stranger. On the positive side, he’d gotten a few pieces of pertinent news afterwards from the man. Sure, that had been contingent on him curing the merchant’s illness, but the transaction had yielded useful results. In particular, the location of Regal Pill Palace’s group of disciples had been a key bit of information. That was why he had been able to rescue Shen Trifire, Gouyu, and the others from House Sikou’s Myriad Puppets Pavilion. It had only been a fair deal, but the timeliness of the information was not to be denied. If he’d been a few days late, it was likely that they would have been sold to the four corners of the world. Therefore, Jiang Chen remembered the favor.

“Boss Lin, you look like you’re doing well lately.” Jiang Chen

smiled at the merchant, noticing that he was no longer powdering his face. The white spots had disappeared. That meant that the root cause of his illness was gone.

Lin Ming's heart trembled at the very thought of the disease. He had been extremely lucky. He knew that without the pill king's previous help, he would likely be a corpse by now. He had kept a Nether Felidae around as a pet. Every midnight, countless evil and yin humors were drawn to it. If it hadn't been for the pill king's keen perception, he would have been history in just a short while. No matter how much money he possessed, he wouldn't have been able to spend any of it.

Thus, his gratefulness towards Pill King Zhen was heartfelt, and by extension, towards Wei Jie as well. After hearing about the pill king's remarkable deeds and witnessing his gradual rise to his present position as Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord, Lin Ming felt extremely regretful. He regretted that his attitude hadn't been the best in the past. Why had he waited until they'd struck a bargain before offering the useful piece of news? If he had been just a bit politer in terms of demeanor and behavior, he would have been able to hug the pill king's powerful thigh, so to speak, and refer to the encounter to others with ease. With Pill King Zhen's support, there was no way he would remain unknown. The backing of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord meant that he could walk with his head held high and do as he would throughout the entire Fish and Dragon District.

House Sikou's Myriad Puppets Pavilion had only been sponsored by the Majestic Clan. Emperor Shura was a layer beyond that. Yes, it was only a single layer of difference, but it meant that the Pavilion could never become a top store. They could only grow to rival the Majestic Clan, and not become useful to Emperor Shura himself. However, Lin Ming could have established a direct relationship with Sacred Peafowl Mountain if he had been s able to help young lord Zhen. Every time he remembered this matter, Lin

Ming regretted his previous actions down to his very intestines. He wanted to slap himself in the face a few times. He had missed out on the opportunity of a lifetime. Fortunately for him, he had another shot at it this time.

Ever since he'd received the news about Pill King Zhen becoming Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord, Lin Ming had wondered what would be the best way to go about making reparations for his past behavior. What would be the most ideal method of connecting with the pill king? He instantly thought that because young lord Zhen was moving into Sacred Peafowl Mountain, he would need a large number of slaves. This was customary for any young lord moving into a new residence. From here, he had an idea. He used every ounce of his energy and every thread of his network to collect a large batch of high-scoring slaves. They were all very reliable to boot! He carried out all of this with caution and reliability.

After all of this, he waited in front of the Fish and Dragon District entrance for Jiang Chen to appear. Lin Ming was fairly smart. He'd fully expected that young lord Zhen would come buy slaves during the half-week prep time. He had waited here three days and nights. His labor had finally been rewarded! He was both excited and anxious.

The excitement was from seeing young lord Zhen, and the anxiety from wondering how petty he would be. Was the capital's new star going to give him attitude for his prior treatment? If the young lord truly was a vengeful one, then the tribute he was attempting to pay him might have entirely the opposite effect. It could bring him misfortune rather than favor. The Fish and Dragon District was a pragmatic place. If anyone knew of the previous bad blood between him and young lord Zhen, they would surely take the opportunity to torment him or worse. The young lord was sure to be pleased by that! Lin Ming was wise enough to acknowledge this possibility from the start.

Thankfully, young lord Zhen was a tolerant man. There had been no lingering grudge. Instead, the young lord had both remembered him and inquired after the condition of his illness. Lin Ming's smile was positively simpering as he replied, "It's all thanks to your help, young lord Zhen. I've always appreciated it, and I've wanted to repay you for a while now..."

Jiang Chen returned the grin. "Then, shall we spend a few moments at your place?"

The other shopkeepers felt a tug on their heartstrings at those words. Countless gazes of admiration and envy shot towards Lin Ming. Nobody could come up with the actual reason why Lin Ming was so lucky. What did the young lord see in him, anyway? They had all been waiting to butter up the new star. Many had redecorated their stores to the point of obsessive perfection. Some had even hired exceptionally pretty girls as employees, all for the sole purpose of pleasing young lord Zhen. If the young lord stepped into their store, business would be much easier for them in the future.

How unfortunate that he'd been intercepted by Lin Ming. Judging by the expression on his face, they were on fairly good terms too. There were smiles and small talk. A relationship like that was enough to make any onlooker go green with envy. Feeling the burningly covetous looks from everyone around him, Lin Ming felt great satisfaction. Now wasn't the time to reveal it, however. He respectfully led Jiang Chen and his entourage along with him towards his store. The group disappeared at the end of the street, but the crowd persisted still.

"Lin Ming doesn't have a big business or a big store. What's that guy up to, joining in on the ruckus like this? Why's he trying to charm the young lord, too? What an annoyance."

"That kid's won the lottery. Did he know young lord Zhen from before?"

“Who knows? He looks like he’s going to have a good life from now on..”

“Ah, curses. I’ll have to socialize with him a bit more in the future. I didn’t know he had such a strong backer...”

Lin Ming was solidly middle-of-the-pack in terms of his prominence in the Fish and Dragon District. After today’s events, though, he would likely skyrocket in importance. It wasn’t a stretch to say that he would become one of the biggest shopkeepers here. This was the art of using someone else’s power to one’s advantage. Even the momentary presence of someone important in one’s store was worth ten thousand gold. That the person in question was on buddy-buddy terms as well made it all the more weightier.

Jiang Chen hadn’t considered any of this. He couldn’t possibly have imagined his few phrases of casual courtesy would cause such a noticeable effect on the Fish and Dragon District. Watching the slightly over-excited Lin Ming in front of him both amused him and made him a bit sentimental. When he had first come to the district, he had felt sidelined, despite having been in the company of Wei Jie. This time, innumerable eyes followed him at every turn, respectful and reverent. A change of standing really did have a large effect on social perception.

Chapter 982: An Immensely Respectful Lin Ming

When they arrived at Lin Ming's store, Xue Tong, Guo Jin and the other attendants stayed outside. Clearly, they didn't want anyone to disturb the young lord.

"Friends, there's no need to stand guard," Lin Ming offered a placatory smile. "My people will keep all the busybodies out."

Xue Tong shook his head coolly. "Just keep our young lord happy, Boss Lin. There's no need to be concerned about us."

The guardsman had small-town origins, but even he knew how to rely on his master's influence. Because of the young lord's rise in status, Xue Tong naturally became more assured as a result. The mild statement was practically inviolate to its listener. The only thing Lin Ming could do was to keep smiling. "Well then, I'll leave the hard work to you. Please excuse me."

These people weren't particularly strong in terms of prowess, but they were indubitably those that young lord Zhen trusted most. Why would he have brought them instead of the Peafowl Guard otherwise? Lin Ming couldn't offend any of these people, either. It was better to get on their good side. The quartet of Xue Tong, Guo Jin, and the Qiao brothers stood at the door like quadruplet gatekeepers. Despite their lack of actual ability, their very presence prevented most people from having the courage to intrude within. It was as if there was a restricted area beyond. Any trespassing would lead to disastrous results.

Lin Ming had made ample preparations for Jiang Chen's arrival. Immediately as the latter entered alongside his girls, a variety of refreshments were offered to them, all of the highest quality. Huang'er was an easygoing girl, and Wen Ziqi quite shy. Neither of them said anything. Gouyu and Ling Hui'er, on the other hand, were very chatty and active. There was no need to stop them, so

Jiang Chen let them be.

Lin Ming didn't know what the girls' relationship to young lord Zhen was, but it was a given that any girls near a young lord were to be fawned over. There could be no oversight in this regard. He acted with the utmost caution in their presence, lest he did anything thoughtless.

"How's business lately, Boss Lin?" Jiang Chen didn't want to see the merchant's excessive busyness and courtesy. Lin Ming was being too careful! This was not the kind of respect that he wanted.

"To answer your question, young lord, business is as usual. It's hard to make a living here in the Fish and Dragon District, and it's thanks to Veluriyam Capital that I'm able to eke out a few proceeds." Lin Ming's answer was humble.

Jiang Chen laughed. "You're a smart man. If even smart people can't stay in business, then the district would be in big trouble."

There were sweat drops on Lin Ming's forehead still. Jiang Chen smiled again, this time placidly. "Alright, you should take a seat as well. Relax, Boss. I'm still me. Treat me like one of your regulars."

The merchant wanted to do that more than anything, but psychological barriers were hard to break. Who could possibly treat Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord as an average Wang, Chen, or Lin? [1]

The young lord raised the teacup in his hand. "Cheers to you, Boss Lin. Pardon the substitution of wine for tea. I haven't yet thanked you for your help last time."

Lin Ming immediately stood up. "Not at all, not at all. I really didn't do much. It is I who should thank you for your lifesaving kindness."

Jiang Chen shook his head. "I saved only a single life in your case. But you… you helped me rescue a few dozen. It is right for me to respect your aid."

The robbery of a few thousand slaves from Myriad Puppets Pavilion was widely known. Lin Ming had heard of it almost instantly after the fact. At the time, the young master of House Sikou had investigated even him. Thankfully, Lin Ming had been extremely tight-lipped about the entire affair. Having failed to unearth any useful clues, House Sikou gave up the endeavor as fruitless. Both the event and aftermath made him wonder about Jiang Chen's origin. And yet, he could only speculate about these things internally. Announcing them to any outside parties was absolutely out of the question. Neither House Sikou nor young lord Zhen was an entity he could trifle with. Angering either one would lead to a swift and painful death. Though Lin Ming did not have a stalwart patron, he made his way around the Fish and Dragon District with his innate guile instead.

"No matter what you say, young lord, I cannot forget your compassion in saving my life. I've prepared a batch of slaves today, all of them sage realm or above. Perhaps they might yet be fitting for someone of your greatness. If it pleases you, do grace us with your presence at the back of the store?"

Jiang Chen raised an eyebrow, looking at Lin Ming with some surprise. He knew that sage realm slaves cost two to ten million saint spirit stones per head. Lin Ming's store was not big at all. It couldn't compare to the scale of an establishment like the Myriad Puppets Pavilion. The merchant was quite capable to have pulled off such a feat. More importantly, he was also shrewd enough to have foreseen that Jiang Chen would come buy slaves in the first place. That was why he'd maneuvered his resources like this.

The young lord's ruminant gaze made Lin Ming feel somewhat nervous. "Young lord, I've always felt a bit sorry about meaningful last encounter," he stammered. "As soon as I heard you became Sacred Peafowl Mountain's new young lord, I wanted to make it up to you. I spared no expense when gathering these slaves, and only barely made ends meet. I only hope that you'll be willing to accept

them, as both an apology and a token of my appreciation." Lin Ming was a clever man. Worried about possible misunderstandings, he plainly explained his motives ahead of time. Jiang Chen smiled and nodded at his words.

"No problem. Shall we go see? It is not good to seek two solutions to a single problem. If we can get business done here, there's no need to trouble another." Jiang Chen didn't exactly approve of the slave trade at his core. But, he was in dire need of additional help that could maintain the day-to-day operations of his residence. After he cultivated his own followers, the slaves could then be slated for eventual release. An opportunity at a new life, so to speak. The response cheered Lin Ming up. The young lord hadn't borne a grudge after all. To the contrary, he was going to do him the favor he'd wanted. The merchant led Jiang Chen into his courtyard.

A hundred and fifty or so sage realm slaves were lined up here, row by row. All of their masks had been removed ahead of time. The supposed rules of the trade: no revealing appearances, no checking identities, none of them were imposed here. Jiang Chen gave the group a casual scan with his God's Eye. He passed over their faces one by one. There was no one he knew among them.

"These slaves are from all over the world. Most are wandering cultivators. As to their identities, I don't think there's much worry about any resulting trouble," Lin Ming explained.

The young lord nodded. He knew what 'no resulting trouble' meant. There was no need to worry about anyone who was going to come find them. In general, slave sales did not extend to those affiliated with large sects. No slave trader wanted to attract an inconvenience, especially since any such inconvenience was likely to devolve into a very sticky affair. The largest sects were especially vengeful. Buying or selling their disciples was like playing with a keg of gunpowder. Jiang Chen checked all of the slaves' consciousnesses. All of them were sage realm and above.

Some were young, some much older.

“These are fine.” A single examination was enough for him to make his decision. A man of his station normally kept three to five hundred servants. However, he had no such designs of excessive grandeur. He had only become young lord for a short while. There was no need for him to flaunt his newfound eminence. A hundred or so sage realm servants was already quite staggering. It was many times more than Regal Pill Palace used to have, once upon a time. Of course, Sacred Peafowl Mountain could not be compared to a mere fourth rank sect. It was at least as powerful as a first rank sect, likely even more so. As the second-in-command of the power and its future leader, Jiang Chen could easily justify a degree of ostentation. Lin Ming was very pleased at young lord Zhen’s decisive patronage.

“How many spirit stones do I owe you, Boss Lin? Give me the bill, if you would be so kind.”

“If the young lord finds it satisfactory, how can I take...” The merchant hurriedly replied.

Jiang Chen waved a hand. “Don’t say anything about not taking my money. Firstly, I’m not a fan of what essentially is outright robbery. Secondly, I’m not going to miss that money anyway. Finally, your store isn’t big enough to play ball like that. Name a price.”

Lin Ming was ashamed. The young lord had hit the mark with his comments. He really couldn’t afford to give the slaves away. Stocking them had cost the majority of his personal fortune. If he wasn’t recouping any of the cost, his store would suffer a grievous blow virtually impossible to recover from. But making young lord Zhen’s acquaintance was more important. If the young lord wanted them for free, then he would get them. Lin Ming wouldn’t bat an eyelash. As long as he had young lord Zhen’s support, there would surely be future opportunities to prosper. Merchants were adept at guessing their betters’ thoughts, however, and Lin Ming

was no different. There was no hint of freebooting intent in Jiang Chen's tone. If he forcefully gave the slaves away, it would upset the young lord instead.

Young lord Zhen had said it himself just now: he didn't need the money. Still, he had to be careful about how much money he did take. "Then I'll quote you the cost of the goods straight. Three hundred million saint spirit stones would be enough to cover my expenses." The sum was fairly accurate, in a fashion. It was only missing a few dozen million saint spirit stones from the actual cost. He could bear a loss like that fairly easily.

Jiang Chen nodded, tossing the merchant a storage ring. "Here's four hundred million. I know there's some water to your quote. You wouldn't just tell me the full amount. No matter the difference, you can keep everything there. I don't think there's any need for further courtesy.

Taking the storage ring in hand instinctively, Lin Ming's mouth was agape. He didn't know what to say, but the gesture warmed the cockles of his heart. Such exceptional generosity! As expected of a young lord. Any more bargaining or pushiness was excessive and a little boorish. Clearly, young lord Zhen didn't care about a trifle in difference. He quickly sang the young lord's praises. "Thank you for being so thoughtful, young lord. This'll make me a tidy sum. Here are the slaves' identification tablets and jade tokens..."

Lin Ming presented the necessary accessories one by one. Jiang Chen waved a hand for Gouyu and Ling Hui'er to collect the items. "Alright. I have business elsewhere, so I won't stay any longer." He gave the slaves another once over. "Boss Lin, would you mind delivering them to Sacred Peafowl Mountain for me?"

"Of course, of course." Lin Ming hastily nodded. "A visit from a young lord is a very rare occurrence, so I was originally thinking of setting a banquet, well..."

“Next time.” Jiang Chen was in no mood to stay. Lin Ming’s disappointment made him smile, though. “I’ll bring Wei Jie sometime. The two of you should get to know each other better.”

Overjoyed, Lin Ming silently cursed his own stupidity. How could someone of his standing just invite young lord Zhen to a banquet like that? On what basis would the young lord have come? The insinuation in the young lord’s words was clear. If he wanted to hobnob with the young lord, getting on Wei Jie’s good side was the first thing to do. He accompanied Jiang Chen’s entourage out the door, incessantly nodding all the while. There was no more mention of a banquet.

1. These are some of the most popular Chinese last names. This would be similar to saying the “average Tom, Dick, and Harry”.

Chapter 983: The Courteousness And Dignity Of A Young Lord

Lin Ming toiled tirelessly once he realized that young lord Zhen didn't bear any grudges against him. Moreover, the young lord had even told him to get to know Wei Jie more. It was an indication that the boss was tacitly accepted by the young lord. This incredibly motivated Lin Ming, and he even brought all of his most trusted men with him to personally escort the newly purchased slaves to Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Jiang Chen had Xue Tong and the others to await Lin Ming's arrival at the entrance of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. The slaves were subdued, so Jiang Chen didn't need to worry that they might rebel against their masters. After all, the Peafowl Guard could easily eliminate them at any moment's notice. However, the slaves were still at the mercy of their owners even without the guards. This was because their ownership jade token were in their owner's hands. The owner need only break the tokens in half to activate the restrictions within their consciousness. Their mind would then collapse, instantly killing them. The slaves would never do anything rash under such conditions, unless they were tired of living. Moreover, the owner could simply check the tokens at any moment to find out if they were planning to revolt.

The slaves had no choice but to resign to their fates and listen to their owner's orders if they wanted to live. Pride and honor had no place in their life. The owner could kill them with the snap of a finger if they disobeyed his orders. However, Jiang Chen wasn't such a tyrannical person. He'd bought these slaves, but he didn't plan to enslave them for the rest of their lives. He actually disliked ordering the slaves around. It wasn't that he believed that all life was equal, but he understood how difficult it was to be a cultivator. Becoming a slave after so much cultivation was a fate crueler than death.

The first thing he did was gather the slaves when they arrived at his residence. “I know not why or how you were reduced into slavery, but It is not my intention to enslave you for the rest of your life. With that said, I still require a lot of help as my residence was only recently established. I hope that you will be responsible in all matters and do whatever it is you are asked to. I will one day return your freedom and your lives back to you. You need not doubt the authenticity of my words. I guarantee that you will not spend more than a hundred years as slaves in my residence.”

Emotions began to appear on their expressionless faces when they heard his words. Emotions had ceased to be a part of them ever since they were reduced into slaves. They were humanoid tools. All they could feel was fear and obedience. A hint of skepticism appeared in the slaves’ eyes when they heard his promise. They were aware of the identity of their buyer. He was the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain and also one of the most popular people of Veluriyam Capital. This was exactly the reason why they were incredibly nervous while they were on road to his residence. There was no say what their life would be like at the Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Young lord Zhen had a good reputation in the capital, but who knew what he was really like in private? Was he a tyrannical person with a short temper? Would he take his anger out on the slaves?

Slaves often led pitiful lives in aristocratic residences. They were treated as mere cultivation tools and were used as targets for skill testing. Some were even used as a punching bags. Their masters would beat them whenever they were in a bad mood. It was difficult to gauge how many slaves were beaten to death in the Upper Eight Regions everyday. A slave had no rights. The death of a slave was like the death of a mere hound. Nobody would ever question or investigate, because a slave was nothing more than a commodity. They didn’t believe Jiang Chen one bit when he said those words. However, It was evident that he had a different attitude towards slaves compared to others.

“Maybe there are some among you that think that I’m lying or that I’m only putting on a show. But let me ask, what do I stand to gain by lying to you?” Jiang Chen cut straight to the point. “I’m not trying to please anyone by promising you anything. I merely wanted to let you know that only I have the power to control your fate. And only I can grant you a new lease in life.”

“Some of you might ask why I’m doing this. I can only say that it’s because I understand that you have gone through all kinds of difficulties to cultivate to your current level. Forever reduced into slavery must’ve been a fate worse than death for all of you.,I’m not fond of such cruelty. This is why I’m offering you an opportunity for a new life! But I will not do it unless you prove that you deserve it. If you dawdle around without any sincerity in your work then I can only apologize. You will have no choice but to be a slave for the rest of your life. I will not offer you the opportunity to turn your life around.” The meaning behind Jiang Chen’s words were clear. He wanted to unite these slaves from different backgrounds by offering them a common goal. It was impossible to brainwash them with the limited time that he had. So, the best way to do that was to entice them by offering their freedom back and a new life. This was something all slaves craved for. It was also the only thing they could look forward to. Jiang Chen glanced briefly through the crowd.

“I will now allow you three questions. Only three.” Jiang Chen gave them a stern look before he continued. “You better make them count.”

The slaves finally realized that the new young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain truly was different from the others. Their icy cold hearts began to thaw, and their minds slowly unwinding themselves. The crowd quickly gathered together to discuss their questions. They sent out three representatives after fifteen minute had passed. These three were the oldest and strongest among the slaves at ninth level sage realm. They were a few hundred years

old. It was obvious that they were very experienced in the cultivation world. Elderly cultivators were often reduced into slaves due to a painful past or because they were backstabbed by others.

