

Three Realms 1151

Chapter 1151: Sir Miao Turns Into a Demon

Sir Miao never imagined that the young cultivator he deemed to unworthy of attention would be able to overpower him completely, despite just being at half-step emperor realm. He was third level emperor realm to begin with. After he joined the demon race and obtained some of their secret arts, his combat power was top tier amongst the four great wandering cultivators.

He'd originally thought that he would be able to take down this cultivator with ease. Realization of how naive he was quickly followed. Not only was this half-step emperor cultivator not easy to deal with, his opponent had the complete upper hand!

If there was a list announcing those least afraid of the demon race in the Divine Abyss Continent, Jiang Chen would absolutely be ranked among the top. The young man wasn't afraid of the demon race not because he possessed unparalleled strength. He just wasn't afraid of them in the first place. This was separated Jiang Chen from the cultivators of Divine Abyss Continent the most.

As the son of the Celestial Emperor in his past life, his knowledge was exceeded by no one in all of the heavenly planes. The demon race wasn't unfamiliar to him, and he could never bring himself to fear them.

Demons were but one of many races his father ruled over. At the time, they were just an average race in the Taiyuan Plane and utterly incapable of stirring much waves. That was why Jiang Chen had a psychological advantage to begin with.

Strength-wise, he had many advantages as well. It was true that he was just half-step emperor realm, but it was also true that he couldn't think less of the average emperor realm cultivator. This was without mentioning the bag of trump cards he possessed.

Sir Miao had learned some superficial arts and technique from the demons in return for his submission. It had allowed him to rise in the wandering cultivator community like a meteor. However, it was one thing to be famous there, and another thing entirely to fight Jiang Chen.

Even a third level emperor realm cultivator of a sect would find themselves hard pressed to battle the current Jiang Chen. Ultimately, Sir Miao was just a wandering cultivator. He might have learned some superficial demonic arts and techniques, but a shortcut was still just a shortcut. Foundation-wise, he was incomparable to Jiang Chen. If Jiang Chen were to unleash the trump cards he possessed, he could absolutely slaughter Sir Miao with no difficulty. The only reason the wandering cultivator was still alive was because Jiang Chen hadn't gone all out against him. Even then, Sir Miao was finding it very difficult to deal with Jiang Chen's ghost-like attacks.

Of course, he himself hadn't used his own trump cards either. But, he had a reason not to use it despite his precarious situation.

Currently, Old Man Clearcloud and Silversand Cavalier were taking a neutral stance and refrained from joining the battle. The moment he used a demonic art and exposed himself, the number of enemies he had to face would immediately increase. Old Man Clearcloud and Silversand Cavalier would definitely turn on him.

Sir Miao felt tremendously pressure from Jiang Chen. This can't go on. This guy will run me dry and kill me if this continues. Sir Miao's handsome face was now deathly pale. A savage grimace flickered through his features. He had to make a gamble!

He secretly activated his demon arts. Suddenly, his pale white face turned eerily red, almost as if he was drunk on alcohol. Waves of red, cloudy light dimmed and brightened on the surface of his skin. Every vein in his body came alive and expanded as a terrifying, harsh aura flared imposingly.

Jiang Chen didn't look surprised by the transformation. A scornful smile sprung to his face instead. "Finally revealing your true self, hmm?"

A flame-like mark appeared at the center of Sir Miao's forehead. It glowed piercingly and looked almost like a strange eye. The bizarre transformation stunned both Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier.

"What... what's this?" Even Granny Goldneedle could feign indifference no longer as she stared at Sir Miao with great astonishment.

In the martial dao world, there were plenty of martial arts that forced one's bloodline to evolve. This was especially true for the cultivators who cultivated the power of a totem. Bloodline evolution was a norm to them.

Sir Miao's transformation did look like the berserk transformation of a bloodline power. However, the similarity between the two transformations were superficial. As he transformed, he also exuded a strange aura that intimidated and struck fear in people's hearts. It meant that this was no ordinary berserker transformation.

"...has he truly surrendered to the demon race?" The Silversand Cavalier muttered to himself. His expression turned serious, and his eyes were full of wariness.

Old Man Clearcloud was also frowning deeply. It was obvious that this turn of events had caught him surprised him greatly as well.

"I don't care who you are, kid. You're not leaving Cloudshatter Mountain alive today!" Sir Miao chuckled evilly. His tone had turned impossibly cold.

Granny Goldneedle shivered all over and frowned when she heard Sir Miao's strange voice. She mumbled, "Excuse me, but I have no interest in getting involved in this mess. Goodbye!"

The granny had plainly noticed that she had been dragged into a terrible plot. She always looked out for number one, not to mention that Sir Miao's bizarre appearance had intimidated her a little. That was why her first thought was to leave as soon as possible.

Before Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier could say anything in reply, Granny Goldneedle was already flying away from the mountains in a beam of light. The Silversand Cavalier shook his head. "Granny Goldneedle is quite strong, but unfortunately, she's much too selfish."

Old Man Clearcloud sighed quietly but didn't say anything.

However, not long after the granny left, a bloodcurdling scream suddenly resounded from the distance. It obviously belonged to Granny Goldneedle. The scream was so terrible that no one could imagine the kind of terror that could cause that stubborn, unreasonable granny to scream like that.

“What’s going on?” Old Man Clearcloud frowned.

Sir Miao suddenly laughed loudly. “Want to leave? It’s too late! The demon emperor is about to descend, and all life in Cloudshatter Mountain will be his sacrifice! Now that the formation is closed, there are no longer any exits for you people to escape to! Hahahaha...”

Both Old Man Clearcloud and Silversand Cavalier turned pale when they heard this.

Surprisingly, Jiang Chen answered as if he had expected this to happen. “As expected, the demon has revealed itself. What else are you two waiting for? Are you going to wait until the demons devour you before you’re finally willing to act?”

Moved by Jiang Chen’s words, Silversand Cavalier looked at Old Man Clearcloud. “Brother, he really is a demon. You and I have no room for further hesitation.”

Even Old Man Clearcloud dared not stay his hand any longer. He nodded. “Let us attack him together!”

Although both of them moved to attack Sir Miao, their performance varied slightly. The Silversand Cavalier had gone all out against Sir Miao, but Old Man Clearcloud was reserving his strength.

Jiang Chen saw this as clear as day, but he didn’t say anything against it. In this situation, Old Man Clearcloud’s actions might be the wiser move. After all, they didn’t know each other and there was a demon present. The smart and cunning would naturally hide a portion of their strength so they could protect themselves during critical moments.

What surprised Jiang Chen was Silversand Cavalier’s passion. He hadn’t imagined that the wandering cultivator would be willing to go all out against the transformed Sir Miao. It greatly changed Jiang Chen’s impression of the other.

With Sir Miao having fully awakened his art, the demonic aura enveloping his body was much stronger than before. The violent aura of a demon soared into the clouds and was an enormous psychological impact. The man himself had become a lot faster as well.

Jiang Chen warned the two wandering cultivators who joined the battle. “Gentlemen, don’t let the demonic cloud strike your core. Also, you only need to harass him. I will bear the burden of killing this demon.”

Old Man Clearcloud was at ease with Jiang Chen’s instructions. He was very wary of the demonic clouds because they were likely corrosive. If they entered his mind and reached his core, he might become a demon puppet in no time. He was aware that the blood of the demon race was extremely invasive.

However, the Silversand Cavalier had different thoughts. Seeing how young Jiang Chen was, he couldn’t help but be worried for the young man. He worried that Jiang Chen might falter under pressure and be killed by the demon. And so he maintained a fierce offense and put great pressure onto Sir Miao, even though he obeyed Jiang Chen’s instructions and toned down his strength.

His actions improved Jiang Chen's impression of him even more. That being said, Jiang Chen didn't fear the demonic clouds at all. He had assimilated the Thundercloud Cicada's bloodline and was one of the very few who were completely impervious to poison and thunder.

The demonic clouds were in fact a type of poison. It was also a lot stronger than the average demonic poison. Protected by the Thundercloud Cicada's bloodline, Jiang Chen was able to ignore the clouds completely. Not only was the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape completely unaffected by the clouds, his attacks were growing fiercer over time.

He was actually attacking Sir Miao barehanded, using neither the Pentecolor Divine Swords nor summoned the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice. The Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice was a natural spirit, but the demonic clouds were incredibly corrosive. Jiang Chen didn't want it to be hurt by the poison.

It wasn't a problem however. Although he couldn't deploy the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice, he still had a lot of trump cards to play. While repeatedly using the Supernova Point, Jiang Chen threw the mountain into the sky once more. A flash of golden light later, an enormous mountain had materialized again.

Jiang Chen made a series of hand seals and guided the violent magnetic storms of the mountain towards Sir Miao. The storm now was completely incomparable to the one before.

As he'd unlocked more and more of the mountain's potential and continuously increased his strength, the storm's power had increased correspondingly. The deadly power of the storm put Sir Miao on his toes even though he had transformed into a demon.

He shrieked. "Who on earth are you? How did you come by such a treasure? I demand to know who your master is!"

Jiang Chen sneered. "You're not worthy!"

Sir Miao howled like a frightened cat. A look of infinite brutality distorted his features. "I want you dead!"

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1152: A Lethal Blow From the Vermilion Bird Image

Now demonized, Sir Miao had ranked up several times both in terms of speed and power. But no matter how much he increased his raw characteristics, each and every one of his techniques was easily predictable. Jiang Chen's Golden Cicada bloodline allowed him to ignore Sir Miao's demonic clouds and his tempered body countered the melee attacks. Therefore, he felt no pressure whatsoever despite Sir Miao's rampage.

However, Jiang Chen didn't skimp on making full use of his extraordinary perception. When Sir Miao began a new pouncing attack from his demonic cloud, Jiang Chen paid close attention to it. The trajectory he saw made his heart skip a beat. "Careful, gentlemen!"

He made several hand seals as he called out, creating streams of magnetic force between Sir Miao and the other two wandering cultivators. The force couldn't shackle Sir Miao completely, but it was effective to a certain degree.

Thanks to Jiang Chen's reminder, Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier realized just in time that they were the real targets. As well-established emperor realm cultivators, they didn't let surprise freeze them.

Both men dodged outwards. In terms of speed, the three wandering cultivators had been on the same level. But Sir Miao in demon mode was twice as fast as before and now had a clear advantage in speed. If not for the magnetic force affecting Sir Miao's movement, the sudden attack would've spelled their demise. Being touched by the demonic cloud and invaded by its bloodlust meant that one would become a demonic puppet within a very short amount of time. Sir Miao's puppet, to be specific.

Yet how could Jiang Chen not know what Sir Miao was planning? The corrupted cultivator wanted to turn Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier into demons so that he could turn the tables. Jiang Chen wasn't scared of having the tables turned on him, but he didn't want to see the demonic race gain in strength. Especially around Cloudshatter Mountain, an extra demon was an extra threat.

"Back off a little, friends. That man's demonized mode won't last. He's burning his own life force to fight and it'll cost him a great deal to maintain this status." Jiang Chen understood Sir Miao's methods well. He knew that the other young man wasn't actually a pure blooded demon, but had obtained some methods of the demon race.

