

# **Sovereign of the Three Realms #Chapter 71: Aweing the Tribes - Read Sovereign of the Three Realms**

## **Chapter 71: 80**

### **Aweing the Tribes**

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When Wen Ziqi saw that Jiang Chen had recognized her, she felt both shy in her heart and a kind of sweet joy.

Screwing up a courage that she had gotten from somewhere, this young girl who liked to blush gathered up her pluck and spoke lowly in the voice of a mosquito, "I heard that you were recruiting for your personal guard, so I hurried over to see if I could help you."

Princess Gouyu had leveraged the power of the royal family to announce this news far and wide throughout all the territories. Jiang Chen hadn't thought that Wen Ziqi would set out on this long trek from far, far away.

Judging from her body covered in dust from the road, she must have started on her way as soon as she heard the news.

Jiang Chen blanked momentarily and asked, "Has your honored master agreed for you to come?"

When her honored master was mentioned, Wen Ziqi's body trembled slightly. Her right hand lightly twisted the bottom of her shirt, her fingers twisting around each other and appearing as if she was quite conflicted.

Jiang Chen smiled involuntarily. It looked like Wen Ziqi had snuck out behind her honored master's back.

Wen Ziqi hastily spoke upon seeing Jiang Chen's smile, "Honored master wouldn't stop me even if she knew. She dotes on me the most."

Jiang Chen nodded. "Ah well, I happen to be short one person here. If Miss Ziqi doesn't feel that it's beneath you, then you can fill in this spot."

“Really?” Wen Ziqi was overjoyed upon hearing this words. She had been worried all along that she would be too late, worried that all the spots would be taken and there would be no place for her.

Who would’ve thought that she would make it just in time for the last spot.

Jiang Tong smiled upon seeing the gentle and refined Wen Ziqi, “Chen’er, do you know this young lady?”

“Mm. We were acquainted with each other that day when I was executing my mission in the Tianhu territory. We’ve met several times now. Her identity and personality are pretty dependable.”

“Alright, since this is the case, we have successfully decided on all eight spots.” Jiang Tong also heaved a sigh of relief. He hadn’t been satisfied with any of the applications for the last spot.

It was naturally for the best that someone Jiang Chen approved of could fill the spot.

“Chen’er, they say that an acquaintance may not sow discord amongst intimate friends. You would rather recruit an outsider than have the son of your uncle. Where is the logic in this? Have I, your aunt, offended you somehow?”

Just as Jiang Chen was speaking, a luxuriously dressed, heavily made up woman swiftly dashed to the front of Jiang Chen and started complaining to him.

Jiang Chen recognized this woman from his past self’s memories. She should be his aunt, and the birth mother of that Lan Yizhou.

“Aunt, Uncle is a vaunted chief, younger cousin Yizhou will be able to make a name for himself in ways other than being in my personal guard. Why not give the opportunity to those who need it more?”

Jiang Chen had to nicely persuade her as he had no desire to be entangled with a shrew.

“So what if he’s a big chief? That can only be passed onto one son, then the second son’s fortune and prosperity will be out in the cold. If he hangs around you, it will be the work of only a word from you to bestow a tribe onto your

cousin Yizhou to rule over when you're a duke in the future. Chen'er, let me tell you something. Your uncle spent quite a bit of effort into looking after your mother before she married. Now that your mother isn't here, seeing your aunt is the same as seeing your mother. Although Yizhou is your cousin in name, what's the difference between that and your younger brother by blood? You can't disregard his matters. Can you bear to..."

"Aunt, younger cousin Yizhou is only of five meridians true qi. I'm powerless to take action even though I have a mind to help him accomplish his aims. I won't be able to satisfactorily complete my mission. If you love this nephew, Aunt, then surely you won't let me suffer defeat in the Hidden Dragon Trials? If I'm defeated, then how will Uncle hang onto his position as a big chief?"

"Eh?" The woman was momentarily dumbfounded upon hearing that her man may not even keep his position as a big chieftain.

Jiang Chen smiled and took this opportunity to leave.

Jiang Tong pronounced the shortlist of candidates at the scene.

"Guo Jin from the capital, the direct grandson of royal tutor, Guo Shun.

Qiao Shan, Qiao Chuan, nephews of the third hallmaster of the Hall of Healing.

Wen Ziqi from the Star Argus Palace of the Tianhu territory, old acquaintances with the young duke Jiang Chen.

Xue Tong, Yinglan Tribe of the Jiang Han territory, maternal cousin of the young duke.

Ke Mu, Summer Tribe of the Jiang Han territory, six meridians true qi.

Shen Yifan, Jade Dragon Tribe of the Jiang Han territory, six meridians true qi.

Bi Yun, Iron Mountain Tribe of the Jiang Han territory, six meridians true qi."

The recruiting meeting was over when Jiang Tong concluded his announcement. Many of the families whose sons hadn't been selected were all secretly dejected.

They had had a prime opportunity, but missed it.

“Will the chiefs of the ten big tribes please adjourn to the duke’s manor for a banquet. The families of the other smaller tribes are discharged. Travel back to your areas with no loitering.” Jiang Tong pronounced afterwards.

The convergence of all these powers on River Wave City was also a latent danger for the city. Since the mission was concluded, they naturally had to disperse.

Apart from Jing Man, the chiefs of the ten large tribes were all present. They naturally wouldn’t give up the chance to repair relations when they heard that the duke’s manor was even feting them with a banquet.

Except, the nine chiefs were all curious as to why the chief of the Redbud Tribe, Jing Man, was nowhere to be seen when even the name of the duke had been brought out?

This Jing Man was normally imperiously domineering, but had he dared openly defy the duke’s name this time? This was really out of line!

One had to know that if a tribe defied the orders of the duke, then they would be punished!

The tribal chiefs brought these doubts with them to the banquet. Apart from the young duke Jiang Chen, all the Jiang family elders, including Jiang Tong, were present.

“Everyone, this time’s banquet is first to reward you for always rushing about on Jiang Han territory business, and secondly to announce a matter of great importance to everyone.”

Jiang Chen personally raised his glass as he one by one met the eyes of all the chiefs with a cool gaze, showing a relaxed confidence of superiority flowing through his eyes.

All of the chiefs felt a cold shiver travel down their backs when they were swept by Jiang Chen’s gaze. They felt a vague hint of something big about to happen.

“Jing Man has had no respect for his superiors and has come to the duke’s manor on multiple occasions to behave wildly. He has even gone so far as to publicly challenge the duke’s authority this time. He has been captured on my orders and is being held secretly!”

“What?”

“Jing Man, held secretly?”

This news also caused the faces of the chiefs, rulers of their own locality, to change drastically.

This was Jing Man! In the entire Jiang Han territory, Jing Man was the cream of the crop when it came to being domineering. Apart from Jiang Feng being able to suppress this person, even the other chiefs had to display a certain weakness in front of him.

Even Jiang Feng, the Duke of Jiang Han, had to think twice before taking action against Jing Man. But the young duke had taken Jing Man without the slightest change in his voice or composure.

“Well done! This Jing Man has always been domineering without boundaries, and his reputation is exceedingly poor amongst all the great tribes!” The first to speak up was naturally the chief of the Yinglan Tribe, Jiang Chen’s uncle Lan Tianji.

“Right, it isn’t the first time that Jing Man has gone to the duke’s manor to behave atrociously and make a scene. He is receiving his just desserts in being punished. Something was bound to happen sooner or later if he wasn’t taken care of.”

“The young duke is brilliant and wise! However, the influence of the Jing family of the Redbud Tribe is widespread and far reaching. Since Jing Man has been captured, the Jing family and local powers are likely to cause trouble.”

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. “This is why I’ve summoned you here. The Jing family has been able to be a tyrant for so long partly because they are truly a powerful local power, and partly because they do quite a bit of business. In addition, the land with the spirit vein in our Jiang Han territory runs through their tribal lands.”

The big chiefs all nodded and looked at Jiang Chen with fresh eyes. How was this the young duke that they knew? How was this the original useless good-for-nothing?

This was absolutely a wolf in sheep's clothing, and a noble son who played the games of politics extremely well!

They finally believed in this moment that Jiang Chen had absolutely been playacting in order to confuse others before. This child most likely had had his sights set on duke of the first rank since he was young!

They had misjudged him. Everyone admitted that in their hearts now. They had truly misjudged the young duke Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen watched the performances of these people out of the corner of his eye, but said in an unhurried and not too slow fashion, "I have no interest in words expressing your loyalty. I say only this, this time, each tribe must send out fifty thousand men and horses. The duke's manor will send out an army of a hundred thousand strong. We will ambush the Redbud Tribe as swiftly as a peal of thunder, leaving one with no time to cover their ears. We must make a clean sweep of all of Jing Man's remaining confederates."

Plucking up evil from the roots was common sense. The chiefs weren't unduly surprised.

"After the remaining confederates of the Jing family are exterminated, I will send Elder Xi to personally oversee the Redbud Tribe region. I will also take out twenty percent of the profits from the land with the spirit vein and split it equally amongst the nine tribes."

If his earlier words could be labelled as coercion, then the twenty percent profits would be temptation.

Coercion and promise of gain, both the carrot and stick were present.

How could the great chiefs hold out against this? Chief Lan Tianji of the Yinglan Tribe was the first to stand up, "I, Yinglan Tribe, will protect and support the Jiang family unto the death! We are willing to fight those traitors to the death!"

"We are willing to join our forces with the duke's manor and exterminate the traitors!"

The ten large tribes in the Jiang Han territory had competed amongst themselves, with the Redbud Tribe lorded over everyone. This had been the situation for many years, and Jing Man was extremely domineering to boot.

Under these circumstances, these people would likely add insult to injury by dropping stones down a well even without coercion and temptation, not to mention when there was gain to be had.

Jiang Tong looked at Jiang Chen with a meaningful glance, secretly astonished. This young duke didn't do things by half measures alright. His boldness of vision was astounding. He had given out twenty percent profit just like that.

Tying the dukedom together with the tribes via profit, how would the tribal chiefs not work together with care and energy? This was far more useful than any form of threats.

“Everyone, our Jiang Han dukedom has worked together with the Pill King Garden before. Our cooperation partner is now the Hall of Healing. This is also to say that our profits with the Hall of Healing will be double those of when we worked with the Pill King Garden. What looks like twenty percent to you is actually forty percent in terms of original profits.”

Under the circumstances, Jiang Chen didn't mind revealing a bit of core intelligence to them.

The Hall of Healing!

This wasn't the first time that these people had heard the name of the Hall of Healing today. The Hall of Healing was the benchmark of the spirit medicine world in the Eastern Kingdom. How could they not be aware of the biggest heavyweight in the spirit medicine world?

“Heh heh, you probably don't know? The Hall of Healing relies on our young duke for many things. Also, another thing that you may not know is that the royal princess Eastern Zhiruo's illness was yet to be resolved after seeing many famous doctors, but the symptoms lessened when the medicine took effect after our young duke made a move!”

One had to say, Jiang Zheng was a very useful steward. Whenever his master needed it, he would voice the thoughts that his master was not at liberty to say. He would employ such a method at just the right time and say it.

What did these words mean? This meant that the young duke's backer was the royal family themselves, and the Hall of Healing!

All the chiefs present were dumbfounded and astounded when they heard these words. They looked at each other, at a loss of what to do.

Jiang Chen, however, smiled. "Come, drink! Jiang Zheng always likes to task his lips and tongue over some small matters. Everyone can listen to these matters of the royal princess, but let it stay in your heart. Don't spread this around."

"Yes yes, who dares to brashly spread information regarding the royal family's secrets?"

Each one of them mumbled "yes, yes" as they raised their glasses, but had no appetite for food. How could they still be in the mood to taste the niceties of the exquisite wine? Their minds were filled with the young duke Jiang Chen's marvelous changes, and all sorts of news that broke through the limits of their expectations. They didn't know what sort of approach they should be taking towards this young duke.

But one thing was for certain, and that was that the young duke Jiang Chen would outdo his father Jiang Feng!

## Chapter 72: A Grand Gift for the Personal Guard

Without their leader Jing Man, although the remaining confederates of the Redbud Tribe raised a loud hue and cry, many of the internal powers that the Jing family had originally suppressed all turned their coats in the face of a large army pressing on the border. They worked in collusion with the army, one from within and the other from the outside. The army took over the Redbud Tribe region with almost no slaughter at all.

The remaining confederates of the Jing family were all rounded up and locked behind bars.

At the same time, a predetermined power from the Jiang family clan took up residence within the Redbud region.

Jiang Chen had made a simple agreement which had to be observed by all the elders of the family clan, and had stuck the son of his third uncle, Jiang Yu, into the Redbud region. Jiang Chen exhorted the clan elders to treat Jiang Yu as a crucial center and cultivate him.



Although jealous, these people all knew that Jiang Yu was the one most intimate with Jiang Chen within the Jiang family clan.

Jiang Chen was Jiang Feng's only child and son. This meant that Jiang Chen had no other blood brothers or sisters. In this way, since they had been close since childhood, Jiang Yu undoubtedly became like Jiang Chen's blood brother, just as if Jiang Tong was the same as the Duke of Jiang Han.

Upon seeing Jiang Chen employ lightning-fast methods to cow the various chiefs into submission and quell the Redbud Tribe rebellion, Jiang Chen's young followers were all privately overjoyed. To have such methods and be able to take on such burdens at this tender age, they all felt that they had done the right thing in following this young duke!

Jiang Chen's newly recruited eight guards were demonstrating their knowledge of martial dao within the training fields of the Jiang Han manor. Since they were comrades now, none of them wanted to admit to being inferior. All wanted to demonstrate their strength in front of their comrades to avoid being underestimated by others.

Jiang Chen merely observed and didn't make any evaluations.

After the demonstrations had run through once, he already had a few thoughts in mind.