“Young lord, this old slave has a question.” A grey-haired man with a beard was the first to speak. “Is it true that you will release us from slavery after a hundred years if we unite as one to serve under your banner?”

Everyone was dying to know the answer to this question. Jiang Chen nodded without hesitation. “You needn’t worry. You will be released as long as you pass the test and satisfy me with your service. It doesn’t have to be a hundred years. It’s possible that I might release you within fifty years, thirty years, or maybe even twenty years.”

There was no vagueness in his answer. The grey-haired man was satisfied. He nodded and returned to his original place. Another middle aged man stepped up to ask the second question.

“Young lord, this lowly one is called Dan Qinzi. I only wish to ask if we are allowed to leave Sacred Peafowl Mountain after we regain our freedom.”

This was also a question that some were concerned about. What use would freedom be if they couldn’t leave this place? Jiang Chen smiled. “It’s your own choice whether you wish to leave or to stay. What would people say if the Sacred Peafowl Mountain had stopped a person of free will from leaving?”

The slaves exchanged glances and communicated with their eyes. Many seemed very content with the answers they’d received. The last person to step up was a big and burly man. He yelled, “Young lord! My surname is Tu! Everyone else calls me Ole Tu! It’s a given that we will serve you after you’ve bought us. However, I wish to ask if there’s anyone among you and your followers that has the habit of beating slaves.”

His boldness had grown bigger after hearing the young lord's sincere answers. His question was also slightly more sensitive than the others.

Jiang Chen burst into laughter. "What, is there a trend in Veluriyam Capital for beating up slaves? I don't know about others, but you need not worry about such matters in my residence. You are slaves in name, but you are more likely to be treated as a common follower. Nobody will give you any trouble as long as you work hard and do your job. Remember that you are now a member of the young lord residence. You should always act in the interest of the residence. I only ask for your loyalty and commitment. I don't want to see anyone evade their responsibilities and create havoc within these walls. As long as you manage these things, you will one day see the light as free men."

Jiang Chen could've use strong handed methods to make them obey, but he was well aware that such methods would often backfire after a period of time had passed. Most of his followers weren't as powerful as them except for Huang'er. There were many instances where a slave's sage realm cultivation could be put up to good use. Inflicting fear into them could make them obey, but it couldn't motivate them to give their all. However, giving them encouragement and a taste of the good life could do exactly that. They weren't going to be lazy or hide their true abilities so they could stand out and pass the test set by the young lord. The slaves were delighted. They had a feeling that young lord Zhen wasn't lying to them. He seemed like a man who kept his promises.

"You three. Since you were sent out as representatives, you must be well respected by the others. I will temporarily set you as leaders among the servants. Each of you will be in charge of fifty people. Naturally, somebody will divide work among all of you later." Jiang Chen had given them a sweet taste of what was to come. Setting three of them as leaders might seem like a small matter, but there was an enormous signal behind it. As expected,

the slaves were elated when they heard that. What did it mean to have one of them as a leader? It meant that the young lord was giving them right to make their own decisions! It was now up to them to perform. The slaves had become infinitely more motivated. Hope had dawned and a new life awaited ahead of them.

Chapter 984: Nianer

Jiang Chen had paved the road for the future. Gouyu and Xue Tong were put in charge of the slaves and allocating work. Jiang Chen also gave them the full management rights to every slave. They were flattered by his trust in both of them, but they also felt quite pressured. Jiang Chen didn't meddle much with matters relating to the slaves. In fact, he distanced himself from the management of the entire residence. Gouyu and Xue Tong were in charge of everything. Two days had already passed and there was only one preparation day left. Since Jiang Chen was already fully prepared, he decided to go for a stroll around Sacred Peafowl Mountain while there was still time. He was, after all, still new here.

He decided to pay some of the elders a visit before he had to leave for the main pagoda. He visited the four monarchs, some high-ranked Peafowl Guard officers, and Elder Gu Yu, who was from the same generation as Emperor Peafowl. They were the ones who were supposed to visit him now that he was young lord. However, they decided against it, as they didn't want to disturb what little time he had left for preparation. They were entirely astonished and fearful when Jiang Chen took the initiative to pay them a visit.

He was the owner of the Progeny Feather Medallion, making him the next heir to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He held a higher position than any of them. Having the young lord visit them instead of it being the other way around was a slight miscalculation on their part, so the first thing they did was try to explain themselves.

"Young lord! We didn't visit you in the past three days because we thought you'd be busy with your preparations for the main pagoda. This is truly embarrassing. I apologize that you had to come visit us instead." Cloudsoar Monarch explained to Jiang Chen patiently. Jiang Chen was not the kind of person to quibble

over such pointless issues. He was certain that the monarch had spoken the truth.

“Cloudsoar Monarch, His Majesty often tells me that I should pay you a visit if I have any questions about Sacred Peafowl Mountain.”

Cloudsoar Monarch smiled. “His Majesty truly flatters me. I must say that I am quite impressed by the amount of foresight His Majesty possesses. Back then, I was too short sighted to see what His Majesty saw in you when he revealed his intentions to make you his heir. I had even expressed my concerns to him regarding his decision. But time has proven me wrong.”

Jiang Chen didn’t stay for long. He said his goodbyes after chatting for a bit. After that, he visited Wildfox Monarch and Chronobalance Monarch. Wildfox Monarch had the temperament of a leisurely wild crane. He was slightly surprised by Jiang Chen’s sudden visit and acted neither overly distant nor overly close.

Chronobalance Monarch was slightly more laid back. He didn’t flatter Jiang Chen, but he did give the new young lord some encouraging words. Jiang Chen offered a gift of pills to every monarch he visited. It was the best thing he could offer right now. He visited Plumscore Monarch last, as she lived the furthest away. There were many mountain ranges in Sacred Peafowl Mountain, and every monarch possessed their own territory.

The Plumscore Retreat was at the northernmost region of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. It was the mountain range where the plum blossoms bloomed the most. Plumscore Monarch loved the flower, her personality just as cold and as lofty as her namesake. It was the reason why she had personally chosen the dao name of Plumscore Monarch. Jiang Chen had seen her many times, but they never truly interacted. He only knew that she had a slightly colder personality than the others.

Jiang Chen didn’t expect the four monarchs to be too courteous

towards him. After all, only a few days had passed since he had become heir. The four monarchs had followed Emperor Peafowl for thousands of years and held very high positions within Sacred Peafowl Mountain. It was only natural that they would find it difficult to lower themselves to the new heir's position. The barrier within their hearts was too high. It wasn't easy for them to forgo their pride and dignity.

He had visited them on his own accord to shorten the distance between them. He was a young man. Dignity wasn't a big concern to him. His relationship with the four monarchs, however, was. Visiting them seemed to have brought them closer. Of course, this didn't necessarily mean that Plumscore Monarch was going to give him face like the other three monarchs had. According to his sources, Plumscore Monarch had opposed the hardest when he was first proposed to be the next heir. Although, it wasn't truly an objection; she had merely voiced her concerns.

Jiang Chen stood outside the entrance of the Plumscore Retreat and admired the unique view. Because of the altitude and terrain, the mountains here were covered in snow all year round, except during the summer. There were all kinds of plum blossom species here. Every seasonal change produced a different view as the flowers bloomed and wilted. He was mesmerized by the scenery as he stood at the entrance.

One couldn't help but praise the beauty of the Plumscore Retreat. The pristine mountains stood high above the clouds. One could faintly see them amongst the snow storm. It was like a view taken from a celestial realm. Plum blossom trees stood tall amongst the billowing snow. The plants here were green and full of life, even though all around them was a world of ice. They seemed to be unaffected by the ongoing snow storm. They must've been specially chosen for this climate.

In the midst of being deeply enthralled by the enchanting view, Jiang Chen suddenly heard a sharp cry. A white flash of light had

shot down from above the clouds and was headed straight at him at a frightening speed. A youthful voice was heard crying out anxiously at the same time, “Whitey! No!”

Jiang Chen used his God’s Eye to take a closer look and noticed that a fierce eagle was barreling towards him. Its feathers were as white as snow, camouflaging it in the world of ice. It was diving at him! He was a little taken aback by the power of the eagle’s attack. It was equivalent to an all-out strike by an earth sage realm cultivator! Of course, there was no reason for alarm.

He cracked a gentle smile as golden brilliance surged from his body. A magnetic power instantly shot up thirty feet above his head. The white eagle came within range of the magnetic power and slammed into an invisible energy wall. Screech! It immediately cried out in pain. Some of its feathers fell off and fluttered away with the snow. However, the eagle’s aggression didn’t wane. It continued to glare at Jiang Chen, but it no longer dared attack. It was obviously wary of an unwanted guest like him. Jiang Chen found the eagle’s human-like expressions quite funny. It had probably attacked him because it thought that he was up to no good in the Plumscore Retreat.

Another white flash of light suddenly shot down from the sky. It was another snow eagle, but this one stopped halfway in the sky. A young girl, roughly about five or six years of age, was mounted on the eagle’s back. Her long black hair was wrapped up into many small braids, and her eyes shimmered like the stars in the night sky. Her white feathery dress only accentuated her fairy-like appearance. Jiang Chen was surprised by her sudden appearance.

One could easily tell how sorry she was by looking into her big watery eyes. “Sorry big brother! Whitey is a bad bird. Did he hurt you?”

The little girl’s voice was crisp and the tone tender. There was an innocence to the voice that could only be found in children. Anyone who heard her voice would feel an urge to dote on her.

“Whitey! Why did you attack big brother?” the little girl asked the eagle as she caressed its feathers. Her voice was full of compassion. “You’re lucky that big brother showed you mercy! You could have suffered from a much worse fate!”

Jiang Chen was equally as curious as he was entertained by her manner of speech. A weird feeling rippled through his heart. For some reason, he felt an instant connection to the little girl when he saw her. Her cuteness tugged on his heartstrings. Jiang Chen was full of smiles as he looked at her. He could feel a warm feeling permeate through his heart. He had very little experience with children in his previous life. It was genuinely a wonderful feeling to have a little girl suddenly barge into his world with such a beautiful scenery in the background. Sigh… I can’t believe that I’ve never had the opportunity to experience a carefree childhood even though I’ve already lived two lives. The little girl’s unique aura flooded his heart with tenderness for some inexplicable reason. It stoked feelings of benevolence from him.

The little girl could sense the kindness within his eyes. She looked back at him with lively eyes and asked, “Big brother, are you alright?”

Jiang Chen burst into laughter. “I’m fine. Little girl, what’s your name?”

The little girl breathed a sigh of relief when she heard that he was fine. The worry in her eyes diminished greatly. “My name is Nian’er. Mommy says that my name originates from the word ‘longing’,” she replied earnestly. [ref] ‘Longing’ in Chinese can be “si nian”.

“Nian’er? Mm. That is indeed a very lovely name. By the way, Nian’er, why are you playing alone at the entrance? Aren’t you afraid of bad people?”

Nian’er tilted her head and laughed. “This is Sacred Peafowl Mountain! Bad people wouldn’t dare come here! Grandpa emperor

will send them running if they ever try to. There's also grandma... they say that bad guys fear grandma the most."

"Grandma? Who is your grandma?" Jiang Chen wondered if this child was Plumscore Monarch's grandchild.

Multiple white silhouettes shot out from the entrance of the Plumscore Retreat while he was deep in his own thoughts. They were surprised to see Jiang Chen. "Young lord Zhen?"

Jiang Chen cupped his fists and smiled. "Greetings, fellow daoists. It's been a few days since I've moved to the mountains. I've come to pay Plumscore Monarch a visit today, as I've finally found some free time."

They became extremely courteous when they realized that he was young lord Zhen. They quickly bowed and greeted him. "We didn't know that the young lord would be coming today. Please excuse us for not welcoming you outside. Young lord, please. Come in."

Another cultivator went to the little girl and said, "Nian'er, it's stormy outside. Come back in. Hurry!"

Nian'er seemed quite curious about Jiang Chen. Her big expressive round eyes darted around Jiang Chen's body. "Big brother, you're young lord Zhen? Nian'er hears that everyone in Veluriyam Capital sings you praises and calls you a great hero!"

Chapter 985: Plumscore Monarch

Jiang Chen didn't think much of it when others called him a hero of Veluriyam Capital. However, he felt some embarrassment when the little girl said the same thing. He had made some good contributions to Veluriyam Capital, but he knew very well that none of them were worthy of him being hailed a hero. Plumscore Monarch was obviously surprised by Jiang Chen's sudden visit, but she wasn't an apologetic sort of person.

"Young lord Zhen, I had my doubts and voiced my opposition when His Majesty made your heir. With that being said, you are welcome to prove me wrong with your actions. I will not oppose your succession just for the sake of opposition. As long as you prove yourself worthy, I will offer you more support than anyone else. There's no ulterior motive behind my words, simply that Sacred Peafowl Mountain needs an exceptional successor." She was very cold and straightforward. If others had tried to convey such words to him, they might've said it in a more tactful manner to soften the blow. However, words that she delivered were forever cold and impersonal.

Those with a petty personality would be offended by her. After all, she was speaking to the young lord whom she was technically a subordinate to. Jiang Chen smiled and nodded. "Plumscore Monarch, you need not explain yourself to me. I fully understand your position. The monarchs have been by His Majesty's side for over a millennia. It's proof that you have all passed his test and aren't the sort to lose sight of the greater picture when intermixing right and wrong. Otherwise, His Majesty would have never promoted you to such great heights. Of this I have never held any doubts."

He was being incredibly straightforward as well. A hint of surprise appeared in Plumscore Monarch's cold eyes. She had never expected young lord Zhen to hold such an opinion. When a

young person was made heir, it was expected that he would also gain an accompanying air of arrogance or maybe even a bit of recklessness. However, young lord Zhen had managed to maintain an objective stance regarding the issue.

Plumscore Monarch was mildly surprised by how mature and level-headed he was. Her expression warmed a little as she nodded in response. “His Majesty didn’t make the wrong judgment when he chose us, so I’m inclined to believe that he’s made a sound judgement in choosing you as well. But unlike the commoners of Veluriyam Capital, I will not be blinded by your minor achievements. You have made some contributions to the capital, but you are still not worthy of being hailed as Veluriyam’s hero. A person’s true character and moral values are only revealed when one goes through hardships. I saw your talent in pill dao when you battled Pillfire City and then your talent in martial dao when you joined the Martial Pagoda battles. I recognize your immense talent in both, but I have yet to see your true character as well as your moral compass. These things take time, and I promise that I will always observe you in an impartial manner.”

Jiang Chen viewed the monarch with solemn respect. As heir to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, his authority was now only second to the emperor. None of the other monarchs would say such things to him. However, this didn’t mean that he had already gained their tacit approval. It was likely that they had the same unvoiced doubts as Plumscore Monarch. She was the only one who dared speak her mind.

Narrow-minded folks likely couldn’t even stand the sight of her. But as someone who had lived two lives, Jiang Chen knew just how important these kinds of people were to a person of high power. In fact, it was actually dangerous to not have these kinds of people around. Jiang Chen had already achieved what he’d come here for. He hadn’t visited the monarchs to show off his new authority or to make Plumscore Monarch kowtow in submission. That would be

asking for too much. He had visited them as an expression of his sincerity. He took his leave after chatting a while longer.

Plumscore Monarch didn't stop him from leaving and sent him off all the way to the entrance. "There's no need for us to exchange pleasantries. I'm certain you will seek out Cloudsoar Monarch if you have any problems. Since you're the owner of Progeny Feather Medallion, you can also summon the Peafowl Guard at your own discretion. I can save myself the trouble of saying you can come to me with any questions."

Jiang Chen smiled. Her sharp tongue was truly formidable. He immediately changed the subject. "Before I entered your retreat, I saw an adorable girl, roughly five or six years of age. Is she your granddaughter?

"You mean Nian'er?" Plumscore Monarch was surprised by the question. She never thought that Jiang Chen would ask about her family matters.

Jiang Chen smiled as he nodded. "Ah, yes. She did say that she was called Nian'er."

The monarch's eyes became a lot more gentler at the mention of Nian'er. The angelic girl seemed capable of melting even the iciest of hearts. "Sigh... cultivation has always been my one focus. How can I have a granddaughter when I've yet to marry? I was kindly asked by the emperor to nurture and take good care of Nian'er. She's a kind girl that has led a hard life. I can only imagine that it was much worse for her mother." She suddenly glanced at Jiang Chen. "Did you hear about the marriage proposal nonsense a few days ago?"

Jiang Chen raised his eyebrow, catching her drift. "Do you mean Nian'er is Miss Dan'er's daughter?"

Jiang Chen had never met Dan'er. They were supposed to meet two days ago, but she had locked herself away in closed door cultivation for three years due to her inability to cope with the

harassment from her suitors. Emperor Peafowl told him that she had a daughter. Who would have thought that Jiang Chen would bump into her today? It felt as though he'd been poked in the softest parts of his heart when he'd met the little girl. He felt an inexplicable sense of kinship and curiosity towards that girl. He couldn't help but wonder why. It was this precise feeling that prompted him to ask Plumscore Monarch even more questions about her. His heart trembled when he heard that the girl had led a hard life. He felt a slight mixture of pity and empathy.

Cultivators often had hearts that were as solid as rock. He was left deeply confused when such feelings had surfaced within him out of nowhere. Sigh... I guess I have no immunity to children because I didn't spend much time with them in my previous life. However, that still doesn't explain the inexplicable sense of kinship I feel... Jiang Chen pondered, but he eventually concluded that he was just innately fond of children. He couldn't resist looking back when he walked out of the Plumscore Retreat. Unfortunately, fate deemed that he would have to walk away disappointed. He wanted to see the girl again, but it'd be weird if he acted overly familiar with a five-year-old child, especially when this was his first time visiting them. A person like Plumscore Monarch would absolutely read too much into his actions.

Nian'er immediately ran up to Plumscore Monarch after Jiang Chen had left.

"Grandma! They brought big brother to see you, and Nian'er wants to talk to big brother more!" Nian'er was full of joy and excitement when she ran towards the monarch.

Plumscore Monarch had just returned after sending Jiang Chen off. A rare smile appeared on her face when she saw the girl. "Nian'er, do you know who that big brother is?"

The little girl nodded in a sensible manner. "Yeah! His name is young lord Zhen. They say that he's a hero of Veluriyam Capital!"

Plumscore Monarch frowned a little. “Does Nian’er think that he is a hero too?”

Nian’er’s big watery eyes blinked as she pondered the question. “Since everyone calls him that, Nian’er thinks that it’s probably true!”

Plumscore Monarch gently sighed and said nothing else. She couldn’t deny the young lord’s contributions to the capital. He had defeated Pillfire City and Pill King Ji Lang, both of which had definitely been great deeds of valor. Unfortunately, the monarch simply knew nothing about the young lord’s background or character. A person like her absolutely found it difficult to accept him on such short notice. But since the emperor had already made his decision, it wouldn’t be right for her to be overly pessimistic. She would never oppose a decision made by the emperor.

“Grandma, has big brother left already?” Nian’er’s eyes were darting around but she couldn’t find Jiang Chen. She seemed a little disappointed.

“Mm. He’s left. Nian’er, why are you looking for young lord Zhen? You’re too young to play with him.” Plumscore Monarch didn’t think much of it. She passed it off as a whim of a child.

“Big brother is a nice person. Nian’er found him very friendly when I first saw him. It feels like he will protect Nian’er even if the sky were to collapse one day. Grandma, big brother will protect Sacred Peafowl Mountain, the people here, and Nian’er right?” Nian’er almost seemed afraid that her grandma wouldn’t give her an answer she wanted to hear. Her tiny little face was all tensed up when she asked the question. She stared at the monarch expectantly, waiting for an answer.

Plumscore Monarch sighed yet again. “Let’s hope so.”

Nian’er quickly yelled, “He definitely will! Nian’er can tell that big brother is a good person just from his eyes alone! He will protect Nian’er and all of Sacred Peafowl Mountain!”

Plumscore Monarch sighed deeply in her mind when she heard what the girl had said. Sigh... young lord Zhen, if you are truly the esteemed protector of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, then it will be our honor to have you here. But if you are actually a miscreant with evil intentions, I have no choice but to commend you for your flawless acting. You might have fooled the entire capital, His Majesty, and even this innocent five-year-old girl...

Emotions lingered within Jiang Chen's mind even after his return to the residence. The little girl's smile was seared into his mind. He felt that his fate with Sacred Peafowl Mountain had suddenly become even more entangled. Not much else happened that night. A day later, the geniuses who had made it into the rankings gathered. The top thirty-six ranked geniuses were allowed entry into the main pagoda first, and those on the Genius Rankings were allowed to enter the Martial Pagoda. Jiang Chen was about to enter the best quadrant within the pagoda and stay in there for up to two years.

