

Three Realms 1181

Chapter 1181: A General Summons

Jiang Chen had interacted with this woman before. At the time, he had visited Plumscore Retreat and met a young girl called “Nian’er”. The girl had left a deep impression on him even to this day. He didn’t know why, but she felt naturally familiar to him. It was an extremely peculiar feeling. It was why Jiang Chen immediately recalled his trip to Plumscore Retreat after he heard the monarch’s cool voice.

Huang’er smiled when she heard Plumscore Monarch’s complaint. “You are right, Plumscore Monarch. However, young lord Zhen rose to fame at a young age, so his foundation is still weak. He travels here and there to solidify his foundations and proclaim to the entire human domain that a person like him exists in Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Speaking of which, didn’t young lord Zhen spread his fame throughout the northern human domain and humiliate Pillfire City when he visited Tilted Moon Region some time ago?”

Huang’er disliked speaking in a hasty and harsh manner. Even when she was defending a point, she would respond logically and unhurriedly while remaining utterly calm. Her noble bearing was extraordinary and something unable to be learned. It was a natural quality she was born with.

Plumscore Monarch was still slightly unhappy. “I’m not saying he can’t go anywhere he wants. He’s the young lord, and his feet are his. Naturally, he has the right to go wherever he wants to. However, he has to have a sense of priority. Veluriyam Capital is in a tumultuous state at the moment and we need him here in order to set things right. Should we consider the possibility that he’s evading his responsibilities if he doesn’t return soon?”

Chronobalance Monarch chuckled. “Relax, relax, sister. Even I’m aware that our young lord isn’t a person like this. If he was afraid of the responsibility, he wouldn’t have volunteered himself during the pill battle against Pill King Ji Lang. Everything’s that happened during after the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering is also proof that he’s a responsible man.”

Plumscore Monarch snorted coldly. In truth she agreed with Chronobalance Monarch, but she was a hot-tempered woman and was also holding a grudge. The complaints had spilled out because she couldn’t hold them back any longer.

Huang’er had a solid grasp of Plumscore Monarch’s behavior herself, so she smiled instead of growing angry. “It’s true that things are a bit strange right now, but the sky hasn’t fallen in yet, has it?”

Plumscore Monarch’s lips moved wordlessly and her expression conveyed her distress clearly. In the end, she simply let out a long sigh and fumed silently.

Suddenly, Wildfox Monarch broke his long silence and spoke with a feminine tone. “We’re all very impressed with your ability to manage the young lord residence, Miss Huang’er. However, I don’t quite agree with your words. It’ll be too late when the sky really falls on our heads. Veluriyam Capital has remained as stable as it was because Emperor Peafowl was around. But now that he isn’t, if another person is to take over, the young lord and Sacred Peafowl Mountain will certainly become the first to fall in the line of fire.”

It was no false warning. Although Wildfox Monarch hadn't pointed fingers at Emperor Shura directly, the meaning behind his words was quite clear. Young lord Zhen would be the first to be targeted once Emperor Shura gained control of Veluriyam Capital. The young lord was the only threat to Emperor Shura because Emperor Peafowl's arrangements indicated a clear preference for the young lord to rule.

Huang'er remained as calm as ever. "The young lord residence is new and few in terms of manpower. However, I hardly think that just anyone can take us apart."

There was a natural bearing and confidence in Huang'er's tone that made people trust her without question.

However, Cloudsoar Monarch sighed quietly. "Miss Huang'er, if the times are still the same as before, we wouldn't have arrived here together. The situation is much different this time."

"How so?" Huang'er smiled.

"Emperor Shura has successfully convinced the other great emperors to issue a general summons. This means that the thirteen great nations and eight hundred cities under Veluriyam Capital rule will arrive in half a month to discuss major events and the future of Veluriyam Capital." Cloudsoar Monarch sounded very conflicted. "The fact that the general summons was issued means that Emperor Shura has made all necessary preparations. The only thing left now is the final declaration."

"Do you mean that Emperor Shura is planning to announce himself as the new ruler of Veluriyam Capital?"

"He doesn't even have to. All he needs to do is manipulate the event, and people will automatically nominate him to be the new ruler of Veluriyam Capital. When that happens..." Cloudsoar Monarch was very grave.