"From today onwards, the eight of you will eat at the same table now. I won't ask too much of you but only want to remind you of one point. You can retain your own personalities and your own thoughts. However, from this moment on, you're all in the same boat and thus are all in this together. You are comrades in the battlefield, which means you are a partner in which one of the others can entrust their back to. If anyone can't do it, then say so now. There's still time to back out!"

Jiang Chen's tone was severely grave.

What was a personal guard? At the heart of the matter, it meant to be death warrior, a type of existence that was willing to die at any time for their master.

Personal guards were often the ones that a master trusted the most, and were entrusted the greatest amount of matters to.

Personal guards were the most intimate battle companions to each other. They were a mutual interdependence and would live and die together!

No one backed out. Resolute determination was written on their faces.

“Good, this is also why I’ve chosen you. I only hope that none of you will disappoint me.”

“And I, Jiang Chen, will absolutely not let you down!”

Jiang Chen was confident and at ease as he swept his gaze over the eight faces. “In order to prove that your decision was correct, I’ve decided to give you a welcome gift in this moment.”

A gift at the first meeting?

Qiao Shan scratched his ears and cheeks, smiling honestly, “Mine uncle says that the young duke is too deep to be fathomable. Looks like uncle he didn’t lie to us’ns!”

Guo Jin was indifferent to the idea of a greeting gift. When he saw Jiang Chen burn incense and pay his respects to his ancestors, he had sworn an oath to himself that he would follow this master until death.

As for the others, Wen Ziqi’s personality was easy going, without greed for anything in particular.

Although traces of expectation flowed in the eyes of others, they didn’t lose their composure.

Jiang Chen nodded, “You must remember that when you accept my gift, it will be as if your body is now imprinted with my brand. You must not reveal this gift to anyone without my permission, even to those you are closest to. Otherwise, I will personally end you.”

These people felt quite perplexed by the increased gravity of Jiang Chen’s tone. It was only a greeting gift, was it really that serious? But seeing that the young duke was acting with such due care and solemnness, their hearts tightened as they vaguely guessed that this greeting gift was no ordinary gift!

“Don’t think wild thoughts. The weight of this gift is absolutely beyond your speculation. Even in the entirety of the Eastern Kingdom, no one else would be able to give another gift such as this.”

What?

Everyone was visibly moved. No one else could afford to give such a gift in the Eastern Kingdom? This... can it be that even the royal family would be unable to give such a gift?

Just what was this?

Qiao Shan was quite impatient and could scarcely wait! His eyes stared unblinkingly at Jiang Chen, full of ardent fervor.

“All of you are currently of six meridians true qi right now, but I can help you breakthrough to seven meridians true qi within ten days!”

“What? Breakthrough to seven meridians true qi within ten days?” Qiao Shan was the first to cry out. “Young duke, don’t bluff us’ns. Ah have been stuck on six meridians true qi for around half a year.”

Even the gentle and refined Wen Ziqi shot out looks of incredulity from her eyes.

Guo Jin, on the other hand, had heard many rumors regarding Jiang Chen previously because he was from the capital. He was rather a believer, “Since the young duke has spoken, how could there be falsehood?”

“Six meridians true qi, all of you here have spent either two or three months to half a year to a full year after reaching six meridians true qi. There is no other reason for your inability to breakthrough other than being unable to sense the seventh acupoint, because there is a bank between the intermediate realm of true qi and the advanced realm of true qi. This moat needs to be explored, to be perceived in due time. Have you stopped at six meridians true qi because you cannot perceive the seventh acupoint?”

“That is truly the case.” Qiao Shan complained.

“The seventh acupoint is fleeting and intransient, and indeed hard to sense.” Guo Jin also nodded.

Wen Ziqi didn't say anything, but her expression as if deep in thought already verified the accuracy of this statement.

The others all nodded as well.

"I have a set of methods that can teach you how to locate the acupoints. You will no longer have to fret over being unable to locate the acupoints when training in the realm of true qi in the future. You will be able to easily locate the acupoints with this method, allowing you to achieve double the results with half the effort on your path of training!"

The eight guards were noticeably moved after these words were said.

Easily locate acupoints!

Was... was this true?

One had to know that the most difficult thing when training in the realm of true qi wasn't clearing the meridians, but locating the acupoints. If the acupoints couldn't be located, then there was no way of clearing the meridians, how could a breakthrough be achieved then?

It could be said that the most amount of time in training martial dao was spent on perceiving the acupoints. If the process of locating the acupoints could be skipped, how could this only be doubling the results with half the effort?

This would be saving tons of effort compared to others!

The method of "True Acupoint Resonance" was without a doubt, a revolutionary secret method for the entire Eastern Kingdom. However, it was only a lowly sort of existence in Jiang Chen's memory banks.

Jiang Chen was the epitome of cautiousness not because of how valuable "True Acupoint Resonance" might be, but because if word of this matter got out, many hidden troubles would lurk in the background.

Jiang Chen had previously passed on the "True Acupoint Resonance" method to his father and his two best friends.

These eight personal guards were the third set of people worthy of receiving this inheritance.

“I will be passing on this method to you. If any of you secretly pass it on and word of this travels out, the others will rise together and attack the person in a group, and I, Jiang Chen, will not go easy on this person!” Jiang Chen once again issued a warning.

“The young duke treats us so kindly and generously, how could we dare to fail and let him down?” Ke Mu from the Summer Tribe of the Jiang Han territory was the first to step forward and make a pledge.

The others all stepped forward and swore an oath afterwards.

“Perk your ears up and listen carefully, I will only verbally pass on this inheritance and won’t give you any books to record this down in. How much you can comprehend and remember will be up to you. I will only say this three times.”

Only three times!

The faces of the eight personal guards all became quite grave. Three times, but they needed to receive the method with their strong memories and comprehension abilities.

Just as he said, Jiang Chen went over the method three times.

What Jiang Chen hadn’t expected was that the first person who seemed to think of something and sit down cross-legged where he stood to contemplate theory was Xue Tong, that thin, young man buried in oblivion.

Afterwards, Guo Jin and Wen Ziqi also seemed to be deep in thought as they sat down cross-legged.

Brothers Qiao Shan and Qiao Chuan, Ke Mu, Shen Yifan, and Bi Yun all sat down cross-legged as well, meditating on the theory and using the newly learnt method to perceive the seventh acupoint.

There truly was a difference in potential when it came to martial dao training.

Xue Tong was the first to contemplate and the first to see results.

Xue Tong’s eyes opened after an hour, with various sorts of incredulous looks shooting out of his eyes. His gaze at Jiang Chen was suffused with endless gratitude and admiration.

“Elder cousin Jiang Chen and I have never interacted much since we were young. To think that cousin Jiang Chen would rather offend aunt and uncle to choose me instead of Lan Yizhou. What do I, Xue Tong, have? My parents died early and I was bullied by Lan Yizhou since I was young. Compared to Lan Yizhou, I have nothing, and yet elder cousin still chose me, trust me, and bestowed upon me this great change in fortune. If in this life I, Xue Tong, don’t follow elder cousin to accomplish something grand, then how could I face my parents in the other world? How would I be worthy of elder cousin’s generous treatment of me?”

Although Xue Tong appeared cold and aloof, he was only cold on the outside and actually warm on the inside. He would remember steadfastly the drops of kindness from others. Jiang Chen had practically helped him be reborn by choosing him and changing his fortunes. How could Xue Tong not understand the concept of gratitude?

Lan Yizhou’s training wasn’t enough? Not up to standard? These were all pretexts that elder cousin had used to fob off his aunt. Elder cousin was so capable, would he worry about not being able to raise Lan Yizhou’s training to six meridians true qi?

What did this mean?

This meant that in elder cousin’s heart, the position of him, Xue Tong, was greater than Lan Yizhou’s!

A gentleman is ready to die for his bosom friends!

Xue Tong’s blood was thrumming ardently at this moment as he was filled with gratitude and adoration towards Jiang chen.

Jiang Chen flicked a glance at Xue Tong, knowing that Xue Tong had already located the seventh acupoint and was merely waiting for the prime opportunity to breakthrough.

He smiled faintly and nodded at Xue Tong, indicating for him not to speak anymore, less he affect other people’s comprehension.

A single glance made Xue Tong feel as if he was bathed by the spring wind and his heart surged with emotions.

After not too much longer, the others also successfully located the seventh acupoint.

“Wonderful, awesome, haha, to think that it would really work!” Qiao Shan capered in his extreme delight. “Haha, Ah finally have the chance to assail seven meridians true qi!”

Although the others didn’t lose their composure like Qiao Shan, happiness was written all over their faces and their looks towards Jiang Chen changed as well.

If it was said that they had the respect and loyalty of a subordinate to the young duke before, then they absolutely worshipped Jiang Chen like paying homage to deities or Buddha now.

They were well too aware of what this method meant.

Such a method in defiance of nature was likely the only one of its kind in the surrounding sixteen kingdoms, not to mention the Jiang Han territory or Eastern Kingdom!

### Chapter 73: Legacy of Formation

Jiang Chen made a motion, “No matter what method you use, you must break through to seven meridians true qi within ten days.”

Jiang Chen had given a non-negotiable order, and created a bit of urgency amongst the eight personal guards.

Only five or six days had passed from when Jiang Chen had selected his second mission until now. He still had quite a bit of time left.

After some calculations, he had decided to set a reasonable timeframe of ten days. It gave a slight sense of urgency, but wasn’t too hasty. It would be a time limit that would be just enough to stimulate their potential.

Jiang Chen planned on using these ten days well.

First, the changes in the Redbud region of the Jiang Han territory needed some time to be fully digested.

Second, Jiang Chen also didn’t want to let this time idly slip by. He wanted to undergo a solid bout of training in the Jiang Han territory.

Time was money, and every minute, every second after he'd reincarnated was beyond precious to him.

In the next ten days, Jiang Chen consistently and persistently held on to an extremely regulated schedule every day. However, he would always take some time out of each day to handle some matters of the territory and to review some intelligence sent back from the Redbud region.

He had created this mess and must clean up after it, lest it affect the greater picture and shake the Jiang family's political foundations. This was one thing that Jiang Chen didn't wish to see.

It was a good thing that the Jing family's tyrannical domineering performance in ordinary times had caused them to lose the hearts of many people. After exterminating the Jing family, the reactions from various parts of the Jiang Han territory were actually quite calm, with no backlash whatsoever.

"Xiaoyu, I hope you can make use of this opportunity to become more mature." Jiang Chen held this expectation deep within his heart. He knew better than anyone that if the Jiang Han territory was to continue to reside within the Jiang family's control in the future, then Jiang Yu must become the future Duke of Jiang Han.

He, Jiang Chen, possessed far-reaching ambitions. It was impossible for him to give up pursuing martial dao for a mere dukedom.

Ten days time passed by peacefully.

"Time indeed passes quickly. Ten days have flown by so calmly and speedily. Although I have yet to break through to nine meridians true qi, I already possess the qualifications to assail that level. I wonder how the eight of them have done?"

Indeed, none of the eight had let him down. They had all ascended after ten days of hard work.

Xue Tong had been the first to break through on the fourth day.

Wen Ziqi and Guo Jin had spent six days.

The Qiao brothers had broken through on the seventh day.



The remaining three had all broken through on the eighth and ninth days!

“Very good, you haven’t disappointed me.” Jiang Chen nodded. “My mission is not only to recruit eight personal guards, but also to pass a test. This test will surely be pertain to martial dao. All of you now possess seven meridians true qi, and thus, logically speaking, should have no problems handling the test. However, in the case of any unexpected developments, I will pass onto you a set of martial arts techniques according to each of your characteristics. I will also pass on one set of offensive and defensive techniques, so that when you face enemies, you won’t have to fight separately and will instead be able to demonstrate an astonishing group fighting competency.”

Jiang Chen had spent quite a bit of time and effort thinking about how to arrange these eight personal guards during this time.

Of course, Jiang Chen wouldn’t be overly radical at this stage and pass onto them some nature-defying methods. The techniques that he had chosen were all according to each person’s unique characteristics. He’d chosen ones that would register as amongst the elite in the Eastern Kingdom repertoire of methods, but none that would exceed the Eastern Kingdom’s range of acceptance.

Although they were his personal guards, Jiang Chen still didn’t wish to spoil their growth through excessive enthusiasm. Firstly, because one couldn’t reach towards the sky with merely one step of martial dao training, and secondly, that it was actually a form of protection in not passing onto them any nature defying methods.

Of course, Jiang Chen had many more choices to choose from when it came to battle formations.

Jiang Chen had chosen a deeper method to combine eight people as one.

“This set of ‘Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation’<sup>1</sup> is a battle formation that can be used to both attack and defend. When faced with an enemy, its changes are numerous. Its iterations are even harder to predict when attacking and defending. If you are able to comprehend sixty or seventy percent, with your current abilities, even a few true qi masters will be unable to break your formation. When the opponents are your peers, you will be able to handle even a hundred with ease.”

“A few true qi masters? Eight against a hundred peers?” Qiao Shan’s large eyes blinked, astounded again.

“Qiao Shan, stop being so wound up and overreactive as a result. The young duke must have his reasons for saying so.” The eight personal guards had thoroughly become familiar with Jiang Chen’s strength and mysteriousness after the matter of locating the acupoints.

“Heh heh, Ah was shocked. Being able to battle against several true qi masters is enough to make anyone’s blood boil.”

“That’s under the conditions of you being able to comprehend sixty to seventy percent. If you can comprehend eighty percent, then it wouldn’t be an impossible thing to kill a true qi master. If you comprehend ninety percent, killing a true qi master will be as simple as killing a dog.”

Jiang Chen was actually being a bit conservative when he spoke like this.

“Then.. what if we comprehend a hundred percent?” Qiao Shan asked haltingly.

“A hundred percent?” Jiang Chen smiled. “Let’s put it this way, if the eight of you are able to comprehend a hundred percent, then you would be invincible within the realm of the Eastern Kingdom, apart from the spirit dao practitioners. If you are able to ascend to the realm of true qi masters in the future, even those who have just set foot into spirit dao will have to keep their distance from you!”