Not having a demon bloodline meant that he was forcibly using demonic arts. That required using his bloodline as fuel. Though it increased his prowess in the short term, he could hardly keep it up for long. Furthermore, the aftereffects of doing so were quite severe.

After an instance of entering a demonized mode, several days or more of recovery was needed. But, if one practiced demonic methods to an authentic degree, then one's body would gradually become the same as a demon's over time. Sir Miao was evidently not at that level yet, though. Otherwise, a third level emperor realm like him could've easily taken out experts like Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier.

Jiang Chen's reminder was the cue for Old Man Clearcloud to back off a long way. "Brother Silversand," he called out. "Let's watch for now and help if our young friend needs it."

The cavalier disagreed. "Old Brother Clearcloud, Sir Miao is in a demonic rage. If we're scared of danger, how is our young friend over there supposed to take care of him? Plus, the Resplendent Emerald Veranda's master seems the mastermind here. Sir Miao is just one of his henchmen. If we can't take down a mere henchman, how can we expect to live when the Veranda master's conspiracy comes to fruition?"

The Silversand Cavalier was more farsighted than most. "Old Brother Clearcloud, our way out has been sealed. Either we die like Granny Goldneedle did, or we put our lives on the line and fight our way out."

Old Man Clearcloud became serious when he heard the analysis. Sir Miao's undiscouraged assault on the Silversand Cavalier and Old Man Clearcloud also enraged Jiang Chen. He pushed his magnetic golden mountain to its limits. A mad torrent of magnetic energy flooded downwards like a golden river.

Guiding them with hand seals, Jiang Chen commanded two rays of aureate light towards the two wandering cultivators on his side. Both of them were surprised at this radiant development.

“Don’t worry, gentlemen. I’m giving you an extra layer of protection.”

Old Man Clearcloud looked hesitant at that, but the cavalier nodded plainly.

“Alright, thank you for your kind assistance.” The light wrapped around the Silversand Cavalier, forming intricate markings that covered him in a sort of golden armor before long. Seeing that there was no problems, Old Man Clearcloud tossed aside his own misgivings, allowing the light to protect him as well.

Jiang Chen had used his magnetic energy to enshroud the two of them in magnetic armor. The armor had phenomenal defensive potency. Though it didn’t quite match up to the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman, it was at least a third as good. More than enough to take a hit from a demonic cloud, in any case.

Sir Miao was furious. “Mind your own business, kid!”

“You’re a demon through and through,” Jiang Chen sneered. “Know your place!”

He pressed his hands downward as he spoke, causing the towering magnetic mountain to crash in the same direction. A glowing beam shot out from the mountain after a muttered incantation. A colossal giant descended from the heavens, his muscles rippling with power. It was as if a deity had showed himself amongst mortals.

The Lord of the Golden Seal! Jiang Chen had summoned the mountain’s final guardian. Roaring into the firmament, the Lord of the Golden Seal shook both of his arms fiercely. The gesture gave off an impression of explosive strength.

“Crush him!” Jiang Chen ordered.

The agreement between the Lord and Jiang Chen required the former to follow orders to the letter. The magnetic golden mountain’s pressure on Sir Miao immediately intensified, limiting the corrupted human’s freedom of movement more and more. As for the Lord of the Golden Seal himself, he charged forward like an arrow, jabbing a fist at Sir Miao in a furious smash.

The gentleman was very fast indeed, but the simple attack almost landed on him nevertheless. The first punch ignited the mountain guardian’s bloodlust. His fists quickly turned into a storm of pummeling motions, advancing with unrivaled ferocity towards Sir Miao.

Sir Miao’s demonic cloud was essentially nonexistent in the face of this assault. Whether the cloud tried to attack or defend, it held no advantage before the Lord of the Golden Seal’s flurry of invincible blows. Demonic methods were strong, but not omnipotent or unbeatable.

The most fearsome thing about the demonic cloud was its supreme corrosiveness. The fact that it could infect bloodlines and take cultivators for its own was absolutely horrific. That ability alone was enough to terrorize any regular cultivator who faced it. One misstep in the defenses of their consciousness was enough to let the demonic cloud consume them.

But the Lord of the Golden Seal wasn’t a human cultivator, being a spirit born of the mountain. There was no bloodline to be invaded by the demonic cloud. It was uncertain if he could even be considered a living thing.

Everything had its pros and cons. The magnetic golden mountain wasn't particularly suppressive of the demonic clouds, but neither could the clouds do anything to the Lord of the Golden Seal.

However, the mountain's magnetic energy was able to lock down Sir Miao reasonably effectively. His demonic cloud gave him no counter advantage and made Sir Miao's position rather awkward. In fact, he could do little else besides passively take a beating.

Under the Lord of the Golden Seal's tempest of attacks, none of Sir Miao's methods did anything of note. Raw force prevailed on this day. Sir Miao was chased off like a homeless stray beneath Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier's shocked eyes. His yelps definitely matched the comparison.

There was no way a miserable fight like this could last very long. A few moments of barely holding on was enough to incentivize Sir Miao into a full-on retreat. Unfortunately for him, the pressure of the golden mountain prevented him from using any of his speed. No matter how much he tried to flee, the mountain kept him in the same place. Meanwhile, Jiang Chen stood to the side like a bystander, throwing in the occasional sneak attack for good measure. It was annoying enough for Sir Miao to cough up blood.

"If you're a real man, kid, then put away your treasure! Let's have a fair fight," Sir Miao shrieked angrily.

Jiang Chen wasn't nearly stupid enough to agree to something as naive as that. Even Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier felt that Sir Miao was being too shameless. What, he was allowed to use demonic methods as a race traitor, but the other guy wasn't allowed a simple treasure?

Jiang Chen snickered. "Sir Miao, you're just one of the demons' goons. I have no time to waste on you. These are your last moments. Lay down and die!"

A crimson halo appeared around his tempered body as he spoke. A powerful force began to invisibly gather behind him in the next moment. It was like a blazing sun was hidden, on the verge of erupting forth at any moment. The upward heat waves cast by the celestial body created a formidable aura.

Jiang Chen shook both his arms. Heralded by brilliant light, a sea of flames poured out into the open. From that sea grew a strong presence that covered the skies, a vermilion image noble and pure.

It was the image of a Vermilion Bird!

Though Jiang Chen didn't have the bloodline to back it up, the image had nevertheless been created out of the essences of prehistoric skyfire. Paired with his tempered body's image-based methods, he was able to deliver a killing stroke.

"To ashes with you!" Jiang Chen cried out. The image swept a tapestry of endless fire towards Sir Miao, hemming him in from every direction.

Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier couldn't close their mouths. The attack was incomprehensibly powerful. Before this, they hadn't quite understood why the Veranda master had delegated the four of them to kill this young man. But now, after seeing what he could truly do, they knew how foolish they had been to underestimate him.

Chapter 1153: Lingering Fear

Sir Miao's strength was fit to bursting after transforming into a demon. He thought he'd be able to easily dispatch this mysterious half-step emperor cultivator, but things didn't go as expected. Not only did he fail to trick the enemy, he was the one being controlled like trapped prey, unable to struggle free.

The fatal attack arrived as he was still panicking. A terrible Vermillion Bird image descended from the sky in dominating fashion and headed straight for his face.

"No!" Sir Miao barely had enough time to emit a bloodcurdling scream. The powerful image enveloped him in a sea of flames a second later. By the time it passed through the corrupted human, the man was no longer anywhere to be seen. The sea of flames was so hot that the image dyed the sky red when it surged upwards!

Even Old Man Clearcloud and Silversand Cavalier had to retreat a couple of kilometers before they barely dodged out of the way of the terrifying attack.

"Damn, that is too scary. It's completely comparable to an attack of sixth or seventh level emperor realm. Who is this young man?" The Silversand Cavalier muttered in shock.

Even if discounting the unnaturally powerful treasures Jiang Chen possessed, this was still one of his most powerful arts. The True Dragon image and Vermillion Bird image were the two most forceful attacks that he cultivated. The only other attack comparable to the two images was the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique.

Old Man Clearcloud's forehead was covered in sweat. He was very glad he hadn't obstinately tried to get in this young man's way. Theoretically, he, the Silversand Cavalier, Sir Miao and the deceased Granny Goldneedle might not be able to gain the upper hand against this young man even if they were to combine forces. In fact, they might still end up dead in the end.

Even if Jiang Chen's deadly attacks were excluded from the equation, the golden mountain's incredible restriction power alone was something none of them could deal with. To put it bluntly, the emperor's domain that these cultivators prided themselves on was nothing before this golden mountain. This was without mentioning that the young man's domain power was ahead of theirs, even though he was just a half-step emperor realm cultivator.

They had no idea how Jiang Chen had honed his powers, but one thing they knew for sure, it was that his martial dao level and horizons completely exceeded theirs. Third or fourth realm emperor realm experts they might be, but their level was completely inferior to this young man's.

Again, Old Man Clearcloud was glad that he hadn't attacked Jiang Chen recklessly, and that the Silversand Cavalier kept a cool head on his shoulders.

The Silversand Cavalier couldn't say anything for a long time as he stared at the Vermillion Bird image that had devoured Sir Miao whole. It was only after the image disappeared into thin air that he walked forward to speak with Jiang Chen. He cupped his fists together in a salute.

"Your techniques are wondrous! The Silversand Cavalier thanks you for your chivalry. If it wasn't for you, we would've been sacrificed by the demon race already."

Jiang Chen's impression of the Silversand Cavalier was good enough, so he smiled faintly and waved his hands. "You can thank me later. We're still in danger right now."

Old Man Clearcloud had also come over. Doing his best not to show his embarrassment, he clasped his fists together. "I've lived for a long time, but it is only today that I understand what 'promising youth' and 'always someone better' truly means. Ai! To think that we would be foolish enough to..."

"Gentlemen, I'm going to get straight to the point." Jiang Chen cut off Old Man Clearcloud. "The Veranda master has surrendered to the demons, and there's even a demon base in Cloudshatter Mountain. Perhaps it was left here since the ancient times. But how did no one in the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region miss this?"

The Silversand Cavalier smiled wryly. "Great Scarlet Mid Region hasn't been doing so well in recent years."

"I guess they were so busy invading others that they forgot to take care of their own domain," Jiang Chen responded indifferently.

Neither the Silversand Cavalier nor Old Man Clearcloud were Great Scarlet locals. They were wandering cultivators used to drifting in and out of many different regions. Therefore, they didn't feel much of a sense of belonging to Great Scarlet and didn't mind Jiang Chen's insult.

Jiang Chen didn't continue his mocking. "The two of you were supposed to escort another fake Veranda master to a different location, weren't you? Why did you show up here instead?"

"Ai!" Silversand Cavalier sighed painfully. "The escorts who escorted the fake Veranda master are actually also fakes. The twelve of us disguised ourselves as normal cultivators and followed the group here. You can say that we are the first group to enter Cloudshatter Mountain. However, the Veranda master didn't tell us to guard the formation. Instead, he arranged us at various locations and told us to stand by for orders..."

Jiang Chen nodded thoughtfully. Everything made sense now. He could guess that the Veranda master was planning something nefarious for the four wandering cultivators, most likely as a sacrifice to his demon emperor. Everything around the entire Cloudshatter Mountain had been prepared long ago. No one could enter or exit anymore because the formation surrounding the mountain had been shut down.