"If all thirteen kings, eight hundred city lords, and various feudal vassals are to support him, Emperor Peafowl will literally become the only person who can overturn everything. Otherwise... it will be too late even if young lord Zhen returns." Cloudsoar Monarch decided to lay everything out.

Plumscore Monarch also added, "Miss Huang'er, I've always had a quick temper, but I've never look down on capable people either. Young lord Zhen is one such person, and I have high expectations of him. The situation is rather precarious right now, so if the young lord can come home to turn the tides and resolve our current crisis, I will swear to support him unswervingly. I'll fight anyone who dares challenge his rule to the death!"

She stood and looked at the other three monarchs. "Now, I have something else to do. Please continue the conversation without me."

Plumscore Monarch was as cold and proud as a lone plum in winter. A winter plum chooses to blossom only during winter and feels that it's beneath its stature to compete with the brightness of other flowers in the spring. Plumscore Monarch was a slightly anti-social person, but her promises carried enormous weight.

The other three monarchs didn't seem to be surprised by her sudden departure at all. They were very familiar with how she was.

Chronobalance Monarch also added, “Miss Huang’er, I am but a uncouth man. As Plumscore Monarch had said earlier, I will serve young lord Zhen unequivocally if he is able to resolve this crisis. Even if something really has happened to Emperor Peafowl, I will still support the young lord with all I have.”

Wildfox Monarch sighed. “I am so too. When the tree falls, the monkey scatter. None of us wishes to see the long, glorious legacy of Sacred Peafowl Mountain vanish into nothingness.”

In general, the four monarchs were of the same opinion. They were slightly disappointed at first that Emperor Peafowl had not selected a successor from within Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Later on, after witnessing Jiang Chen’s outstanding talents, they’d swallowed their discomfort and accepted his rise to power with an open heart. After all, Emperor Peafowl had never once groomed them as his successor. Most of the time, they played the role of a ruler’s assistant.

As members of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, they naturally didn’t want Emperor Shura to rise to power. Their preference wasn’t the only thing that was at stake here. Their lives were as well.

Emperor Shura cultivated the dao of Shura, so he was by nature a ruthless and cruel man. If he grasped power, he would assuredly start off his rule by eliminating his competition. Sacred Peafowl Mountain would become his target, and young lord Zhen the very first person he sent to the gallows. The four monarchs would undoubtedly fall under his wrath as well. That was why they were as concerned as they were.

Huang’er pondered for a moment. “I hear that the general summons of Veluriyam Capital can only be issued with the Progenitor Feather Medallion and the Progeny Feather Medallion, isn’t that right?”

Cloudsoar Monarch sighed quietly. “There is an exception to every rule. The seven great emperors of Veluriyam Capital have a different agreement where if four out of seven great emperors agree to issue the general summons, it can be done. The vassals must respond to the order issued, or they will be branded traitors.”

Huang’er was an outsider, so naturally she didn’t know about this clause. She finally understood how this came to be after listening to Cloudsoar Monarch’s explanation.

“Do you mean that four of the great emperors have agreed to issue the general summons?”

“It’s not just four, actually. Everyone except Emperor Void and Emperor Coiling Dragon has agreed to this.” Cloudsoar Monarch sounded a little depressed.

“I’m not surprised to hear Emperor Vastsea’s agreement since he’s a diehard supporter of Emperor Shura. But Emperor Petalpluck is a man who cares little for fame and profit and normally stays away from power struggles. Also, I remember that Emperor Mountaincrush’s relationship with Emperor Shura is ordinary at best. Why would he ever agree to this? Emperor Skysplitter is the second most inexperienced great emperor of Veluriyam Capital after Emperor Coiling Dragon. Did Emperor Shura persuade him too?” Huang’er knew a little about the great emperors of Veluriyam Capital.

“No one here knew exactly what kind of internal agreement they’ve arrived at, but the important thing is that five great emperors have agreed to issue the general summons. I saw it with my own eyes and confirmed that the signatures of all five great emperors are present.”

Emperor Peafowl's strength and vision were very great. He far surpassed the other great emperors. However, he wasn't without his flaws. His methods were never too forceful, or to put it in a different way, he was a gentleman who never demanded by force.

It wasn't that Emperor Peafowl was incapable of doing so, just that he didn't want to do it. He didn't want his forcefulness to stunt the growth of the other great emperors. In reality, he had been planning to choose one of the seven great emperors the successor of Veluriyam Capital. That was another reason why he never applied too much force when ruling.