“Spirit dao practitioners keeping their distance from us’ns?” Qiao Shan’s tongue was about to tie itself into knots as a fervent light shone in his eyes. He itched to immediately start practicing this formation and find a spirit dao practitioner to test and corroborate this!

“Qiao Shan, you’re barely retaining your composure again. The young duke is saying that all of us need to join the ranks of the true qi masters and fully comprehend this formation before we have the qualifications to battle spirit dao practitioners.” Guo Jin dumped a timely bucket of cold water on him.

“Heh heh, true qi masters, we will surely be able to advance! But Ah’ve yet to see one of those legendary spirit dao practitioners. Mine uncle’s position is so high and he’s hung around the capital for so many years - he doesn’t seem to have ever seen a spirit dao practitioner either.”

No wonder Qiao Shan was so excited. For a common, ordinary kingdom, the existence of a spirit dao practitioner was basically on the same level as divine myths - living on only in legends.

Although there were rumors that the Eastern Kingdom did have spirit dao practitioners, not that many in the entire Eastern Kingdom had ever enriched their knowledge by actually seeing what one of the spirit dao practitioners looked like.

Therefore, in the hearts of all the youths pursuing martial dao in the Kingdom, the existence of spirit dao practitioners were that of legends, as if symbolic totems.

To try and think about it, how great a temptation would it be to battle a spirit dao practitioner under these circumstances? How honorable would it be? No wonder Qiao Shan utterly lost his composure.

A spirit dao practitioner was an absolutely divine existence to those ordinary practitioners.

“Formation training is not the matter of one day and night. The pressing matter for all of you at the moment is training your true qi and martial arts techniques. Guo Jin, focus on the dao of the blade. Qiao brothers, one of you take the axe, the other familiarize himself with brass rods. Both are heavy weapons that can fully display your strength. Wen Ziqi, Ke Mu, and Bi Yun, you all use swords, but the dao of the sword is broad and profound. Each of you will walk your own different path. Shen Yifan, you take the spear. It’s domineering and direct, a tough and fierce path. Xue Tong, you’re different from them as your technique does not fall into a set pattern.”

Xue Tong’s expression became downcast. Although he was the younger cousin of the young duke, he had been bereft of parents since young and lived in the house of the family from his mother’s side. He had been bullied by his older cousin since young and sought survival in the cracks. It had already been quite difficult for him to train his true qi to six meridians.

As for martial arts techniques, the Lan family of the Yinglan Tribe had never given any thought of preparing any for him. It could even be said that the Lan family either by design or by accident, even oppressed Xue Tong.

They didn’t want Xue Tong to become too prominent and outshine the sons of the Lan family. After all, Xue Tong was also a relative of the duke’s family.

What if his potential was too strong, resulting in preferment from the duke's manor? Wouldn't it turn into the Lan family being suppressed in the future?

Because of these reasons, Xue Tong had had an exceedingly difficult existence in the Lan family. Therefore, his martial arts techniques were quite simplistic and crude.

"Xue Tong, what do you like? Or rather, what weapons are you most disposed towards?"

"I like concealed weapons, particularly the bow and arrow."

"Bow and arrow?" Jiang Chen's thoughts moved. There was indeed a lack of someone skilled at surprise attacks amongst these eight. Xue Tong's potential was the highest, it would be a nice choice if he concentrated on the way of surprise attacks.

"Alright, when we return to the capital, I will purchase a fine bow for you at the first opportunity. You will begin practicing the bow and arrow from this day forth."

"Bi Yun, I've heard that you like to research poisons. You can also spend more effort and thought in this regard. You are my personal guards and thus should be widely practiced in all sorts of ways. Additional skills are never considered an increased burden on the body. The more skills you have and the more practiced you are, the better you will be able to retain your lives in the future."

The eight of them all nodded their heads as they felt the young duke made quite a bit of sense.

On the path of martial dao, the more skills and talents one had meant an additional layer of guarantee. After all, the world of martial dao was filled with strange and treacherous currents. Many times, it wasn't the strongest one who was the last person left standing.

Just as Jiang Chen was training his eight personal guards, Jiang Tong came to visit and was in an extreme hurry.

"Third uncle, what matter has caused you to be in such a rush?"

“Chen’er, an urgent message has just come from the Redbud region with three feathers stuck to it. This represents urgent intelligence of the highest grade.”

“What intelligence?”

“The letter didn’t say, just that a bizarre matter has occurred in the Redbud region and requests that the young duke must hasten over to take charge of the situation!”

“Could this letter be a deceit?” Jiang Chen asked.

“No deceit. The letter contains my Jiang family’s secret code and the handwriting is also Xiaoyu’s handwriting.”

Something large had happened but the letter didn’t offer an explanation.

Mutiny from his troops? That shouldn’t be the case. The remaining confederates of the Redbud region had been fully exterminated. The other tribes temporarily couldn’t find an excuse to rebel.

Besides, if the other tribes rebelled, it wouldn’t be the Redbed region sending urgent intelligence back.

Invasion from a strong enemy?

It didn’t seem like it. If a strong enemy invaded, there would be no need for secrecy in the letter.

“Since this is the case, I will set out immediately. We should be able to make it there before noon on the backs of fast horses.”

Jiang Chen wasn’t an irresolute and hesitant person. He immediately summoned his troops and prepared fast horses, setting out on his way.

Jiang Chen was unafraid of any conspiracy developing in the Jiang Han territory. Judging from the letter, it must be that some bizarre development had occurred in the Redbud region, and it was a change that must be kept secret.

Otherwise, Jiang Yu could absolutely speak clearly in the letter.

Galloping quickly on the backs of horses, they sped along the way. Jiang Chen and his retinue entered the Redbud region before noon.

“Brother, you’re here.” It was as if Jiang Yu had seen a savior when he saw Jiang Chen, and he welcomed Jiang Chen into the secret room.

“Xiaoyu, what is going on?” Jiang Chen furrowed his brow.

“Brother, bizarre happenings. The strangest thing. I’ve already given orders to seal this news. Even the elders of the family clan, apart from Elder Xi, are being kept in the dark right now. I dare not announce it.”

“Oh?” Jiang Chen’s interest was piqued upon seeing Jiang Yu so solemn.

“Brother, our medicine boy went to the land with the spirit vein to water the plots last night at dusk as usual, but the spirit medicine in the fields suddenly spontaneously matured!”

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bagua#Bagua\\_of\\_the\\_eight\\_aspirations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bagua#Bagua_of_the_eight_aspirations)↔

#### Chapter 74: Odd Happenings at the Spirit Medicine Garden

“Ripened? Instantaneously?”

“Well, it can’t be said that it was instantaneous. There was originally still half a year left in the spirit medicines’ maturing cycle. There was at least a month left until they ripened. But these spirit medicines suddenly ripened yesterday, and they were full of spirit energy. In terms of quality, they were actually a grade higher than the spirit medicines that had matured before!”

This was indeed an odd happening!

Although the cultivation of spirit medicines was more particular than that of ordinary crops, it was impossible for a miracle such as ripening overnight to occur.

However, such a bizarre occurrence had indeed happened.

“Take me to it,” Jiang Chen was unable to make much of a judgement without actually seeing things for himself.

Jiang Yu hadn’t spoken a single false word. When Jiang Chen saw that batch of spirit medicine, he saw that they had indeed matured and exuded a thick

sense of spirit energy. They were indeed a grade higher in quality than those that had matured before.

Jiang Chen once again creased his brow, but something didn't add up in this matter no matter how much he thought about it.

Even with his plentiful knowledge of spirit medicine from his past life, he didn't have the answer nor did he know how to respond..

A same batch of spirit medicine was planted roughly one kilometer away from this patch, but it was still a patch of green shoots and was at least two months away from ripening.

But the spirit medicines on the two sides were of the same breed and planted at the same time. Even the methods and process in which they'd been raised were the same.

"Collect a few samples of soil for me. I'll test the soil." Jiang Chen was a connoisseur of spirit medicines, and the first problem he thought of was that of the soil changing.

But, after testing the soil collected from various corners, they discovered that there was not much difference in the soil. It was practically the same.

"Is someone playing a malicious trick and applying spirit fertilizer to this patch?" Jiang Chen thought of this point but then immediately discarded this possibility.

There was a natural rhythm to cultivating spirit medicine. Spirit fertilizer could help the spirit medicine grow better and shorten the cycle of growth, but it wouldn't make the spirit medicine mature overnight.

If one wanted to make spirit medicine mature overnight, then the amount of spirit fertilizer needed would absolutely exceed the value of this spirit medicine by ten times, or even a hundred times.

No one would commit such a boring act.

"Or could it be that a strong practitioner passed by carrying a strong spirit weapon, and the spirit energy from the weapon leaked out, unintentionally benefiting this patch of soil?"

This possibility seemed triflingly insignificant.

Putting aside the fact that it was impossible for a practitioner on such a strong level to appear in this common, ordinary kingdom. Even if such a practitioner did pass by, there would be noticeable traces of such a strong spirit energy. It would be impossible for only this patch to benefit and nowhere else.

“Could it be that some secluded practitioner is playing a prank?” Jiang Chen even thought of such a farfetched possibility.

A light wind breezed over as Jiang Chen lightly shook his head, throwing those random, laughable speculations to the back of his mind.

“Xiaoyu, you have handled this matter properly. Temporarily seal off news of this and harvest the spirit medicine as they’ve ripened. Continue to sow the seeds and observe what other changes occur. I will spend a few days here and wait and see what occurs.”

Jiang Chen ordered.

Jiang Yu nodded and hesitated momentarily, asking, “Should we ask the duke to come back...”

Jiang Chen waved his hand, “No need. The winds and clouds of the political situation change rapidly within the capital, and a slight move on one part may affect the whole. He will absolutely be unable to leave at this moment.”

Even if Jiang Feng returned, he was sure to be at a loss of what to do. Within the Eastern Kingdom, if he, Jiang Chen, couldn’t understand something behind spirit medicine, then it would be futile for anyone else to come.

Jiang Yu told the medicine boy to harvest the spirit medicine according to Jiang Chen’s instructions, and to begin sowing seeds in the late afternoon.

“All of you take notice that the matters of the spirit medicine garden must not be revealed to the outside world. Otherwise you will be subjected to the family rules!” Jiang Yu warned severely.

It was a good thing that the plots were independent of each other within the spirit medicine garden, with mutual noninterference. The matters that had occurred within the spirit garden hadn’t made their way out yet.



Due to Jiang Yu's timely information blockade, the true status of the situation had yet to spread.

After a night, Jiang Chen came to this plot of land early next morning. His eyes fell on the seeds from yesterday. They had already sent out young shoots, and were already two to three inches tall.

This... this was an insane speed of growth!

"Brother, this..." Jiang Yu was also dumbfounded by this scene. The medicine boys were also bewildered. They had the most dealings with spirit medicine and had a thorough understanding of the cultivation cycle of spirit medicines.

This scene was absolutely incredible.

"Jiang Yu, seal off all information flow and allow no one to approach this plot of land."

Jiang Chen also had a head full of questions. Although it looked like it was absolutely a good thing for the spirit medicine garden to be so miraculous as to shorten the cultivation period, Jiang Chen had a foreboding feeling prickle down his back.

One had to remember that in his past life, Jiang Chen was widely experienced and had seen all the various theories beneath the heavens. Something falling from the heavens into one's lap like this often concealed a hidden mystery and danger!

Jiang Chen felt slightly frustrated that there was something he couldn't resolve.

"Brother, this isn't a bad thing, don't worry about it. The wind is mild and the sun is bright today. Why don't you and I amuse ourselves and scale Purple Cloud Peak to survey the beautiful scenery of the Redbud region?"

Purple Cloud Peak was located not too far from the spirit medicine garden and the distance in a straight line did not exceed five kilometers. After scaling its heights, looking out would open one's mind and heart.

Jiang Chen brought his personal guards and scaled the Purple Cloud Peak with Jiang Yu's accompaniment. They looked out after climbing to the peak, and all that fell within sight belonged to the Redbud region.

Jiang Chen deployed his “God’s Eye” and his vision stretched out even further in a continuous stream, without boundary or end.

Suddenly, Jiang Chen’s eyes dropped onto the spirit medicine garden and his gaze abruptly halted.

When viewed from above, the spirit medicine garden was actually shrouded in a light, misty haze. If he hadn’t viewed it from afar, he never would’ve detected the abnormality when he was close to it.

But gazing out whilst standing from a high vantage point, he was able to discern the differences.

There was actually a thin layer of smoke clouding the air above the spirit medicine garden. It seemed like fog, yet wasn’t. It was muggy and indistinct, unable to be described or explained.

“Xiaoyu, look at that medicine garden!”

Xiaoyu followed the sound of his voice and also saw the strange phenomenon. “Brother, what is that? Is it the legendary spirit energy? Tsk tsk, this is too amazing.”

“Look carefully. This smoky haze is encircling the medicine garden. When considering it as a whole, does it look like an image or anything in particular?”

After perusing it carefully, Jiang Yu also spoke in surprise, “Brother, I wouldn’t have been able to make it out if not for your reminder. This actually does seem like something after a careful look.”

“What does it look like?”

“Talons, it looks like the talons of a large beast. Look, the four raised patches of soil in the spirit medicine garden looks like the four sharp talons of a large beast. This part in the back looks like the palm behind the talons. And this part, it looks like where the base of the talons connects to the leg. It really does look like it! Tsk tsk, the divine force that created nature is amazing, too amazing!”

Jiang Yu expressed many astonished sounds, but he didn’t see Jiang Chen’s expression become more and more frozen in seriousness.

“Jiang Yu, hasten down the mountain, quickly! Destroy the spirit medicines in that patch of land. Sow no more seeds in that patch of land, quickly!”

Jiang Chen’s entire body sprang up like the bowstring of a bow as he stood up.

“Brother, what’s the matter?”

“Don’t ask me questions, just do as I say!” Jiang Chen’s face was darkened as he beckoned to his subordinates. “We go down from the mountain!”