Jiang Chen thanked his lucky stars at this point. Thank goodness he'd been one step ahead of his enemies and had managed to send Wei Xing'er away before they shut down the formation. Otherwise, she wouldn't be able to leave even though he'd rescued her from the Veranda master!

Old Man Clearcloud couldn't help but ask when he saw the stern look on Jiang Chen's face. "Young friend, has the entire Cloudshatter Mountain come under the demon race's control?"

Silversand Cavalier also looked inquisitive. It was obvious that the question interested him greatly.

Jiang Chen shook his head. "I'm not entirely certain of the details myself. I only know that the Veranda master is the mastermind, or at least one of the masterminds involved in this scheme. Do you know how many have entered?"

"We were arranged at a secluded spot and told to wait for the Veranda master's orders. We don't know how many have entered either." The Silversand Cavalier shook his head blankly.

Jiang Chen thought that was the case. Still, he could guess that a great number of cultivators had entered Cloudshatter Mountain. Nearly half of Great Scarlet's elites were here. That being said, he didn't pity the region's experts at all. He had no plans to become their savior and rescue them from their fates. There were only two objectives for him right now. One, to claim the enemy's precious earth attribute treasure for himself and two, prevent the demon emperor from resurrecting.

Jiang Chen might not know the ins and outs of the situation completely, but Sir Miao's words had revealed some information. For example, this mountain was likely a base of the ancient demons. However, it was so well hidden that it hadn't been discovered even to this day. Obviously, the Veranda master was planning to sacrifice many lives to that strange altar and awaken a demon emperor slumbering inside the ancient seal.

If the demon emperor were to awaken, Jiang Chen had no doubt that the enemy would be powerful enough to take down Great Scarlet Mid Region and its surrounding regions. Even if the ancient demon emperor was just a great emperor, he would still be stronger than most of the existing great emperors. Most importantly, it was highly improbable that great emperors were present in a mid region like Great Scarlet at all.

Most of the strongest great emperors were in the Upper Eight Regions. Even if Jiang Chen assumed that a great emperor secluded from the world happened to be somewhere in Great Scarlet, he doubted that they would stand a chance against the demon emperor. All ancient demon emperors had lived through the great war of races and were baptized by many life-and-death experiences. This was without mentioning that the demon race was an incredibly powerful race.

One demon great emperor might be powerful enough to take on two human great emperors. Of course, a demon might not necessarily be able to regain peak strength immediately after it awoke from slumber. That was why the sacrificial ritual was necessary.

The more and the stronger the sacrifices, the faster the demon emperor would regain his strength. This was likely why the Veranda master had lured so many emperor realm cultivators here. There was no better level of sacrifices than this.

Even if the Veranda master could lure over a great emperor, the demon emperor might not be able to deal with that caliber of cultivator due to his weakened state. If unlucky, he would even be eliminated by the human instead. And most importantly, this was Great Scarlet Mid Region. The Veranda master's network wasn't good enough to lure a human great emperor here.

Old Man Clearcloud was very worried when he considered that all the exits were sealed off within Cloudshatter Mountain.

"Young friend, the exits are all sealed. Doesn't that mean that it's only a matter of time before we become the demon emperor's food?"

Silversand Cavalier asked, "That Sir Miao was originally a nobody, but because he cultivated the demonic arts, he rose to fame within the wandering cultivator community in just a few years. Are demons really that scary?"

Old Man Clearcloud also sighed. "If they truly are as scary as they seem, the demon race would not need to expand their territories. Countless mediocre people would automatically want to serve them at all costs."

That wasn't random alarmist talk.

In actuality, the demon race had poor reproductive abilities. The number of pure demons in the demon race were pitifully few. Every time that race attempted to conquer a plane, the number of troops they sent out was actually quite modest. However, the demon race was good at enslaving other races and converting them into demons.

Moreover, the demon race possessed certain characteristics that made them highly attractive to worshippers. For example, those such as Sir Miao desired strength, the ability to do whatever they wanted in the martial dao world and to be superior to others. He wanted to be so powerful that he could ignore all rules and conventions of the world. A person like this could cast aside faith at any given moment and join the demon race to acquire strength that no one else possessed.

"The demon race wasn't scary and they don't just accept anyone into their midst. On the contrary, the demon race actually demands a lot from their worshippers. Only those who have the right talent and mental state are chosen. While it's true that demonic arts can be cultivated very quickly, the side effects are just as enormous. For example, the demonic clouds Sir Miao conjured may seem incredibly dominating, but he has to spend an extremely long time recovering afterwards. And if he runs into a true expert, his half-assed demonic art isn't all that scary." Jiang Chen didn't purposely belittle the demon race, but he didn't exaggerate their abilities either.

Chapter 1154: An Enormous Stone Forest

Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier traded a look. Jiang Chen's explanation didn't alleviate their concern one bit. According to what the young man was saying, Sir Miao was nothing more than a pawn. Even the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master wasn't likely to be the mastermind. If that was true, then no one who'd entered the mountain today could escape. If a mere pawn was this strong, wasn't the mastermind sure to be a hundred times moreso?

"What kind of ability is that demonic cloud? Getting close to it is enough for my consciousness to waver. My entire body feels uncomfortable because of it. It's like I'm suffocating."

"That's a long story and now is not the time. Just remember that you shouldn't be touched by the demonic cloud. Protect your consciousnesses well. The demonic cloud is one of the most aggressive abilities the demons have and belongs to an equally aggressive branch."

The demon race had many branches. The formation and usage of demonic clouds was a method that belonged to the blood demons. The blood demons were the most murderous and vicious of their brethren. The word 'blood' was in their name, and they loved exposing themselves to as much of it as possible. Copious amounts of slaughter was typically involved.

Back in the desolate wildlands, Jiang Chen had met both shadow demons and wood demons. Blood demons had been missing from that lineup. Meeting a nasty race like the blood demons here in Cloudshatter Mountain of Great Scarlet had been completely out of his expectations. If the demon emperor was allowed to awaken and consume all of these emperor realm cultivators, he would return

to peak performance in no time. When that happened, even someone like Jiang Chen would be in great trouble.

"Alright, you two. This place has been locked down, but there's always a ray of hope in times of despair. We just have to look for it ourselves." Having said his piece, Jiang Chen disappeared into the distance without delay.

Old Man Clearcloud and the Silversand Cavalier exchanged another look, unsure of how to proceed.

"Silversand, my friend, I didn't expect the Veranda master to deceive us like this. We really put our foot in it this time." Old Man Clearcloud sighed. "If we escape with our lives intact, I won't meddle in any worldly affairs ever again."

"Let's hope there's a miracle," the Silversand Cavalier let out a dry laugh. "Our young friend was right, though. We need to find our own ray of hope. It's no use waiting around for one to simply appear."

"How are we supposed to look?" The old man was morose. "His words sounded like spurious nonsense. It's hard to make heads or tails of it. I think he might be exaggerating the danger we're in."

"I don't agree," the Silversand Cavalier shook his head. "If he means us ill, there's no need to do something as absurd as warning us. Someone of his abilities doesn't need us on his side. Since he neither means ill nor needs us, there's no reason for him to deceive us."

The cavalier was a bit smarter than the old man at the end of the day. "I've decided. I'm going to follow his lead and head inside to check things out. Only through information can there be a chance at life."

Old Man Clearcloud hesitated a moment, but didn't immediately agree. "Brother Silversand, further in means you'd be closer to the zone of trouble. Aren't you heading straight into the jaws of death?"

"The formation is sealed now," the Silversand Cavalier replied seriously. "If we can't leave, then there's not much of a difference how close we are to the center. If a demon emperor really is awakening, does it really make it safer to be a bit further away?"

Old Man Clearcloud looked shaky. "Better than putting yourself into the path of danger, no?"

"Not necessarily! If we all put in the work, perhaps we can stop the Veranda master as a collective. I believe that young man has left to do exactly that."

"Him?" The old man was still a bit upset when he spoke of the young man. "If he's so great, why didn't he invite us?"

"Maybe he doesn't care for our strength," the cavalier smiled wryly. The duo hadn't been able to help much in that last encounter.

"Hmph! He's just half-step emperor realm. If he didn't have so many treasures—from a prominent sect, no doubt—it wouldn't have been so easy for him to beat Sir Miao." Old Man Clearcloud harrumphed. "I think he has his own agenda."

The Silversand Cavalier disapproved of the old man's suspicion somewhat. "Old Brother Clearcloud," he frowned, "he did save our lives back there. It's rather ignoble for us to speak poorly of him behind his back."

Old Man Clearcloud was displeased. "Brother Silversand, if you're set on heading inside... then I'm sorry to say this, but I'm not going with you."

It was obvious to the cavalier that the two men had differing goals. He sighed softly, presenting his comrade with a cupped fist salute. "If so, then let's split here. In a sense, the Veranda master's task for us to serve as his protectors has ended early. There's no need for us to stick together any more."

The cavalier's tone was a bit chilly. He was clearly disgruntled by the old man's irresponsibility in the face of danger. Clearcloud was no different from the late Granny Goldneedle. He didn't have the courage to do some simple investigation, despite evidence of the demon race's resurgence. The old man's fame alone wasn't enough to make the cavalier respect him.

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"Young master Chen, there's a secluded valley eighty miles southwest of here. There's a forest of stone there, and the pulse of the earth seems to have its origins around that area as well." The Goldbiter Rat King had some breaking news for his master.

Jiang Chen nodded. "Sounds good. Let's go there."

He had no time for delay. Soaring towards the direction the Rat King had informed him, he saw numerous cultivators in his flight. Some even tried to attack him, but the speed of the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape technique removed any possibility of their success.

It didn't take long at all for Jiang Chen to land near the forest of stone. The granite formation was imposing indeed and looked like a potential home for a tribe of giants. Each stone was grand in its own way, a blend of ruggedness and splendor. In this forest, the wonders of the natural world were evident. At the moment, there were roughly two hundred gathered here in the forest. All of them were emperor realm cultivators.

Jiang Chen didn't rush closer immediately, instead opting to hang far away on the outside. He was perfectly willing to approach, provided the two dozen emperor realm cultivators nearby made themselves scarce in the near future. As long as they were around, he would definitely be attacked.

It seems that these people are all here for the earth attribute treasure. The terrifyingly potent earthen pulse it generates marks it as something truly extraordinary. But what treasure is it, actually? Jiang Chen mused in curiosity.

He was certain now that the treasure really did belong to Great Scarlet Mid Region. It wasn't just some demonic trick. A pulse in the earth was not so easily faked. Even if this place had been the site of an ancient demon fort a long time ago, the treasure definitely also existed. Perhaps this truth was the foundation of the Veranda master's plot. Without it, how could he have drawn so many emperor realm cultivators here?

"Humans die for wealth, birds die for food." Jiang Chen watched the mad crowd of cultivators from the Great Scarlet Mid Region a long distance away, internally sneering. He felt no compassion for them. If there was the opportunity to do so, he would've liked to watch their slaughter in person. After all, many people here had participated in the invasion of Myriad Domain.

"These people are so fired up. Why is it that none of them suspects the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master?" Jiang Chen found that fact rather odd.