Chapter 986: The Three Secret Realms

The geniuses of the seven great emperors had once again gathered and were awaiting further instructions. Those chosen for the Pill and Martial Pagoda had already gone on, while the thirty-six slated for the main pagoda were still waiting. Jiang Chen knew that the seven emperors were intending to pay their respects to the main pagoda first.

The main pagoda was a structure that symbolized the Capital and was considered its sacred legacy. A solemn ceremony needed to be performed for each entrance, with all sorts of omens appearing after the ceremony. These omens also decided some of the specifics relating to the main pagoda's opening. It took about an hour for the seven emperors to bring the ceremony to a close. When they exited the main pagoda, their expressions were curiously uniform with surprise and serendipity. It was an easy guess that the augury within the pagoda had gone fairly well. There was no alternative explanation for the coordinated joy of the seven emperors otherwise.

All of the geniuses present felt a certain degree of anticipation. What could have made the seven lofty emperors so happy? Did they foretell something exceedingly good? The seven emperors traded furtively communicative looks. Finally, their collective gazes settled on Emperor Peafowl to announce the results. There was no reason for the leading emperor to refuse. He spoke with an expression of unmistakable joy, "Apologies to have kept everyone waiting. However, I think that you'll find that it's been worth your while."

The emperor's words successfully piqued his audience's curiosity. "This particular opening of the Pagoda is different from usual. Typically, when the Pagoda opens, only one single secret realm is accessible. This time, however, three will be opened to you fortunate entrants. Such an occurrence, while not strictly

unique, has only happened three times in total since the beginning of antiquity. Therefore, you should count yourselves greatly blessed by providence. Countless Veluriyam Pagoda gatherings have been held throughout millennia, and yet only thrice has this happened before now." Emperor Peafowl's tone became a little more passionate. "Gentlemen, this is both a time of boon and a time of doom. In the past, these special occasions have also heralded eras of great turmoil for the Divine Abyss Continent. It is quite likely that a new age of martial anarchy is upon us. I am not here to prophesy doomsday, however, so feel free to simply treat my words as advice. Make the best of this opportunity. Exert yourselves to your utmost and receive plentiful experiences, advancements, treasures, and traditions. No one can predict the future. Obtaining a more varied arsenal now will provide better security down the road."

All thirty-six young lords in the Ranking became quite serious. They deciphered great opportunity from the emperor's speech, but a hint of worry as well. In the crowd of people, Ji San couldn't resist exchanging a look with his sworn brother.

"So that you can better deal with the problems you'll encounter on this excursion, I would like to tell you about the three secret realms opening this year. They are, in order, the secret realms of heritage, adventure, and battle. Heritage is a place of cultivation and meditation. Adventure, a place where you can gather experience and forge yourselves anew. Finally, battle is where you may test your mettle, an arena to assess the results of your cultivation.

"This year, everyone on the Ranking of Young Lords can choose between the three secret realms freely. Each man can decide on his own which is best suited for him. However, note that the thirty-six of you are divided into four divisions. The fourth division may stay in the Pagoda for only three months, and switch between realms only twice. The third division will be given half a year and four

changes. The second, one entire year, eight changes. And lastly, the first division has two full years, and an unlimited number of changes between the secret realms."

The details made the first division's nine geniuses grin with glee. Making it into the top nine had reaped a lion's share of benefits. The freedom to change between the secret realms at will gave them unlimited flexibility. It was an overwhelming advantage. On top of that, they had the longest stay inside the main pagoda.

"Finally, one last reminder. You are not a hundred percent safe inside a secret realm. Moreover, the risk of being kicked out is present at all times. As for when that might happen, you will be informed once you go inside." Emperor Peafowl smiled at this point. "Alright, I think that's enough. I'm sure I haven't mentioned everything, so try to be mindful of the finer details after you go inside. To sum up everything I've mentioned: This is a rare opportunity. Whether you do or die here is entirely up to you. Prepare yourselves and receive your jade tokens, because a new realm awaits you all very soon. Note that your jade token is a proof of both your rank and identity. In addition to your authorizations, it will record all of your scores. Don't lose or destroy it! If the latter happens, you'll be kicked out instantly."

Each of them came up to receive a jade token according to their ranking. Beginning from number thirty-six, the geniuses were sent into the main pagoda one by one via the transportation formation. Naturally, everyone coming forward was asked the same question: What secret realm were they entering first?

Jiang Chen answered it with zero hesitation. He picked the realm of heritage. He firmly believed that it was the preferred choice of most of his peers. The secret realm of heritage was a place of cultivation and understanding. The entire reason for the grueling competition had been to vie for a chance into the Veluriyam Pagoda. The cultivation environment there was vastly different from that of the outside world.

The transportation formation activated, and he was whisked directly into the secret realm of heritage. Bzzt! An ear-screeching noise blasted against his eardrums. In the next moment, he found himself within a veluriyam world filled with fantastical color. He was standing upon an enormous field. Even with his God's Eye, he was unable to see an end to its boundaries.

"Congratulations on entering the secret realm of heritage. You are the twenty-fifth entrant here." An emotionless voice sounded near his ears.

Twenty-fifth? Jiang Chen furrowed his brow. If he remembered correctly, there were twenty-eight cultivators who had entered the Pagoda before him, since he was in eighth place. Including himself, there should have been twenty-nine.

Did four cultivators choose another secret realm? Though Jiang Chen was a little surprised, he didn't find it very unusual. People had different natures. Some naturally fancied risk and speculation, and there was certainly nothing wrong with an unconventional choice. It wasn't necessarily good for everyone to choose the same secret realm, either. At the end of the day, though, Jiang Chen didn't particularly care about the choices of others. He cared more about what he himself could get out of the trip into the Veluriyam Pagoda.

"Each entrant has his own cultivation area. All areas are separate from each other, and interference between one another is not allowed." Another voice sounded. "You are in the secret realm of heritage. Please listen carefully to the instructions before continuing. You have hereby received the right to cultivate within the secret realm of heritage, and your first mission is as follows: you must comprehend three Veluriyam Obelisks. Note that you must complete the task within half a month or be eliminated. All who are successful shall receive randomized rewards. What you receive is dictated by luck alone."

Jiang Chen didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Was this kind of

thing alright? The rewards were apparently different to the point of being completely arbitrary. The Veluriyam Pagoda was definitely a unique place.

“Even in ancient times, what kind of amazing powerhouse did one have to be to build a structure as remarkable as the Veluriyam Pagoda?” The prized construction aside, Jiang Chen had to admit that despite his wealth of experience, the Pagoda was truly a distinct design. The person who had built it was absolutely a divine level genius. They had been erudite and multi-talented, possessing a mastery of spatial powers and an understanding of various kinds of intricate machinistry. Moreover, they must have been fabulously wealthy. It was impossible to design such a miraculous, interdimensional tower without possessing all of those factors

All three Veluriyam Obelisks each contained a martial mystery. The first was a boxing technique. Observing it a few times over, Jiang Chen did not feel that the technique was particularly familiar. However, it clearly wasn’t difficult for him to learn the technique on the spot given his wealth of second-hand experience. He understood its intricacies in only around half a day or so.

The technique was between a sage realm technique and an emperor realm one in terms of complexity—enough to keep a typical genius occupied for a few months. It was hardly any trouble for any genius listed on the Ranking of Young Lords, though. Of course, understanding had to be followed by an immediate display in the form of a practical examination. A genius was considered to have successfully learned the technique only after passing the test given by a mirror. A single set of forms was enough for Jiang Chen to pass the test on the spot. The mirror gave the highest possible evaluation almost instantly.

The test of the Veluriyam Obelisk was divided into four marks: failure, acceptable, excellent, and perfect. Jiang Chen received the impressive distinction of ‘perfect’. The entire Obelisk became a pure cyan hue, indicating the impeccable result of its pupil.

Because they were outside of the Veluriyam Pagoda's formation, the seven emperors didn't know the specifics of what was happening inside. Still, they were able to notice some of the more basic things. For example, they were aware of the number of people that had entered each secret realm.

"Tsk tsk, it looks like thirty-one went into heritage, three into adventure, and two madmen directly into battle."

"Most geniuses were reasonable enough. The largest number of people picked the safest choice. Going into the secret realms of adventure and battle risks being ejected at the slightest of errors."

"I hope that those unorthodox geniuses can rise to the challenge." The seven emperors were engaged in lively conversation.

Suddenly, one of the emperors called out, "So fast!. There's someone who's already grasped the first Veluriyam Obelisk in the secret realm of heritage. It's only been half a day, hasn't it? That's unbelievable."

"How could that be?"

"See for yourself."

Outside the Veluriyam Pagoda's formation was a formation of images. Though it did not record any specifics from inside the main pagoda, it reported a large portion of the results and scores to the outside.

"Huh, so it's true after all. Looks like they're the first one to finish. What's more—look, that's a perfect score! Half a day to attain perfection... what kind of inhuman powers of understanding does he have?"

"Quick, what number genius is it?" There was a flurry of commotion amongst the emperors.

Chapter 987: The Astounding Young Lord Zhen

The scenes kept flickering until they locked onto this astounding genius. “It’s number 8… number 8… isn’t that Pill King Zhen?”

The seven emperors might not have remembered anyone else’s number, but who wouldn’t remember the genius behind number eight? The darkest of all horses from the Genius Rankings, having won his eighth rank on the Ranking of Young Lords after thoroughly trouncing Gao Zhan with flair.

Pill King Zhen! This was a name deeply branded into every one of their minds. Emperor Peafowl designating the pill king as his heir afterwards had raised an even greater furor amongst them. It had shocked and stunned many of the emperors and made the Capital erupt in jubilation.

“Haha, Daoist Peafowl, your eye for talent is as keen as ever. Pill King Zhen is indeed an uncommon genius,” Emperor Mountaincrush spoke with obvious admiration.

Emperor Skysplitter also sighed. “Daoist Peafowl always recognizes the gems from the masses. You discovered young lord Fan back then, and now young lord Zhen as well! With each of them more accomplished than the last, I really am a bit jealous. Brother, all of Veluriyam Capital is speculating that you had long since placed young lord Zhen as a hidden pawn. Are these rumors true?”

The other emperors also looked inquisitively at Emperor Peafowl, evidently curious as well. He laughed softly. “A true genius is born as a result of the times. I only discovered him. It’d be too much to say that I had cultivated him or made specific plans for him from the start.”

“I really wonder how you raised him. Pill King Zhen possesses

such stunning pill and martial dao potential that it truly makes him a one-of-a-kind cultivator in Veluriyam Capital history."

"He's not only one of a kind; he's as rare as the scale of a dragon or the feather of a phoenix!"

Emperor Peafowl smiled slightly. "It's too early to say all this. After all, perhaps he's already comprehended the mysteries of the Obelisk before?"

That made sense as well. Pill King Zhen possessed a wide breadth of experience and astounding talent. Perhaps he had already come in contact with this technique in the past. Having mastered the first obelisk, Jiang Chen continued onwards and proceeded to the second. The second was one that involved tempering the heart and mind, with its difficulty being noticeably higher than before. Not only was a strong understanding of martial dao required, but an even stronger strength of mind, observation, and perception was also needed.

There were ninety-nine images on this obelisk, and each one represented a blade technique. What the candidate had to do was discern which of these blade techniques was unlike the rest. All of the techniques looked like they derived from the same school of thought, so there was no fundamental difference between them. This made the test much harder, as all the techniques looked the same.

Jiang Chen fully deployed his Psychic's Head and observed the ninety-nine images, the different blades trailing imaginary paths in his mind. This was undoubtedly a complete set of blade techniques and even encompassed an entire martial school of thought. It would serve as good material for an emperor realm cultivator. If they couldn't identity which stroke of the ninety-nine blade techniques was different, that meant that the cultivator hadn't fully comprehended the technique. They could only guess blindly as a result, and their chances of success would be exceedingly low.

Given the standards of the Ranking of Young Lords, they would all certainly be able to tell which stroke stood out given enough time. And time was precisely the field that they were competing in. They only had half a month to spend on three obelisks, which immensely increased the difficulty level. The other key point was that the order of the strokes was jumbled, so there was no hope in finding the answer by successively sorting out each stroke. The contest not only involved the foundation of martial dao, but martial dao potential and understanding as well.

Thankfully, discerning such things happened to be one of Jiang Chen's strengths. They were all required to deconstruct this blade technique, but his mind operated at a much higher speed than that of most of his peers. He called upon the immense collection of memories and foundations from his past life, deploying them to the utmost. He entered each stroke into his mind and reordered them, organizing and analyzing them... He immersed himself in this task as the technique became increasingly clearer to him.

After roughly eight hours, the various strokes had slowly settled themselves into a certain order. Jiang Chen's eyes suddenly widened with joy. As I thought. This stroke looks different, but its meaning overlaps with the one preceding it, and it transitions stiffly to the next stroke. It doesn't look different if analyzed separately, but when it's put in order like this, it's apparent that it could possibly follow the one before it, but it couldn't possibly precede the one following it . Mm, it's this one without a doubt.

Although Jiang Chen had identified his answer, he wasn't in a rush to submit it. He went over the technique a few more times in his mind until he was certain there was no doubt that he had chosen the correct answer.

This is it! He locked onto that jarring stroke with his mind. According to the rules, the candidate would fail after four incorrect choices and be transported out. They would be given acceptable if they picked out the right answer within three tries, excellent

within two, and perfection within one. Not even a day had passed for Jiang Chen to reach his answer, which made for astounding speed indeed. If they can see our performance in the outside world, would mine be a bit over the top?

Despite his thoughts, he didn't slow down and submitted his answer. The familiar azure color appeared once again. Another correct answer, another perfection grade! A trace of a confident smile appeared on Jiang Chen's face. His two attempts had gone very smoothly, and he was now more assured in his strength and capabilities. Although he also surmised that the outside world would be surprised by his results, he still underestimated their shock.

"No way! Him again? He's passed the second obelisk?"

"This speed is simply too heaven defying! Pill King Zhen's martial dao talent is absolutely frightening!"

It was no wonder that the seven emperors were stunned. One had to know that during this time, only three out of the premier geniuses had completed the first obelisk, and that was a much simpler task. Here Pill King Zhen was full speed ahead, already passing the second obelisk. The difference in comparison was simply too great, and even the top three cultivators on the Ranking of Young Lords suffered a great loss of face. It was a good thing that no one knew of anyone else's scores during this period, so there was no risk of anyone's mentality being affected. But once this stage was over, their scores would all be announced publicly to goad the geniuses into trying harder and stoke their competitive spirit.

"Daoist Peafowl, I completely submit to you. Young lord Zhen is a heaven-defying genius and he outshines the top three geniuses of the Ranking of Young Lords. He's only at the sage realm now. What heights will he reach in the emperor realm?"

"He's truly the foremost genius of three millennia. It looks like

the heavens favor Veluriyam Capital. Our fortune is still exceedingly high!”

“Haha, indeed! Why would such a heaven-defying genius appear if it not for great fortune?”

Emperor Shura was the most depressed to hear all this. His true disciple Li Jiancheng stood at the head of the rankings, but even he seemed subpar in comparison now. The most important was that the more brilliantly Pill King Zhen performed, the more people would approve of his position as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. That position would be cemented as time went on, and everyone would naturally assume that he would take over running Veluriyam Capital as well.

But what of Emperor Shura then? The emperor was greatly put out. He was ticked at Pill King Zhen and Emperor Peafowl. Emperor Peafowl owes me! I’ve been number two for so many years and deserve recognition for my efforts, and if not, at least for my achievements! Why not let me inherit the Capital? Why raise another young lord? Is your Sacred Peafowl Mountain going to rule over the Capital generation after generation? Why don’t you ask how others feel about that?

Jiang Chen didn’t pause and continued onto the third obelisk. The difficulty of this one was raised a bit further. On the obelisk, an image of two experts fighting each other was shown. The fight lasted for roughly an hour, and one was to identify three moments of when one side could seize victory from the other. There were always crucial points in a fight; it was just a matter of seeing who would first grasp the opportunity and win.

Chapter 988: The Opening of the Magnetic Golden Mountain

The third obelisk required a high amount of technical knowledge. Simply put, it was a test of observation skills. A third party would have a clearer view of the fight and see things in more detail. ‘Those closely involved cannot see as clearly as an onlooker’ was a saying that best described the situation.

However, exchanges were over in a split second. Failing to grasp the complexity of the moves within such a short amount of time was normal. Finding a critical moment was relatively easy, especially when one could watch the image again and again from the view of a third party. However, finding all three critical moments was at another level of difficulty. Finding the first one was relatively easy, but the second one was twice as difficult. Finding all three however, ramped up difficulty by several multitudes. Those who used up more time in the previous two obelisks would definitely be short of time in the third one. This would limit their performance to a certain extent. The test wasn’t too difficult for Jiang Chen. After all, his power of observations was even stronger than Emperor Peafowl himself.

However, his power was shackled by his cultivation level to a certain extent. This time, he was no longer restrained by such as he could repeat the scene as many times as he wanted. He could simply rewind the scene if he failed to understand something. The two cultivators in the image seemed to be mid level emperor realm cultivators. A battle of this magnitude wasn’t exactly heaven defying for a person of Jiang Chen’s stature.

He immediately noticed a critical moment in his first viewing. He watched it again to find the second one. However, he failed to notice the third one even after watching for the third and fourth time. The established rules of the Veluriyam Obelisk was

incredibly strict. There was definitely three critical moments if it gave the participants a task to find three.

Jiang Chen wasn't discouraged. He stopped watching the image and closed in meditation. He simulated the battle in his mind and repeated it over and over again. He began by studying the battle from the point of view of one of the cultivators. Then, he switched to the other cultivator and did the same thing. He was able to gain many insights by fully immersing himself into the mindset of the two cultivators.

Two days later, he finally found the third critical moment after picking every detail apart and analyzed everything. Tsk tsk. The last critical moment is hidden so incredibly well. I would never have found it unless I picked it apart and analyzed it bit by bit. Jiang Chen was secretly glad that he had taken great pains to pick the fight apart, and had used the correct method to do. The third obelisk is extremely difficult. If It took me two days, then Brother Ji will probably need six or seven to fully comprehend the fight. I can only pray that he do well in the previous two obelisks so that he will have enough time in the third one.

Analyzing a full battle between experts had benefited Jiang Chen greatly. He didn't just gain insight on how battles were conducted between emperor realm cultivators. He'd learned to analyze battles by putting himself in the shoes of others. Nothing could be benefit more than an actual battle, but it was still good experience. He was about to turn in the answer with his consciousness after he found all three critical moments. However, he ultimately decided not to.

It had only been three days since the start of this fifteen day test. He was worried that he would bring too much attention to himself if he completed all three obelisk tests right now. Jiang Chen wasn't necessarily afraid of someone, but the tree that stood out the most in the forest was more likely to be fallen by the gale. He decided to wait awhile before he proceeded. One day of cultivation in this secret quadrant was equivalent to ten days in the outside world.

Now was a good time to cultivate.

He'd gained much insight in martial dao ever since he broke through the eighth level sage realm. He was now closer to the emperor realm than ever before. Since he succeeded in summoning the Lord of the Golden Seal in the previous battle, he could now add the lord's attack to his arsenal of moves. The lord was incredibly destructive. It was absolutely a worthy addition to Jiang Chen's box of trump cards.

The lord had revealed incredible strength and might during the fight with Gao Zhan, but Jiang Chen knew that that wasn't the limits of its potential yet. There was still a great deal of untapped potential in both the Lord of the Golden Seal and the magnetic golden mountain. Jiang Chen made refining the magnetic golden mountain his priority. He wanted to comprehend the profound mysteries behind metallic power and metal attribute. Comprehending the origin power of metal was of utmost importance to him. Metal represented the power of sharpness and destruction. It contained the power to cut and sever everything.

The Lord of the Golden Seal was made up of an amalgamation of powerful metallic essences. Its entire existence was contradictory. it relied on the magnetic golden mountain for its own existence, yet it always seemed to yearn for freedom and independence from the mountain. Jiang Chen had made the lord a promise that he would one day release it when he finally gained the ability to do so. There were two ways for the lord to gain freedom.

For the first way, the lord would have to fully refine the magnetic golden mountain and digest its components. The mountain would then merge with it and become part of its body. The other method was to borrow the power from another powerful metal attribute treasure or formation to release it from the shackles of the magnetic golden mountain. In other words, Jiang Chen would have to borrow an outside power to destroy the chains between the lord and the mountain, and extract it from the mountain, freeing

it.

Of course, Jiang Chen required a condition before he promised to help it. Once freed, it would have to serve by his side for ten thousand years in gratitude. He had put significant effort and constant diligence into refining the magnetic golden mountain. Jiang Chen had constantly cultivating the magnetic power and the magnetic storms. It was an art that he constantly used in battle. These two abilities grew in tandem with Jiang Chen's cultivation level. He didn't use metallic monsters and Lord of the Golden Seal often. The monsters were made for group battles, but Jiang Chen didn't often run into an opportunity to call upon them.