Jiang Yu had followed Jiang Chen since he was young and now that he knew that Jiang Chen was of a mind to foster him, he naturally had the utmost faith in Jiang Chen’s words now.

Once traveling down the mountain, Jiang Yu instructed the medicine boys to destroy all the spirit crops within this patch of land. He reminded the medicine boys over and over again not to breathe a hint of what had happened here, upon penalty of death!

None of them dared to ask much, seeing that Jiang Chen’s face was gravely solemn.

Jiang Chen took several turns around the four corners of the spirit medicine garden and looked around. His brows became more and more knitted together, as if he was remembering something and wanted to prove something.

After a long while, Jiang Chen walked over in Jiang Yu’s direction.

“Xiaoyu, come here. I’ll hand draw a map for you. Send some men to investigate the directions according to the distance and scale of this map. Find out whether or not spirit medicine is being planted in the soil in these areas.”

Jiang Chen started drawing. He didn’t draw a shape, but dotted various regions in numerous corners.

He then confirmed the direction and distance between each of these dots.

“No need to go to the other regions, pick the three closest locations to investigate. You must report back within three days, the sooner the better!”

Jiang Chen’s tone became more imposing.

“Brother, has something significant happened?” It was the first time that Jiang Yu had seen such a sense of urgency from Jiang Chen.

Even on the day of capturing the traitor Jing Man, his cousin, Jiang Chen’s performance had been carefree, at ease, and he had gone on talking and laughing as if nothing had happened.

Today’s matter was a bit bizarre, a bit out of the ordinary.

But Jiang Yu’s biggest redeeming quality was that he listened to Jiang Chen. He immediately invited some clan elders to personally set out and start investigating the directions that Jiang Chen had pointed out.

The three clan elders started returning after two days, and the news they brought back made Jiang Chen’s heart even heavier.

As Jiang Chen expected, there were indeed plots of land permeated with spirit energy in the regions that Jiang Chen had estimated, and spirit medicine was being grown on them! Some of these regions were within the Eastern Kingdom borders, and others had already traveled into the lands of other kingdoms.

“Brother, just what is going on?” Jiang Yu had been exceedingly curious over the past couple days.

Jiang Chen sighed lightly, “The creator of fate has preordained every sip and bite, there is no one who doesn’t have a predefined destiny. How could this spirit land appear in such a common kingdom without rhyme or reason? Why would such fertile spirit land appear? Xiaoyu, if my guesses are correct, this is an ill omen - an extremely foreboding sign!”

“Extremely foreboding sign? Brother, is something amiss with this spirit land?”

Jiang Chen shook his head, “This matter will not be resolved by the power of you or me. In order to verify my speculations, unless you and I both enter the realm of spirit dao and fully grasp the abilities of flying through the earth to travel deep into the ground for investigation and exploration, otherwise any speculations will remain speculations.”

Jiang Chen didn’t wish to explain much. The more he explained, the more uneasy Jiang Yu would become.

“Xiaoyu, do not do anything to that patch of spirit medicine garden at all costs. It’s a good thing that although the ill omen has faintly materialized, it has yet to reach a stage of breaking out. I do hope that my guesses are incorrect. Otherwise, this will be a disaster that a common kingdom can absolutely not defend against.”

Jiang Chen sighed faintly. His experience was broad and he had actually come to a sort of conclusion in his heart already. Except, he knew that he would be unable to share knowledge of this matter. Who knew what frightening consequences would occur once word spread.

Although he was the son of the Celestial Emperor in his past life, he was no longer that now, as he had reincarnated. He no longer had the ability and foundation to have his own way when fooling around in this common world.

He had to take into account all considerations behind every step and move, lest he be embroiled in it as well.

#### Chapter 75: You Defy Me?

According to Jiang Chen’s calculations, although the events of the spirit medicine garden were an ill omen, it was an omen yet to be fulfilled. The most pressing matter of the moment was for Jiang Chen to hurry back to the capital and complete his mission.

“Xiaoyu, remember my words. Seal off that patch in the medicine garden and don’t let anyone enter or leave.” In Jiang Chen’s eyes, this extremely foreboding sign could come to fruition any time between two to eight years. There was still time to think of a plan.

He took his leave from the Redbud region and returned to the River Wave City, bidding farewell to Jiang Tong. He brought a crew of old and new subordinates, setting out on the path to return to the capital.

Along the way, Jiang Chen travelled during the day and supervise the training of these guards by night, giving them pointers on martial techniques and teaching them the formation.

A trip that was originally three or four days long took a full ten days before reaching the capital.

Except, during these ten days, whether it was Jiang Chen or the eight personal guards, their level of training all advanced another level.

Back in the capital, the completion of this mission had only taken around twenty six to twenty seven days.

“Jiang Chen, second mission of the first rank, recruit eight personal guards. They must be less than twenty years old with strength higher than six meridians true qi!”

“This is the list of my personal guards. It also contains their information, identity, and origin.”

Jiang Chen handed over the information of his eight personal guards.

Once verification of the information showed that all was in order, the examiner continued, “This mission requires that each personal guard also pass the requirements of the martial arts exam.”

“How will the exam be administered?”

“There are two tests . The first test is for them to one by one undergo the test of six meridians true qi. This test is relatively simple.” The examiner responded.

“The second test is for them to go to the arena and fight against eight level six wooden puppets. They must defeat the eight wooden puppets within the allotted time. The time allotted is quite short, at only half an hour.”

The first test was a set matter with no skills whatsoever. When Jiang Chen had participated in the foundational exams, he had also undergone the test himself.

This procedure was simple and unable to be faked.

The second test was a bit more complicated. After all, it was a bit difficult to defeat eight wooden puppets, equivalent to six meridians true qi, in half an hour.

If Jiang Chen hadn't made his preparations and rushed to complete his mission after filling his eight slots, he may very well have failed this exam.

Now, however, Jiang Chen was well prepared. Not only had he risen all eight of his personal guards to seven meridians true qi, but he had also passed on the formation and given them pointers regarding martial arts techniques.

In this way, they had a great deal more assurance regarding this second test.

Under Jiang Chen's indications, the eight people didn't reveal their strength and only released six meridians of true qi in the first test. They stopped when they reached six meridians and didn't reveal all their hidden cards at once.

A successful pass.

Princess Gouyu had been paying attention to the entire proceeding, and breathed a small sigh of relief when she saw that Jiang Chen's eight personal guard recruits all passed the six meridians true qi test.

She had been continuously worried that Jiang Chen's control and charisma would be insufficient to recruit the required number of guards. It would seem that she had been worried in vain.

Princess Gouyu was rather unworried about the second test. What kind of character was Jiang Chen? He had been able to give pointers to even a true qi master such as she. How much easier would it be for him to give pointers to a couple of six meridians true qi followers?

When he arrived at the arena, Jiang Chen discovered that this location was extraordinarily bustling.

He discovered at the same time that he wasn't the only one executing the mission of recruiting personal guards.

Almost all of the heirs competing for the position of duke of first rank had to execute this same exact mission. Familiar faces dotted the arena, and all forced a smile when they saw Jiang Chen.

In this place, everyone was competition.

The brother and sister pair Long Yinye and Long Juxue were naturally found amongst their ranks.

Hong Tiantong, heir to the Vermillion Bird dukedom, was also a staunch Long Juxue supporter. As one of the heirs of the four great dukes, he was naturally present in the arena.

In addition, Bai Zhanyun, the heir to the White Tiger dukedom, and Yi Taichu, the heir to the Black Tortoise dukedom, were all present and both renowned heirs in the Eastern Kingdom.

When these people saw Jiang Chen, some were full of hostility, and some smiled faintly in a form of greeting.

In particular, Yan Yiming, the heir to Yanmen dukedom, no longer dared to provoke Jiang Chen now. Rather, he turned his head vehemently and looked in another direction, observing but not paying attention to Jiang Chen.

“Foundations, this is what’s called foundations!” Hong Tiantong’s inopportune voice rang out to the side behind Jiang Chen. “Us dukes of first rank have long since completed the task of recruiting eight personal guards, unlike some new money upstarts who, without much of a foundation, seek to reach the sky in a single bound. They’ve only barely managed to complete the mission at this late hour, but it’s still unknown as to whether or not they’ll pass the second exam!”

Bai Zhanyun and Yi Taichu had by now seen through Long Juxue, and understood what a fool they’d been previously to be a weapon for Long Juxue.

But, even if Hong Tiantong weren’t willing to be a weapon for Long Juxue, he was more than happy to be of service.

Even if he didn’t gain Long Juxue’s heart, Hong Tiantong would still be quite happy to enrich his relationships with the Soaring Dragon family. He did so not to merely curry favor with Long Juxue, but also to put on a performance for Long Yinye.

Afterall, Long Yinye was the legitimate son of the Duke of Soaring Dragon, and was sure to inherit his position in the future.

Hong Tiantong’s words, laced with acid and abusing one person while pointing to someone else, were obviously aimed at Jiang Chen.

Except, at this moment, Jiang Chen had no interest in verbally sparring with these kinds of boring people.



He handed over the exam token to the examiner. The examiner took a look and said, "Arena seven. The exam will begin in one hour."

"Jiang Chen, Hong Tiantong speaks correctly. A family clan's heritage and foundation still matters for some issues. From what nooks and crannies of some rural backwater country did you find your personal guards? They look awkward no matter how much I look at them. Can these country warriors be dependable and reliable in important matters?"

Long Yinye was different to Hong Tiantong. He would never beat around the bush about anyone he wished to provoke or suppress - he would always make a direct attack on the subject.

"Haha, it would be a bit harsh to compare them to ugly plants that didn't grow properly. But, brother Jiang Chen, the people you've found are truly a bit too uncouth? Oh, this person looks a bit familiar. Isn't he that guy? The grandson of royal tutor Guo? If I recall correctly, his father is that deserter that is renowned in the capital?"

Hong Tiantong was spurred on to greater heights upon seeing that Long Yinye was also taking a stand, and walked over as well.

"Hong Tiantong, do I understand correctly that you're provoking me?" Jiang Chen smiled lightly.

Hong Tiantong stood behind Long Yinye, and feeling the reassurance of a strong back up thus puffed out his chest, "If you really must think that way, then let it be so! I just can't bear jumped up upstarts like you. People carry out business according to what position they have. On what basis or ability does your Jiang family dare to compete for the position of first rank?"

Flaunting their qualifications or displaying their position, these were the usual methods employed by the so-called nobles.

However, Jiang Chen had never been one to play his cards according to predefined expectations.

He flicked a carefree, sidelong glance at Hong Tiantong, "What's the point of so much blather? You look down on my personal guards? It's very simple, call out your eight personal guards and let's have a little competition. There's an hour left until the exam anyways. Rather than standing here in boredom and

waiting, why don't we put on some entertainment for everyone. Wouldn't you all say so?"

How could Jiang Chen not see that Guo Jin's eyes were just about ready to spit fire. Hong Tiantong's appraisal of "deserter" had bore deeply into Guo Jin's nerves.

As someone's superior, Jiang Chen naturally had to protect the dignity of his subordinates.

"A match?" Long Yinye's eyes gleamed slightly as he looked at Hong Tiantong, "Tiantong, at the end of the day, your Vermillion Bird dukedom is one of the four great dukedoms. Would you be scared by an inferior duke?"

Hong Tiantong's carefulness went quite deep as he thought cautiously for a bit. Of his eight personal guards, one was at eight meridians true qi, three at seven meridians true qi, and the remaining four at the peak of six meridians true qi.

This kind of allocation was sure to be some distance away from Long Yinye's personal guards, but would definitely not be subpar to the heirs of the other four great dukes.

Jiang Chen, a mere duke of the second rank and hailing from the out of the way Jiang Han territory - how many young geniuses would he be able to recruit?

Jiang Chen couldn't make a move in a match between personal guards, why should Hong Tiantong fear him?

Now matter how Hong Tiantong calculated things, he felt that he had full assurance of success. After all, after casting a glance upon them, none of Jiang Chen's troops stood out.

On his side, one eight meridians true qi was enough to trample over three or four six meridians true qi. He also had three more of seven meridians, and they weren't pushovers either.

As his thoughts travelled around, a notion struck Hong Tiantong as he revealed a trace of a sinister smile. "A match is not out of the question, but the exam is about to start. How will things be handled if something untoward was to happen?"

Long Yinye said impatiently, "Fists and feet have no eyes, if anything untoward does happen, then you'll have to admit that you were unlucky, wouldn't you agree, Jiang Chen?"

Although Long Yinye appeared brashly violent, his thoughts were actually quite malicious. He was goading Jiang Chen into action by sarcasm.

Jiang Chen privately felt that this was funny, but purposefully said angrily, "Admit that I'm unlucky? You guys are merely trying to make my Jiang Han dukedom lose face and make me fail the exam."

Long Yinye laughed heartily, "Jiang Chen, it's no big deal to admit your defeat if you're afraid of affecting the exams. After all, this match is completely voluntarily, and no one can be coerced."

"Getting cold feet is the action of a coward." Yan Yiming on the side suddenly interjected this sentence out of the blue.

Jiang Chen chuckled, "Hong Tiantong, they're pushing you and I onto the grill over the fire, what say you?"

Hong Tiantong thought that Jiang Chen was appearing to have second thoughts. He was even prouder and smiled, "How could my Vermillion Bird dukedom be so disappointing as to throw a wet blanket over things? Since people are so interested, let's have a competition!"

"Have a competition?" Jiang Chen asked, playing along with Hong Tiantong's tone.

"A match!" Hong Tiantong spoke with a heroic air and sidled a look at Long Juxue. He seemed to see Long Juxue's head vaguely incline, appearing to approve of his actions.

With this, Hong Tiantong's fighting spirit became even more full of flight.

"There's still one more hour. Everyone clear a patch of land. The heirs to Vermillion Bird and Jiang Han will be sending out their personal guards for a demonstration for everyone's entertainment."

Long Yinye's words had the effect of clearing the area. Everyone else's entourage all backed up, vacating a large patch of land.