No matter how attractive a treasure was, the people gathered had ultimately followed the Veranda master's trail here. But the man in question was currently nowhere to be found. Was there not the slightest shred of doubt? Why were they behaving in such a frenzied manner?

Jiang Chen didn't know the precise origins of these experts, but there weren't many possibilities to choose from. The imperial family and the three sects, plus possibly a few extra wandering cultivators. Maybe a few others from the surrounding regions who'd caught wind of this. Without counting things out, he estimated that at least eight factions stood here today.

Unfortunately, these factions seemed to have reached consensus about not allowing anyone else to enter this place. The agreement involved collective expulsion of any latecomers. However, the formation outside Cloudshatter Mountain's closure meant that no one else had come into the valley. Thus, internal conflict began to intensify. Everyone wanted to take the first bite. They all wanted the best position. It quickly devolved into a shouting match.

"What right do you have to say that? What right does the Sky Eagle Sect have to take the most privileged position?"

"Exactly. We're in a fair competition here! You Sky Eagle Sect guys better be careful with that cocky swagger! The rest of us can very easily gang up on you."

"Hmph. And what do you think you're doing? You look pretty unfamiliar. You're not from Great Scarlet, are you? Why are you minding our region's business?" One of the experts from the Sky Eagle Sect stared coldly at the second speaker.

"Everyone, please listen! We of the Sky Eagle Sect have no intention of becoming a public enemy. But we are the first ones that got here, and I think we deserve a small edge because of that. It's not because we think we're superior to everyone else here. First come first served makes sense, no?"

The Sky Eagle Sect expert followed the speech up with a cupped fist salute. "These are my thoughts. The affairs of our Great Scarlet Mid Region should be settled only by the locals. The strongest sects here are the Sky Eagle, Myriad Buddha, and Scarlet Parting Sects. We three sects should therefore naturally take a leading position today. Don't you all agree?"

The speech was very persuasive. A few words were enough to dismantle the others' common hatred. Furthermore, it pulled the other two sects closer to their side and pushed away everyone else. The member of the Scarlet Parting Sect was placated and now agreed rather than opposed.

"Quite so. The Great Scarlet Mid Region is dominated by our three sects. Everyone else must either take our orders or leave!"

Someone from the Myriad Buddha Sect opened his mouth as well. "I suggest that we three sects join forces. We can clear out the riff-raff out with ease."

"Who're you calling riff-raff? We come as representatives of the imperial house. You three sects are strong, but are you stronger than the entirety of the empire?" Ole Zhang was talking now, the strongest of the protectors from back at the formation.

Jiang Chen had been able to pass because Old Zhang had let him in. The old man was a peak sixth level emperor realm cultivator and a hair's breadth away from seventh.

Chapter 1155: Imperial Prince Zhao

The heated argument came to a halt when the powerful factions began speaking.

"Old Zhang, your virtuous and upright reputation commands great respect from us. Forgive us for our ignorance, but we never knew that you're a royal representative?"

"Yeah! The royals are surnamed Yan, but you are a Zhang! How do you expect us to believe that you represent royalty?"

The three great sects took turns to speak their mind. Their fear for the royal family was evident, but that didn't mean they feared any random royal representative. They would never willingly forego such a valuable treasure unless the Great Yan emperor was present.

Old Zhang smiled blandly. The response from the three great sects was within his calculations. He looked leisurely at the side, his eyes gleaming meaningfully.

"It seems the three great sects only acknowledge royalty! Very well. Imperial Prince Zhao [1], the representatives of the great sects have asked for you. It's time to reveal yourself!"

What? The crowd was dumbfounded.

An ordinary looking, middle-aged man beside Old Zhang suddenly burst into laughter. "I never knew that the great sects held so much respect for royalty! It'd be incredibly rude if I continued to conceal my identity!"

He turned into an entirely different person with a swipe of his hands across his face. A shake of his arms tore his outer garb apart to reveal his royal attire. His long hair made him seem extremely dignified. The air of royalty emanated naturally from within.

Imperial Prince Zhao was the royal emperor's younger brother. He held enormous authority in Great Scarlet and was the third most powerful royal personage. His authority was second only to the emperor's and the patriarch of the royal family. He was greatly revered by Great Scarlet citizens and was often put in charge of jianghu matters. He was quite renowned among the great sects as a result of that.

Moreover, he was also extremely talented in martial dao. He was just as strong, if not stronger than the emperor in both cultivation and martial dao knowledge. However, Imperial Prince Zhao's passion in martial dao far exceeded his interest in the throne. His frightening talent paired with the royal family's limitless resources made him a force to reckoned with in the martial dao world. Even the emperor paled a little in comparison.

Because of this, the prince was almost always in charge of matters related to war and conquest. This only served to further heighten his fame and prominence, making his reputation eclipse even the heads of great sects.

In the hunt for Jiang Chen, Imperial Prince Zhao surely would've led the mission if he hadn't been in closed cultivation. It was his responsibility, given his position and duties. The representatives of the three sects were completely dumbfounded when Imperial Prince Zhao revealed himself. They were

mere senior executives of their own respective sects. Without the presence of their heads, they didn't have the courage to speak against Imperial Prince Zhao. They exchanged glances with each other that expressed their dejection.

"Everyone, this prince is here to acquire the treasure for our Great Scarlet Mid Region. The sects you represent are from our great region, so it's only right that you assist me in acquiring the treasure to bolster our great region's heritage."

"Imperial Prince Zhao, you've hid yourself well!" The representative of the Sky Eagle sect was extremely depressed and spoke with a slightly sour tone.

"If we'd known that Prince Zhao was here, we wouldn't have been so passionate about the treasure!"

"Obtaining valuable treasure is up to the fates themselves. If Prince Zhao is going to swallow it whole, shouldn't we be given a few mouthfuls of soup as compensation?" Only the three great sects had the right to open their mouths in a time like this, the remainder didn't even have the right to speak.

Prince Zhao burst into hearty laughter. "Fine! I can make the decision in this. If the treasure is turned over to the royal family, all gains derived from it will be shared with the three great sects. As for the others, depending on the situation, we may come to a..." He suddenly changed his tone mid-sentence. "But to those that are not from our region, I'm sorry to say that this no longer has anything to do with you! You can either do nothing and watch from the side, or leave."

Prince Zhao was extremely domineering. They were in Great Scarlet Mid Region's territory after all. As the prince of this region, he could act however he wanted. After he spoke, other powerful royal experts quickly ran to Prince Zhao's side to bolster the numbers and strengthen his presence. The air suddenly became incredibly tense.

The representatives of the great sects exchanged glances. They were still on the fence about it, but they didn't have the courage to revolt against Prince Zhao without their sect heads. They might have a chance if all three sects banded together and formed an alliance, but the authoritative figure of royalty was right in front of them! They didn't dare openly oppose their liege.

There would be a complete fallout in which only one side would survive. Working together, the three sects might actually have a small advantage over the royal party. But after an intense fight with heavy losses on both sides, they'd have to slaughter every single person in the chamber, including Imperial Prince Zhao! Unfortunately, there was no guarantee that they could actually kill him. And even if they could, they probably didn't have the courage to do so!

It'd be incredibly disastrous if word got out that the three great sects had betrayed royalty. The royal family was so powerful that they'd never hesitate to crush the sects. The representatives of the great sects were incredibly dejected when they arrived at this conclusion. They realized that they didn't have the power to resist.

"Old Zhang, clean the place up a little. Kindly send away those that aren't Great Scarlet citizens. If they resist... treat them as an enemy."

Old Zhang immediately nodded. "Understood."

Old Zhang had always been an authoritative figure in the Great Scarlet Mid Region. Now with Prince Zhao behind him, nobody dared resist his orders.

Jiang Chen was struck with an idea when Old Zhang was counting heads. He quickly waved his hand at the old man. "Elder Zhang, I'm here! They're not letting me in!"

He hadn't been exposed for impersonating the person he'd captured yet. Thus, he decided to be a bit bolder.

Old Zhang frowned when he saw Jiang Chen. "Xiao Chen, hasn't it been a while since your arrival? Where did you run off to and what took you so long?"

The person Jiang Chen was impersonating went by the surname of Chen. He responded with a wry smile. "Old Zhang, let's not talk about it. I was ambushed on my way here and almost lost my life!"

Prince Zhao didn't mind having one more person by his side. Jiang Chen was a mere nobody whose sole purpose was to prop up the numbers anyways. However, he furrowed his brows when he heard that a member of royal party was ambushed. "Who ambushed you?"

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. "Who else can it be? Granny Goldneedle and Sir Miao! The Veranda master's men!"

He'd noticed that the crowd was more than happy to forget about the Veranda master's existence, so he decided to ring the alarm bells instead. He couldn't care less if these people lived or die. In fact, he'd rather they all died. But compared to the demon king, they weren't much of a threat.

Jiang Chen didn't want them to drop their guards against the Veranda master before catastrophe struck. He dropped them a hint so that they'd continue to be on the alert and let him profit from the impending battle.

As expected, Prince Zhao immediately furrowed his brows when he was reminded about the Veranda master. "The Veranda master? Did any of you see him while you were enroute?"

The crowd collectively shook their heads. They'd completely forgotten about him. Clearly, nobody thought that the Veranda master was much of a threat. With this reminder, the crowd came to a sudden realization that they were here to tail the Veranda master. But in the middle of everything, the Veranda master had suddenly disappeared into thin air.

Prince Zhao's face immediately darkened. "Xiao Chen, you said that you were ambushed by Granny Goldneedle and Sir Miao, but aren't they supposed to be elsewhere?"

"This subordinate finds it very strange too. The Veranda master must be planning something. Why else would he suddenly disappear?" Jiang Chen kept planting the idea inside their heads.

Prince Zhao nodded with a solemn expression. "Just what is the Veranda master up to? I've been told that he intends to betray Great Scarlet royalty! It looks like he definitely has an ulterior motive! He's definitely up to something if he suddenly disappears at a time like this!"

Old Zhang nodded in agreement. "Esteemed prince, shall we send someone to investigate?"

Prince Zhao thought about it for a moment and shook his head. "Forget it. He's a sixth level emperor only on the verge of breaking into the seventh. Our men will only be sent to their deaths. We needn't spread ourselves thin. I want to finish up matters here."

Jiang Chen cursed inwardly when he heard Prince Zhao's reply. He decided to add even more oil to the fire. "Imperial Prince Zhao, the formation that led us into this place is completely sealed. We no longer have a way out. This subordinate strongly believes that we've walked into his trap."

Since the prince was being extremely pig-headed, Jiang Chen had no choice but to break even more pressing news.

"What did you say?!" Color immediately drained from the prince face.

"Every word I say is true." Jiang Chen quickly replied.

The representatives of the three great sects were completely dumbfounded as well. They weren't idiots. The sealed entrance was a clear indication that they'd walked into a trap! Someone was trying to get them all in one fell swoop! However, was the Veranda master's appetite really that voracious? Was he truly planning on killing every single person from the three great sects, the royal family, and various other fourth ranked sects?

Chapter 1156: The Giant Rock Formation

Complicated looks graced the crowd's faces for a time. Even Imperial Prince Zhao looked grave and beckoned Jiang Chen over. "Little Chen, tell us everything you know in detail."