Previously, his cultivation level hadn't been high enough to summon the Lord of the Golden Seal. There simply wasn't much reason to summon it by force, only to find out that it had only achieved a low level of awakening. Jiang Chen had also put utmost effort into refining the Evil Golden Eye. It was truly a heaven defying art. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to utilize its full potential yet. Once the Evil Golden Eye is refined to the limit, I can penetrate a person's consciousness even if his eyes are closed. It will only takes a single glance to petrify a person's mind and body. Right now, I can't even even invade a person's mind without direct eye contact. At the end of the day, the art's true might is still limited by my cultivation level. I will have to reach the great emperor realm for the eye to reach its terrorizing potential.

Refining the Evil Golden Eye wasn't an overnight job. One needed to gradually refine and improve upon the art. Moreover, one also had to ensure full compatibility with one's physical abilities and conscious might. The current level of Jiang Chen's conscious might could instantly kill those with a lower cultivation level than him. Geniuses of the same cultivation level could be instantly killed as well if they weren't careful. In fact, those with higher cultivation levels could find themselves petrified by the Evil Golden Eye if they dropped their guard. However, the effectiveness

of the Evil Golden Eye was greatly reduced against cultivators with a powerful consciousness and geniuses who cultivated eye techniques.

I guess I still need to raise my cultivation level so can that I can improve the level of my conscious and its penetrative strength. Maybe I can pair the Evil Golden Eye with a spine-chilling image to improve its effects? The Evil Golden Eye was an art that worked best against opponents that were dominated from all sides. The effect of the eye technique was greatly reduced when up against another eye technique. However, if an image attack or a powerful technique was used in tandem with the eye technique, it would greatly improve its potency. There was no limit to the refinement of eye techniques.

The art of eye techniques is as deep as the ocean. A powerful eye technique doesn't merely deal physical or mental attacks. It can also be used to read the opponent's mind and hear their deepest, darkest thoughts. One can find out if the opponent is lying, has evil intentions, speaks empty words, bears a hidden grudge, or hides a true identity. One can even unmask the true identity of someone corrupted by evil. All truths are brought to light under a powerful eye technique. Eye technique cultivators were celebrated individuals in his previous life. He couldn't resist being fascinated by their power. Eye techniques were ever changing. People were often astonished by how many variation there was in their tricks and attacks. Of course, they hadn't gained their ever changing abilities in just one night. The Evil Golden Eye had a great potential when used in tandem with the magnetic golden mountain. He was absolutely going to use this rare opportunity to improve his own eye technique's cultivation.

The God's Eye had already begun to merge with Evil Golden Eye. This had improved his eye techniques immensely. There was actually another art that Jiang Chen hadn't unearthed yet, the Magnetic Dao Armor. As its name would suggest, it was a magnetic

art that protected the body with strong, magnetic armor. This magnetic armor could deflect powerful attacks of varying strength.

The Magnetic Dao Armor wasn't too useful for him as he already cultivated the Nine Transformation of Demons and Gods, and possessed the Demon and God Golden Body. Moreover, he could already manipulate magnetic energy at will. However, it was the best way to protect a group of comrades in a group battle. The armor could only last for an hour. It was roughly as effective as a defensive talisman. The Imperial Advent Defensive Talisman that he used last time also lasted around that amount of time.

Chapter 989: The Six Palaces of Heritage

Jiang Chen turned in his answer on the fifteenth day and successfully passed the test. He had been the fastest among the young lords in the first and second obelisk test. The outside world had waited in anticipation for his next achievement. Unfortunately, it took him until the fifteenth day to pass the third test. This greatly diminished the crowd's enthusiasm.

"It seems that young lord Zhen is still limited by his cultivation level. His observation skills isn't up to par for the analytical test."

"Heh. That's to be expected right? How can the other geniuses compete if he excels at everything?"

Emperor Peafowl smiled without saying a word. He didn't seem fazed by the results. In fact, he suspected that Jiang Chen had taken such a long time on purpose. Of course, nobody could really know for sure as Jiang Chen hadn't emerged yet. The three obelisk tests were merely a preliminary test, but some were already eliminated at this stage. Six cultivators from the Ranking of Young Lords failed to pass the test within half a month and were given the boot.

Ji San also exhibited some potential. It only took him thirteen days to finish all three obelisk tests. He was ranked twelfth among the geniuses who made into the secret quadrant, while Jiang Chen's rank wasn't a true reflection of his abilities.

A voice sounded in the ears of the geniuses who had passed the three Veluriyam Obelisk tests.

"Candidates may now choose to continue or give up the challenge. If you give up, you're allowed to cultivate in peace until your time limit is up. If you continue, you are given an opportunity to increase your time limit in the pagoda.

"You'll be given an extra month if you pass the fourth obelisk test

within fifteen days. An addition of three months is given if you pass the fifth test, six months if you pass the sixth test, one year if you pass the seventh test, and two years if you pass the eighth test. However, if you manage to pass the ninth obelisk test, you'll be given an opportunity to enter the Six Palaces of Heritage in tandem with another two years in the pagoda.

"The Six Palaces of Heritage is the vital core of Veluriyam main pagoda. If a genius inherits the legacy within the palaces, his abilities will be recognized by the pagoda, making him the next master of the pagoda. There are three secret realms within Veluriyam Pagoda, but the realm of heritage is most vital to the pagoda. The Six Palaces of Heritage contains the core legacies of the secret realm."

The Six Palaces of Heritage? The hearts of everyone present began to palpitate, including Jiang Chen. Emperor Peafowl had told him about the cavern-like nature of the pagoda. It was an enormous quadrant filled with secrets of unfathomable depth. Not even the ancients had ever explored the pagoda in full. No one truly understood the Veluriyam Pagoda. Not even a great legend like Emperor Peafowl had been able to conquer the pagoda in his youth. This was a testament to its mysteriousness and strength.

"Some of you might be curious about the Six Palaces of Heritage. Frankly, it doesn't appear at every Veluriyam Pagoda Gathering. It only appears when the pagoda senses a great change of fates of the heaven and earth. It has only appeared three times throughout the history of the pagoda."

This piqued Jiang Chen's curiosity. How did the voice know that this was the third appearance of the Six Palaces of Heritage, as the voice had obviously obviously implemented since the ancient pagoda was first built? However, it didn't take long for him to understand why. The pagoda was designed so that every single step and every single detail was automatically controlled by a formation. Jiang Chen was in awe once he realized this. What a

monstrous formation. The amount of minute detail within this formation is simply unimaginable.

Jiang Chen wasn't unfamiliar with formations. He'd become quite adept in the art of formations after he inherited the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's legacy. This was the exact reason why he knew how difficult it was to realize every single detail found within the pagoda. The progenitor who built the Veluriyam Pagoda must be an extraordinary being. The common empyrean cultivator would never be able to build such a miraculous quadrant. Jiang Chen even suspected that the progenitor of this quadrant had a cultivation beyond that of the empyrean realm. But this was nothing but conjecture.

"Remember, you must conquer all nine obelisk tests to enter the Six Palaces of Heritage. The tests have to be done in a sequential manner. You are not allowed to skip any of the tests. If you manage to enter the Six Palaces of Heritage, you shall gain an opportunity that nobody else will ever receive: a second admission to the Verluriyam Pagoda. Once you've entered the first palace, you shall be granted a second admission to the pagoda, even if you failed the first palace test. You will also be granted one more admission with every subsequent palace you enter. Once you've entered the sixth palace, you shall be granted three more admissions.

"Do not think that this is absurd. Those who find their way into the Six Palaces of Heritage will all be seen as future lords of Veluriyam Capital. Geniuses like these will only be seen once in every thirty to fifty thousand years. It is only natural that they would be granted a few more admissions to the pagoda." The voice continued to speak indifferently. "The Six Palaces of Heritage has appeared for third time because it has sensed a great change in the heaven and earth. There is someone among you with a great destiny ahead. It could be a single person, it could be two people, or it could even be a group of people.

The geniuses were flabbergasted. A second opportunity to enter the Veluriyam Pagoda? More admissions for every subsequent palace entered? And three when one reaches the sixth palace? This overturned everything they knew about the Veluriyam Pagoda! This was information that the seven great emperors weren't even aware of! Didn't he say that the Six Palaces of Heritage has appeared thrice in history? Why wasn't this information passed down the generations?

"If you find this strange, it's because all information of the Six Palaces of Heritage is kept an absolute secret. If you failed to qualify for an entry into the palace, all memories of it will be wiped off from your mind when you leave. This is why information regarding the palace has never been brought to light." The voice quickly answered the questions within everybody's mind.

Jiang Chen was still at a loss for words. The person who designed the Veluriyam Pagoda had done so with extreme prudence. Everything was calculated. No detail was left unchecked.

"Alright, you may now make your choice. The extra time given as prize for taking on the Veluriyam Obelisk challenge may seem extremely tempting, but please keep in mind that you will be ejected from the quadrant if you fail any of the tests. Also, all memory of the Six Palaces of Heritage will be wiped from your mind."

Many were in a dilemma. Were they going to continue the challenge? Or were they going to take the safe path and cultivate until the time limit was up?

Jiang Chen had no need to mull over such decisions. The challenge was much more attractive to him than anything else. He was filled with enthusiasm. He felt compelled to explore the entire pagoda. He didn't have enough information about the Divine Abyss Continent to link it to the world from his previous life. There were simply no leads. It was evident that the pagoda was no common secret realm. He was convinced that this was his chance.

Maybe… the pagoda has traces of ancient secrets that I can use as a lead? He was resolute. He must proceed with the obelisk test.

“Brother, are yo-… are you going to take on the fourth obelisk challenge?” Ji San noticed that Jiang Chen was walking towards the fourth obelisk.

Jiang Chen nodded. “Brother Ji, what about you?”

Ji San grit his teeth. “I will make the gamble as well. The obelisk test will no doubt be equally as rewarding as a peaceful cultivation. I will be ejected from the quadrant if I fail, but rich rewards have always come with an equal danger. How can I expect big rewards without first taking big risks?

Jiang Chen was fond of Ji San’s fighting spirit. “A daring attitude is required to walk the path of martial dao.”

Ji San now looked to Jiang Chen for all advice and opinion. He could refine the true dragon blood even if he was ejected from the Veluriyam Pagoda anyways. However, entering the main pagoda was a once in a lifetime event. He possessed some ambition for the Six Palaces of Heritage, but he wasn’t too hopeful that he could somehow make it into the palaces. But even though he knew that his chances weren’t very high, a tiny, restless flame had already begun smoldering within him. He also felt some anticipation for what was to come when he looked at Jiang Chen. He was certain that the Six Palaces of Heritage had only appeared because of Jiang Chen. It was merely a conjecture as he had no proof, but he believed what his instincts had told him.

If one insisted that he give a reason, it would be due to the numerous heaven defying acts that Jiang Chen had achieved. The Pinecrane Pill, the Longevity Pill, the defeat of Pillfire City, his rank in the Pagoda Battles, and the true dragon blood… Looking back on these events, Ji San had no choice but to admit that Jiang Chen was the bearer of a great destiny. His brother was a genius that he would forever look up to!

Chapter 990: Breaking Through Forcefully, Leaving Others in the Dust

The personalities of the young lords began to surface now that they were forced to make a choice. Those prudent and cautious chose to give up the challenge. They would stay and cultivate. Those focused on improvement continued to stride forward. The majority chose to continue, including those at the bottom of the ranks. Almost everyone at the top of the ranks chose to continue as well.

They were obviously enticed by the Six Palaces of Heritage. Why would any of the geniuses from the Ranking of Young Lords think that they were inferior to others? The top ten were the biggest proponents of this mindset. All of them believed that they were favored by the gods, and that their potential was limitless. For all they knew, they might be the destined genius.

In the world of martial dao, there wasn't a single genius who lacked confidence. Moreover, there were all kinds of fortuitous encounters, so one could never know if they would eventually have the last laugh. A head start wasn't everything. After all, it'd been the turtle that won the race in the end. It didn't matter if they failed to enter the top three or even the top five ranks. Throughout the history of Divine Abyss Continent, there had been many top geniuses who were nameless at the start. They only gained success in the later parts of their lives. Very few geniuses had a smooth journey to the top. Because of this, they weren't too perturbed about their low rankings. Their confidence remained high.

Jiang Chen and Ji San walked through the wide open Veluriyam Square and headed towards the fourth obelisk. They found an inconspicuous spot and sat down. The other geniuses slowly made their way towards their own chosen spots as well.

"It seems like you have made your decisions. Geniuses under the

fourth obelisk, I must commend you for taking the smart choice. However, this is a decision in which risk and opportunity dwell alike. Some of you will be disqualified on the fifteenth day, but there will also be those who succeed. Remember, you're not allowed to exchange any information through your consciousness, voice, or any other means. You should rely on your own talent and wisdom. Cheaters will be ejected from the premises immediately."

Geniuses from the same factions who'd planned on working together smiled wryly. The Veluriyam Pagoda was extremely strict and meticulous. They wouldn't have the chance to cheat. Jiang Chen wasn't too surprised. If cheating was allowed, only one person would need to comprehend the test for all to pass. The test would lose its meaning.

He threw Ji San a glance of encouragement, and started to focus on his own preparations. With his understanding from the previous obelisk tests, even if the difficulty was raised, he was confident that he could solve the fourth one. He held his breath and concentrated deeply while he waited for the fourth image to appear.

The place was so silent that one could hear a pin drop. Everyone was self aware and did nothing to harm the atmosphere, or break the silence and disrupt everyone's concentration. They wouldn't be ejected from the palace if they made some noise, but they would certainly be drowned by the spit of others. Doing so wouldn't bring them any benefit. They should focus on the image instead. This time, a formation appeared. To be more specific, it was a trap formation.

"Right now, you are trapped within the formation before your eyes, and you must decipher it within your consciousness. Doing so within fifteen days is proof that you've comprehended the fourth obelisk."

Deciphering a formation wasn't a rare sight. This formation itself however, was. Making heads or tails of it was the biggest difficulty

for everyone. Jiang Chen remained calm as he was already quite proficient with this art. He hadn't seen this exact one in "The Heart of Formations", but formations often shared similar foundations and profound mysteries. He was able to cut right into the heart of it all by combining his knowledge of formations from his previous life and the knowledge from that tome.

Reading, analyzing, and deciphering formations was a very specific set of skills. Of course, if one was powerful enough, one could use brute force or some kind of heaven defying treasure to break one's way through a formation. But this time, the task was to decipher the formation in their consciousness. This meant that they would have to fully comprehend the formation and identify the correct way to decipher it. This test assessed the foundations of their knowledge and comprehension of formations. A true genius would need to have the ability to handle all kinds of unexpected situations and problems. Being trapped within a formation was something they would all eventually face on their journey to the top. It was impossible that a cultivator could reach the top while being completely ignorant of them. Nobody was immune to formations in the path of martial dao.

Jiang Chen observed the formation meticulously and slowly deconstructed it in his mind. It didn't take long before he caught a lead. The formation was actually much simpler than it seemed. It was likely an earth rank formation. It was meant to be used against emperor realm geniuses and didn't actually pose a danger as it was only meant to be used as a test.

Jiang Chen finished studying the formation within two hours and began to decipher it. He was able to find the perfect answer after a series of conjectures in his head. This time, he didn't choose to hide his abilities. He submitted his answer with his mind.

"Success. You are the first to decipher the formation." The obelisk had turned cyan yet again.

"Number 8 has passed the test. You may take your leave." The

obelisk pinpointed his number and told him to make his exit.

Jiang Chen immediately stood up without any pretentiousness. He glanced at Ji San and gave him a look of encouragement before he left. His actions caused quite a bit of commotion. It hasn't even been six hours yet right? He was able to comprehend the fourth obelisk in such a short amount of time? Has he seen this one before?

Many found this difficult to accept. Even the top geniuses were affected by how long Jiang Chen had taken to comprehend the fourth obelisk. A ripple appeared within their dao hearts. However, Ji San only felt encouragement when he saw Jiang Chen dominate the test. The warm look from his brother only gave him more confidence. While some delighted and others fretted, the young lords quickly suppressed the commotion within their hearts and continued to study the formation.

"Surely not? He... grasped the fourth obelisk already? Number 8? It's young lord Zhen again?"

"It's only been six hours! Can this be yet another coincidence? Daoist Peafowl, your Sacred Peafowl Mountain has truly picked up a monster!" All seven emperors were astounded by Jiang Chen's heaven defying speed.

Emperor Peafowl smiled wryly. "Don't look at me like that. He must've solved a question similar to the one from the fourth obelisk before. Otherwise, there's no way he would've solved it in such a short time."

It was the only logical explanation for this situation. There was nothing he could do about it if others chose not to believe him. However, their expressions suggested that they believed every word. After all, it was the only logical answer to this. Even if he was much talented than the others, there shouldn't be such a big discrepancy between them. These were all young lords of Veluriyam Capital after all. They were some of the most talented

geniuses throughout the Upper Eight Regions.

“Will young lord Zhen challenge the fifth obelisk? If my memory serves me right, you are awarded with three more months if you beat the fifth obelisk.”

“He will get half a year if he beats the sixth obelisk too.”

“I remember that there are nine obelisks in total. If he grasps all of them, he will gain another six to seven years. If you add in the two years he was originally given, won’t he be in there for almost ten years?

“Comprehending the ninth obelisk is easier said than done. The furthest anyone has ever gotten in the past few thousand years was the eighth obelisk.”

“Mm. And he failed at the eighth one too. That was over five thousand years ago.”

“Didn’t Daoist Peafowl make it to the seventh obelisk and was a hair way from fully understanding it?”

The crowd turned with looks of curiousity. The emperor laughed gently. “That is indeed the case. I was young and full of vigor back then. I tried to do everything in one go, failing to realize the importance of pacing myself. If I had paced myself a little, I might’ve made it to the eighth obelisk. It’s really a pity that we only get one chance at it.”

The emperors already knew this, but they couldn’t help but feel admiration. After all, the other emperors hadn’t even gone as far as he had. Emperor Shura and Emperor Petalpluck had progressed the furthest among the six other emperors. They were able to make it to the sixth obelisk, but failed to comprehend it in the end.

“By the way, how far do you think young lord Zhen will go?” Emperor Mountaincrush suddenly asked. This drew everyone’s attention.

“Daoist Peafowl, since he is the heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain,

how far do you reckon he will go?" Emperor Vastsea asked.

Emperor Peafowl smiled in response. "Hard to say. It depends on how well he can pace himself. He has already made it through the fourth obelisk, and did it with much more ease than any of us. This is proof that he has the potential to make it to the seventh obelisk, or maybe even the eighth one. But to make it to that point, he will have to pace himself well and take many other variables into account."

Chapter 991: Five In a Row

How would anyone fail to discern that Emperor Vastsea's apparently plain question was filled with malice to the core? That was obvious to Emperor Peafowl. A conservative prediction was no good. If Pill King Zhen was anything short of remarkable, then why had the emperor made him young lord in the first place? Too much optimism was dangerous as well, though. If Jiang Chen suddenly failed because of either inattentiveness or happenstance, it was possible that the emperor would be secretly ridiculed for making too much of an early call. Therefore, Emperor Peafowl chose not to give a fixed conclusion. He stuck to the facts, and nothing but the facts.

Emperor Vastsea laughed. "Daoist Peafowl, it seems that you have high hopes for that young man. Challenging the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk? You must feel that he's the best we've gotten in five thousand years."

Emperor Peafowl returned the laughter. "You're certainly a master of conclusions, Brother Vastsea. There are many unpredictable factors in one's ability to even advance to the eighth Obelisk. Can you say for sure which one your young lord Ye Piaoling will be able to get to?"

Being upset at his fellow emperor would be only seen as petty. Emperor Vastsea wanted to ensnare him, but Emperor Peafowl was a sophisticated man. Two or three retorts were enough to silence the detractor. Could Emperor Vastsea predict the results of the geniuses under his wing? What was the point of paying more attention to Emperor Peafowl's students more than his own?

Having been quiet all along, Emperor Petalpluck suddenly asked a question of his own. "Daoist Peafowl, this rhythm you speak of… it's a rather fresh line of thought for me. Can you elaborate a little?"

Emperor Peafowl knew that his friend bore him no malice. The other emperor truly wanted to know more. “This stems from my personal experiences in times long past. Breaking through the fourth obelisk rewards its challenger with a month, the fifth three months, and so forth. It’s perfectly understandable to use the extra time to cultivate and refine oneself further, only challenging the next obelisk upon sufficient preparation. Why not make best use of one’s time inside the Veluriyam Pagoda, right? If one challenges the next obelisk immediately after breaking through the first one, well, doing that isn’t the best use of time… regardless of how much apparent momentum is gathered by the act. After all, a single failure means elimination, which forfeits all of the previously earned time rewards.”

“You mean, it’s better to wait until the deadline before challenging the next obelisk? So that one can make better use of one’s time?”

“In theory, yes. But exactly how one goes about it in practice, I think that will depend on the situation. I see no reason to hold off if one feels a great increase in one’s prowess after cultivation, or better yet, a spark of inspiration. There’s nothing inherently wrong with taking the next challenge ahead of your own timeline.”