“What are all of you doing? The Hidden Dragon Trials are no trifling matter!” Princess Gouyu had appeared with a dignified and imposing manner at the same time.

With eleven meridians true qi, Princess Gouyu was undoubtedly the cream of the crop within the kingdom. Her appearance immediately put a complex twist in the atmosphere.

Hong Tiantong had originally been arrogantly overbearing and full of fighting spirit, but he too now subconsciously stood behind Long Yinye, hoping to make use of Long Yinye’s presence to ward off Princess Gouyu’s flames of anger.

#### Chapter 76: Make Them Suffer Thoroughly

“Heh heh, your Highness, a demonstration between the heirs doesn’t affect the greater picture. The princess is of a higher status, and wields great power. Many large and small matters are awaiting your attention, why be bothered with these small things?” Long Yinye smiled faintly, and could actually so speak boldly and with confidence in the presence of Princess Gouyu.

“Huh. Do you think I have no eyes or ears, nor have an idea of what’s going on here? Ever since Jiang Chen appeared, all of you have jeered and mocked him, backing him up against a wall, undoubtedly to make Jiang Chen embarrass himself. The so-called dukes of the first rank of the kingdom have this breadth of mind? Afraid of the competition posed by those beneath you, and thus must use these methods to oppress the competition?” Princess Gouyu had snatched at the opportunity to argue a point to death.

Her string of words made Hong Tongtian force a wry smile.

“So the princess had been listening from the shadows for quite a while. Then you should’ve heard clearly that it was Jiang Chen who issued the challenge, not others.” Long Yinye shrugged his shoulders.

“Yes, I also remember that it was Jiang Chen who first proposed the idea of a match. He said it was to provide entertainment for everyone.”

Hong Tiantong spoke with a bit more authority since he had others backing him up. “Your Highness, it’s not that I’m starting something, but that this Jiang Chen truly is a bit outrageous. We were only joking with him when the first

words out of his mouth were to have a competition, as if his Jiang family really is something.”

These so-called nobles were each more shameless than the other. They were the ones who first instigated matters, but provocation had turned into a joke in their mouths, and Jiang Chen’s counter had turned into starting a fight!

Princess Gouyu was similarly at a loss for words and she looked at Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen rubbed his nose, smiling, “Don’t look at me Princess. I don’t like to argue. Since Hong Tiantong says I’m outrageous, then I really will be outrageous. Everyone is prone to outrageous behavior when they’re young. Your Highness can treat it as a good show.”

“Excellent, such simple and direct words, I like it!” Long Yinye was overjoyed to see that Jiang Chen was stubborn and reluctant to admit defeat. He had been truly worried that Jiang Chen would take advantage of the circumstances to find a way out and avoid the competition.

Seeing that Jiang Chen sought face, Long Yinye immediately added fuel to the flame, “Your Highness, both sides are willing. Surely Your Highness will not put a dampener on things?”

Princess Gouyu took a careful look at Jiang Chen and saw that he continued to sport that lazy, small smile. She felt a bit irritated, thinking I brought up the demeanor of a princess to rescue you from a siege, but you continued to climb up someone else’s pole. Don’t you know that this is a trap?

“A match, a match!”

Those in the surrounding crowd, here for a good show, started a noisy clamor.

From ancient times to present, those watching a good show were unafraid of things getting out of hand. They didn’t care that if someone was injured on either side, they might be unable to pass the exam later.

What did these things matter to people who were here for a good show? The bigger things got, the more of a show they could watch!

“You there, are you ready? Someone is looking down on the personal guards of the four great families. Don’t lose my face when you’re in the ring!”

Hong Tiantong purposefully lectured in a loud voice.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, “Do you hear that? That’s the rhythm of wanting to make you suffer thoroughly. I shouldn’t have to say much more about what you should do?”

After this period of time, these personal guards were well acquainted with Jiang Chen’s personality. The calmer his smile was, the hotter the flames of his anger were most likely burning.

This wasn’t mentioning that this Hong Tiantong had just insulted Guo Jin. This was equivalent to insulting their band of personal guards, and humiliating their master.

When the master is shamed, the subject dies. They were well aware of what this battle represented!

“When we’re in the ring later, don’t lose your position. Guo Jin, you must contain yourself no matter what they say.” The always reticent Xue Tong actually spoke up then.

“Xue Tong, you’re the calmest. You should be the leader in this time’s battle.” Ke Mu suggested.

“I concur.” Shen Yifan said.

“I too agree.” Wen Ziqi said in a soft voice.

The Qiao brothers didn’t care at all about matters like a leader. They just wanted to rush in and beat someone to vent their feelings of frustration.

In their eyes, the people in front of them were all bastards. The young duke had bestowed upon them the grace of rebirth, and these people dared to provoke the young duke. What were they, if not bastards?

“Brothers, let’s go! Us’ns will thrash these animals!” Qiao Shan roared out, as his enormous axe danced, taking large strides into the battle ring.

Qiao Chuan dragged his copper rods as he followed close behind.

Guo Jin and Wen Ziqi followed shortly thereafter.

What looked like a disorderly and messy order of entrance actually encompassed the mysteries of the “Eight Trigram Assimilation Matrix”. Except, in the eyes of those who didn’t understand this formation, these eight people appeared entirely without cooperation, and didn’t look the slightest bit a team. It basically looked like a motley crew with no discipline.

Hong Tiantong laughed. How could Jiang Chen have dared raise a hue and cry with this kind of team. He would make use of the opportunity today to thoroughly subdue Jiang Chen’s spirits. The most perfect result would be to beat these fellows until they had serious wounds all over, making them unable to take part in the succeeding exams.

If Jiang Chen couldn’t pass the exams, that meant he’d failed his attempt for the position of first rank.

This was the best way to suppress the Jiang family.

If he was able to suppress them in this way, then those of Soaring Dragon were sure to look at Hong Tiantong with fresh eyes!

Hong Tongtian became more excited the more he thought, and threw a glance at the eight personal guards. These eight guards stepped into the ring like wolves and tigers, spreading out and encircling Jiang Chen’s guards.

At this moment, Long Juxue seemed to be thinking of other matters. She retracted her unexpected glance from Jiang Chen and walked next to Hong Tiantong, speaking lowly, “Don’t underestimate your foe. This Jiang Chen knows every sort of wicked guile, it’s necessary that you be on your guard!”

A warm feeling engulfed Hong Tiantong’s heart upon receiving a beauty’s reminder next to his ear. How he wished to fan and burn the flames of his ardor, and fight for Long Juxue to the end!

In these ten short days, Jiang Chen’s guards had only comprehended twenty to thirty percent of the “Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation”.

But, under these circumstances, twenty to thirty percent of the formation’s mysteries was enough.

After all, grasping sixty to seventy percent would enable them to directly battle against several true qi masters.

Grasping twenty to thirty percent and with eight acting as one, that would enable them to barely handle a true qi master. The combined fighting abilities of Hong Tiantong's personal guards paled far in comparison to a true qi master.

The lowest level of training for a true qi master was ten meridians true qi.

Their highest level was merely eight levels true qi.

Of course, it wasn't the thing to do to speak in generalities for a group battle like this. The victor would still depend on improvisational reaction.

On Jiang Chen's side, the calm Xue Tong was coordinating the formation with the Qiao brothers providing a fierce offensive. Although the connections of the formation were a bit stiff, it didn't fall into disarray.

For someone coordinating a formation for the first time, not falling into a disorganized mess was equivalent to success.

Particularly in a large scale pitched battle like this - if you kept order and successfully threw the other's tempo into disarray, then that would be a huge success.

Although, Hong Tiantong's side did indeed occupy the advantage of being preeminent amongst his kind with the eight meridians true qi, but apart from that, his team had no advantages at all.

Three of seven meridians true qi?

Worthless!

Jiang Chen's personal guard were all of seven meridians true qi.

In this way, Hong Tiantong's personal guard became more and more lacking in self confidence the more they fought. The eight meridians true qi practitioner had been giving off a majestic looking air in the beginning, attacking with force, teasing in all directions.

But he discovered, tragically, that after a while any two of his opponents could form a small team after quick communication and dispel his attacks.



And, their formation that seemed messy and disorderly, actually enabled any two or three people to form a small team at any time. They could attack if they advanced, and could defend if they retreated.

The “Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation” combined the power of eight into one, drawing aspiration from the eight cardinal directions. This power could be broken and could be united, going through endless iterations of changes.

Those assembled had thought that it would be a scene of Hong Tiantong’s band crushing their opponents; who knew that the situation would be completely upended after a few rounds.

Particularly that eight meridians true qi practitioner, he was complaining incessantly without ceasing at this point.

The Qiao brothers and Guo Jin, three people with extremely high offensive power, had formed an attack team and were crazily focusing their attention on him.

The other three seven meridians true qi practitioners were entangled by the three sword users Wen Ziqi, Ke Mu, and Bi Yun.

Shen Yifan’s spear thrust and swept in grand movements, partnering with Xue Tong, and easily handled the other four who were of six meridians true qi.

And, the most ingenious part of this formation was that the small teams weren’t isolated from each other. Their every step and every move could take concerted action together, or rush to the rescue of each other.

In the beginning, those not in the know of the formation’s mysteries couldn’t make sense of it. They only thought that the eight had great cooperation. As the battle dragged on, those with expansive knowledge could seem to read something from the situation.

Except, the mysteries of this formation were exceedingly complex, how would they be comprehended with a mere few glances?

Suddenly, the eight meridians true qi practitioner gave a ghastly yell as Qiao Chuan’s bronze rods landed solidly on his back. Fresh blood spewed from his mouth as his spine was directly broken into several pieces, and he flew back like a kite with a snapped string.

The fighting spirit of the others immediately dissipated with the fall of the eight meridians true qi practitioner. The flames of fury in Guo Jin's heart had obviously not been dispelled yet. Light danced from his blade as he removed the right arm of a person of seven meridians true qi.

Qiao Shan was unwilling to lag behind as he waved his great axe and chopped towards waist level. A slightly chubby, relatively slower, seven meridians practitioner was chopped in two at the waist, blood and flesh flying everywhere.

Hong Tiantong's band disintegrated in the span of a moment as cries of agony filled the air.

"Stop, I concede, I concede the match!" When Hong Tiantong reacted, pain filled howls had already sounded out a few times.

He took another look at the scene. Two had died in battle, another two were deeply wounded, and one of them was missing an arm. The remaining three were all injured and had pale faces drained of blood.

If Hong Tiantong had been just a bit slower to call out, then this match would have surely ended in complete annihilation of his troops.

Qiao Shan grinned broadly and shouldered his large axe, laughing, "Happiness, great happiness! Who else remains unconvinced? Come on in and let's play."

Guo Jin's blade pointed as he said to Hong Tiantong, "You with the Hong surname, you insulted my father. Even if you're one of the four great dukes, I will have my revenge on you for this slight sooner or later."

"You... Jiang Chen, your subordinates dared to be so cruel in an exhibition match!" Hong Tiantong was at a loss for words. He had never thought of this scene developing.

Jiang Chen spoke faintly, "If I recall correctly, someone said that one would be responsible for his own consequences if something untoward was to happen?"

Hong Tiantong's face had been drained of all blood, and his heart hurt so much that it was like blood dripped from it when he thought of the fact that a

great half of his personal guards had been destroyed, indicating that he would be unable to pass this particular exam of the first rank.

Once he thought of the disastrous consequences of this, Hong Tiantong's eyes grew bloodshot as he became like a mad tiger. "Jiang Chen, you have ruined my affairs, you must pay for this!"

Long Yinye flung a slap onto his face just as he was about to make his move. "Idiots that can't afford a loss, move to the side!"

A large slap was directly fanned onto Hong Tiantong's face, flinging him out a distance of several meters.

### Chapter 77: Limelight Surpassing the Four Great Dukes

Jiang Chen didn't think that Long Yinye's slap was to help Jiang Chen out of a sticky situation. It was obvious that Long Yinye didn't wish for Hong Tiantong to rush over to his death.

In reality, if Hong Tiantong had closed to within three meters of Jiang Chen, the latter's personal guards would absolutely have ripped Hong Tiantong apart.

Therefore, although it looked like Long Yinye had slapped Hong Tiantong, he'd actually saved Hong Tiantong's life.

Jiang Chen was as indifferent as the wind and clouds, merely smiling faintly at Long Yinye's action, and being noncommittal. The eight guards retreated to behind Jiang Chen.

After this battle, the other heirs who had originally sought a place with the Long brother and sister were all internally aghast. They were thinking over if there was a need for them to plunge into the mix when deities fought, and if they had the ability to join in.

Hong Tiantong was a living lesson dripping with blood, to speak of nothing else.

And going back further, when had the Duke of Soaring Dragon ever truly occupied the high ground when it came to contending with the Duke of Jiang Han?

At the banquet at the Soaring Dragon manor, all sides had purposefully created difficulties for Jiang Chen, but Jiang Chen had been the one to soar to the skies in the end with a single amazing feat.

The Duke of Soaring Dragon had propped up the Pill King Garden to befuddle the pill medicine market situation within the capital, but had been defeated with a loud crash by the Hall of Healing.

He had sent men to assassinate Jiang Feng, the Duke of Jiang Han, and rumors abounded in the outside world that the latter had been murdered. However, Jiang Feng had suddenly appeared and actually broken through the shackles of the martial dao, and had ascended to the ranks of the true qi masters!

He'd afterwards sent strong men to slaughter Jiang Chen, but Jiang Chen had emerged wholly unscathed. Instead, it had been the true qi master from the Soaring Dragon's side who had been crippled and sent back, dying shortly thereafter.

And now, Hong Tiantong had been a weapon for the Soaring Dragon contingent, but had ended up in these straits.

Although there was no clear evidence connecting Long San's death and the Hall of Healing crushing the Pill King Garden to Jiang Chen, combining all the rumors together made it difficult for one to eliminate Jiang Chen from the list of causes.