Jiang Chen had prepared his script early on, so he immediately responded with, "I was attacked by both Granny Goldneedle and Sir Miao at the same time, but for some reason the two of them suddenly fell out with each other afterwards. Granny Goldneedle was no match for Sir Miao, and she tried to escape Cloudshatter Mountain. However, she was devoured by a kind of energy when she reached the edge of the formation. It was then I realized an unknown power has blocked the way out of the formation completely."

"What happened to Granny Goldneedle after she was devoured?" Prince Zhao had heard of the old woman's name. He knew that she was a third level emperor realm cultivator.

"There are no more signs of life. She's probably dead." Jiang Chen sighed.

"What about Sir Miao?" Prince Zhao asked again.

"I killed him." This wasn't a lie at least. "After I killed Sir Miao and discovered that the way out was completely blocked, I didn't linger and immediately made my way here. However, these people tried to stop me. If you haven't arrived, I may not even be able to come in, Your Highness."

Jiang Chen's words were woven with half lies and truth. He had cleverly taken himself out of the picture and avoided mentioning the demon race at the same time. He wasn't afraid to bring up the demon race, but he was afraid that these people would immediately lose heart, scatter, and be easily turned into sacrifices for the demon emperor.

He might not feel any goodwill towards these people, and in fact wished only misfortune on them, but he couldn't allow them to die right now. They were useful pawns in the fight against the Veranda

master. Even if they had to die, Jiang Chen would rather he killed them with his own hands instead of the demon emperor. Their deaths would greatly fuel the demon emperor's cultivation, placing Jiang Chen in a very disadvantageous position. He might not be able to eliminate all of the people on his own, but he was absolutely confident in his ability to protect himself. But, he had almost no chance of victory if his opponent was a peak demon great emperor of ancient times, unless he used Guo Ran's restriction left in his abode, assuming that the demon great emperor was gullible enough to walk inside.

Considering the wealth of knowledge and experience an ancient demon emperor might possess, it was doubtful that he would be careless enough to make an entry. If his enemy didn't walk inside, then the restrictions it contained were completely useless.

He could use the abode to save himself, but he wouldn't be able to stop the demon emperor from leaving the mountain. Therefore, the ideal outcome would be to make this group fight the Veranda master to a standstill and prevent the demon emperor from emerging at the same time.

"Your Highness, if the way out really is blocked, I think it's a sign of how greedy the Veranda master truly is." Elder Zhang couldn't help but speak a word of caution.

Prince Zhao frowned. "What is he planning? He can't be planning to catch us all in one fell swoop, can he? Is he really that greedy?"

Everyone fell silent at this and the atmosphere grew a little heavy. The prince waved his hands once as his ruthless personality shone. "Let us forget the Veranda master for now. We'll deal with whatever comes our way later. We have great numbers on our side, and he's just a coward who doesn't even dare to show his face. What can he possibly do to us?"

Imperial Prince Zhao was forced to make such a statement in order to raise his men's spirits. He was aware that an evil plot lurked behind the scenes, but his first priority was to find the treasure that made the earth pulse.

As for the other matters, they had to be set aside no matter how urgent they were. Even if the treasure was bait and he was prey stepping into an obvious trap, Prince Zhao still couldn't find it within himself to walk away from it. He had a feeling that this treasure could rewrite the destiny of the Great Scarlet Mid Region itself! If he could obtain this treasure, the decline that had afflicted the region lately would be swept away in an instant. Success and prosperity would come to them, and perhaps one day their destiny might even grow big enough to qualify them as an upper region.

"Old Zhang, take a group of men with you and guard this place unto the death. Kill the Veranda master the second he shows up!"

Old Zhang was a sixth level emperor realm cultivator himself, which put him on equal footing with the Veranda master. With the men Prince Zhao lent him, he should be able to deal with the Veranda master even if the latter suddenly grew another two heads and four hands.

Prince Zhao then looked to the three great sects. "Everyone, it seems that the Veranda master's web of schemes extends even to us. Since all our lives are currently at stake, don't you think you should lend us a hand too?"

As the three great sects hesitated, a voice suddenly came from the crowd. "Prince Zhao, I am but a mere wandering cultivator, but I can't help but feel that something's a little odd about this whole thing."

Prince Zhao's face turned dark. "Who are you?"

The man smiled. "I am just a nobody, so I doubt you have use for my name. I am curious about something though, do you think that Daoist Chen's words can be trusted?"

"What do you mean?" Prince Zhao was expressionless. "My men are absolutely loyal to the royal family. If you plan to sow discord among my people, I must say that your method is a little crude."

"I have absolutely no intentions of sowing discord among the royal family, on the contrary, I am thinking on behalf of the royal family's well being. Imperial Prince Zhao, this Daoist Chen isn't anyone important within the royal family, right? Do you really think he can take out the famous wandering cultivator, Sir Miao, in such a short time? Moreover, don't you think that his statement lacks substance and is full of holes if you scrutinize it closely?"

Jiang Chen smiled and stared at this person deeply. "Now I'm curious. This is the royal family's internal business. Are you telling me that you, an outsider, knows us better than we know ourselves?"

Jiang Chen looked calm, but anxiety was actually gnawing at him from the inside. Judging from his tone, this wandering cultivator was obviously trying to undermine his credibility. He might even be in cahoots with the Veranda master! Perhaps the Veranda master had secretly ordered him to stand up in accusation.

After all, he had survived the attack from the wandering cultivators. The fact that he was still safe and sound was no doubt ringing alarm bells in the Veranda master's head. Moreover, he had tampered with the Veranda master's plans and sent Wei Xing'er away from here. It must have affected the Veranda master's plans somehow. Considering the other's personality, Jiang Chen was certain that the man would try to prevent him from causing further damage even if he wasn't present to deal with Jiang Chen personally.

"The royal family? Can you swear a heavenly oath and prove that you truly represent the royal family?" The wandering cultivator who accused Jiang Chen sneered in response.

Jiang Chen refused to show weakness. "If you'll swear a heavenly oath and prove that you're not an accomplice of the Veranda master, then why not!"

He turned with a cupped fist salute and looked at Prince Zhao.

"Your Highness, you can send someone to check the edges of the formation and know if I'm trustworthy right away. I may not have witnessed everything with my own eyes, but if there's one thing I'm certain of, the Veranda master is cooking up a big plot that involves all of us. He's planning to get us all in one go! If you remember, Granny Goldneedle is someone the Veranda master spent a lot of money to hire. If she hadn't discovered some clues about his scheme, why would she suddenly leave? Why would she be killed by the restriction in the end?"

Prince Zhao frowned and shot Jiang Chen a meaningful glance, then looked back at the wandering cultivator. "Since you're the one who's accusing my subordinate of lying, would you mind swearing a heavenly oath and prove that you're not an accomplice of the Veranda master?"

The wandering cultivator snorted coldly. "I was hired by the Veranda master. It's my job to handle his problems. So if you wish to call me an accomplice of the Veranda master, I can't exactly deny it, can I? This has nothing to do with me accusing Daoist Chen of lying, however."

"Like hell it isn't! If you represent the Veranda master's interest, then you are causing trouble by accusing my subordinate!" Prince Zhao scolded coldly.

Old Zhang beckoned Jiang Chen to walk closer. He had no choice but to comply.

"Little Chen, are you absolutely sure that what you told us is the absolute truth?" Old Zhang asked calmly.

Jiang Chen's eyes were honest. "Elder Zhang, I'm going to say this again. If we let our guard down around the Veranda master, I don't think many of us are going to leave this place alive!"

As they spoke, the ground beneath their feet suddenly shook. Everyone stumbled on their feet as the tremors grew in intensity. The shaking quickly turned into a full blown earthquake. In the next moment, the giant rocks of the rock forest stood up one by one like stone giants. They floated as if they were given a life of their own. The rocks floated slowly at the beginning, but they quickly gained in speed.

Rumble!

It was as if meteors were falling from the sky as the rocks moved about swiftly. They flew and rammed into one another seemingly at random in the enormous area, blotting out the sky. Even the smallest rock was three meters tall. The biggest one was around sixty to ninety meters.

When giant rocks of this size rammed into one another, it literally felt like the mountains were crumbling, and the earth itself was cracking in half.

A lot of cultivators were struck by the flying rocks. Logically speaking, the flying rocks shouldn't be a fatal threat to any emperor realm cultivator despite their flying speed. However, they seemed to be imbued with some sort of powerful art of strength that hurt badly even at the slightest brush. Those caught by the rocks died upon impact. Their flesh and blood splattered all over in gory fashion.

For a time, the place was in absolute chaos. Naturally, Jiang Chen couldn't afford to hang around and speak with Old Zhang in this situation. He immediately executed the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape and dodged the rocks. No one was faster than him in this place.

The others weren't as lucky, however. The flying rocks were moving faster and faster, and anyone who ran to the edge of the giant rock formation were immediately thrown back into the center by a powerful pulse. It completely cut off their retreat.

Jiang Chen immediately understood that they were all in great danger when he saw the same thing happening everywhere. This giant rock formation was obviously the very core of the earthpulse.

"This isn't good!" An unsettling feeling passed through Jiang Chen's mind. In the next moment, order suddenly took over the flying rocks.

The flying rocks started arranging themselves into an enormous disk as if they had a mind of their own. The disk spun so quickly that a powerful vortex in the air sucked everyone in. Not even Prince Zhao was able to escape.

The scene before everyone's eyes grew dimmer and dimmer. The enormous disk-like formation of rocks that covered the sky cast darker and darker shadows upon them. It didn't take long before absolute darkness consumed everyone.

Chapter 1157: A Bloody Fog

Jiang Chen was also caught in the vortex. He was able to protect himself with his superior speed, but he wasn't able to escape its powerful suction. He reached for a spacetime seal and held it gently in his hands. He would crush the seal as soon as he sensed that his life was in danger and be teleported into Veluriyam Pagoda's Six Palaces of Heritage.

Fortunately, even though the vortex had an extremely powerful pull, it didn't contain a shred of lethality. That was all for the best as he didn't want to use the spacetime seal lightly.

The free falling sensation ended in just a few breath's time. The crowd had all ended up in a sea of red misty fog. The red fog was the same exact color as the bloody mist surrounding Sir Miao when he transformed into a demon. However, this patch was even thicker and felt even more eerie and sinister.

Sir Miao's transformation had given others only an uncomfortable feeling, but this sea of red mist sent chills down everyone's spine. The vortex disappeared after everyone had been deposited into the fog. The crowd regained their movements soon after its disappearance.

Those who didn't cultivate eye techniques couldn't see further than three meters in the fog. Those who did couldn't see any further than thirty. Even though Jiang Chen had cultivated both the God's Eye and Evil Golden Eye, he could only see at most a hundred meters in front of him without exerting himself to the utmost. If he did, he could double the range and see two hundred meters in front of him.

However, only a further blanket of bloody fog was revealed to him. There was no signs of life, buildings, or even a single piece of vegetation. It was as though they'd fallen into a barren sea of mist. Jiang Chen was quite alarmed, but after observing with his consciousness, he immediately realized that they were inside a formation. This made sense. There was no way they'd suddenly be teleported into a place filled with only red mist and nothing else within two hundred meters.

We're definitely inside a formation and the Veranda master is absolutely behind this frightening fog. His hand tightened around the spacetime again. The seal could teleport him out of even the most powerful of formations.