As a young genius, Emperor Peafowl had only passed the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. His own failure to pace himself had held him off from completing the eighth. Given his talent and potential, he’d had the very real hope of doing so, but opportunity only knocked once. A missed one was a permanent consequence. It was one of Emperor Peafowl’s lifelong regrets. Evidently, he didn’t want Jiang Chen to make the same mistake he had. Anxiety in the pursuit of success was folly. Why not use the time on his hands as much as possible? There would be plenty left to tackle the Veluriyam Obelisks.

Moreover, the Pagoda had opened three secret realms this year. As someone in the first division of the Ranking of Young Lords,

Jiang Chen had no restrictions on moving between the secret realms. He had both space and time on his side. There was no reason not to maximize benefits by exerting all of his advantages. However, Emperor Peafowl was dumbfounded by what happened next right away.

Jiang Chen continued his challenge! After leaving the fourth obelisk, he'd immediately beelined for the fifth. He was working ahead of schedule. Emperor Peafowl didn't know what to say. Here he was talking about rhythm and pacing, and Jiang Chen was just going for the next challenge. Though the fifth obelisk wasn't going to stop the youth, Emperor Peafowl was concerned more about the impulse. He was worried that a string of successes would make the young man overconfident and irrational. If it did, the seventh obelisk was likely to act as an immense obstacle.

Any genius who'd experienced the secret realm of heritage knew that the sixth and seventh obelisks were two immensely large thresholds. It wasn't easy to pass either of these. The majority of geniuses were stopped short by one of the two, in fact. A genius that could break through to the eighth obelisk appeared only once every five thousand years. As for one who made it to the ninth, there hadn't been a single one for more than ten. Veluriyam Capital's written records for times before then were quite vague. Nothing in recorded history indicated such an event.

"Fellow daoist, your new young lord is a curious one indeed." Emperor Mountaincrush smiled. He, for one, was impressed by Emperor Peafowl a fair bit, not only by his ability and prestige, but his eye for talent as well. Who else among the seven emperors could dig up such a genius? The sole fact that he was equally capable of pill and martial dao was enough to put him ahead of the pack. Martial dao aside, the young lord's history of pill battles was proof enough that he could perform on a grand stage despite his youth. Some geniuses were born for grand occasions. At least, that was how Emperor Mountaincrush felt about young lord Zhen. The

pill battle against Pillfire City had been one such occasion. The conflict between Taiyuan Tower and Taiyuan Lodge had been another. The Martial Pagoda battles, yet another. Finally, entering the Veluriyam Pagoda to comprehend the nine Veluriyam Obelisks definitely qualified as yet another grand occasion.

Emperor Mountaincrush predicted that young lord Zhen was likely to achieve some unusually brilliant results in the Veluriyam Pagoda. Some emperors didn't want to admit it yet, but the young lord's overwhelming momentum and advantage over his competitors was hard to deny. Emperor Mountaincrush's speculation, for one, was heavily fueled by the performance.

The fifth Veluriyam Obelisk was much more difficult. At twenty days, the time limit for it was higher than its predecessors. The Obelisk involved another image clip of actual combat. It required its challenger to assimilate the essence of both parties' martial techniques, then simulate it through his own consciousness. Fundamentally, it demanded one to be able to copy a martial technique via watching it in action. This was very difficult to accomplish. Strong martial techniques hinged on both forms and mental methods. Without the latter, understanding a technique's essence was a bewildering task. Only someone with the dual powers of perception and comprehension could pull it off, by slowly reverse engineering the technique through observation alone.

Because he was unfamiliar with the martial techniques the two people in the image clip were using, Jiang Chen only had a slight advantage. Without his memory to cheat him through, he could only rely on wealth of experience and superb cognitive ability to deduce its details. Thankfully, even if both techniques were new to him, he was still a fair bit ahead of his peers. The martial dao insight from his previous life was virtually unmatched.

Jiang Chen immersed himself in the clip of combat. Without the mental details to match, it was an extreme challenge to deduce a

martial technique from its physical manifestation alone. He didn't have it nearly as easy as the previous few, but was in no rush. The twenty-day period gave him plenty of room to maneuver. He had more than enough time to analyze and infer what he needed. A few days later, several of the best geniuses at the fourth obelisk finished their tasks, joining him one by one at the fifth without hesitation. Ten days later, Ji San broke through the fourth as well. He followed suit, immediately coming to the fifth.

Fifteen days later, the fourth obelisk's time limit was up. Another four geniuses were cruelly eliminated. Some of the geniuses that had succeeded in breaking through the fourth chose not to continue right away. Wanting to slow the pace a while, they planned to resume only after a period of cultivation. Thirteen geniuses remained beneath the fifth Veluriyam Obelisk.

On the day of the fourth obelisk's deadline, Jiang Chen succeeded in understanding the fifth obelisk. He had passed once more. Advancing past the fifth had cost him almost fifteen days. Its intimidating difficulty was a warning: Jiang Chen did not intend to take the following challenges lightly.

"If Brother Ji is able to break through here as well, then I have to tell him not to rush into the sixth obelisk. Holding off and cultivating here a while would be a much better use of his time." Time inside the Veluriyam Pagoda was to be treasured. Jiang Chen did not want Ji San to be kicked out purely because of foolhardiness. Therefore, he temporarily halted his own series of challenges after the fifth Veluriyam Obelisk. He hadn't lost confidence in himself. He justed wanted to wait until Ji San finished before proceeding. He wasn't going to waste the time in the interim, though. Returning to his private space, Jiang Chen began to cultivate once more.

With an abundance of Heroic Sage Pills, dragon crystals, and saint spirit stones, he was set to do so to his heart's content. The relative brevity since his last breakthrough to eighth level sage

realm didn't affect his passion one bit. Inside the Veluriyam Pagoda, a single day of cultivation was worth ten outside, perhaps even twenty or thirty. Each minute and second here was exceedingly precious.

As expected, the fifth obelisk required an excruciating effort from Ji San. Without exceptional mental fortitude and a startling showing at a key moment, he likely would have been eliminated himself. He passed by the skin of his teeth on the final day, barely completing the fifth obelisk's test. Even someone as self-confident as Ji San felt some lingering pressure. If he'd taken just a little longer, he would have been disqualified for sure.

"Brother Ji, now that you've passed both the fourth and fifth challenges, you have four extra months on your hands. You should use amply the time you've been awarded."

Ji San nodded several times in agreement. "Yes, I want to go further, but I must first cultivate. I need to use the time I've already got. It would be a huge loss if I'm kicked out before I get a chance to cash in."

Chapter 992: Enormous Gains

Jiang Chen refrained from resuming his challenge for the next several months, choosing to focus on polishing himself within his private space. Breaking through to ninth level sage realm wasn't exactly a matter of a day's work, but he was unwavering in his determination. He had set it as his absolute prerequisite for his trip into the Veluriyam Pagoda.

Cultivating inside his private space for a day was akin to ten or even twenty days outside, so a two-year stay was equivalent to at least twenty or thirty years. Ample time, a good environment; he'd never had those luxuries before, not since his first steps into this world. It was a perfect time for cultivating without distractions. Over the next several months, the memory of his performance faded from the minds of those in the outside world. Only Jiang Chen was aware of the true extent of his benefits.

For one, the development of the magnetic golden mountain deepened with each passing day. Every ability he drew from it was strengthened, especially his skill at summoning the Lord of the Golden Seal. His rapport with it grew deeper, as did his proficiency with the Magnetic Armor art. It had grown from its originally rusty roots to an easy familiarity. Now, he could shield up to ten people instantly. His defensive capability was now as reliable as that of an initial emperor realm cultivator. As his cultivation advanced, so would the armor's defensive prowess.

"The magnetic golden mountain is truly a treasure trove. Although I'm almost certain that I've excavated all it has to give, making the most of these will take a bit more time." While there was little left for Jiang Chen to discover in the mountain, discovery and master were two different beasts. For example, the Lord of the Golden Seal's potential was something that had to be unearthed over time. The same went for his Evil Golden Eye. He knew the extent of its abilities, but he needed to invest lasting

effort to achieve their peaks.

Besides refining the mountain, Jiang Chen had also spent time on his cultivation level. While he still had a ways to go before he could break through, a new glimmer of hope had appeared on the horizon. As ever, cultivation was a walk along a winding path, each level being nothing more than a rest stop. Jiang Chen could see ninth level sage realm waving in the distance, beckoning him over for a rest. Next, he had spent time practicing his Divine Five Thunderclap Sword.

Unlocking more and more of its mysteries only meant an increase in its strength. meant that it was becoming stronger. Finally, Jiang Chen's main target for refining had been the eight statues. Through the formation disk, he could now release more of their innate strength. As he practiced with them, he realized that the statues had nearly endless potential. He surmised that their ultimate power would likely rival that of the magnetic golden mountain. As his consciousness synced further with the eight statues, his control over them grew more precise. With the formation disk and the Eight Trigrams Assimilation Formation amplifying their strength, the eight statues demonstrated much greater combat ability.

"Who knows where the eight statues come from? Their strange, life-like will is remarkable in and of itself. It's almost like they were once alive. What a shame that I can't yet use all of its potential to augment their power yet." The eight statues' origin was unquestionably extraordinary. Especially since he couldn't see how much potential they had left. Even still, his instincts told him that something with such strong wills and plentiful untapped strength couldn't possibly be any less valuable than the magnetic golden mountain. In the world of martial dao, there was no such thing as an excess of treasures. Even if the statues one day reached a peak in their strength, they would still be a keen tool in his arsenal. They were far too deft at both offense and defense to be

ignored.

With more and more of his trump cards played in front of others, and since some of his old tricks coming up short, the eight statues were sure to be crucial to his next steps. By the time he'd completed everything he'd set out to do and resurfaced, Jiang Chen spent a full six months in seclusion.

The world had not stopped, and he immediately noticed many differences. Of the thirty-six geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords, no more than half remained in the Pagoda. Ji San was one of them. He hadn't relented once over the past few months, spending them in cultivation and seclusion just like Jiang Chen. His own goal had been to break through to emperor realm. However, the gap between half step emperor realm and emperor realm proper was deceivingly large. Many cultivators had been stopped short at that step, and even after spending their whole lives beating at its doors, fallen.

Though Ji San was remarkably talented, he had nevertheless failed to take that last step. Still, the months of tough cultivation had not been without rich rewards. He had focused on fully assimilating the true dragon's blood, strengthening his body and soul several fold. Indeed, it'd almost like he'd been reborn. As a result of completing subsuming it, he had achieved bloodline reversion in both strength and purity, a true return to his roots. Vague memories of true dragon lore had begun to awaken in the back of his mind. The dragon totem image within him had exploded in size.

There was unbounded potential in that image, enough to surpass that of all his ancestors. His ancestors had only passed down a draconic bloodline, and generations of dilution had thinned its primal strength. But the blood he'd refined was a hundred percent true dragon blood, with no impurities whatsoever. He knew his gains better than anyone. Compared to that, what did a failure to break through to emperor realm matter? They were hardly

comparable. Given his new latent strength after purifying his bloodline, doing so would be a walk in the park. All he needed to do was shut himself up for a couple of months.

When Jiang Chen saw Ji San again, he felt the rich sensation of a fellow bloodline from his sworn brother's body. A faint hum of resonance sounded within him as his sharp eyes swept over the young master. "Congratulations, Brother Ji! Looks like you've brought back quite the prize in the last few months."

Without saying a word, Ji San rushed up and clasped Jiang Chen in a rough hug. "Brother, there's nothing adequate that I can say. For as long as I live, both my life and strength are yours." Ji San was very animated in his emotion. Only he could truly understand what kind of amazing potential and power lay within his bloodline and body. And more importantly, it was something that had been freely given to him by this very man. This wasn't just a favor, but something life-altering.

Without the true dragon blood, Ji San could still accomplish a modest number of things in his martial dao career. However, top twenty in the Ranking of Young Lords was probably the extent of his abilities. Breaking through that limit necessitated an almost miraculous fortune, which had an absolutely miniscule likelihood. Besides the man before him, Ji San could say with utter confidence that no one else in Veluriyam Capital had more martial dao potential. He was now confident enough to even take on the young lord Fan of yesteryear.

Ye Piaoling? Shui Rutian? He could smash all of them within three years! Even the first-ranked Li Jiancheng was someone he was sure to surpass in under ten years. This wasn't some blind egoism. The dragon bloodline in his body gave him endless courage. It made the previously impossible, possible.

Jiang Chen could feel the intrepid determination that radiated from Ji San's frame. He was filled with happiness for his friend. Smiling, he raised both eyebrows. "Don't forget our promise."

Ji San grew serious. He remembered the words Jiang Chen had spoken when he'd given him the true dragon's blood. Back then, his sworn brother had hoped that Ji San would become Veluriyam Capital's future master. He had thought it only a joke at the time, said to encourage him. Hearing it a second time shook his heart. Had brother Jiang Chen been serious back then? Was master of Veluriyam Capital not a title that sufficed for a man of his ambition?

Jiang Chen barked a soft laugh at Ji San's overreaction. He patted the young master's shoulder. "Potential and strength aren't the only things you managed to harvest this time. You have faith in yourself now, and something more intrinsic as well. So, how about it? Do you feel brave enough to challenge the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk with me?"

Ji San was completely fired up. "What could I possibly be afraid of?"

He didn't have long left in the Veluriyam Pagoda. If he could grasp the sixth obelisk, he would be rewarded with a six-month stay. It was an extremely enticing reward.

Four people had already gathered beneath the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. They were the top four ranked geniuses from the Ranking of Young Lords: Li Jiancheng from Emperor Shura's faction; Zhou Yan the sword dao genius from Emperor Peafowl's faction; Shui Rutian from Emperor Petalpluck's faction; and Ye Piaoling from Emperor Vastsea's faction. Together, they were the unofficial four giants of the Ranking. Their very presence meant that they were the ones in the limelight, more so than Jiang Chen. They hadn't paused long after breaking through the fifth Obelisk. Their actions alone spoke of their dominance over the rest. In addition, there was an internal struggle between the four. In the clash between geniuses, none of them wanted to be the first one eliminated.

Chapter 993: Stunning Comprehension

As expected, the sixth obelisk was much more difficult than its predecessor. The four great geniuses weren't too surprised to see Jiang Chen still in the running either. They had already considered him as their equal. However, the sight of Ji San beside him raised some contemptuous eyebrows. In their mind, he was not qualified to challenge the sixth obelisk. But when they considered the fact that Ji San was only in the third quartile of the rankings, they understood where he was coming from. He didn't have that much time left. This was worth the gamble. His time would be extended by another six months if he somehow managed to pass.

"Brother Ji, cast away useless thoughts. Focus on what is ahead of you," Jiang Chen advised.

The contents of the sixth obelisk seemed rather easy at first glance. It was a calligraphy piece that contained no more than 200 words. However, each and every word seemed to contain some sort of profound intent. To complicate things, when linked together, the profoundness of the intent multiplied exponentially. Candidates had to sense the intent within the calligraphy, immerse themselves in it, and then completely understand the profound intent of the martial arts within.

Even though the obelisks were designed to hand out different challenges, each subsequent obelisk was legitimately much more difficult than the one before. Calligraphy was already a profound art by nature, but integrating a profound martial art intent within was certainly a twist. Jiang Chen took a closer look when he noticed each word seemingly coming to life. They seemed to twist and frolic among each other, like graceful celestial beings. Every word had its own unique charm.

Martial art calligraphy have been around since the ancient times. The elegant pursuit remains popular to this day, but those who reached the peak solely through martial arts learned from

calligraphy are few and far between. I wonder who authored this particular piece. It's truly exquisite and uncommon. Jiang Chen took an even closer look and frowned slightly. These words weren't written with a mere brush. This is sword intent that took the form of a brush. That's the only way to explain the sharpness within these words.

He had seen many martial art calligraphy pieces in his previous life, but very few were comparable to the sharpness imbued within this example. The test is a lot trickier than it seems. I might not be able to comprehend the true meaning of the martial dao if I simply study the intent within the calligraphy. One must immerse oneself in the calligraphy with the mindset of a swordmaster. Only then can one comprehend the sword intent within.

Jiang Chen came to that conclusion after studying it for a while. He was the only one with enough knowledge and experience to notice the underlying problem with simple examination. The other four great geniuses had been sitting down before the sixth obelisk for some time now. They had begun to immerse themselves into the meaning behind the calligraphy, but they couldn't make head nor tails of it.

Even the most outstanding genius among the young lords was at his wit's end. But as time passed, they discovered the subtle sword intent buried within the calligraphy. When they changed their perspective to view the words as a sword technique, they finally found a lead, which then let them progress faster. However, they internally scoffed at the idea that Jiang Chen and Ji San would be perceptive enough to sense the sword dao within.

Unbeknownst to them, Jiang Chen had already utilized his vast knowledge to pinpoint the sword dao within the calligraphy. On the other hand, Ji San was fond of calligraphy. He'd already looked at it from all kinds of perspectives, but continuously failed. However, he wasn't the kind to be trapped in a fixed mindset. After a few hours of fruitlessly pursuing theories, his instincts told

him that it was time to switch it up. His heritage memories, slowly rousing after his bloodline reinvigoration, stirred restlessly. Even when not fully shaped, they had already sharpened his insight and intuition.

An epiphany struck when he noticed the sharpness within each word. The calligraphy is bold and decisive, very like a dragon. It is also extremely sharp. It would be more appropriate to call it a carving than a brushstroke. Wait... maybe it wasn't written with a brush, but carved from a weapon? Ji San was quick to explore that train of thought, and it didn't take long for him to find the connection to sword dao. He was overjoyed when it really turned out to be a sword technique after putting his conjecture to the test. Calligraphy was merely a front to misguide them!

Hahaha! I was right! Ji San was jumping for joy inside. His discovery had excited him greatly. He couldn't resist glancing over at Jiang Chen. Coincidentally, Jiang Chen was also glancing at him with an expression that seemed full of wisdom. Ji San was a little surprised when their eyes met. It seems that Brother Jiang has already figured out the secret within the sixth obelisk. Tsk tsk. His insight is simply astounding. Although, my insight and intuition would never be this sharp if he hadn't given me the true dragon's blood, His admiration for Jiang Chen grew yet again. The sword technique was ever-changing and also rich with sword intent. Every word contained an extremely profound sword move.

The calligraphy had roughly two hundred words, meaning that there were also roughly two hundred sword moves. Each and every move was unique and creative, showing an exquisite sword dance when all the moves were performed in a sequential manner. The switching of pace and sword intent seemed awfully crude at first glance, but after some scrutiny, one would realize that it was actually a brilliant execution of sword dao. Jiang Chen was extremely impressed by its depth. No wonder the time limit is one month for the sixth obelisk test. Mastering such a complex sword

technique is no easy feat.

With his innate talent, he would never be able to comprehend this sword technique if he wasn't equipped with memories from his previous life. Even comprehending a third of the sword technique would be a gargantuan task for that him. New Star Ranking geniuses probably won't even comprehend half of the sword technique in a month. Genius Ranking geniuses might be able to comprehend more than that, but two thirds is probably the limit for those who qualified for the Ranking of Young Lords challenge.

The sixth obelisk challenge was unbelievably difficult. So much so that the four great geniuses themselves were now in a race against time. They didn't have time to spare on worrying about others. As for Jiang Chen, his memories from his past life gave him an incontrovertible advantage in comprehending martial dao. The words arranged themselves in front of him like an exquisite painting. A vivid image of a celestial being was performing a sword dance within his mind as the words linked together, one by one.

The singular sword dao describes a sword intent that flows smoothly like water, which is a characteristic shared by this sword technique. However, this sword technique also incorporates huge changes of sword intent between each move. An amateur of sword dao would never be able to wield it. Just like a mountain road was filled with unforeseen ups and downs, one could never predict what would happen in the next sword move.

The ebbs and crests in the sword intent were beyond normal imagination. It didn't just stay unpredictable, instead sometimes returning well within the confines of reason before once again skipping beyond rational practice in sword intent. This sword technique is truly extraordinary. An enemy facing this would wish for a quick death. Jiang Chen's admiration grew as he comprehended more of its mysteries.

Before Jiang Chen and Ji San arrived beneath the sixth obelisk,

the four great geniuses had already been studying it for a some time. Thanks to his heaven defying speed, Jiang Chen caught up to their progress in just three days. On the tenth day, he was already at the final parts of the test.

On Jiang Chen's fifteenth day, Li Jiancheng was the first to stand up. He'd fully comprehended the technique. It was the fifteenth day for Jiang Chen, but the twenty sixth for Li Jiancheng. Still, one had to commend him for his superior insight.

The second to finish was Zhou Yan. He had comprehended the sword technique at almost the same time as Li Jiancheng, and successfully moved on to the next stage. They expected Shui Rutian, who was from Emperor Petalpluck's faction, to come third. But never in their minds did they expect Jiang Chen to finish an hour after them. A mixed expression crossed Li Jiancheng's face when he saw the obelisk turn cyan after Jiang Chen stood up. Zhou Yan was also flabbergasted when he saw Jiang Chen take his leave from the obelisk. It had taken them twenty six days to fully comprehend the sword technique, but young lord Zhen had finished at the same time as them, even though he started more than ten days later than them! Just how monstrous was his comprehension of martial dao?