This was to say, that in the various open and underhanded conflicts between the Duke of Soaring Dragon and the Duke of Jiang Han, the so-called first duke of the kingdom actually hadn't gained any bit of an advantage, and had rather suffered heavy casualties in the form of losing his generals and soldiers instead. Even the true qi master, Long San, ranked in the top ten of the Soaring Dragon household, had died with no clear reason whatsoever.

After careful thought, many of those who wished to cling onto Soaring Dragon all privately halted their plans, deciding to wait and see whilst avoid offending either.

After all, from the situation at hand, the Duke of Soaring Dragon, with his ferocious momentum, may not have the assurance of success within his grasp.

At least, this Jiang Han dukedom wasn't an easy target.

Bai Zhanyun, heir to White Tiger, had provoked Jiang Chen several times, and ended up with a face full of dust for his troubles.

Yan Yiming, heir to Yanmen, had also provoked Jiang Chen several times, and now walked in another direction whenever he saw Jiang Chen.

Everyone had seen what had befallen Hong Tiantong, heir of Vermillion Bird.

As everyone looked at that Hong Tiantong wailing bitterly, having a mental meltdown, they also felt a subtle pleasure in someone else's misfortunes. Hong Tiantong failing his exam meant that out of the contenders for the position of first rank, one of the stronger candidates was out of the running!

At this moment, the examiner in charge of the arena announced, "The time for the exam is here. All contestants please enter your respective arenas!"

"Keep a cool head, display yourselves well, and don't feel any pressure." Jiang Chen didn't give too many reminders. With the calm leader Xue Tong in charge, and the aid of the "Eight Trigrams Assimilation Foundation", there shouldn't be that many problems in the second test.

Defeating eight wooden puppets equivalent to six meridians true qi within half an hour.

Jiang Chen believe that this test wouldn't be too difficult, unless something affected their mentality. The "Eight Trigrams Assimilation Foundation" had just been put into practical action with the battle against Hong Tiantong's crew just now, naturally greatly increasing their chances of victory.

After all, it was very important whether or not a formation had had actual battle experience.

When battling Hong Tiantong's crew, Jiang Chen's team had been unpracticed with the formation in the beginning, and thus hadn't swiftly occupied the high ground.

When Jiang Chen's team grew accustomed to the formation, their frightening level of prowess was displayed, and they practically trampled over Hong Tiantong's team.

“Everyone guess, will be it young duke YinYe’s team finishing the test first, or Miss Juxue’s team finishing first?”

Someone still couldn’t resist the chance to stand out and offer a few fawning words.

“Heh heh, Duke Long’s pair of heirs are dragons and phoenixes amongst men. It is hard to discern a difference between the two. This question truly stumps all of us.”

“Look, one third of the time has already elapsed.”

“Ai, I hope that my personal guard team can successfully pass.”

“Yes, I still admire the four great dukes. Although Hong Tiantong’s team has collapsed, the four great dukes have two candidate slots. Although Hong Tiantong’s team has failed, it’s still fine if the other team succeeds.”

This advantage was enormous for the four great dukes.

Time ticked by steadily as the hearts of those candidates relatively weaker in strength became increasingly nervous.

They too knew that this test was quite difficult. Unless the crew of personal guards possessed overwhelming strength, it would be difficult to defeat eight wooden puppets at six levels of true qi within half an hour.

Apart from the heirs of the four great dukes, who were relatively more at ease, the heirs of the other dukes were all more or less a bit worried.

As for Jiang Chen, his heart was as settled as still water.

Half of the allotted time quickly passed. Many of the heirs’ breathing started to increase in pace. Jiang Chen’s “Ear of the Zephyr” could even hear their hurried breathing.

At this moment, the great doors to the arena opened --

This meant that a team had completed the test and was coming out!

“Look, the great doors are open, a team is coming out! Is it young duke YinYe or Miss Juxue’s crew? The answer will be revealed soon!”

“What’s the point of speculating about this? If it’s not young duke YinYe, then it’ll be Miss Juxue’s. The most outstanding amongst the Eastern Kingdom are without a doubt, the heirs of Soaring Dragon.”

“Right, no matter whose team finishes first, they all represent the Long family.”

The great doors opened and footsteps sounded out from inside.

A hearty laugh was heard before a figure was seen, “Haha, this test wasn’t that hard! I wonder what place in line our exit falls under?”

“It doesn’t matter what place we are, it’s not like rankings are decided here.”

“Heh heh, although that’s the case, it would still be a damned good feeling if we could firmly sit on those suckers. I, Qiao Shan, was pissed off seeing those suckers put on airs in front of our young duke.”

A crowd of eight people walked out following their voices.

It wasn’t Long YinYe’s team, nor was it Long Juxue’s team.

Neither was it any of the teams of the four great dukes.

It was the team of Jiang Chen of the Jiang Han dukedom!

Everyone was dumbfounded, and even Long YinYe and Long Juxue felt that it was slightly incredible. Both of them exchanged glances on the alert with each other.

They seemed to have suddenly, truly, become conscious that Jiang Chen, and this Jiang Han, were absolutely not a slight defect of small importance, but a true threat!

“This Jiang Chen must be eliminated at the first opportunity!” Long YinYe formed the motive to kill in that moment.

Brother and sister shared an understanding between their hearts. A fierce beam of killing intent also flashed through Long Juxue’s phoenix eyes at this moment.

The education provided at the Soaring Dragon manor since young was that of domination, eradicating all threats that might possibly form, and using one’s strength to bully the weak.

Even Princess Gouyu felt vaguely surprised. Jiang Chen's team was the first to complete the test!

As the main organizer in charge of the Hidden Dragon Trials, she was well aware of how difficult this level was. Jiang Chen's team had indeed displayed a strong fighting competency when they triumphed over Hong Tiantong's team, but none of them had particularly displayed overwhelming power.

As for Long Yinye and Long Juxue's teams, there were strong practitioners of nine meridians true qi present in both of them.

A nine meridians true qi would mangle a six meridians true qi as the former rolled over the latter.

This was a surprising development, an extremely surprising development.

Jiang Chen ignored the complex looks from all sides and walked towards Princess Gouyu. "Your Highness, here are the results of the second test. Please look over and accept them."

Princess Gouyu nodded, "Jiang Chen, well done. I have to admit, you're the biggest dark horse in this time's Hidden Dragon Trials."

A big dark horse, absolutely a big dark horse.

One had to know that even just a few months ago, jokes about Jiang Chen still abounded in the capital. Jiang Chen had even been the butt of all the jokes of the Hidden Dragon Trials, a unique character who couldn't even pass the foundational exams!

However, the affairs of the world are inconstant!

They say that changes in prosperity and decline were capricious in their rise and fall, such as feng shui being favorable on the east side of the river for thirty years, and being favorable on the west side for the other thirty years.

This Jiang Chen had such a rapid change in prosperity and decline, that feng shui had shifted to the other side of the river in three months!

Multiple teams also completed the test after Jiang Chen's team had passed the tests and walked out of the arena.



Long Yinye and Long Juxue's team were close behind Jiang Chen's, with the rest of the four great dukes following afterwards.

There was still quite a basis for talk of family foundations and strength at times like these.

Compared to the other dukes of the first rank, the advantages of the four great dukes were quite apparent.

The Duke of Soaring Dragon had even more apparent advantage out of the four great dukes.

Of course, there was no point in contrasting any of this at this moment because Jiang Chen had appeared. This caused the four great dukes, even the heirs of Soaring Dragon, to be overshadowed and eclipsed.

This was unprecedented that the limelight of the heirs to Soaring Dragon had been suppressed by someone!

One had to know that the Duke of Soaring Dragon had occupied the position of duke of first rank for far, far too long. Almost no powers had appeared in several hundred years to challenge their existence.

Even the existence of someone close to them didn't exist, not to mention someone who could challenge their position.

However, an unexpected development had appeared today.

An unexpected development that hadn't been present for hundreds of years had appeared!

Although this small test wasn't a pivotal one, and just a minor detail that had nothing to do with the greater picture, a general observation of previous Hidden Dragon Trials would reveal that the existence of Soaring Dragon heirs stood out like a crane standing amongst chickens. They were far in the lead, whether in terms of the greater picture, or in the smallest details.

And now, even though they had been surpassed by someone else in the smallest of details, this was still a first in hundreds of years!

News travelled fast, as if it had grown legs and ran along the wind. It had traveled through almost the entire capital in fifteen minutes.

This news was simply too shocking.

The heirs of Soaring Dragon had been surpassed by someone on the Hidden Dragon Trials!

As for the person in question, Jiang Chen, he didn't feel smugly satisfied at all. His sights were set directly on the third mission after completing the second.

Only after successfully completing the third mission would it be the equivalent of pronouncing that the Jiang Han territory had successfully attempted for duke of first rank.

The succeeding ranking battles would determine the internal rankings of the dukes of first rank.

The ranking battles were the true goal of Jiang Chen's participation in the Hidden Dragon Trials this time.

These so-called missions were all just warm-ups and appetizers.

His reaction was diffident, but he couldn't stop the spread of the story behind this time's upset. The reactions from all sides were greatly beyond his forecasts.

When the Soaring Dragon household received this news, all those present burst into an uproar. Long Zhaofeng, the Duke of Soaring Dragon himself, was silent for quite a while. He had given the order previously that no matter what the methods, Jiang Chen had to die and could not be permitted to grow into his power.

Within the palace, Eastern Lu was similarly speechless for quite a while when he received immediate updates of this. He tragically realized that in the tussle between the royal family and the Duke of Soaring Dragon, Jiang Chen, this originally nameless kid, had become the greatest weapon that the royal family had no choice but to rely on.

## Chapter 78: The Third Mission

"Tiandu, pass on my royal decree. Send more men to lay in wait around the Jiang Han manor during the Hidden Dragon Trials and protect the Jiang Han Manor. Attend to this matter yourself and personally ensure Jiang Chen's security from the shadows. Don't let any threats approach Jiang Chen."

“Understood.”

Eastern Lu had never thought that this youth who had once made him feel extremely vexed and upset would, cause him, the ruler of a nation, to use the greatest manpower at his disposal to protect him on this day.

“Jiang Chen... just what kind of person are you?” Eastern Lu sank into deep contemplation for a while.

Severe reactions abounded in the capital at this moment.

The Hall of Healing was naturally beyond overjoyed. After all, the greater the strength that Jiang Chen possessed, the more they felt that their partnership with Jiang Chen was even more stable with an even brighter future..

However, there was no one happier than Jiang Feng. He had held down the fort alone in the capital during this time and had also been subjected to a lot of pressure.

Due to interference from the royal family, although the harassment from the Duke of Soaring Dragon had yet to become flagrantly blatant, it had still caused Jiang Feng to feel an inordinate amount of pressure.

Jiang Chen had been able to firmly suppress both Long Yinye and Long Juxue once during this mission. Even if it was only suppression on a minor detail, this still caused Jiang Feng to be quite happy.

“Chen’er, well done!” Jiang Feng had been not that optimistic with regards to Jiang Chen’s second mission, and hadn’t particularly known how things stood when Jiang Chen made a trip back to the Jiang Han territory.

He was very aware that he represented a sheet of iron in the Jiang Han territory, and that no one dared to create a disturbance when he was around. But when Jiang Chen went back, it was an unknown as to whether or not even the clan elders would listen to his arrangements, much less the big chieftains.

However, the truth had proven Jiang Feng’s worries to be extraneous.

Not only had Jiang Chen successfully controlled the situation, he had also conveniently wiped out Jing Man, who had been a big thorn in his side. One should either not make a move, or make a thorough and decisive move if one takes action.

Jiang Feng had to admit, with such boldness and methods, his son was even a bit stronger than himself when he was of a similar age.

Jiang Feng was very happy to have his son surpass him.

Jiang Feng had discovered that ever since that encounter at the Rites of Heavenly Worship, Jiang Chen's entire being had undergone a change that was akin to turning the world upside down.

The Hidden Dragon Trials proceeded like a raging fire.

The time had finally arrived for the third mission. This mission was one in which all the participating heirs took part in.

The third mission: trials in the Boundless Catacombs.

The Boundless Catacombs were an amazing underground world in the northeast of the Eastern Kingdom.

Throughout the entire history of the Eastern Kingdom, these endless catacombs had never been fully excavated.

Even the most distinguished of practitioners in the Eastern Kingdom had never fully explored the Boundless Catacombs to the end.

No one knew if the Boundless Catacombs even had an end.

No one knew either where this end to the Boundless Catacombs was.

It was an underground world, and a heaven for the existence of underground creatures.

What was a heaven for underground creatures could very well turn into a one-way trip to hell for practitioners.

Jiang Chen was attempting a mission of the first rank and therefore the difficulty of this mission was the highest.

“Collect either one hundred green spirit pearls, ten silver spirit pearls, or one gold spirit pearl!” Jiang Chen was completely confused by the mission requirements.

It was a good that there was an introduction to the Boundless Catacombs at the bottom of the mission scroll.

All sorts of underground creatures lived in the Boundless Catacombs, one of which was a green winged swordbird, which had a spirit pearl glowing with a green light in its forehead.

Since the Boundless Catacombs were an underground world, they were dark and dank with exceedingly poor vision. The green spirit pearl in the forehead of the greenwing swordbird would give it a great advantage in this environment.

The silverwing swordbird was a variant of the greenwing swordbird, with the pearl on its forehead glowing with a silver light. The silverwing swordbird was the evolved form of the greenwing swordbird, and only one could be found for every hundred greenwing swordbirds.

The goldwing swordbird was the once again evolved form of the greenwing swordbird, the king of the greenwing swordbirds. Any single one of them possessed a strength that would be on par with a true qi master.

After perusing through the information on the Boundless Catacombs, Jiang Chen had formed a pretty good idea of what was going on.

Except, the information had also mentioned a numerous variety of creatures within the Boundless Catacombs. The greenwing swordbirds were merely one of the more common spirit creatures.