However, Jiang Chen didn't intend to leave. He wanted that earth attribute treasure. The powerful giant rock formation and earth pulses were a clear indication that the treasure was nearby. But where exactly was it?

He probed around, but no matter how hard he pushed his consciousness, all he could see was a blanket of crimson mist. After further observation, he was even more certain that they were inside a formation. To locate the treasure, he'd have to crack the scarlet fog first.

Jiang Chen was in a difficult situation. He was confident that he could escape, but deciphering the formation while searching for the treasure was a different situation altogether. It seems like obtaining the treasure isn't going to be easy. But going home empty handed and also allowing the demon lord to

reawaken is going to leave a bitter taste in my mouth. The greatest treasures are typically fraught with danger! It'll be risky, but I must obtain that treasure. He made up his mind in this instant

The giant stone formation had crushed a number of cultivators, but those happened to be the weakest ones. A majority of the emperor realm cultivators had been sucked into the crimson fog. Fortunately, the mist hadn't completely separated them. The cultivators began to call and shout for allies. Desperate times called for unity.

"Imperial Prince Zhao, we really were tricked!" Old Zhang exclaimed solemnly.

The prince snorted coldly. "The Veranda master's appetite too big for his own good. Does he really think that he can defeat us with this puny red mist?"

Old Zhang sighed. "The fog is everywhere and spans far beyond what the eye can see. I've scouted the surrounding area and failed to find the border. This subordinate suspects that we're trapped in a formation."

"No need for suspicions. We're definitely trapped in a formation." Prince Zhao had a very keen eye. He'd noticed the peculiarity of the red mist with just a glance.

"What can the Veranda master be planning? Isn't he a Great Scarlet citizen as well? What could he possibly stand to gain by capturing all of us?" Old Zhang was perplexed.

Imperial Prince Zhao flew into a rage. "Who the hell knows? Maybe he covets the throne and the entire region?"

Ambitious lunatics like these were a relatively common sight in the martial dao world. For the sake of their ambitions, they were willing to do things that outsiders might deem crazy or ludicrous. The prince had no doubt that the Veranda master was one of those men.

"Your Highness, what should we do?" another royal subordinate asked.

The prince furrowed his brows. "No need for panic. This crimson fog isn't lethal. The Veranda master is using it to wear away at our morale. Don't be frantic and defeat yourself with fear. Remember! As long as we don't panic, the Veranda master will not be able to catch us by surprise!"

"Mm! Everyone listen to the imperial prince's orders. Group up into a team of three to five. Those of the same sect should band together and form a defensive line! As long as we remain vigilant, the Veranda master will not be able to break through our lines! We can afford to play the waiting game, but he might not be able to!" Old Zhang yelled loudly.

"Hahahaha..." An eerie laughter suddenly echoed through the air. "Is that Old Zhang? The older you get, the more naive you become."

Many instantly recognized the owner of the voice.

"It's the Veranda master!"

Old Zhang's eyebrow twitched when he heard the voice. "Master of the Veranda! We're all citizens of the Great Scarlet Region! Don't you feel ashamed for scheming against your countrymen?!"

Jiang Chen shook his head. The old man's naivety was truly growing as he aged. The Veranda master's intent was as clear as day. What was the point of sprouting all this idealistic bullshit now?

The Veranda master's voice seemed to originate from all sides. "Scheming against my countrymen? How could I have succeeded if not for your own greed? Every single one of you is full of it. You wanted to plot against me, but your feeble minds are too simple. You've simply fallen into my trap because of your own inadequacy."

The Veranda master was right. They had both been scheming against one another. Old Zhang was supposed to serve his employer, but he was a royal representative in the end. The Veranda master had been farsighted enough to have ploys within his schemes so that he could trap the entire group.

He'd feigned a cultivation breakthrough and released subtle hints to let everyone know that he here to unearth a priceless treasure. The crowd had been so consumed by greed that it was already too late when they realized that it was all a trap.

The imperial prince snorted coldly. "Cui! You're a well-respected figure in Great Scarlet! When has the royal family ever mistreated you? If it weren't for our support, do you really think that the Resplendent Emerald Veranda could become as prosperous and influential as it is today? Instead of being thankful, how dare you bite the hands that feed you? Have you no shame?!"

"Shame?" The Veranda master burst into laughter. "Why should I? Did the Yan emperor feel shame when he forced my younger sister to warm his bed? Was he ashamed after sleeping with both my sister and my daughter? Did he feel shame for summoning me to the palace for drinks after doing all that? Imperial Prince Shao, does your family really think they're superior beings and are born to reign over others?!" He grew increasingly furious as he spoke.

The crowd went completely silent. This information was known to many, but many had also thought that the Veranda master had been a willing party in all of it. Giving one's sister and daughter to royalty was a good way to curry favor. But now it seemed like he'd never been a willing party in any of it?

The prince's face darkened. "Cui! My royal brother is the emperor of the Great Scarlet! His right to rule was given to him by the gods! You've sacrificed a lot to royalty, but you've received your current wealth and status in return! You're much too foolish if this is the sole reason behind your betrayal. There's no guarantee that you'll succeed, and even if you do, you'll become a public enemy in the region afterwards. Do you think you can live a good life even after succeeding?"

The Veranda master snorted coldly. "So what? The Great Scarlet has plenty of public enemies. A genius from the backwater Myriad Domain threw the entire region into chaos years ago. He killed o many fourth rank sect heads and gifted their heads to the palace, but was any retribution forthcoming? You've not harmed even a single hair on his body after so many years! Imperial Prince Zhao, the Great Scarlet has long been ruined by the Yan clan. It's time to your family to give up the limelight!"

His voice was filled with boiling rage and didn't even contain an ounce of respect for royalty.

The crowd stood with their mouths agape, except for Prince Zhao. The Veranda master wasn't just plotting against the present crowd. His goal was to topple the monarchy and gain control of the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region! His appetite was clearly insatiable!

Could he really topple the Yan clan that had governed the Great Scarlet for over ten thousand years? Prince Zhao flew into a rage. These blasphemous words were hated by all royalty.

“Cui! Your ambition is bigger than I could’ve ever thought! Why don’t you take a piss and take a look at yourself first? Do you really think that you can overthrow the Yan monarchy by your own meager self?!”

The Veranda master answered coldly. “The Great Scarlet is already as good as mine. Unfortunately, you won’t be here to see it.”

Prince Zhao snorted coldly. “How conceited! I sure look forward to seeing how much weight is behind your nonsense!”

Chapter 1158: Hagglng

Imperial Prince Zhao far surpassed the Veranda master in martial prowess. Even though the latter had the initiative, the prince staunchly believed that things were still undecided. That advantage plus a few of his trademark treasures could very well be enough to turn the tables. At least to him, he was far from being at the end of his line. So what if the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master had succeeded in his plot against them?

For that plot to come to complete fruition, the Veranda master needed sufficient strength to back it up. As long as the prince had the upper hand on that front, he was unafraid of any plot from his adversary, no matter how dastardly.

While Prince Zhao and the Veranda master duked it out verbally, Jiang Chen roamed some more within the bounds of the formation. His goal was the earth attribute treasure found somewhere within. He didn’t much care about the fight between the prince and the Veranda master.

However, being trapped within the formation of fog was a death sentence for Imperial Prince Zhao and company. The master of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda suddenly cackled ominously.

“Don’t look around like that, brat! I never thought that you would create the only chink in the curtain of my perfect plan.”

Everyone was confounded by the sudden declaration. They didn’t quite understand why the Veranda master had made such a baseless comment.

Only Jiang Chen knew that he was the target. Laughing softly, he responded with indifference. “I’m impressed with your ambition, Cui, and also your cunning. But have you considered that our current differences are completely reconcilable?”

Jiang Chen’s words shocked the audience once more. Even Imperial Prince Zhao didn’t know what to say. He deployed an eye ability with utmost force in the youth’s direction, struggling to confirm whether the new speaker really was his subordinate ‘Little Chen’.

Ole Zhang was just as confused as the prince. “What are you talking about, Little Chen?”

“I’m not really him,” Jiang Chen smiled faintly. “The real ‘Little Chen’ is already dead.”

“Really?” Old Zhang blinked. “Who are you, then?”

The prince's brow furrowed. "Kid, you dare lay a hand on a servant of the royal family?!"

"Royal family, hmm?" Jiang Chen's detached tone continued. "Is that something impressive or important? If that's so, why are you locked up here like a homeless mutt?"

Prince Zhao was almost angry enough to cough up blood. "You! Good, good, very good! I didn't know so many geniuses lived in the Great Scarlet Mid Region. First the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master, and now you. You're an oddball, alright. Identify yourself, kid!"

"Rather than being interested in who I am, maybe you should pay some more attention to yourself," Jiang Chen grinned mockingly. "I reminded you earlier out of the kindness of my heart. I told you not to fall for the Veranda master's stratagem. But you didn't listen to me, did you? My betrayal here should be unsurprising."

Prince Zhao's face was as dark as the night sky, his ugly expression a sight to behold. It was true, there had been a reminder earlier. He simply hadn't taken the warning seriously. The treasure had been their top priority at the time. He hadn't expected the Veranda master to show up so quickly.

"Friend," Ole Zhang replied hurriedly, "it doesn't matter whether you're Little Chen or not anymore. We should be on the same side right now. The Veranda master won't let us escape, but that is true for you as well."

Smiling still, Jiang Chen glanced towards the aforementioned man. "Let's see what the Veranda master himself has to say about it."

"Are you trying to strike a compromise, kid?" The Veranda master grinned in his own bizarre way. "You robbed me of my woman and ruined the most important part of my blood sacrifice. Do you think you have the right to talk to me like this?"

"I don't think I can force you to actually forgive me, but I certainly can force you to compromise," Jiang Chen said coolly.

"Oh?" The Veranda master's grin widened.

"I'll start killing everyone in here. Each casualty means that your sacrifice has a higher probability of failing. If I finish my task, then your ritual will be done for. You can say goodbye to your plans of summoning the demon great emperor!" Jiang Chen's countenance was cheerful as he said this, but his tone rang dread through his listeners' hearts.

The Veranda master was stunned. The emperor he was trying to awaken was in a crucial period within the altar. He couldn't yet consume flesh and blood with a physical body. If the young man went on a killing spree now... it was possible for him to eliminate all sources of food for the demon emperor!

The Veranda master had prepared eighty-one pure yin female cultivators to fuel the blood sacrifice. Through a specific ceremony, the demon emperor could use them to struggle free of his restrictions.

Wei Xing'er's time of birth and bloodline potential had perfectly matched the blood sacrifice's criteria. She had been one of the most key components of the sacrificial process. Without her, the ritual could only unleash a third of its intended effects.

That was the reason the Resplendent Emerald Veranda master had sent the four wandering cultivators to cut Jiang Chen off. Thankfully, the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape ability had been too fast for them. When the quartet caught up, Wei Xing'er was long gone.

The Veranda master didn't even close off the formation in time. Without her, the sacrifice was significantly less powerful. If not for the fact that the ancient restrictions had already loosened considerably, a thirty-percent ritual would've been nowhere near the amount of needed energy to wake the demon emperor.