Unfortunately, his fairness had indirectly nurtured their tempers. Had Emperor Peafowl really tried to cement his individual authority, these great emperors might not have dared to act as impudently as they did. This applied even to Emperor Shura.

Cloudsoar Monarch sighed again. "Miss Huang'er, the situation is precarious right now. If you can contact young lord Zhen, you must tell him to make preparations as soon as possible. We don't have much time left. At best, we have a month, and at worst we only have half a month. Once the Vassal Meeting begins, a new ruler will be chosen. It will be too late to turn things around then."

They had said all that needed to be said, so Cloudsoar Monarch and the other two rose to their feet and left soon after.

Watching the deeply worried monarchs depart, Jiang Chen strode out from his hiding spot with a very complicated look. He knew that a storm was about to strike Veluriyam Capital, and that his real test had finally arrived. Emperor Shura had already drawn his sword. It was time that Jiang Chen show his mettle as well.

Chapter 1182: The Two Great Emperors

The four monarchs had scarcely left before two emperors came to the young lord's residence. It was Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void. The situation in Veluriyam had made these two slightly restless as well.

"Miss Huang'er, please excuse our uninvited arrivals. Didn't young lord Zhen return home recently? Has he gone into seclusion or departed once more?" As someone who knew Jiang Chen quite well, Emperor Coiling Dragon found no need to hold his tongue.

Huang'er smiled slightly. "Your Majesties, please come with me."

Exchanging a look, the two emperors followed the girl inside. They came to a quiet place in a few moments.

"Your Majesties, how have you been?" Emerging from the shadows, Jiang Chen smiled with genuine affection.

"There you are, kiddo! I didn't expect you to be home." Emperor Coiling Dragon was stunned for only a second before he broke into a smile as well.

It was the same for Emperor Void, though his typically stoic expression showed only muted joy.

"To tell you the truth, I haven't been back long at all. I don't know very much about the happenings in the city recently, so it's not a good time for me to walk about in public." Jiang Chen was entirely truthful.

“Hmm, quite so. It is good for you to be cautious.” Emperor Coiling Dragon looked meaningfully about the young lord’s residence. “If my eyes don’t fail me, you’ve laid a very potent defensive formation around this place, correct?”

Jiang Chen half-smiled in tacit agreement. “You talked to me the last time I came back. I was worried, so I set up this formation as a precaution.”

“How well does it perform?” asked the emperor.

“Once it’s fully activated, even two or three great emperors working in conjunction would have some difficulty breaking through.”

“Oh?” Emperor Coiling Dragon’s eyes lit up. “Is the formation that sturdy?”

Jiang Chen nodded. “As long as the flow of energy to the formation is uninterrupted, there should be little problems with the barrier. It can withstand the attacks of multiple great emperors working together.”

Emperor Void’s eyes glittered as well. “To think that there was a formation as powerful as this... Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s caches of knowledge are truly deep.”

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, but didn’t explain further. The formation wasn’t Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s, but rather one of the ten formations of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect. In actuality, the Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation was only the formation’s first form. Its more advanced version was the Hundred Sparks Petalstorm Formation, a true empyrean rank formation that was several dozen times stronger than the Nine Sparks version.

The Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation had already cost Jiang Chen quite a pretty stone. There was no question that the Hundred Sparks one would be exponentially more expensive. Jiang Chen didn’t have nearly enough money to set up something of that scale.

Emperor Coiling Dragon slapped his thigh. “No wonder the young lord’s residence has remained so impassive for so long. You have this ridiculously strong trump card up your sleeve! Alright, alright. Daoist Void, it seems that we’re standing here worrying about nothing, hahaha. Perhaps our young lord Zhen of Sacred Peafowl Mountain already has a plan fully fleshed out.”

A glint of fire flashed across Emperor Void’s own eyes. He stared at Jiang Chen, his voice low. “Young lord Zhen, Emperor Shura found us a few days ago to demand that we send out the summons so that a discussion on the future of Veluriyam Capital can be held. Daoist Coiling Dragon and I vehemently opposed it, but... having received the support of the four other emperors, Emperor Shura was able to send it off without obstacle. The Vassal Meeting will take place in another half-month.”

The tradition of the Vassal Meeting had always been present here in the city. When Emperor Peafowl had been around, he rarely ordered one to be held without grave occasion. Sometimes, one wouldn’t be held in over several centuries.