“All the heirs participating in the Hidden Dragon Trials listen carefully. Convene here tomorrow morning to head towards the Boundless Catacombs. The third mission will officially start in three days time.”

Princess Gouyu spoke loudly, “Remember the quota for your respective missions. The time allotted is one month. The mission will be deemed as a failure after one month. If you reach your quota early, you can leave ahead of time. Your lives and deaths are up to the will of the heavens in this mission. If you are afraid or cowardly, you can forfeit.”

The Hidden Dragon Trials had to do with the dukedom, it was impossible for anyone to forfeit.

The matter of life or death was never able to be avoided in the world of martial dao. Only through experiencing the trials of life and death was one able to grow.

“Alright, I’ve said all that needs to be said. Return to your manors tonight and convene here in the morning. Remember the time to gather, we will not wait if you are late!”

Jiang Chen shut himself in the secret training room upon returning to the manor.

This time’s mission was relatively more complex, and he had to make several preparations.

Jiang Chen was currently at the peak of eight meridians true qi. He would be able to break through to nine meridians true qi in three days at the least, and half a month at the most.

The second form of “Vast Ocean Current Splitter”, Wave Breaker, was becoming more and more familiar. Full of a pleasing quality, its battle capabilities were astounding when deployed.

The practice of “Divine Aeons Fist”, when compared to “Vast Ocean Current Splitter”, was progressing at a slightly faster pace. He had already trained to four cycles of blooming and wilting, the mysteries of four cycles of reincarnation.

Jiang Chen had also quite adeptly grasped the foundational movements of “Moonshatter Flying Daggers”.

Jiang Chen’s training in these four accompanying abilities had already progressed a bit, but he was still a far ways off from employing the mysteries of the “Moonshatter Flying Daggers” in an attack.

This so-called using the mysteries to attack was the true great move of this method.

“God’s Eye” was the most prominent ability that Jiang Chen had trained the fastest. As of now, he had already trained it to the fifth level .

“Ear of the Zephyr” was on the same level as “God’s Eye”. Jiang Chen had also trained it to the fifth level.

In the month that he'd trained in the Jian Han territory, "Boulder's Heart" had finally broken through to the second level and successfully entered the third level.

There was no way that Jiang Chen could even attempt "Psychic's Head" before entering the realm of spirit dao.

Jiang Chen took stock of his various methods and techniques, confident that even if he met a true qi master, he would be able to directly confront him.

Did a true qi master truly exist amongst all the heirs?

Jiang Chen didn't dare think too optimistically, but neither was he overly pessimistic. Even if Long Yinye and Long Juxue entered the ranks of the true qi masters, Jiang Chen would still be able to exchange a round or two with them by himself.

"The ranking of the dukes will commence after the third mission is complete. No matter if it's Long Yinye or Long Juxue, they are sure to have many trump cards, as they are heirs to the Duke of Soaring Dragon. How will I fight them in the ranking battles if I don't improve my training to the best of my abilities?"

Jiang Chen discovered that even though the speed of advancements in his training since reincarnation could be described as miraculous, he still had to expend great effort in catching up to the gaps that had formed previously.

"There's still one more month and anything is possible. The Boundless Catacombs are the first true trials of my life. Perhaps my potential will only be stimulated to the next level in the midst of a real battle?"

Jiang Chen was in high and vigorous spirits as he fully made his preparations.

Apart from the advantages in martial dao methods, Jiang Chen also took inventory of his equipment.

The Layered Feather Throwing Daggers that Princess Gouyu had gifted him, as well as the Skysilk Armor were necessary items to take along, as well as the nameless saber raided from Du Ruhai's house. It was Jiang Chen's personal weapon now, and naturally never left his side.

In addition, Jiang Chen would not give up the dao of poison. Until his martial dao had reached perfection, this was one of his advantages.

Some of his specially mixed poisons would have life-saving effects in critical moments.

After finishing his inventory count, Jiang Chen sat down cross-legged and once again started circulating his qi, forging his meridians, and training his true qi.

Peak of eight meridians true qi. Jiang Chen tried continuously to assail and find that moment of inspiration for a breakthrough.

When training in martial dao, a breakthrough wasn't as easy as eating or sleeping. Even those with extraordinary potential needed a bout of comprehension and a catalyst to set a foot through that threshold.

Breakthroughs would never come knocking randomly.

He spent the first half of the night tempering his true qi and the second half of the night meditating with closed eyes. A night quickly passed by.

Jiang Chen walked out of the secret room early next morning, taking his leave from his father and arranging all his personal guards within the manor.

The third mission did not allow for the presence of personal guards.

He arrived at the convening point and, escorted by the royal army, the entire entourage set out for the northeast part of the kingdom, the location of the Boundless Catacombs!

Within the Soaring Dragon manor.

"Your Lordship, your subordinate has already come to a covert agreement with Hidden Hand. They will send four true qi masters and we'll pay double the rate."

"Four true qi masters? Good!" Long Zhaofeng nodded and smiled. "Hidden Hand isn't an assassin organization from Eastern Kingdom. Even if Eastern Lu wishes to pursue the matter afterwards, he won't be able to trace it to us."

"Heh heh, the duke is wise and brilliant."

"Long Yi, my apologies to you in this matter. Long San was your brother and you should've been the one to take revenge for this matter. Don't take it badly that you'll be unable to personally take your revenge."



“The duke’s great plans take precedence over everything.” Long Yi was a thin man with a gaze like that of knives, but exceedingly humble before Long Zhaofeng.

“I promise you that when my matters succeed in the future, the Jiang family will be handed over to you for you brothers to dispose of. They will be one Jiang Chen short, but the rest of the Jiang family clan will be unable to escape.”

“Jiang family!” A cold killing intent shot out from Long Yi’s eyes.

“Oh right, Long Yi, have you finished selecting the candidates yet? This matter must be kept airtight, with people having no evidence, even if they speculate it is us.”

“I’ve selected them, four unremarkable heirs. Hidden Hand always conducts their affairs in a clean and crisp manner, without revealing any traces. The results of the matter will be that the four heirs failed in their trials and were eaten by fierce beasts.”

Long Yi’s voice was remote, as if other people’s lives were less than those of ants in his eyes.

Long Zhaofeng laughed heartily. “Jiang Chen, let’s see how you’ll be able to avoid the all extensive nets above and snares below! Eastern Lu, you’re pointing at the Jiang family to be your foot soldiers, looks like you’re out of cards in your hands?”

## Chapter 79: Trials in the Boundless Catacombs

Although he was under the escort of the elite troops of the royal family, Jiang Chen still didn’t relax his guard along the road. He understood very clearly that the feud he had formed with the Duke of Soaring Dragon had reached the level of life and death.

The Duke of Soaring Dragon was overweeningly ambitious, and would never allow any obstacles to be present on his path towards seizing power, whereas it was patently obvious that Jiang Chen had already become the Duke of Soaring Dragon’s obstacle.

Except, what was vaguely surprisingly to Jiang Chen was that this entire trip proceeded smoothly without obstructions. Jiang Chen paid attention, but there wasn't even covert observation, much less attacks or bizarre ambushes.

"Can it be that the Duke of Soaring Dragon has had a change of heart, and doesn't intend on making a move? Or does he have other motives instead?" Jiang Chen felt a bit surprised, and couldn't quite get a grasp on things.

The entourage reached the outskirts of the Boundless Catacombs two days later.

The Boundless Catacombs were located on the outskirts of a patch of mountain valleys in the northeast of the kingdom. The army made their camp for the night.

Princess Gouyu stood high atop a temporarily erected tent. "We will camp here tonight. You will enter the mountain range early tomorrow morning, and the entrance to the Boundless Catacombs are located within these mountain valleys. There are numerous entrances, but they're all within this patch of mountain valleys. You must search for the entrance and exit yourselves within this terrain."

"Remember, no matter whether you're lost within the mountain valleys or within the Boundless Catacombs, the kingdom will not send people to rescue you. You hold your life and death in your own hands once you enter the Boundless Catacombs, so be more than a hundred percent on full alert."

Jiang Chen chose to sit cross legged next to a large tree as they made camp.

Of course, although he was aware that the center of Princess Gouyu's defences would revolve around him, he wasn't accustomed to entrusting the great matter of personal security to someone else.

That night, Jiang Chen didn't relax his "Ear of the Zephyr" even once. Not even the slightest rustle in the grass from the wind could escape his hearing.

However, this night was still bafflingly calm.

Jiang Chen even had a feeling of a misconception - had the Duke of Soaring Dragon truly decided not to make a move? Or should he say that in the eyes of the Duke of Soaring Dragon, he, Jiang Chen, still came up short?

After thinking about it back and forth, Jiang Chen decisively decided he was too lazy to continue contemplating the matter.

The next morning, the rays of the morning sun shone down on the outskirts of the mountain valleys. All the heirs were in high spirits as they looked into the mountain valleys, their gazes suffused with concentrated expectation.

“Brother Chen, I want to tell you some good news. I broke through again last night.” Fatty Xuan closed in and said excitedly.

Fatty Xuan had only been of five meridians true qi two or three months ago, and belonged to the lower tier of existences amongst the heirs.

When Jiang Chen had passed onto him the “True Acupoint Resonance” method, it had aided fatty in breaking through to six meridians true qi. However, fatty had broken through again and gained seven meridian true qi, successfully entering the ranks of the advanced realm of true qi!

Fatty Xuan had chosen to keep his position, that of a duke of the fourth rank. Thus, he was executing the mission of the fourth rank.

Seven meridians true qi was enough for the missions of the fourth rank.

After Hubing Yue had broken through to eight meridians true qi last time, he had chosen not to break through again. However, he had already located the ninth acupoint and was not too far away from nine meridians true qi.

“Brother Chen, many thanks to you this time.” A concentrated sense of gratitude emitted from Hubing Yue’s eyes. He was vying for the position of second rank this time.

He had successfully completed the first two second rank missions earlier.

If he successfully completed the third mission, then his Hubing clan would rise through the ranks to a second rank dukedom!

“Do well, and be careful!” Jiang Chen counseled them.

The various heirs were clustered together in groups of two or three. It was apparent that many were still a bit nervous with the impending commencement of the final mission.

Standing together was a form of psychological reassurance.

Princess Gouyu seemed to have purposefully dressed for today. She hadn't worn the sexy leather armor, but rather put on a demure court outfit, adding a few traces of royal nobility to her presence.

"I've said all that needs to be said. I hereby announce that the third mission is about to commence. You will enter the mountain valleys one by one, according to your current dukedom ranking, starting from the lowest. One person will enter every fifteen minutes."

This arrangement was obviously to avoid malicious competition between the heirs, and to prevent schemes against each other whilst still in the mountain valley.

Those who were ranked lower had relatively weaker strength, and thus they entered first.

It was an exceedingly reasonable thing to go from the bottom upwards.

Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue all entered one after another. The Jiang Han dukedom was ranked number fourteen, so it was quite some time afterwards that Jiang Chen entered.

"Jiang Chen, the Boundless Catacombs are endless and ever reaching. You must be careful. You will be able to move freely within the first and second level, but will have to be exceedingly alert and wary on the third level, because it's very like that king level violent beasts will appear. Their battle strength is on par with human true qi masters at the very least. You mustn't set foot into and beyond the fourth level at any costs. That is a forbidden zone. Countless numbers of geniuses have once brashly ventured in, and no one has ever emerged. The odds would be stacked against even a spirit dao practitioner. So remember this well, remember this very well!"

Princess Gouyu admired Jiang Chen, and was thoroughly unabashed as she gave Jiang Chen a few pointers in front of everyone.

The relationship between Jiang Chen and the royal family was no longer a secret now. Even so, those who saw Princess Gouyu pay special attention to Jiang Chen still felt vaguely envious.

Jiang Chen nodded as his body sprang up and shot off into the mountain valleys.

The second he entered the mountain valleys, Jiang Chen immediately deployed “God’s Eye” and “Ear of the Zephyr”.

One should not have the intention to harm others, but cannot lack the intention to defend oneself against others.

Although none of the heirs that had entered previously could harm him, Jiang Chen was someone who had reincarnated and had the experience of two lifetimes. He knew when he should be prudent.

Random shrubs and patches of grass abounded within the mountain valleys. The sunlight was blocked by all sorts of big trees that couldn’t even be spanned with both arms, making the environment appear deep and serene.

Jiang Chen was neither in a rush, nor too lazy, as he began to search for the entrance to the Boundless Catacombs.

After a while, he found an exceedingly small entrance about 1.5 to 2 kilometers away. The entrance was twisting and winding, with many forks in the path.

Jiang Chen twisted and turned, following one path to who knew how far in. He only felt that the light was becoming duller and duller, and that the temperature kept dropping.

He finally lost all of the light as the soil beneath his feet became more and more wet. Jiang Chen realized that he had unwittingly already entered the Boundless Catacombs.

“There were endless forks in the road along the way, as if a maze. Add to that the numerous entrances... it would be difficult for the hundred or so heirs to purposefully lie in wait to ambush someone.”

Jiang Chen was in no hurry to make time once he’d arrived underground. He took the time to observe his surroundings, only relaxing when he was certain that he’d arrived beneath the ground.

“This should be the so-called first level?”

If an ordinary person stood here, he would surely be like a blind person, and be unable to see his fingers when he stretched out his hand.

The vision of a practitioner was naturally many times stronger than an ordinary person.

And since Jiang Chen practiced “God’s Eye”, his eyesight was many times stronger than a practitioner of the same level. Add to that “Ear of the Zephyr” and “Boulder’s Heart”, and he held quite a bit of advantage in the Boundless Catacombs.

“One hundred green spirit pearls.” Jiang Chen continuously reminded himself of his mission.

“Ah!”

Suddenly, Jiang Chen seemed to hear an agonized wail deep in the depths of the catacombs. The sound was hurried and ghastly. He was unable to discern the distance of this wail, due to various sounds echoing throughout the catacombs.

“Has someone already fallen victim in the first level?” Jiang Chen was shocked.

At this moment, Jiang Chen felt a breeze at the back of his head.