However, with an incomplete blood sacrifice, the demon emperor would take much longer to recuperate. Because of that, he needed more food to hasten his recovery. With enough food, the demon great emperor could just as easily return to peak performance. As the heir to the emperor, the Veranda master's status would rapidly rise as a result. His goal was control of the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region. He wanted to act as the demon emperor's agent, and rule with an iron fist of expansionism.

Lofty ambitions for a pitiful man.

His plans were also close to flawless. He had played the entire Great Scarlet Mid Region for fools. However, no amount of calculation could've prepared him for Jiang Chen's appearance out of the blue. A crucial segment of the plan had been broken. The Veranda master hated Great Scarlet Empire's ruling family, but he hated the outrageous Jiang Chen just as much. He wanted to feast on the entrails of both parties.

The conversation took place as if no one else was present. Prince Zhao was furious at being ignored.

"Master of the Veranda, it's truly incredible that you'd sell yourself out to demons! You've made yourself a public enemy to the human race. Friends, the remnants of the demon race are making a comeback, and our lives are on the line. Are you going to sit still and wait to be slaughtered, or are you with me to kill the monster in front of us once and for all?!"

As an experienced and world-wise man, Imperial Prince Zhao knew how important it was for everyone to stand in solidarity in a time of trouble such as today. Their deaths were insignificant when compared to the range of devastation the Veranda master could unleash upon the rest of the world. He'd probably start with the royal family first after killing them all. Prince Zhao absolutely did not want that to happen.

The three sects' personnel no longer seemed to care about the treasure any more. All of them gathered in front of the prince, making their thoughts known. "Your Highness, we shall weather this trouble together!"

"That's right! A monster who's sold himself to the demons deserves hostility from everyone!"

"As supporters of the royal family, we're behind your demon-slaying efforts all the way!"

The determined attitude of the vast majority present reassured Prince Zhao a fair bit. There were so many emperor realm cultivators here. If everyone worked in unity, then they could overcome any challenge! Most people now stood by the prince. Only a hesitant few hadn't yet made the decision. Jiang Chen was the defiant exception.

Ole Zhang sighed, his eyes turning towards the noticeable outlier. "Friend, I'm sure you've known the Veranda master's defection to the demon race for a long time. Are you still willing to cooperate with

him, knowing that? Right now, it doesn't matter whether you killed Little Chen or not. We human cultivators should stick together and fight our common demon foe."

The old man had a keen eye and a sensitive grasp on the situation. He had perceived that the young man here was perhaps more useful than everyone else combined. Though he didn't know where this 'Little Chen' impostor had come from, this stranger had just played a key part in ruining part of the Veranda master's blood sacrifice. It was evident from that that the young man had a unique method of dealing with demons. Even the Veranda master was wary of him.

If a man like that wasn't on their side... no, worse, if he was allowed to go to the Veranda master's... there was no telling the consequences!

The prince harrumphed softly, but didn't cut the old man off. He had noticed the same thing. This mysterious challenger was the key to victory today. Ensuring his neutrality was the bare minimum they needed to accomplish.

"Friend, this prince guarantees that if you stand with us, you will be absolved of anything you've done. I won't press you on whether you killed Little Chen or not. It's clear from the Veranda master's betrayal of his race that he has no principles to speak of. It is dangerous to work with him. Perhaps he will start on you after he deals with us!"

"That's right, friend. I think you should make a sound-minded decision. The demons' malevolence has been infamous since ancient times. If you collaborate with them, you'll be a criminal for all of history!"

"His Highness is right. Do you expect a man who conspires with demons to honor his word?"

Everyone knew that the Veranda master's enmity had no solution. Since he'd submitted to the demon race, they could only be mortal enemies hereafter. But this enigmatic cultivator seemed to hold plenty of animosity for the Veranda master. Moreover, the latter exercised caution around him. There was every advantage to having a guy like that on their side.

If these people had been from literally anywhere else, Jiang Chen would've joined up without hesitation. However, Great Scarlet Mid Region was an important exception. He hated and was wary of demons, but that didn't mean he could lay down his old grudges and work with anyone from that region. His heart wouldn't let him. He didn't care for it one bit.

Glancing emotionlessly at the prince, Jiang Chen's voice was as deadpan as his appearance. "Rather than sparing the time to worry about me, you should think how you're going to break through this formation. When the demon emperor wakes up, you're only going to be food for him. If you really are as noble as you say, then the best way to show it is to kill yourselves. Show your devotion to your race! Otherwise, you'll be shameful morsels of contribution towards the demon emperor's revival. You'll only be enabling the demon emperor with your cowardice and stupidity!"

Chapter 1159: Skyclearer Talisman

Jiang Chen's tone was taunting because he knew that these people would never commit suicide, even at death's door. They might say that they fought for the greater good of mankind, but that was just a meaningless motto. Some might not even resist temptation and would surrender to the demons when they were forced to choose between life or death.

Naturally, Jiang Chen's words resulted in much shock and hostility. The demon race might be detestable, but this young man and his provocative tone was completely unlikeable as well.

"Don't be stupid! Prince Zhao wants to recruit you because he thinks highly of your abilities. Do you really think we'll be dead just because you aren't on our side?"

"Yeah, your cultivation is weak and you don't look like a master. Why don't you take a look at yourself first before you run your mouth!"

Old Zhang let out a long sigh. His expression was both ugly and regretful, but he didn't try to persuade Jiang Chen any longer. He didn't know why the young man refused to join them despite the danger they were in. There had to be a reason behind the rejection, but Old Zhang wasn't equipped with the knowledge to guess it. Maybe this person was the same as the Veranda master. Maybe the Great Scarlet royal family had once offended him.

The Veranda master cackled oddly as he stared at Jiang Chen. "You have a sharp tongue alright, but do you really think you are different from them?"

Jiang Chen replied indifferently. "Even if I'm the same as them, it isn't beyond my ability to destroy your ritual sacrifice. The ritual hadn't begun when I left the altar. That means the demon emperor is still a ways from awakening. This is more than enough time for me to kill a lot of people."

The situation instantly turned into a standoff between three factions. The Veranda master and his demon backers represented one faction, Jiang Chen himself represented the second, and the rest of the people represented the third. However, those who represented the third faction might fall apart and flock to the Veranda master at any moment.

Surprisingly, the one thing the Veranda master was most afraid of was Jiang Chen taking too many lives before the ritual began. But on the other hand, he didn't believe that Jiang Chen was that capable, or that the others would let him slaughter them without resistance.

In addition, he had another trump card in the form of this bloody fog. The red colored mist was evaporated demonic clouds. Although it wasn't as corrosive as the demonic clouds, anyone exposed to the crimson mist for a prolonged period of time would eventually suffer the same effects. By the time they noticed it, it would already be too late.

This was why the Veranda master had dared show himself openly despite their numbers. He thought that victory was well within grasp already. He hadn't watched the battle between Jiang Chen and Sir Miao and naturally wasn't aware that Jiang Chen was an exception immune to the demonic clouds.

His mind flew rapidly through various thoughts. "Kid, I admit that you're devious, but you're nothing more but a piece of meat on the chopping block right now. Even if you succeed in causing some damage, you still won't be able to stop the demon emperor from rising. However... if you're sincere, I can consider giving you an opportunity to join us."

Expressions on Imperial Prince Zhao's side changed drastically when they heard this. They hadn't thought it possible for the two men to come to an agreement!

Old Zhang broke his silence and cried out, "Friend, even if you refuse to stand with the prince, you absolutely mustn't join hands with the demon race!"

But Jiang Chen ignored him and answered with a smile, "Oh no, it's not you giving me an opportunity. This is a fair trade. Get it?"

"Fair trade? Do you really believe you are in a position to trade fairly with me?" The Veranda master declared arrogantly.

Jiang Chen was impressed. The Veranda master was a master actor alright. He knew that the Veranda master would never compromise, but was still playing along anyways to buy time and lull Jiang Chen into lowering his guard. Jiang Chen didn't expose the plot. "You may think so now, but the truth will quickly change your mind."

In truth, he was also buying time for himself. He wasn't unaware that the Veranda master's short term goal was to delay things as much as possible. The Veranda master's trump card was without a doubt the red mist around them. The others might not recognize it, but he did.

The bloody fog was the demonic clouds, but in a different form. The difference between the two was that the mist appeared harmless at first glance, but was surely just as corrosive because it was just another form. If the demonic cloud was a murder weapon, then the red mist was the pot that slowly cooked its prey alive. By the time the prey realized it was being cooked, it would already be too late. The Veranda master was buying time for his scheme to work, but Jiang Chen was doing the exact same thing.

For a time, the atmosphere felt absolutely oppressive. At this point, Jiang Chen could not be bothered to warn these people about the danger they were literally breathing in because they would all die. The only difference was whether they were sacrificed by the Veranda master or killed by him.

Time passed slowly.

Someone on Prince Zhao's side finally lost his cool as the minutes ticked by little by little. Patently, the cultivator with the poorest mental fortitude was the first one to break.

"Your Highness, we can't just keep waiting like this." Someone suggested.

Prince Zhao wasn't a fool. He also knew that certain death awaited them if they continued to do nothing.

"What do you think, Old Zhang?" Prince Zhao asked the elder next to him.

Old Zhang pondered for a moment before answering. "The Veranda master is certainly buying time for something. In my opinion, there is nothing worse than waiting until the demon emperor awakens. None of us will be able to escape when the worst happens."

"So you're suggesting that we break through this formation?" Prince Zhao asked.

"We have to. Even if we are to die in the process, it is still a better fate than being devoured by the demon emperor."

Old Zhang was admittedly one of the few people in this group who hadn't lost his conscience completely. However, it was only because the human race and demon race held deep prejudices against one another. There was no telling if he would do the same thing in a wholly different matter.

The three great sects also spoke up. "Imperial Prince Zhao, we have come to a decision. We agree that we must get out of this formation. Please give us the order."

"Yeah, please give us the order, Your Highness!"

The Veranda master sneered sinisterly. "You want to break out of this formation, don't you? But do you really think that this formation of infinite boundary is so easy to escape?"

He wasn't underestimating his opponents, he just knew that this formation was unbelievably powerful. Even a great emperor would be hard pressed to find any clues in here, much less these people. Moreover, the master knew these people very well. None of them were even qualified to find a corner of the formation, much less break out of it.

The Boundless Fog Formation wasn't qualify as a top rank killing formation, but it was a top rank trap formation. The formation itself hardly had much offensive power, but its ability to entrap people ranked amongst the best. As its name might suggest, the Boundless Fog Formation was an infinite world. There were mist everywhere, and it seemed there was no end in sight.

Of course, the sea of mist wasn't nearly as boundless as its name might suggest. It was just a spatial effect of the formation that made those trapped inside feel like the formation had no end.

Many years ago, there had been a great cultivator of the three realms who'd managed to refine an spatial art centered around his palm. As a result, he was able to toy with a great demon sage and literally prevent it from escaping his palm, no matter what the great demon sage tried.

The truth behind the great cultivator's infinitely vast palm technique was an extremely high level spatial manipulation technique. He had created a boundless space within a formation that tricked its prey into thinking that the world had no end. Had the great demon sage been able to find a flaw in the formation, the effect would've failed instantly.

This Boundless Fog Formation was undoubtedly incomparable to that great cultivator's technique. However, it did utilize some similar concepts.