"Senior brother Zhen, have you... seen this technique before...?" Zhou Yan couldn't resist asking.

Jiang Chen smiled in response. "I've not seen the exact technique, but I've crossed paths with a few other techniques that were also assimilated into calligraphy. People called them calligraphy pieces, but they were actually sword techniques. I already realized that this wasn't just a simple calligraphy piece from the beginning, and concluded that it was a sword technique after noticing the sharpness within the words. It was simply the sword technique itself that completely astounded me."

Zhou Yan's mouth was agape. The only emotion he could feel right now was admiration and speechlessness. It had taken him

four days to pivot from the calligraphy mindset into a sword technique mindset, but young lord Zhen had never caught in the wrong mindset in the first place! His comprehension level, observation strength, and knowledge was enough to put him to shame, even though he was a true disciple from Sacred Peafowl Mountain! Even Li Jiancheng, typically an opinionated and self-centered person, could only look at Jiang Chen with a complicated expression.

Chapter 994: A Conflict of Pride

Li Jiancheng, nicknamed the crown prince, had been publicly acknowledged as the number one genius of the Ranking of Young Lords after young lord Fan's unfortunate demise, before Jiang Chen appeared. Neither Zhou Yan nor Shui Rutian had the qualifications to challenge his position as the strongest young lord. However, right at this moment, he felt an enormous shadow threaten his number one position. As he cast a complicated glance at Jiang Chen, he had to admit that young lord Zhen definitely deserved his full attention. In fact, young lord Zhen possessed many qualities that exceeded his own.

It was enough to depress Li Jiancheng. His domain was being encroached on, his status challenged. But like any fierce animal's first instinct in defending its territory, his hackles rose. When he saw Zhou Yan and Jiang Chen talking and laughing with each other, the threat seemed even greater than before. Zhou Yan was clearly giving a sign that he didn't plan on competing with young lord Zhen. This naturally wasn't what Li Jiancheng wished to see. He wished to see Zhou Yan and young lord Zhen would fight each other out of jealousy. He wished for a conflict between the two members of Sacred Peafowl Mountain that would lead to internal strife. Only then could he rest easy. If the two great geniuses of Sacred Peafowl Mountain were to come to a compromise with each other... or worse, if one of them were to submit to the other, that would be the worst outcome for the young lord of Emperor Shura's faction.

This cannot stand. I mustn't allow them to enter a honeymoon period. If these two doesn't fight each other, they'll absolutely work together to attack me. Li Jiancheng knew very well what kind of situation he was facing. But, he wasn't in a hurry to take action. If he were to rashly do something now, he was sure to fail to attain his goals. He would have to endure and wait until the

right opportunity presented itself.

Two days later, Shui Rutian finally completed his challenge. As Emperor Petalpluck's young lord, Shui Rutian wasn't lacking in either wits or talent. However, he wasn't familiar with sword dao because of Emperor Petalpluck's school of teaching. That was why he had fallen slightly behind when studying sword dao. That being said, he was still faster that the fourth ranked young lord Ye Piaoling. He finished his challenge just four hours before his one month time limit, cutting it very close to the wire.

Young master Ji San was now the only person left beneath the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. He still had plenty of time since he and Jiang Chen had arrived a dozen or so days later than the others. A sneer crawled over Ye Piaoling's face when he saw the lone remaining candidate beneath the obelisk. "Ji Ole Third is such a blind fool. Does he really think that a mere great clan descendant like him is qualified to challenge the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk? Should we call this the final desperate struggles that precedes impending failure?"

Zhou Yan frowned. "Ye Piaoling, you barely squeaked through yourself. Are you sure you have the leisure to criticize others when your own position is at stake?"

Ye Piaoing smiled faintly. "When all is said and done, I passed the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. I heard that Emperor Peafowl himself only managed to reach the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. This also means..."

"Stop right there. Let me guess: You want to boast that your talent is comparable to that of a young Emperor Peafowl, am I right?" Zhou Yan sneered derisively. As a true disciple under Emperor Peafowl's personal command, Zhou Yan naturally knew why Emperor Peafowl's progress had halted at the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. In reality, Emperor Peafowl hadn't been lacking in talent. He'd been too young and failed to keep his emotions in check. That was why he'd fallen for the goading from

his peers. Emperor Peafowl hadn't talked about this with the other great emperors, but Zhou Yan knew a bit about what'd happened back in the day. There had been a lot of geniuses back in Emperor Peafowl's era. He'd also been rather cocky in his youth and high off his fame. This had made him an easy target for provocation, and he'd chosen to challenge the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk right after completing the sixth. As a result, his consciousness and train of thought weren't fully prepared, and his desire for haste only bogged him down further. In the end, he'd failed moments before he was about to complete the obelisk's challenge.

Although Emperor Peafowl hadn't relayed this to him directly, he had warned his disciples to never lose control over their emotions or act irrationally while they were inside the Veluriyam Pagoda. Zhou Yan was a detail oriented person and had deduced the facts from some of Emperor Peafowl's words. It would appear that even someone as great as Emperor Peafowl had a preposterous past. Talent wise, the emperor was absolutely qualified to make it all the way to the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk. In fact, there had been those who felt that the young Emperor Peafowl's talent had been good enough to carry him to the ninth Veluriyam Obelisk. But that was all in the past now.

Although he'd learned from this lesson and later become a mighty ruler over Veluriyam Capital for three thousand years, that failure remained a twinge of regret in his mind to this day. He didn't regret falling for his enemies' provocation back then, but he did regret missing the opportunity to get to know and interact deeper with the Veluriyam Pagoda. He knew very well that this Veluriyam Pagoda was extremely wondrous, filled with limitless possibilities. That was why he attached so much value to the gathering and went so far as to appoint Jiang Chen as his heir, pushing the latter into participating in the Martial Pagoda Battles and enter the Veluriyam Pagoda.

He wanted to make up for the regret he'd harbored since then.

Zhou Yan was Emperor Peafowl's true disciple, and he had always respected his master like a living god. That was why he was extremely offended by Ye Piaoling's words. But Ye Piaoling just cackled oddly. "Zhou Yan, each new generation exceeds the previous one. Is no one allowed to be better than Emperor Peafowl? Have you never heard of the saying that 'each age bring forth new geniuses onto this noble land, each to rule their own domain for years to come'?"

Jiang Chen couldn't hold himself back from a snort, casting a glance at Ye Piaoling, "'Each age bring forth new geniuses onto this noble land', huh?"

Ye Piaoling frowned. "What?"

Jiang Chen smiled leisurely. "Oh, nothing. I have nothing but agreement for the sentiment. That being said, I can't help but laugh if you're applying it to yourself to signify that you're better than the older generation."

"What's so funny about that?" Ye Piaoling's tone abruptly turned cold. "Are you saying that I'm boasting? Do you really think that you are the only genius that exists in Veluriyam Capital?"

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "I don't know how many geniuses there exist here, but I'm going to throw your comment about Ji San being a 'blind fool' right back at you."

Ye Piaoling laughed oddly. "You want to throw it back at me? What, you can't possibly be thinking that this Ji Ole Third will succeed in passing the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk!" He threw his head back in laughter, ridicule in every guffaw.

"You don't think he'll succeed?" Jiang Chen asked, a ghost of a smile appearing on his face.

"Of course not," Ye Piaoling said with a sneer on his face. "Even the top ten of the Ranking of Young Lords dare not claim that they can easily pass the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. Who the hell does he

think he is?”

Even Zhou Yan couldn’t hold himself from speaking up at that. “If you’re going to use the Ranking of Young Lords to prop every one of your arguments, then I have to ask: why did you come out later than senior brother Zhen, even though you’re ranked fourth on that list?”

His question was a huge slap right across Ye Piaoling’s face. But the latter snorted softly. “We can stop right now if you insist on using Zhen to boast. I’m talking about Ji Ole Third. What does it have anything to do with Zhen?”

“Very good, very good.” Jiang Chen started clapping. “Then let us assume that you’re talking just about Brother Ji. I’m still going to fight for justice on his behalf though.”

“Fight for justice on his behalf?” Ye Piaoling asked coldly, “How?”

“I bet that the time Ji San spends on the the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk will be shorter than yours,” Jiang Chen said calmly.

Ye Piaoling thought he heard wrong. “What? You’re going to bet that he will spend less time than me? Are you seriously thinking that he’ll succeed?”

“Just say if you’re willing to bet or not.” Jiang Chen’s eyebrows wrinkled slightly.

“What’s at stake?” Ye Piaoling’s eyes lit up, even as a trace of dark malice appeared in his eyes.

“The bet is between you and I. Whoever loses leaves the Pagoda. What do you say?”

Zhou Yan hastily interjected. “Stop this. We shouldn’t let emotions get to our heads. There’s no meaning behind this bet at all. Senior brother Zhen, you…”

Zhou Yan’s feelings towards Jiang Chen were rather

complicated. In fact, he even felt a twinge of jealousy from time to time. However, Zhou Yan was extremely loyal to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He realized that young lord Zhen was currently the face of his faction, and that he represented the interest of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. If he was forced to leave the Veluriyam Pagoda due to a meaningless conflict, then they would lose out horribly in this venture. Zhou Yan wouldn't have cared if Pill King Zhen had bet on himself instead. It was highly doubtful that Ye Piaoling would even consider agreeing to such a bet.

But they were betting on young master Ji San's progress right now. Zhou Yan himself didn't think that Ji San had much of a chance to succeed. After all, the foundation of a great clan descendant could only prop him up so much. Even Zhou Yan himself thought that young master Ji San was simply here to earn some cheap experience. He didn't believe for a second that the young master could grasp the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk.

Footsteps rang out from behind the group, and a vigorous but calm voice reached their ears. "Junior Zhou, we are fighters, are we not? Some emotionally charged conflict is the millstone that pushes us to become better. You are free to act as overly cautious as you wish, but must you interfere with another person's decision?"

It was none other than the leader of the ranking board, Li Jiancheng. When he saw that young lord Zhen had chosen to butt heads with Ye Piaoling and then come up with such a ridiculous bet, he couldn't help but entertain some thoughts of his own. If he could disqualify young lord Zhen with this bet, then he could remove this latent threat as easily as pulling a thorn from flesh. A person who was disqualified from Veluriyam Pagoda so early had absolutely no chance of competing against him in the future. Moreover, Li Jiancheng had always believed himself to be the genius who was born to fulfill a great destiny; the genius that would control Veluriyam Capital's fate in the future. Therefore, he only had one thought in his mind towards every person who

showed even a tinge of becoming a threat. Suppress them all.

Ye Piaoling's complexion looked dark with anger, but he was inwardly a bit unsettled. If this bet had happened some time ago, he would have agreed without a second thought. But after witnessing young lord Zhen's miracles again and again, he was instinctively wary of Jiang Chen. He couldn't help but feel the presence of enormous risk even when he was certain that he would win without question. If he won and disqualified young lord Zhen, then it would without a doubt great news. But if he lost? After a moment spent in deeper thought, Ye Piaoling realized that he would only be benefiting Li Jiancheng regardless of the outcome. He was also the only one taking any risk. He hesitated for a moment.

Chapter 995: A Stunning Young Master Ji San

Zhou Yan was anxious. Ye Piaoling, hesitant. Li Jiancheng had turned dark and brooding. Shui Rutian distanced himself from this seeming powder keg of a situation. The only one standing confidently was Jiang Chen. It was as if the bet was just a small game to him, a passing fancy. Ye Piaoling looked at Jiang Chen, his eyes filled with a sliver of concentrated dread. Finally, he inhaled deeply and shook his head. “Zhou Yan is right. Contests born out of personal feelings are meaningless. Ultimately, we are all scions of Veluriyam Capital. We should bare our steel against outsiders, not each other.”

Though the statement was a veiled admission of defeat, he had still managed to recover a portion of face. On the other hand, Jiang Chen was a little surprised. He’d thought his provocation enough to spur the other youth into the bet. Was Ye Piaoling just giving up? His opinion of Vastsea’s young lord imperceptibly rose a notch. Though his trouble-stirring attempt failed, Li Jiancheng was still entirely unaffected. He wasn’t the least bit self-conscious about his villainy, much less embarrassed. Faintly smiling, he drifted away.

Ye Piaoling gave the others a cupped fist salute. “I’m taking a break from the Veluriyam Obelisks, everyone. I’m heading to the secret realm of battle for a while. Who’s with me?”

“I want to take a stroll around the secret realm of adventure.” The previously aloof Shui Rutian chose this moment to pipe up.

Zhou Yan looked at Jiang Chen. “How about you, senior brother Zhen?”

Jiang Chen smiled placidly. “I’ll stay here for now.”

The declaration moved Zhou Yan. “Does senior brother intend to

challenge the seventh obelisk?”

Despite the four geniuses’ exceptional talent and potential, they had in common a pessimistic view of their chances against the seventh obelisk. It was why Shui Rutian and Ye Piaoling had both departed in order to better themselves within the other secret realms. The geniuses of the first division had plenty of time left. They were in no rush at all to get the results they wanted.

“Of course I’ll challenge it,” Jiang Chen affirmed. “But I haven’t decided exactly when yet.”

Remembering the speed with which his senior brother had comprehended the obelisk, Zhou Yan sighed. “You started more than ten days later than us, but we finished on the same day. If there’s one person among us who can get past the seventh obelisk, it’s probably you.”

Though Li Jiancheng ranked number one on the Ranking of Young Lords, Zhou Yan was sure that Emperor Shura’s young lord would assuredly fail if he were to challenge the next obelisk immediately. On the other hand, senior brother Zhen had at least a thirty to forty percent chance, possibly even sixty to seventy right now.

As they spoke, the obelisk beeped once more. Young master Ji San opened his eyes in the next moment, his face splitting into a wide smile of success. This was no illusion, the obelisk was indicating that he had passed!

“What?” Ye Piaoling hadn’t left the vicinity yet. He couldn’t resist turning his head at the commotion, and the sight that greeted his eyes stunned him. The young master Ji San that he’d belittled had comprehended the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk–in a shorter amount of time than he had taken as well! Though Li Jiancheng had been the first to comprehend it, even he had taken more time than Ji San in total.

The perpetually calm Shui Rutian examined the approaching Ji

San with appraising eyes before tossing a thoughtful glance at Jiang Chen. He turned to depart, a soft sigh escaping him. Ye Piaoling was speechless and ashamed. The outcome was more powerful than any verbal smackdown. He had almost no courage to continue heckling. With a wry chuckle, he hastily followed suit. If there had been a hole in the ground, doubtless he would have headed straight for it. At the same time, he felt a frisson of lingering fear. If he'd gone and made the bet with young lord Zhen on a moment's impulse, he would be out of the Pagoda right now.

He was the fourth-ranked genius in the Ranking of Young Lords. Being kicked out now would be one of the heaviest blows one could strike against Emperor Vastsea and his faction. Even removal by more typical means was more preferable than that. Failure due to raw arrogance was extremely likely to earn him a severe cursing-out from His Majesty Vastsea, and possibly demotion from young lord as well. As an onlooker, Zhou Yan had only a dry smile and utter silence to give. His vehement opposition to the bet prior had been wholly unnecessary, it seemed. If senior brother Zhen was inclined to open his mouth, then it was probably a foregone conclusion. The fact that Ji San had used less time than a sword dao genius like him instilled a strong sense of danger in Zhou Yan's heart. He felt the metaphorical whip crack behind him. If he didn't put in more effort, then he would only be left behind.

Outside the Veluriyam Pagoda, the seven emperors were on careful watch for any changes from within. When they saw that six people had passed the sixth obelisk, there were sighs and exhales all around. Besides Emperors Peafowl and Shura, none of the seven emperors had passed the sixth obelisk during their trials within the Veluriyam Pagoda. Although the obelisks' content changed with each iteration of the Meeting, their relative levels of difficulty remained the same. The discovery that six people had conquered the sixth obelisk was tremendously rewarding news.

"Who is number twenty-one?" In the heat of the moment,

Emperor Skysplitter couldn't quite remember whom that number in particular belonged to.

"Number... twenty-one?" It wasn't a hard question for Emperor Mountaincrush. He recalled that his very own Gu Zhenshan had been the former occupant of that spot. He smiled wryly, his expression slightly odd. "Number twenty-one is a scion of the Coiling Dragon Clan. Ji Ole Third."

These words jogged the other emperors' memories. Their expressions too grew slightly strange.

"I remember Coiling Dragon's Ji Ole Third. Weren't there rumors that he's just a frivolous dandy?"

"But he passed the sixth obelisk. Has he been concealing his strength this entire time?"

"It's quite possible. Even the geniuses in the top ten of the Ranking will find it hard to comprehend the sixth obelisk. It's very surprising that he completed it in just over twenty days. That's a superior showing than the top four, isn't it?"

"Tsk, tsk. Li Jiancheng, Zhou Yan, Shui Rutian... he's outshining all of them. Is the Coiling Dragon Clan kid going to set the world on fire?" The seven emperors were absolutely astounded. Jiang Chen's overabundance of absurdities had numbed their expectations of him. They'd long accepted that young lord's position to be head and shoulders over everyone else. But Ji San had just appeared out of the blue. He was a scion of the great clans, a fair bit lower in position and standing than the other young lords. The very fact that he'd even entered the Veluriyam Pagoda proper was striking in and of itself. How could the fact that he had comprehended the sixth obelisk... not be?

"Daoist Peafowl, everyone under your wing seems to be full of surprises. They're sweeping up everything good. What's up with Ji Ole Third, eh?"

“That’s right, brother Peafowl. The Peafowl faction is simply ludicrous already. Maybe you can let me have Ji Ole Third instead, huh?”

“Daoist Peafowl, my Skysplitter faction has a shortage of geniuses. Why not give Ji Ole Third to me?”

Emperor Peafowl laughed. “Please, everyone. Coiling Dragon Clan is allied with Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but they are ultimately a secular faction. I cannot take away what is rightfully theirs.”

In truth, he was just as shocked as everyone else. He had entered the Veluriyam Pagoda himself before. The sixth obelisk’s difficulty wasn’t something that great clan’s scion could handle. They needed a miracle to stand the ghost of a chance in front of it. He knew that the geniuses this year were some of the best he’d ever seen, but the scion of a great clan? It really was amazing where one found excellence sometimes.

“Is Jiang Chen’s excellence contagious?” He allowed himself a wry smile. He had originally been very satisfied with the fact that he had been able to keep Jiang Chen around. But now, it was amplified by newfound expectancy. Jiang Chen himself was outstanding enough, but he could also elevate those around him to the same heights! Emperor Peafowl was happy to see a change like that.

The Coiling Dragon Clan did not have the right to sit in on matters relating to inside the Veluriyam Pagoda. Only the seven titled emperors and their personal factions had the right to observe, and of that, only certain results and details that the image formation saw fit to display. However, Emperor Peafowl quickly sent them the good news.

The Coiling Dragon clan lord was quite reclusive nowadays, and barely left his residence. Though Jiang Chen had used the Five Elements Augmentation Art upon him, it’d only given him a few

extra years of life. Each of his days was spent in nervousness and apprehension. He suddenly received a message glyph. Glancing at the time, the clan lord let out a low laugh. “It’s already been half a year now. Is Ole Third coming out from the Main Pagoda, finally?”

He opened the glyph as he thought idly. A brief once-over brought flushed color to his cheeks, and his eyes bulged out of their sockets. “What? Ole Third succeeded at the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk? He’s one of only six geniuses that managed to do so?”

The clan lord almost thought he was hallucinating. He rubbed his eyes to make sure he wasn’t reading incorrectly. The glyph had been sent from His Majesty Peafowl himself. The clan lord’s aged hands, wrinkled like deadwood, were trembling slightly.

“Ole Third, Ole Third... you’ve really given this old man a pleasant surprise.” Alone in his room, unseen, the clan lord allowed himself to give vent to his outburst of emotion.

During the battles for the Ranking of Young Lords, Ji San had given up on his opportunity to challenge those ranked higher than him. His decision had led the clan lord to suspect whether the young master was missing a key component in his determination. At the time, Ji Ole Third had promised him that the young master would one day stand upright before him. This result, from within the Veluriyam Pagoda, was the best display of that promise.

Only six geniuses had comprehended the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. What did that mean? Young master Ji San was effectively in the top six in the Ranking of Young Lords! No matter what the numbers on the Ranking had been, the geniuses were tested like gold in the refiner’s fire after entering the Pagoda proper. Who was the wheat and who was the chaff? The fires of Veluriyam Pagoda's furnace revealed all. Certainly, with this, young master Ji San was showing himself to be the former.

Chapter 996: The Sole Regret in Breaking Through to Emperor Realm

Passing the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk had given young master Ji San another six months of time within the Pagoda. The same went for Jiang Chen, added to the two years he was originally eligible for. Time had suddenly become far more abundant. However, the other geniuses in Ji San's percentile from the Ranking of Young Lords had run out of time. The ones that still remained in the Veluriyam Pagoda were either recipients of bonus time or originally eligible for a year or more. The top-ranked geniuses from the Ranking of Young Lords, to a one, had no intention of continuing to challenge the obelisks for the moment.