This is bad, an ambush!

Jiang Chen’s ears moved as he flung his sleeve. A Layered Feather Throwing Dagger drew a cold arc through the air - as if there were eyes on the back of his head - forming a beautiful rainbow in the darkness of the catacombs.

Whoosh!

A tragic hiss sounded as something fell when the throwing dagger connected with its target.

A greenwing swordbird!

The wings and mouth of this greenwing swordbird were all as sharp as knives, much sharper than the swords of ordinary practitioners.

“The wings and mouth of the greenwing swordbird are indeed much sharper than a sword’s edge.”

Jiang Chen collected his throwing dagger and took the green spirit pearl protruding from the bird's forehead, storing it into his sack.

"Heh, victory from the first battle has arrived quite swiftly." After Jiang Chen's first contact with the greenwing swordbird, he had a good understanding of the swordbird's capabilities.

"The battle capabilities of the greenwing swordbird are akin to a human practitioner of four meridians true qi. However, its speed is fast, and it possesses the advantages of favorable climate and topography within the darkness of its territory. If a practitioner's level doesn't exceed it, then it would indeed be difficult to handle the swordbird."

Jiang Chen's heart was much more at ease with the experience of his first battle.

He didn't increase his speed but rather continued on the same pace, deploying "God's Eye" and "Ear of the Zephyr" to the utmost.

Leveraging his advantages, Jiang Chen collected twelve green spirit pearls after a day.

"Collecting twelve spirit pearls in a day. This speed is neither fast nor slow. If I can continue at this level everyday, I'll be able to leave in eight or nine days."

Jiang Chen's confidence was greatly boosted after rich rewards within a day.

However, Jiang Chen discovered the second day that the frequency of greenwing swordbird appearances within the five or so kilometers he was moving around in had decreased overnight.

"The greenwing swordbird is a spirit animal, and thus possesses intelligence. Looks like they've gone into hiding because they know that a large numbers of human hunters have come down."

More than a hundred heirs had suddenly appeared. Even with everyone killing just a few, this number would still be staggering.

Therefore, Jiang Chen didn't find it odd that the numbers of greenwing swordbirds had greatly decreased.

“What the hell; do these greenwings swordbirds have greater intelligence than humans? I killed two the first day, but I haven’t even seen a feather the second, much less than kill one of them!”

“Damn it, have all the swordbirds been killed by the stronger dukedom heirs? I don’t want to risk my neck in the second level.”

Jiang Chen heard an earful of complaints along his way.

It was as if all the greenwing swordbirds had been slaughtered cleanly in the span of a single night.

Even Jiang Chen, with his numerous advantages, only killed three greenwing swordbirds during his entire second day.

If Jiang Chen was thus, then it would be easy to imagine how the others fared.

“Looks like I can no longer linger in the first level. I must be the first to enter the second level, or maybe even the third!”

Jiang Chen speculated that this greenwing swordbird possessed extraordinary intelligence. He who strikes first gains the advantage, and those who strike second gain nothing at all.

When his thoughts traveled here, Jiang Chen increased his footsteps and rushed towards the depths of the Boundless Catacombs.

It was pitch black within the Boundless Catacombs, with marshland and bog underfoot. It was rather risky to proceed at a fast pace.

## Chapter 80: A Successive String of Bizarre Occurrences

Except, Jiang Chen possessed superb skills and was quite daring. He put his apprehensions to the side.

Indeed, after proceeding roughly fifty to one hundred kilometers, the depth of the Boundless Catacombs became noticeably deeper. The various underground creatures within the catacombs also became more lively.

Jiang Chen’s hauls became rich again on the following third and fourth days.

Eleven green spirit pearls on the third day...



Eight spirit pearls on the fourth day...

The sum total at the end of the four days was 34 pearls in total.

“Four days and 34 pearls. At this rate, I can still complete the mission ahead of time.” Jiang Chen calculated that there was still a difference of 66 pearls between his current gains and the requirements of the mission.

However, a bizarre thing happened again on the fifth day.

The number of Greenwing Swordbirds in the surrounding fifty to one hundred kilometers had once again decreased.

“Do the Greenwing Swordbirds really possess this level of intelligence?” Jiang Chen was a bit confused. There was no such detail included in the introduction from the official information in the Hidden Dragon Trials.

In addition, according to the experience of those who’d gone before him, there should be enough numbers of Greenwing Swordbirds in the first and second levels for everyone.

Only a mission of the first rank would need occasional venturing into the third level.

Yet, according to Jiang Chen’s calculations, he should’ve already entered the second level, and it was quite apparent that the Greenwing Swordbirds had all been slaughtered.

“Damn it, someone’s screwing with me! When did the Greenwing Swordbirds become so hard to find? The information was all lies! It said that the most common creature underground was this Greenwing Swordbird, but I haven’t even seen a freaking feather these days.”

“Seriously. I’m only attempting a mission of the seventh rank, and only need ten green spirit pearls. Are the heavens preventing me from completing even such a simple mission?”

Jiang Chen once again heard similar complaints.

He too felt that it was odd. Logically speaking, if the Greenwing Swordbirds were this hard to find, then the quota set by the mission wouldn’t be this high.

Could it be that someone had driven away the Greenwing Swordbirds through man made measures?

Jiang Chen's brow creased faintly at the thought of this possibility. This wasn't outside the realm of possibility. With Long Yinye and Long Juxue's domineering traits, they could absolutely commit this sort of action.

"If they had some sort of special methods to drive away all the Greenwing Swordbirds, or to release a signal that the Swordbirds were afraid of, they could absolutely drive all the Greenwing Swordbirds into the depths of the catacombs."

Jiang Chen cursed inwardly when his thoughts traveled down this path. He felt that his speculations were right on target.

"If it truly is as I've speculated, then the Long brother and sister are simply being too ruthless. They're cutting off the path of survival for the heirs of the low ranked dukedoms!"

The strength of the heirs of the low ranked dukedoms were mediocre. They didn't have the ability to wander into the third level of the catacombs, and could only flit around in guerilla warfare in the first and second levels.

If all the Greenwing Swordbirds were driven away from the first and second levels, then it'd a disaster of annihilation for these people!

"But what benefits would this bring to them?" Jiang Chen thought carefully.

To make it more convenient for them to hunt? Although that reason was possible, it couldn't be the main reason. With the strength of the Long brother and sister, they wouldn't spend so much effort to kill Greenwing Swordbirds.

To suppress other dukes? This possibility was also likely. After all, the Duke of Soaring Dragon had overweening ambitions. Suppressing the dukes that weren't on his side, and helping those under his banner to achieve their aims, thus causing the various dukedoms to come under his jurisdiction... this was highly likely!

"Mm! If the Long brother and sister killed enough Greenwing Swordbirds, those under their banner could receive green spirit pearls from their hands, while the heirs that were an eyesore in their eyes would receive faces full of dust and nothing at all, even losing their dukedom!"

Such vicious malice! Indeed, a malicious scheme for the purposes of extinction!

“There is indeed nothing that the Long family won’t do. However, how would I, Jiang Chen, be led by the nose by you?” Jiang Chen was also thoroughly infuriated by the Long family plots.

Jiang Chen simply decided not to proceed any further. Four or five days worth of hunting had given him a great deal of training. The portents of an imminent breakthrough had repeatedly appeared at the boundaries of his eight meridians true qi.

Jiang Chen found an isolated corner, and simply decided to start training.

If Jiang Chen had the intentions to conceal himself, he actually wouldn’t be worried that anyone would come disturb him in the Boundless Catacombs. However, just because no one could find him, didn’t mean that it was absolutely safe.

The most frightening things in these catacombs were the underground creatures.

Jiang Chen prepared a few simple setups, and cleverly arranged all sorts of poison, forming a self preservation trap.

Whether it was man or underground creature, as long as they ventured into this ring, they would be poisoned.

Two days passed.

Jiang Chen opened his eyes. He firmly suppressed each current of raging true qi within his body. Nine meridians true qi were as if nine overflowing rivers, with extensive momentum, as they ran rampant throughout his body.

“Further progress has been made, another step has been taken forward.” A satisfied smile was shown on Jiang Chen’s face. “Nine meridians true qi is the peak of the advanced realm of true qi. Another step forward will allow me to become a true qi master. Except, with my current training, what need would I have to fear of a true qi master of ten meridians true qi?”

It wasn’t that Jiang Chen was over confident, but that he truly had the capital to be arrogant.

After entering nine meridians true qi, one's battle strength was bound to increase in spades when accompanied by strong martial techniques.

Particularly "God's Eye". After surviving in the catacombs for six or seven days, Jiang Chen could clearly feel that the realm of "God's Eye" had risen again, and had entered the sixth level.

"It looks like my 'God's Eye' is the most remarkable out of the four great abilities. It's pitch black within the catacombs, but it's actually benefited the training of 'God's Eye' the most."

The sixth level of "God's Eye" was indeed on a much more advanced level when compared to before. There was no difference between a dark and gloomy day during the daytime and these dark catacombs to Jiang Chen's eyes.

Although his vision wasn't as wide as it would be on a sunny day, it was already a potent advantage when compared to the other practitioners.

A breakthrough and an increase in strength. This made Jiang Chen feel even more assured.

"Long brother and sister, I wonder what kind of mess the two of you have created now! Huh, no matter what kind of disturbance they create, all will still have to come to a head in the third level. The fourth level is a forbidden zone. Princess Zouyu has emphasized and repeated her warnings that we can't enter it. Therefore, as much as they create havoc, the third level is their absolute limit!"

Jiang Chen was different from the lower ranked dukedom heirs. Those people were unwilling to venture into the third level, but he, Jiang Chen, had the capability to do so.

When Jiang Chen walked out of this isolated corner, he discovered that he had underestimated the intelligence of others. He discovered from the random comments and remarks of the outside world that the heirs had already discovered that someone was up to mischief. The heirs had all now formed into groups of two or three, and were heading into the third level.

The power of one was limited, but a team would work, right?

As for who was up to mischief, most speculations pointed to the Long brother and sister.

However, there was another frightening sort of rumor that splashed this pail of dirty water onto him, Jiang Chen!

“Looks like the Long brother and sister have spent some effort, and thought about targeting me?” Jiang Chen smiled coolly. He was weary of the game of the cat catching the mice.

Since there were so many boring speculations in the outside world, Jiang Chen decisively decided not to conceal himself anymore, and not avoid crowds as he had done before.

One day later, Jiang Chen felt that the temperature in the catacombs had decreased even more. The marsh and bog beneath his feet also felt ripe with danger.

“Looks like I’ve entered the third level.” Jiang Chen became prudent and cautious with where he set his feet.

Monsters would occasionally bubble up from the depths of this marsh. There were tentacled monsters, evil plants, and all sorts of armor eating demonic bugs...

Even Jiang Chen’s progress forward noticeably slowed down.

However, the amount of Greenwing Swordbirds noticeably increased after entering the third level.

Except, Jiang Chen had to spend quite a bit of time handling the numerous threats beneath his feet. It was bound to affect his hunt of Greenwing Swordbirds.

Jiang Chen killed another twenty three Greenwing Swordbirds after three days.

In this way, he’d collected 57 green spirit pearls.

Precisely ten days had passed.

“57 pearls in ten days. This is a bit slower than I’d thought. Except, oddly enough, why hasn’t there been a single Silverwing Swordbird along the way?”

Jiang Chen was a bit tired of killing Greenwing Swordbirds. One had to know that one Silverwing Swordbird would result in one silver pearl.

One silver pearl was the equivalent of ten green spirit pearls.

Jiang Chen only had 43 green spirit pearls left to collect, but if converted into silver spirit pearls, that was only five silver spirit pearls.

“Look, that’s Jiang Chen!”

“Yeah, this Jiang Chen has finally appeared. But why is he still collecting green spirit pearls?”

“This means that he shouldn’t be the one causing trouble. If it was him, he would’ve long since collected enough!”

Jiang Chen had purposefully revealed himself to prove this point to the outside world, and to force the Long brother and sister duo out from the corners.

“Brother Jiang Chen.” Bai Zhanyun walked out from a dark corner.

“Brother Bai.” The two of them had formed a friendship after an exchange of blows. Jiang Chen didn’t harbor any ill intent towards Bai Zhanyun, and at least the latter was aware of his error, and was being responsible for it.

“You must also know that someone is causing trouble within the Boundless Catacombs, and has driven all of the Greenwing Swordbirds to the third level. This has caused everyone to have a very difficult time in hunting. Ten days have passed, but most are quite far off from reaching their quota! How has brother Jiang Chen fared?”

“I’m still half off.” Jiang Chen didn’t bother concealing anything.

“Then this means that brother Jiang Chen isn’t the one causing trouble?”

“Do you think I’m that bored?” Jiang Chen’s tone was remote. “Some people are obsessed with ambition, and seek to dictate the competition through control of the Greenwing Swordbirds, thus controlling the jurisdiction of the dukedoms. This is an act of ‘Those who adhere to me will ascend, and those who defy me will die’.”

“This... can the Long family really be behind this?” Bai Zhanyun’s face grew slightly cold.

Others immediately detected the abnormalities in this when everything was laid out. They called out, “Right, look everyone! Who are amongst those unable to hunt down Greenwing Swordbirds? Have you seen any of the heirs that are close to Soaring Dragon?”

“That’s right, we haven’t seen any of them! This Long family is indeed manipulating the competition!”

“Damn it, too despicable and utterly shameless! This is still the dominion of the Eastern Kingdom! Aren’t they afraid of arousing public anger with their actions?”

The pent up rage and anger of these heirs were unleashed in the span of a moment.

This matter was quite clear now. Those who weren’t close with the Duke of Soaring Dragon, or hadn’t come under his banner were basically empty handed, with no gains whatsoever.

Those heirs close to the Duke of Soaring Dragon were conspicuously absent from the premises.

Even idiots could see that the Long brother and sister were behind this!

However, they also tragically discovered that the rules of the Hidden Dragon Trials didn’t seem to prohibit such things from happening.