Imperial Prince Zhao's people didn't think that deeply about things. They only knew that this was a fight for their lives, and that the price of failure was death. If they couldn't escape before the demon emperor arrived, they wouldn't even be left with a corpse in the end.

The group split into four smaller groups under Prince Zhao's command. They set their sights in four different directions and did everything in their power to try and break through the formation. It was part of their agreement to work together no matter what obstacle they faced.

North, south, east and west were the four directions these four smaller groups charged towards wildly. A moment later, everyone suddenly sensed some enemies right ahead of them. They hurriedly raised their arms and attacked in full force.

Bang bang bang! Attacks clashed furiously against one another inside the crimson fog, followed by a series of dull groans.

"No, wait, I think they're our own people!"

"Ah? Is that Elder Gao?"

“Why did you attack without checking first, Elder Zhang?”

They yelled and hollered at each other. At this point, they’d all noticed that the ‘enemies’ were their own people. Somehow, the four groups had run into each other.

“How was this possible? We advanced down four different directions and moved in a straight line. None of us strayed off the right path either, so how on earth did we run into each other?”

Luckily for them, no one had died during the torrent of attacks. It was the best they could hope for in this situation. Prince Zhao’s expression turned even uglier. Not only did this formation seemed to have no boundaries, they somehow ran into each other after progressing for some time. This was just too bizarre.

“Your Highness, this doesn’t look good.” Old Zhang looked very dejected. “This formation looks simple at first glance, but it employs a surprisingly high level spatial technique. If we can’t find a flaw in this formation, then we will never be able to break out with brute force.”

Prince Zhao looked like he had suddenly figured out something. He nodded once, and an earthen brown, ancient talisman suddenly appeared in his palm.

“Ai, I suppose I have no choice but to use this ancient talisman.”

Old Zhang was stunned when he saw the talisman. “Your Highness, is that the famed Skyclearer Talisman gifted to you by the royal forefather himself?”

The Skyclearer Talisman? Jiang Chen was a bit moved when he heard this. To his knowledge, the Skyclearer Talisman was an incredibly useful item.

More specifically, the Skyclearer Talisman was wonderfully good at breaking formations. As long as the formation in question wasn’t of the unparalleled kind, it could discover and attack the eye of a formation immediately, thus breaking it. This talisman was without a doubt an ancient talisman. No current talisman makers would be able to create it.

Chapter 1160: Great Losses on Both Sides

Everyone’s spirits lifted when Prince Zhao took out his Skyclearer Talisman. The mass of cultivators started gathering around the prince. Those from the three third rank sects, the rest from the fourth rank sects, and the royal representatives—all acted with one mind. Even the wandering cultivators began to edge closer. They wanted to ride the prince’s coattails out of this mess.

His face black, the prince issued a command to Ole Zhang and those from the three third rank sects. “Cut down every man who showed hesitation. I’m not interested in taking those fence-sitters out with me.”

As soon as Prince Zhao gave his orders, Ole Zhang and the experts from the third ranks sprang into motion. Like tigers hunting down sheep, they pounced upon the group of stragglers on the outside.

Their targets were utterly shocked. They never thought that the prince would attack them. The people who had showed hesitation were relatively few in number. They were either wandering cultivators or visitors from outside the region, possessing no advantage in numbers or raw strength. There was no time for them to react at all before several were cut down in the ferocious attack.

The fewer prey there was, the easier it was to clean them up. It didn't take long at all for the situation to devolve into a five-against-one or worse for the defending side. In only a few moments, those who had taken too long to consider where to stand were all cleaned out.

Jiang Chen watched them from the sidelines. When he saw the stirrings of internal strife, he cleared an even larger distance from the group. He wasn't scared of them turning on him, but a healthy caution was always advisable.

As expected, Imperial Prince Zhao turned his attention to Jiang Chen shortly thereafter. His fierce gaze belied the murderous intent he had towards the person who'd kept singing a different tune.

Jiang Chen was impassive. He read the cruelty in the prince's eyes plainly. His sole response was to focus inwards, quieting his breath. Prince Zhao was made angrier by the young man's indifference. "Kill that brat as well."

"...my prince," Ole Zhang advised hesitantly. "Time is of the essence. We should break through this formation right away. When the demon emperor wakes up, it will be too late."

"If we all attack at once, we can take him out instantly!" the prince roared. "As long as he lives, my anger will not be abated."

Ole Zhang was at an impasse. He was a wily old man and instinctively sensed the difficulty in dealing with the mysterious young cultivator. The fence-sitters had been easy targets, but this youth was assuredly ten times harder... or more. The young cultivator's speed alone was unlike anything they could imitate. Plus, they were still within a dangerous formation. The longer they delayed, the riskier it was.

"Come on then, Prince Zhao, if you're looking for a fight," Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "But I can guarantee that you'll die before I do."

Imperial Prince Zhao could scarcely contain himself at the provocation. "Everybody, forward! Wipe him out! Anyone who does will receive a personally petitioned reward from the emperor!"

The master of the Resplendent Emerald Veranda had been observing the situation from the formation's exterior all this time. He'd braced himself when Prince Zhao produced his Skyclearer Talisman.

The corrosion from the fog required a little longer to affect its targets. If Prince Zhao used the talisman right this moment, then the formation could very well be broken. His prey escaping was a tangible possibility. Though there were more powerful formations further out, the demon emperor would find a hard time finding his food after they departed this sea of mist.

After all, it was far more spacious outside these boundaries. For a recently-awakened demon emperor, it was a hundred times harder to hunt all of them down within such a vast territory, compared to simply plucking them out of this foggy ocean.

Most importantly, the Veranda master didn't want to fail the demon emperor multiple times. He wanted to maintain a good impression before his master. Their infighting was excellent news for him. If they fought a vicious battle here, the blood mist's corroding effects would be sped up significantly.

Once it fully took place on its unsuspecting victims, none of them would be able to leave any longer. Even if the formation were broken, they wouldn't be able to move at all. The demon emperor's food would be safe.

Thus, the Veranda master had no intention of interfering with the group's dissension. Though he thought the death of a couple of cultivators was unfortunate, it was no great loss compared to the remainder of Great Scarlet Mid Region's powerhouses. The ones left were more important.

Jiang Chen shared the same line of thought as the Veranda master. He was also waiting for the bloody mist's corrosion to take place. When Prince Zhao issued the command to attack him, the death knell had also tolled on everyone here.

Jiang Chen had no interest in engaging with the walking dead. Instead, he used his Kunpeng Meteoric Escape ability to run circles around them. Even Prince Zhao could not match Jiang Chen's speed, much less anyone else.

Despite their absolute advantage in numbers, they couldn't catch up to Jiang Chen to attack him. In the sea of mists, it was very hard to keep up a persistent assault. Outside the formation, the Veranda watched on at Jiang Chen's ghostly speed with dropped jaw.

"Where did this kid come from? Why is his agility so absurd?" As a man who'd seen a great deal, the Veranda master was certain that he had never witnessed such a thing before. In fact, he hadn't heard of such skill being possible. "I'm glad that those dogs are eating each other. The fog will take care of them in their fatigue. The demon emperor will be pleased with the docility of his food!"

The Veranda master was the calmest one present. He could almost taste the victory to this spectacle.

Seeing that pursuing Jiang Chen was fruitless, Ole Zhang wanted to try dissuading the prince some more. But he swallowed the words on the tip of his tongue; Prince Zhao, red in the eyes, had joined the fray himself.

Ole Zhang knew the prince's temper well. Entering the melee personally meant that his anger had reached a boiling point. The only people that he would listen to now were the imperial family's ancestor and the emperor himself. Anyone else who tried would only further upset him.

Helpless against the predicament, the elder could only half-heartedly keep up the barrage. If it was up to him, he wouldn't waste another moment on this pointless endeavor. Each minute, each second, could mean the difference between life and death. Burning away precious opportunity like this was unwise.

Jiang Chen used no force at all. He relied only on his speed to play with the cultivators on his tail. Fighting several dozen cultivators head on was senseless and dumb. The scarlet fog did nothing to him whatsoever, but took an increasingly greater toll on the crowd behind him the more they used their cultivation.

Fifteen minutes wouldn't ordinarily be considered a long time, but it was dragged out by the situation at hand. Despite pursuing Jiang Chen for that long, the group of cultivators behind him didn't touch a hair on the young man's body. Prince Zhao was enraged.

"Kid!" He hissed shrilly. "If you have a spine at all, then stop running! Is your toughness limited to your talk? Do you only know how to run, and not how to fight?"

"Is your head on right?" Jiang Chen jeered. "I'm alone, and you have a few dozen with you. You're calling that a real fight?"

"...kill him!" The prince grit his teeth.

It was at this moment that several experts from fourth rank sects began to shake. Their faces looked rather ill. "What's happening?" One of them shrieked suddenly.

"This isn't good. There's something wrong with my consciousness!"

"Why can't I use spirit energy?"

"Aah! Someone's poisoned me! My consciousness has been invaded as well!" One after another, cultivators began to report their indisposition.

Jiang Chen's heart shook. Finally, the poison's effects had begun to take place.

One, two, three. The cultivators dropped like flies, as if a plaguing wave had just passed through them. It spread to those from third rank sects, then the imperial representatives as well.

Ole Zhang looked extremely disquieted. "Your Highness, something's wrong. My consciousness has also been invaded by a strange force."

Prince Zhao harrumphed, but his face reddened as he was about to comment.

"How could this be?" He examined his own consciousness. There was something terrifying within. Discovery of the oddity led to the discovery that he had no strength left whatsoever.

"This mist is toxic!" Ole Zhang was the first to make that observation.

Prince Zhao looked disgusted. He was rapidly being sapped of his strength. No matter how he pushed his hidden reservoirs, his body would not respond. He wanted to use the Skyclearer Talisman in his hand, but he couldn't. The archaic talisman reacted to him not at all.

Prince Zhao's face really and truly blanched this time. He knew that he was done for. A flash of regret passed through his mind. If he had listened to Ole Zhang's advice, maybe... Too bad there was no medicine in the world for regret.

Seeing that the time had come, Jiang Chen feigned his own collapse as well, remembering to berate the prince as he did so. "Prince Zhao, you stupid idiot! You're happy with a mutual loss, are you?"

"I thought you wanted to join up with the demons, kid?" The prince fired back. "How come you're down too? Aren't you some hot shot, eh? Why don't you keep talking?! Keep talking!"

Jiang Chen was at a loss for words. Prince Zhao was a stubborn fool.

The Veranda master cackled when he saw the cultivators drop one by one. "Good, good, good. I didn't expect things to go this smoothly. You fools! Fighting amongst yourselves brought you to your demise. Even the heavens have come to my aid."

When Imperial Prince Zhao had taken out the Skyclearer Talisman, it had made the Veranda master rather wary. Therefore, he was very thankful for the prince's incompetence. Without that specific imbecile, his plans wouldn't have so easily come to fruition.

The Veranda master was in a really good mood. As reaper of the harvest, as a trapper collecting his spoils, he could finally enjoy toying with his prey. He shut off the formation, causing the crimson fog to disperse into nothingness.

It was no longer needed. Everyone here had already been poisoned and were essentially fish in a barrel. Even if the Veranda master stood around and did nothing, they wouldn't have the strength to come kill him.