Li Jiancheng had retired into seclusion to cultivate further. The other three split themselves among the two other secret realms. Staying here had little benefit aside from pure cultivation. But they couldn't just head straight for the seventh obelisk. All of them had enough basic self-awareness to know that doing so now would only end in tragedy.

Instead, they sought inspiration in the other two secret realms. There had to be a reason for all three secret realms to be open this year. Perhaps there was some kind of discovery or rare opportunity to be found that would help them with the seventh obelisk. Or it might possibly help them with the eighth obelisk, a feat that even Emperor Peafowl hadn't managed back in the day.

Though the youngsters all knew that Emperor Peafowl was Veluriyam Capital's foremost expert for the past three to four thousand years, youth are always peerlessly confident in the face of overwhelming odds. They had the luxury of daydreaming: perhaps I'm actually a genius beyond compare? Maybe I can surpass Emperor Peafowl? I don't think that's altogether impossible, is it?

Jiang Chen did not leave the secret realm of heritage, instead returning to secluded cultivation. Before he'd challenged the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk, he had reaped great rewards from doing so for a few months. He decided to ride his current momentum and attempt to break through to ninth level sage realm. Because he'd comprehended the sixth obelisk, he was granted entrance to an area that had a higher concentration of spirit energy.

Cultivating here a single day was as good as cultivating outside for twenty. Everything had slotted perfectly into place to allow him to reach the finish line. He was going to get to ninth level sage realm this time for sure.

Ji San's choice was similar to Jiang Chen's. He became a lot more confident after comprehending the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. The true dragon blood was forging both his body and mind for the better every day, constantly expanding the limits of his cultivation. A potent, turbulent power had welled up within his body without him even realizing it. It hungered, calling him to break through to emperor realm.

He had stagnated for a long while at peak ninth level sage realm, also known as half step emperor realm, almost too long. But finding the opportunity to actually break through was tough, so his cultivation had slowed to a standstill for the last few years.

Luckily, the true dragon blood's immense potential smashed through his bottleneck like a giant hammer, giving his own potential wings. Now, the previously impenetrable emperor realm was urgently beckoning him over. Ji San needed to re-enter seclusion, and tightly grasp this chance. Once he took the jump, he would make that final step into emperor realm.

His horizons would expand beyond his imagining. In this world, sage realm was only the beginning of proper martial dao. On the other hand, emperor realm signified a higher level, giving one the right to launch oneself to further heights. For the strongest experts, emperor realm was akin to a permit of entry. Someone

who couldn't achieve emperor realm couldn't possibly call themselves an expert.

Ji San had never lost hope to break through to emperor realm. But, his age when he did so would decide the scope of eventual accomplishments. It would dictate how deeply he would delve into the truths of martial dao. The true dragon blood had shattered all his plans and expectations, leading him into a brand-new world. It'd enriched his martial dao experience and raised his level by several degrees.

What was previously a painful obstacle was no longer even a stumbling block. The awakening of his bloodline simplified the process even more than Ji San had thought. He'd originally envisioned his breakthrough taking four months, but in reality, it only took two. Moreover, he hadn't spent the two months only on breaking through. He'd also consolidated and improved his own martial techniques as well.

"I can't believe that I've broken through to emperor realm before the age of forty! Haha, the students of emperors aside, I must be the best from the great clans in three thousand years." To say that Ji San wasn't proud of the achievement would be a lie. His breakthrough to emperor realm would drastically improve the Coiling Dragon Clan's status and outlook as well. The likelihood becoming the eighth emperor faction of Veluriyam Capital had taken a quantum leap upward.

"We only need Brother Jiang's Pinecrane Pill now. If the clan lord lives for another thousand years, then surely he can break through from emperor realm to great emperor. I'll be able to use that time to rise up, and no one will be able to stop the clan's ascension to becoming the faction of the eighth emperor." Ji San's entire mindset opened up. Suddenly, he found the fact that he'd fought over the paltry position of clan heir childish and amusing. With his current state of mind, the inheritance of a clan could no longer disturb his heart. He had loftier goals now, establishing the

faction of an eighth emperor. No one else in Coiling Dragon Clan's younger generation could help the clan accomplish this noble task.

Completing the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk had given Ji San a boost of six months. After spending two odd months on his breakthrough, he still had more than enough time. Therefore, Ji San resolved to continue polishing his current level of cultivation. He wanted to stabilize his new realm a bit more. The true dragon bloodline that he had received naturally gifted him with a stronger domain than most emperor realm cultivators. Though he was still first level emperor realm, his bloodline domain rivaled that of a third level cultivator's. It excited and motivated him even more. He almost wanted to challenge the seventh obelisk right away.

"Let's take things slowly. Compared to my brother Jiang Chen, I still have many things to improve when it comes to my composure. In that regard, I am still many leagues below him." Sometimes Ji San was really, really impressed with Jiang Chen. His genius and poise were both outstanding. Each move he made had a reason behind it.

"There are many things I can yet learn from my sworn brother." He sighed, and went back to cultivating.

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In another corner of the Pagoda, Jiang Chen was fully invested in breaking through to ninth level sage realm. Because he wasn't in a particular hurry, his movements were unhurried and smooth. His actions were deliberate as the unraveling of a cocoon, unhurried as the simmering of a broth. Jiang Chen knew well that his body had been severely disadvantaged from the start. Though he'd undergone several reforgings of the flesh since his transmigration, there were still flaws that had persisted from his childhood. That much was undeniable. His cultivation journey, to any eye, had been very mind numbingly fast. In his pursuit for speed, he had foregone polishing some of the minor details of his foundations. But presently, he had ample time to solidify and reinforce the

basics... to a degree. Doing that was the key to breaking through to ninth level sage realm. After all, the step after that was straight to emperor realm.

The threshold between ninth level sage realm and emperor realm was quite tall. However, not everyone had to experience the state of being stuck at half step emperor realm. Ultimately, 'half step emperor realm' only meant 'peak of ninth level sage realm'. The reason why Jiang Chen was being so careful was because he wanted to strengthen his fundamentals to prepare for his eventual breakthrough to emperor realm proper.

The defects of his ten-year cultivation history were obvious to him. He had bridged the gap from true qi realm to close-to-ninth-level sage realm in an incredibly short span of time. Therefore, Jiang Chen was more than happy to hunker down and grind things out for a while. It was time to make up for some of the fundamentals he had been ignoring.

"Although my breakthroughs have been very fast, my fundamentals aren't actually that horrible. When I broke through to spirit realm, I used the Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill to stabilize the process, which gave me a big advantage over many of my peers. Alas, I haven't yet found an earth attribute treasure to make up my elemental deficiency. For metal, I have the magnetic golden mountain; for wood, the wood spirit spring and the Taiyi Jade Vine; for water and fire, the Bewitching Lotus. Earth is the only one that I'm missing something. If I can plug that gap, then I will have all five elements ready. It'll be a big help for when I break through into emperor realm."

He understood perfectly that a battle between emperor realm cultivators was a clash between their domains. And the strength of an emperor domain depended on how polished one's fundamentals and intrinsics were. Many cultivators used pills and alternative methods to break through to emperor realm, so they couldn't at all compete against others who broke through via hard cultivation.

“Completing the five elements and refining all five elemental meridians will allow me to form a perfect cycle. It’s rare to be able to imbue a domain with that kind of powerful quality.” Jiang Chen was absolutely confident. Even the seven titled emperors of Veluriyam Capital couldn’t train in all five elements. Most martial dao geniuses didn’t have the predisposition or necessary qualities for such an enormous undertaking. This was especially true for those with strong innate constitutions.

Geniuses with an innate constitution of every attribute were an exception, not the rule, but they were essentially impossible to find on normal planes. Rarer than once every ten thousand years, certainly. Natural born constitutions of one or two attributes led to a bias that worked in favor of the same. The biggest advantage of Jiang Chen’s cultivation thus far was his refining of all five elements. It wasn’t something obviously manifest before emperor realm. However, it would slowly show itself once he did break through. Jiang Chen’s only regret was that he did not have a treasure for the earth attribute yet.

Chapter 997: Breakthrough, Ninth Level Sage Realm

Emperor Peafowl had bestowed the Pentecolor Divine Swords to Jiang Chen after great consideration. The emperor himself was a born genius who could cultivate all five elements. The biggest reason he liked and appreciated Jiang Chen was also because he noticed that Jiang Chen was also a genius who could cultivate all five elements.

“Perhaps I should head out and take a walk before I attain emperor realm?” Jiang Chen suddenly felt that he didn’t necessarily have to push himself to reach emperor realm in one go. Considering the amount of time he would be spending in the Pagoda, reaching emperor realm wasn’t impossible. He already had two years of time. After grasping three Veluriyam Obelisks in a row, another ten months had been added to his time limit.

He was confident in his abilities to comprehend the next few Veluriyam Obelisks. At the very least, he was sure that the seventh obelisk wouldn’t be a problem for him. If he did succeed at the seventh, another year would be added to his time limit for a total of three years. Cultivating three years in here was the equivalent of cultivating sixty years in the outside world.

“I’ve spent less than ten years to break through to eighth level sage realm from third level sage realm. Therefore, sixty years is more than enough for me to ascend from ninth level sage realm to emperor realm.” He still had confidence enough in this area. Emperor realm might be a near insurmountable wall for some cultivators, but it wasn’t all that difficult for Jiang Chen. His memories from his past life alone offered many methods to help him break through to emperor realm, not to mention the many trump cards he possessed in this life. After deliberating again and again, Jiang Chen ultimately thought that it might not necessarily

be a good idea to break through all the way to emperor realm right now.

“Our of all five elements, my understanding of the earth element is still a little lacking. Although ascending to emperor realm now may appear to be a good thing, I actually lose more than I gain. If I can fix the flaw in my understanding first before I break through to emperor realm, then there will be no flaws in my cultivation.”

After pondering for a while, Jiang Chen ultimately felt that he should stop at the peak of sage realm for now. He also only had one chance to enter Veluriyam Pagoda. If he exited now, he wouldn’t be able to reenter. Jiang Chen didn’t want to give up on exploring Veluriyam Pagoda. He also knew that Emperor Peafowl likely had high expectations for him. If he were to leave now, the emperor might be disappointed in him.

“I can’t give up on exploring the Veluriyam Pagoda, but I must get out at least once to perfect my understanding. In that case, the only way left before me is to pass all nine Veluriyam Obelisks and enter the Six Palaces of Heritage!”

Anyone who passed all nine Veluriyam Obelisks would have another opportunity to enter the Six Palaces of Heritage. Moreover, they were granted an additional chance in the event of failure. This meant that entering the Six Palaces would also allow him to reenter the Veluriyam Pagoda in the future. Of course, his age had to be younger than sixty years old.

Veluriyam Pagoda’s rules were extremely strict. All cultivators above sixty years old were barred from entry. All who exceeded this age might be attacked by Veluriyam Pagoda’s powerful restrictions. Of course, it was a different story if a cultivator was less than sixty years old when they first entered the Veluriyam Pagoda and stayed there until they were over sixty.

“Mm. I will dominate all nine Veluriyam Obelisks no matter what. I want to know what the Six Palaces of Heritage are about.”

Jiang Chen's mind became free of all stray thoughts after making up his mind. He began cultivating with all his might once more.

Three months later, a powerful heat surged into his ocean of qi. A comfortable warmth spread throughout his entire body like an electrical shock.

"Ninth level sage realm..." Jiang Chen opened his eyes and huffed out a mouthful of putrid breath. He had used half a year to ascend to ninth level sage realm. He could've completed the process in just three months' time, but had chosen to spend another three months in cultivation. Given where he was, this meant that he'd cultivated for ten years, and he'd done so to patch up holes in his cultivation caused by previous swift breakthroughs. He felt the time was well spent. He'd been worried that his foundations were destabilized from his rapid progress, but the half year in the Pagoda was enough to vanquish this worry.

Much had changed inside Veluriyam Pagoda during this time. When Jiang Chen walked out of his private domain, he noticed that there were only a few people left inside the secret realm of heritage. The others had either been disqualified or had left to explore other secret realms. There were only three to four people left inside the secret realm of heritage besides Jiang Chen.

Three were gathered beneath the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. They were pointing and gesturing, seemingly discussing something. When the trio saw Jiang Chen walking towards them, they all nodded their heads at him in greeting. One of them even greeted him warmly. "Young lord Zhen, your seclusion lasted quite a long time, I see. Have you broken through to new heights?"

Jiang Chen have him a slight nod in response. He then asked, "Why are you three lingering before the Veluriyam Obelisk instead of challenging it?"

The genius who'd offered a greeting was ninth on the Ranking of Young Lords. Jiang Chen remembered that he was a member of

Emperor Petalpluck's faction, and that his name was Zhang Moheng. The other two cultivators were ranked sixth and seventh on the list. They were all geniuses from the first quartile. However, these two cultivators didn't treat Jiang Chen as warmly as Zhang Moheng because they were ranked higher. They would lose face if they treated him too warmly.

Zhang Moheng had no such qualms, so he laughed wryly. "Brother Zhen, I for one know the limit of my capabilities. I am not able to grasp the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk thoroughly even to this day, much less the seventh. If we haven't comprehended the fourth and fifth beforehand, we would've hit the time limit already. The reason we came here today is because we heard that Young lord Li Jiancheng of Emperor Asura is planning to challenge the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. We've come to see if he can succeed in his endeavor."

The other two cultivators shared the same thoughts. They hadn't even managed to pass the sixth, so naturally it was impossible for them to study the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk.

Jiang Chen smiled. "What a coincidence! Li Jiancheng is planning to challenge the seventh obelisk too? Is he planning to be the first to pass it?"

Zhang Moheng smiled ruefully. "The first? He may be too late already."

Jiang Chen was surprised. "Why is that?"

Zhang Moheng stared at Jiang Chen with exaggerated surprise. "You don't know?"

The other two cultivators were also staring at Jiang Chen in puzzlement. It was obvious that they were somewhat surprised by his reaction. He smiled wryly in response. "I was cultivating in seclusion all this time. I have no idea what's happened in the outside world."

Zhang Moheng sighed. “Does that mean you don’t know that someone has already passed the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk?”

Jiang Chen’s heart skipped a beat. “Who is it?”

“You really don’t know?” Zhang Moheng looked up and down with an expression of surprise, wondering if Jiang Chen was pretending or not. When he finally confirmed that this wasn’t a front, he sighed. “Aren’t you and young master Ji San brothers? Didn’t he tell you that he passed the seventh?”

Jiang Chen really didn’t think that the first person to pass would be Ji San. His mind went blank for a moment before he broke into laughter. “Well, isn’t he in a rush!”

Zhang Moheng exclaimed in surprise, “Aren’t you surprised at all? Your reaction is a bit unusual.”

Jiang Chen shrugged. “Brother Ji is a man of many hidden talents. You all feel strange only because you don’t know him too well. I know that he had this potential in him since a long time ago, so I’m not surprised by this.”

A man of many hidden talents? Zhang Moheng and the other two cultivators exchanged glances with each other. It might’ve been reasonable if he had used this description on Li Jiancheng, Shui Rutian or Zhou Yan. But Ji Ole Third? Wasn’t that a bit unsuitable? This was a fellow of loose restraint. Could a man like this really hide many talents?

Jiang Chen wasn’t paying attention to their reactions. He smiled and cupped his hands. “Do keep yourselves busy, everyone. I have other things to do.” With that, he headed straight towards the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk.

All three were transfixed by this action. “What... what does he want to do?” The trio communicated with each other through their eyes. Their heads were buzzing with great shock. Look at him. Could it be that young lord Zhen was planning to challenge

the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk too? What was wrong with this world? Even now, none of the geniuses under the great emperors' command had dared take up this challenge. Instead, the two common geniuses who fought their way up to the Ranking of Young Lords were the ones to challenge it first. Something was very wrong with this picture!

Complicated emotions assaulted the trio for a time. But their feet wouldn't move according to their wishes, almost as if they had rooted themselves in the ground. One young master Ji San was shocking enough already, and now young lord zhen had shown up too. Was the Ranking of Young Lords really going to undergo a massive change?

When young master Ji San successfully grasped the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk and left in style, he'd also left behind a legend. It had been the topic of discussion for several days then, and to this day they still weren't able to digest the news entirely. Now that young lord Zhen had made his move, their minds couldn't keep up. Was this the era of the dark horses?

Out of the four strongest geniuses of the Ranking of Young Lords, Li Jiancheng had the only one who revealed that he was ready almost ready to challenge the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. The rest of the three had gone to other secret realms to train. It was likely that they wouldn't return to make their challenge until the final moment. After all, no one wanted to risk starting a challenge that they weren't confident in passing. It'd be a great waste of their accumulated time if they failed.

Chapter 998: Conquering The Seventh Veluriyam Obelisk

Jiang Chen didn't think that Ji San's actions were inappropriate. His brother had no way to contact Jiang Chen while the latter had been in seclusion. Challenging the seventh obelisk was the natural course for Ji San as he was was ranked in the third quadrant and didn't have much time left in the Pagoda. He would've been ejected by now if he wasn't granted six more months after grasping the sixth obelisk. He'd succeeded in challenging the seventh obelisk with whatever time he had left. Jiang Chen was genuinely happy for him.

It seems Brother Ji's assimilation of the true dragon's blood has gone perfectly. I'm certain he has broken through the emperor realm by now and awakened another part of his heritage memories. It's given him a great boost in both his martial knowledge and martial dao realm. Grasping the seventh obelisk was only the natural next step.

Ji San was granted one more year after comprehending the seventh obelisk. He now had more time to cultivate within the Pagoda.

Brother Ji is being sensible. Testing his mettle within the secret realm of battle is definitely the best course of action. He has already done all he can within the secret realm of heritage. He won't be able to make any more significant breakthroughs right after reaching the emperor realm, so it's better for him to find inspiration in real battle. Jiang Chen approved of these actions greatly. After all, Ji San wasn't like him. Jiang Chen didn't need to worry about the lack of inspiration even if he continued to stay within the secret realm of heritage. The knowledge from his previous life had given him an advantage that others could only dream of. There wasn't even an inkling of worry in his mind when

he sat down in front of the seventh obelisk. He was extremely confident that this challenge would pose no trouble for him.

This wasn't blind confidence, but Zhang Moheng and the others couldn't help but think that young lord Zhen had been a little too rash. The three looked at Jiang Chen from afar, curiosity and doubt writ all over their faces. Can he really do it?

Jiang Chen sent his consciousness towards the seventh obelisk.

"Welcome to the seventh obelisk challenge. This obelisk is called the Prehistoric Flame Obelisk. You are given one month to pass the test and obtain a single prehistoric flame essence," a voice announced blandly.

The Prehistoric Flame Obelisk? Jiang Chen's heart trembled. The prehistoric flame was a type of heavenly fire, and also one of the oldest fire sources in the world. How is the obelisk connected to the prehistoric flame? He began the test with such questions in mind, but the truth didn't elude him for long. The powerful flame was contained within the obelisk. It emitted the might of the flame which tempered the contestant's consciousness. This was both a test and also a rare opportunity to strengthen oneself.

One's consciousness would definitely be several multitudes stronger after suffering through a month of arduous tempering by the prehistoric flame. However, it would be a much greater fortune if one obtained a single spark of the prehistoric flame essence for themselves. One could refine a single spark and strengthen its flame, helping it eventually grow into a blazing fire. The prehistoric flame was ranked thirty six among countless heavenly flames. It was a frighteningly powerful heavenly flame. In the ancient times, there were a few occasions in which an entire sect was razed into ashes by a single prehistoric flame. Jiang Chen treated the test with all due seriousness after hearing this description.

In the beginning, it was only a tiny flame that was no stronger

than a candle flame. Despite its size, it would actually cause an enormous amount of destruction if materialized. Jiang Chen didn't dare to take it lightly. He linked his consciousness to the obelisk and allowed the flame's power to temper it freely. He didn't feel much strain for the first seven to eight days as there wasn't much movement to the flame. However, Jiang Chen could feel the minute changes as the flame evolved with each passing second. The changes were miniscule, but persistent.

On the ninth day, Jian Chen could feel a great change in the flame's intensity. Its impact on his consciousness had also increased by four times. Previously, the flame had only been as small as a candle fire, but it had now bloomed into the size of a lotus flower.

Mm. The prehistoric flame has begun its evolution. The common cultivator would probably be satisfied if they merely withstood the flame's test, but Jiang Chen wouldn't be done with just that. He continued to observe the changes within the flame. The prehistoric flame didn't change much in form, but its flickering movement brimmed with profound meaning. The extremely famous prehistoric flame had its own unique characteristics, and the ability to grasp and control them was the main test of this obelisk. How was one supposed to absorb the essence if one couldn't even understand its main characteristic?

Jiang Chen's consciousness grew increasingly resilient in tandem with the intensity of the prehistoric flame. He was fully immersed in that frame of mind. The prehistoric flame is a heavenly fire from the ancient times with a mind of its own. Absorbing its essence is an task easier said than done. One must begin by understanding its nature, then communicate with it, and slowly absorb and harmonize with it...

He was so immersed that he no longer noticed the passage of time. The minutes and seconds quickly passed by. By the twenty eighth day, the prehistoric flame had reached its final and most

ultimate form. The obelisk was fully immersed in a sea of flames. Jiang Chen's consciousness was like a dragon, twisting and meandering among the sea of flames, in search of the prehistoric flame essence. A bright flash suddenly appeared within his consciousness.

A crimson light had just shot across his sea of consciousness. A great force immediately surged across his consciousness in pursuit of the crimson light. Moments later, the crimson light transformed into a miniscule speck of flame and was drawn into the sea of consciousness, becoming one. Jiang Chen blew a gentle sigh of relief. It's done.

That was the prehistoric flame essence that he'd been searching for the past thirty days. The sea of fire that covered the obelisk was merely an image created by the prehistoric flame essence. The obelisk hadn't actually been covered by an intensely burning prehistoric flame. If an prehistoric flame really combusted into a sea of flame, it would be enough to destroy half of Veluriyam Capital. Even though it was merely an image, it was still an intense test to one's consciousness. The test not only tempered one's consciousness, but also one's perception. Finding the single spark of true essence within a sea of imagery was something easier said than done. Capturing and refining the prehistoric flame essence meant completion of the test.

The seventh obelisk shone in a mesmerizing cyan when Jiang Chen opened his eyes. He'd conquered the seventh obelisk! Zhang Moheng and the others had been observing for over a month in the distance. Their faces were full of shock when Jiang Chen conquered the obelisk test. Two more had joined their cohort. One was Li Jiancheng, and the other was Shui Rutian. The latter had just come back from another secret realm, while the former was waiting for his turn to challenge the seventh obelisk. The seventh obelisk and the subsequent obelisks could only host one challenger at a time.

Li Jiancheng carried a sombre expression as all kinds of emotions filled him. It was evident that Jiang Chen's success had pressured him greatly. After all, he was the champion of the Ranking of Young Lords. Two had conquered the seventh obelisk already. It would be humiliating if a champion like him failed to follow suit. Jiang Chen didn't act too cordially towards both of them. He nodded at them slightly and walked right past them.

"Brother Zhen, please wait." Zhang Moheng couldn't resist calling out.

Jiang Chen stopped dead in his tracks. "What is it?"

Zhang Moheng smiled wryly. "Brother Zhen, will you be challenging the eighth obelisk?"

Jiang Chen responded with a bland smile. "Maybe."

There's no way Jiang Chen would ever tell him anything of substance as they weren't even acquainted. Such information shouldn't be shared with mere strangers. Zhang Moheng didn't dare to chase the matter after seeing Jiang Chen's distant expression. He laughed awkwardly and said nothing else.

If Jiang Chen did what was expected, he would visit the other secret realms after conquering the seventh obelisk, but he chose not to after some careful thought. He decided to go after the eighth obelisk after some slight preparations. The difficulty of the seventh obelisk gave him confidence that he had a good chance at conquering the eighth obelisk. There was some difficulty to the seventh obelisk, but it had been nothing too precarious. He still had innate potential that wasn't fully utilized yet. It was the reason why he believed that he still had energy left within him to go for the eighth obelisk.

Time waits for no one. If I visit the other secret realms, three to five years will pass in a blink of an eye. I have no qualms with spending that much time, but the situation outside could turn sour at any moment. Moreover, I've also promised the Coiling Dragon

clan lord a Pinecrane Pill. The Five Elements Augmentation Art might lose its potency if I take too long. Jiang Chen was someone who held onto his promises. He would never go back on the promise he made to the clan lord.

Thus, he made the decision to conquer the eighth obelisk so that he could move on to the ninth. One would only be granted entry to the Six Palaces of Heritage after one conquered the ninth obelisk. He would gain a re-entry chance to the Veluriyam Pagoda in doing so. He would be able to leave the pagoda without worrying about coming back in.

Chapter 999: A Mad Young Lord Zhen

“What?”

“Did someone comprehend the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk again?”

“It’s Li Jiancheng this time, isn’t it?”

“Tsk tsk, it actually isn’t Li Jiancheng. Brother Peafowl, it would seem that congratulations are due again. The Sacred Peafowl Mountain is really hogging the limelight. The dark horse this time is Pill King Zhen.”

“Incredible. Two geniuses have passed the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk in a row, and they’re all from Sacred Peafowl Mountain, and they’re both dark horses. Seriously, this is just unfair!”

“Can it really be that the geniuses of the Ranking of Young Lords are actually incomparable to the dark horses who fought their way up from the bottom? That’s a little too difficult to believe, isn’t it?” It didn’t matter if they believed it or not; the truth was right in front of them.

Young master Ji San had defied all expectations to be the first to conquer the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. Not even Emperor Peafowl had managed to conquer the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk back then, although that had been due to some unexpected twists. The emperor had been talented enough back then that the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk was very much within his reach. Some people even said that he had the power to grasp the ninth Veluriyam Obelisk successfully as well.

Today, the younger generation was surpassing the older generation. Young master Ji San being first to attain this milestone was completely different from just passing the obelisk. The achievement of becoming the first to conquer the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk alone was something to be recorded into the

annals of history. After all, not a single genius had managed to conquer the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk in almost five thousand years. This included all the great emperors currently in power.

Although conquering the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk didn't mean that Ji San's achievements might necessarily be greater than these great emperors, it was at minimum proof that everyone had underestimated his potential, and by quite a lot. That being said, the great emperors normally didn't extend their care to a great clan descendant at all, so it was only inevitable that they would overlook him. Even the Coiling Dragon clan lord himself was a little dumbfounded after receiving one good news after another.

It wasn't that he didn't wish for Ji San to create a miracle or two, just that the clan lord had imagined that conquering the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk was Ji San's absolute limit. But realistically speaking, the clan lord predicted that Ji San could only go as far as the fifth. He was sure that the boy wouldn't be able to go any further than this. Who would've imagined that Ji Ole Third would amaze the world and be the darkest horse of all? In fact, he was looking like the dark horse who would overcome expectations all the way until the end.

The clan lord felt that his brain couldn't catch up to reality. How had that scoundrel Ji Ole Third even managed to pass the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk and be the first ever to do so? Were the geniuses of the Ranking of Young Lords all dead? Li Jiancheng, Shui Rutian, Zhou Yan… had they fallen asleep?

Sometimes, people couldn't understand why their family members were good-for-nothing. In this case, Ji San's family couldn't quite understand how Ji San was able to bring great honor and glory. Why? Just why?

The clan lord itched for an answer. He even suspected that Veluriyam Pagoda's systems had gone awry. Perhaps the rankings were displayed incorrectly? The system couldn't have mistaken number one for number two, could it? He couldn't make himself to

calm down no matter what. Although he was slightly worried about his health and felt that his cultivation would begin to fade again in another year or two, he felt a lot calmer than before for some reason.

One, he didn't think that his life was destined to end here. Pill King Zhen had promised him the Pinecrane Pill, and he was certain that the pill king wouldn't disappoint him. Two, even if the Pinecrane Pill didn't happen and he were to pass away, the clan lord believed that the clan would still thrive. Ji San's sudden burst of potential had fanned his confidence. It was why he felt that he would have no regrets even if he were to lose his cultivation and bid the world goodbye. If he could pass the clan onto Ji Ole Third, his dream of the clan climbing to greater heights a few hundred years later would absolutely be more than a dream. After all, the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk was something even Emperor Peafowl had failed to conquer in the past.

Although the content of the seventh test would certainly be different now, the difference in difficulty was miniscule. This meant that Ji Ole Third's current performance in Veluriyam Pagoda had at least exceeded Emperor Peafowl's of yesteryear.

Outside Veluriyam Pagoda, the experts under the seven great emperor's personal command were still absorbed in Jiang Chen's successful domination of the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. Suddenly, someone cried out, "Look, a challenger has appeared inside the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk's area. Is something planning to challenge the eight Veluriyam Obelisk? Is it young lord Zhen? Or is it Ji Ole Third?"

"Let's take a closer look."

"Eh? That looks like young lord Zhen. Didn't he just pass the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk not long ago? It hasn't even been six hours yet, has it? He... maybe he's just checking out the eighth obelisk. He can't possibly be planning to challenge it right away..." The speaker himself didn't sound too sure.

“It doesn’t look like it though. He’s already stepped into the core area of the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk. It’s definitely looking like he’s planning to challenge it!”

“This kid is taking too much risks, isn’t he? He’s being overconfident.”

“Yes. He hasn’t systematically improved himself, and he just grasped the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. It really is quite risky to take the next challenge right away. There’s practically no chance that he’ll succeed.”

“If he chooses to challenge the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk now, I can only say that his mentality hasn’t fully matured yet. It would be a complete disregard of discipline when challenging the Veluriyam Obelisks just for glory’s sake.”

“We shouldn’t come to conclusions so quickly. In my opinion, everything Pill King Zhen has done from the beginning has been universally shocking, but he hasn’t failed to proved himself yet. I’ve never seen him be frivolous. Have you?” This counter caused many to shut up. They realized that it was the truth upon introspection. Pill King Zhen had run into many troubles since he arriving in Veluriyam Capital, but he always had the last laugh. The crowd couldn’t help but look at Emperor Peafowl. They wished to know if everything happening according to his plans.

Emperor Peafowl smiled. “Don’t look at me. Everything he did after he entered Veluriyam Pagoda is of his own will. Plus, you all should know that Veluriyam Pagoda changes every time it reopens. Therefore, my experience from a couple thousand years ago is completely useless now.”

It was true. Veluriyam Pagoda was everchanging, and no one could say for sure what was happening inside. Emperor Shura was suffering a bit from this ordeal. There were already two geniuses who had conquered the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk, but none of them were named Li Jiancheng. This made him slightly anxious. If

Li Jiancheng failed to conquer the seventh Veluriyam Pagoda, it would be an enormous blow to to the Shura faction. When that happened, his ambition would have even less space to grow than before. The sheer gap between his genius and Emperor Peafowl's geniuses was making Emperor Shura appear very pathetic.

The hate in the emperor heart even extended to Jiang Chen. This brat seeks more glory from grandiose deeds. He's running to the eight obelisk so soon after passing the seventh. His frivolous temper is proof that he will never be able to accomplish great things. Hopefully, Jiancheng can keep his pace in check and tune out all external influences. Anything can happen in Veluriyam Pagoda. This brat may look like he's in the lead, but one careless move is all it takes for him to collapse before the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk and be rightfully disqualified.

Emperor Shura was yearning ardently for Jiang Chen to fail the eighth challenge and be kicked out of Veluriyam Pagoda. It was the only way Li Jiancheng could protect his reputation and dignity. Otherwise, if this brat successfully conquers the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk, the emperor's ambition would be completely turned into dust. The world of martial dao worshipped the strong.

If Jiang Chen successfully conquered the eighth obelisk, this would mean that he'd qualified to ascend to the peak that was the ninth Veluriyam Obelisk. What did this mean? Even if Jiang Chen ultimately failed to conquer the ninth Veluriyam Obelisk, it was still an achievement tall enough to carve his name into the hearts of Veluriyam Capital's citizens forever. He would become their greatest idol. How on earth could Li Jiancheng going to challenge him if that actually happened?

Jiang Chen sat cross-legged and cleared his mind. Then, he activated the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk with his consciousness. He was itching to pass the eighth challenge already. An indifferent voice rang out. "Congratulations. The fact that you've stepped before the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk proves that your talent is one

that appears only once every ten thousand years. The eighth challenge is an extension of the challenge you faced in the seventh. Your task is to ascend the Prehistory Flame you've absorbed at the seventh. The eighth Veluriyam Obelisk is also named the Vermillion Bird Obelisk. Here, you will perceive the might of the ancient divine vermillion bird, visualize its image, and use your Ancient Flame Essence to refine a vermillion bird image."

A vermillion bird was sometimes called a phoenix. It was one of the noblest of divine beasts. It was an innate fire constitution beast and ruled over one of the most terrifying heavenly flames to exist: the vermillion bird fire. The vermillion bird's bloodline was one of the rare few bloodlines that was a match for a dragon's bloodline, and its spirit in no way inferior to that of a true dragon.

"How unfortunate that the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk only has a vermillion bird image. How good will it be if the reward is a vermillion bird's true spirit?" Admittedly, Jiang Chen saw an inch and hoped for a mile. Still, he was very certain that he would be able to meet the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk's requirement.

Creating an image was no difficult ordeal for Jiang Chen because he cultivated the Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods. The final four transformations of the Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods was about the cultivation of the images of demons and gods. Naturally, the vermillion bird's image was one of the most powerful images of demons and gods that existed in the world. This was similar to encountering a question to do with a field he was most proficient in during an exam. It was a pleasing sensation that was almost like cheating.

Chapter 1000: A Comparison of Geniuses

His consciousness locked onto the eighth obelisk, Jiang Chen went over all knowledge of the vermillion bird image that the obelisk was imparting. The image underwent a myriad of transformations. It was sometimes a mere mirage or a chaotic fog, sometimes a fiery ocean that immolated all. Its wings were outstretched, ready to receive the energy of the heavens and earth at any moment. Any movement of its blazing eyes were as radiant as the celestial heavens.

Jiang Chen carefully took in the various changes of the image, slowly refining the spark of Prehistory Flame within his body. He would first have to refine the essence of this flame and manipulate it at will before he could use it to coalesce the vermilion bird image. The vermillion bird was a divine beast born of flames and its very fate was tired to fire. Therefore, the core to grasping the image was one's control over the element of fire.

"It's a pity that I don't have the vermillion bird bloodline within me. Even if I use the essence of Prehistory Flame to simulate the vermillion bird image, it still won't compare to an image refined from vermillion bird blood." Jiang Chen was well aware that since the image in the obelisk didn't contain the divine beast's bloodline, there would be certain flaws in it. To put it plainly, it was an image without substance. However, even though the vermilion bird image wouldn't have the power it would backed by the divine beast's bloodline and would still pack a punch. Jiang Chen sat quietly beneath the eighth obelisk. It was almost as if he had become one with it. He rather enjoyed this feeling, and time slowly passed by.

Beneath the seventh, Li Jiancheng had pulled out all stops but was still one step short of fully comprehending it. He was regretfully out of the running, and his elimination caused a great furor within and outside of the Pagoda. The champion of the

Ranking of Young Lords failing at the seventh obelisk wouldn't have been a big deal before, since the best competitor within the last five millennia had been Emperor Peafowl, who had also failed at the seventh obelisk. The others didn't even have the right to challenge the seventh obelisk. So logically speaking, this wasn't an embarrassing occurrence for Li Jiancheng. He was now on par with Emperor Peafowl of yesteryear. If it hadn't been for the previous results of Jiang Chen and young master Ji, people would actually think that being on the same level as Emperor Peafowl would be a highly honorable matter.

But because of those two, it became rather ironic when Li Jiancheng failed the seventh obelisk. He was the champion of the rankings while young master Ji was ranked 21st. Even Pill King Zhen, with his unsurpassed talents and appointment as the new young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, had only been ranked 8th. All things were leery of comparison. With this kind of comparison, Li Jiancheng came up rather short in the end.

Emperor Shura could no longer sit still on the outskirts of the Pagoda. This wasn't wholly unexpected, but when he'd heard that young master Ji and young lord Zhen had passed, he'd naturally felt that perhaps the Pagoda's difficulty was a bit easier this time, or that the geniuses in this gathering were possibly more fortunate that before. Thus, he felt that as the champion of the rankings, Li Jiancheng wouldn't have much trouble at grasping the seventh obelisk either.

Fantasies were always the most beautiful, and reality was harsh. Li Jiancheng had failed in the final moments, instantly crushing Emperor Shura's daydreams. Regardless of why his disciple had been eliminated, he'd been eliminated nonetheless.

"Sigh, even Li Jiancheng's been disqualified. It looks like Sacred Peafowl Mountain has greater fortune after all."

"Indeed. Comparisons can be scary sometimes. Li Jiancheng is very accomplished, but it's apparent at crucial moments whose

fortune is greater, and whose potential and talents are superior."

"Right. I've always felt that he's been able to shore up any flaws he's had in the past, apart from a certain something in his demeanor, and most certainly luck."

Emperor Shura clearly caught all the low voices of discussion. Everyone present here were the direct followers of the emperors. Apart from Emperor Peafowl having absolute authority, there was some conflict in the other factions. At the heart of it all, it had been Li Jiancheng who hadn't been up to snuff.

Zhang Moheng was also eliminated as time went on. And so the sixth and seventh ranked geniuses on the ranking had their progress halted by the seventh obelisk, unable to tangibly proceed further. The emperors reacted with heartfelt emotion to this.

"This is the true strength of the Ranking of Young Lords! Us great emperors also halted at the seventh obelisk during our gathering. Although there are more geniuses this time, it's not as if everyone's going to be as legendary as a dragon or fierce as a tiger!"

"Definitely. One or two perverse geniuses is one thing, but it wouldn't be normal if everyone was one. The overall strength of our Veluriyam Capital hasn't increased, so it doesn't make sense for all of our geniuses to suddenly become stronger."

"Hmm. Perhaps some extraordinary geniuses will appear this time, but the overall skill level the gathering will remain the same."

The crowd had finally calmed down. Some had already hung their heads in dejection when two geniuses broke through obelisks one after another earlier. It would be too insane if this was replicated on a wide scale. Nothing like that had ever happened in the history of the Veluriyam Pagoda, so it wouldn't be too realistic if it happened now.

"According to my views, young lord Zhen is the one to keep an

eye on this time. Don't you see that he's already challenging the eighth obelisk? If he succeeds, that'll be a heroic feat that no one's managed to achieve for the last ten thousand years!"

"I wouldn't think anyone else would be able to pull this off. But there's never been any absolutes when it comes to young lord Zhen. I think highly of him!"

"No shit. I told you a long time ago that Pill King Zhen is absolutely someone who possesses great fortune. I say he has at least a fifty percent chance of passing!"

"Heh heh. Daoist Peafowl certainly plays his cards close to his chest. Young lord Zhen must be a pawn that he strategically placed a long time ago. He's certainly showing great dominance now!"

Setting aside Jiang Chen's prior achievements, his actions in challenging the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk this time were enough to spread his name far and wide."

"There's also young master Ji who went to the secret realm of battle. Why do I also get the feeling that he's some mysterious, unfathomable fellow as well? Perhaps we can have some sort of expectations for him too?"

"Ji Ole Third is normally a frivolous dandy, but to think that he would possess such incredible potential and decision-making skills in crucial moments! This is natural talent!"

"Mm. So it seems that personalities can only truly be determined from great happenings. Who would have thought that he'd possess such skills and comprehension ability when looking at him ordinarily?

Young master Ji San was a descendent of a great clan, so his identity brought him more scrutiny now. After all, people would normally pay special attention only to the great emperors' disciples. What did they care about the great clans? Even if one or two of them made it onto the Ranking of Young Lords, they were

just there to accompany the young lords. It was almost impossible for a great clan disciple to claim the limelight on the Ranking. But young master Ji San had completely upended that notion this time.

“Hmm? Seems like there’s some new disturbance.”

“What is it this time?” All those under the great emperors, including the emperors themselves, stared intently at the image crystal. After such a long period of eliminations, any hint of information from within the Pagoda would be major news. Those remaining sought to, or were in the process of, creating miracles. Images slowly formed to show that it was news from the eighth obelisk.

“What?!” someone exclaimed. “The eighth obelisk’s been comprehended? And… it’s still young lord Zhen?”

“Incredible, absolutely incredible! The eighth one’s been passed! Are we going to see a miracle this time?”

“Will we finally see a grand occasion at the Veluriyam Pagoda after so many years?!”

“Absolutely, definitely! Young lord Zhen was truly born for these times! The other geniuses have all stopped at the fifth obelisk, but he’s passed the eighth! This is the truest gap!”

“Absolutely. If it had been between the fifth and the sixth obelisk, then the gap wouldn’t be so large; it’d be more due to a matter of execution and luck. But someone able to progress past the eighth obelisk is definitely an unsurpassed genius!”

Of this, no one could doubt. Good luck might come around once or twice, but repeated successes wasn’t down to luck.

“Your Majesty, young lord Zhen has comprehended the eighth obelisk!” The Cloudsoar Monarch was quite moved. Emperor Peafowl was also immensely stunned. Jiang Chen’s progress surprised him. He rather felt as if he were dreaming.

Even the Wildfox Monarch with his high standards was murmuring, “Genius, genius! I have to say, Your Majesty, your vision is something that none of us can match.”

The Chronobalance Monarch was smiling and nodding as well. “I truly like young master Zhen more and more now.”

Even the pickiest Plumscore Monarch looked on with gleaming eyes, obviously stunned by Jiang Chen’s performance as well.

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