After all, Veluriyam Capital held monstrously expansive territories, containing a daunting plethora of factions and sides. There were thirteen great nations alone, with just one of them equalling the size of the entire sixteen kingdom alliance. Besides these thirteen nations were eight hundred cities of varying

sizes, each with their own dedicated regions. All in all, the capital had holdings easily more than ten times that of the Myriad Domain. It was a humongous undertaking to summon everyone.

Additionally, the vassal medallions issued by the capital were different from the ones distributed to the dukes of the Eastern Kingdom. Anyone who received one here was a veritable giant in their local sphere, certainly noteworthy even if they came to the capital itself.

The kings of the thirteen nations naturally possessed the most important versions. The lords of the eight hundred cities were similarly eligible for the medallions, being handed ones of different ranks according to their strength.

Still, even the lowliest of medallions earned one remarkable honor and prestige. When the ruler of Veluriyam Capital sent out a summons, they all had the privilege and mandate to come together to discuss the affairs of the state. This was a duty that nobody could shirk.

Anyone who didn't come at the call of the medallions was branded as a traitor, and subject to punishment from the city's great emperors or even their peers.

Emperor Peafowl wasn't a man that enjoyed belaboring his people. During his rule, he never sent out the summons unless there was something vitally important. A meeting was never convened otherwise. Because the Vassal Meeting was so rarely held, it became a festive event whenever it did occur. There was greater jubilation than even the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering.

"I've heard about the Vassal Meeting already," mused Jiang Chen. "I'm just curious what gives Emperor Shura the confidence to convene it in the first place? Why is he so sure that His Majesty Peafowl won't come back for it?"

This was a mystifying fact for Jiang Chen and the two emperors alike.

"There are growing rumors in Veluriyam Capital that His Majesty was ganged up on by a group of demon experts and died in the aftermath." Emperor Coiling Dragon sounded frustrated. "Emperor Void and I have been trying to suppress these rumors in secret, but the person who is spreading them clearly has a more sinister purpose in mind. He has used a variety of channels to spread them everywhere across the city and its lands. The people are thoroughly afraid... creating a perfect opportunity to convene the Vassal Meeting."

"Emperor Shura is no longer content to hide his activities." Emperor Void was none too pleased, either.

Emperor Coiling Dragon looked fiercely at the young lord. "Young lord Zhen," encouraged the emperor, "we cannot investigate the safety of Emperor Peafowl at the moment. But Emperor Shura cannot be allowed to rule over Veluriyam Capital. I say this not because we are jealous, but rather because both Daoist Void and I know that once the city is in his hands, it will be unable to maintain its present glory. In fact, it is quite likely that it will head down a slippery slope of decline."

The emperors' judgments were both affected by Emperor Peafowl's impression of their ambitious peer.

Emperor Peafowl had considered simply allowing Emperor Shura to succeed him, but abandoned that idea in the end. At the end of the day, Emperor Shura was just not up to the task.

Jiang Chen nodded slightly. "Emperor Peafowl has mentioned that to me as well. Shura wants to call for the Vassal Meeting solely because he's jumping at the chance to take the city."

"We must foil his plans. Otherwise, there'll be no room for us to exist here," Emperor Coiling Dragon declared rather sternly.

"You are the current heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, young lord Zhen. Since Emperor Peafowl isn't around, you must take up his mantle and decide. I've come to an agreement with Daoist Coiling Dragon already that we'll stand by Sacred Peafowl Mountain no matter what. However, this is what we don't know: how much resolution do you have? Do you have the courage and assurance to see the struggle with Emperor Shura to the end?" Emperor Void was keenly interested in the young man's answers.

If Jiang Chen himself had no spirit, then no amount of support from the Emperor Void and Coiling Dragon meant anything.

Jiang Chen calmly returned their gaze. "I have an agreement with His Majesty. No matter what, Veluriyam Capital must not fall into another's hands. So don't worry. As long as I am still here, Emperor Shura will not have the city."

The emperors traded a look, mutual relief evident in their eyes.

"Good. Now that we've heard those words from you, we'll win this fight even if we have to lay down our lives."

"Daoist Coiling Dragon is right. Sacred Peafowl Mountain has ruled Veluriyam Capital for the past three thousand years. We don't know whether Emperor Peafowl has fallen yet, but even assuming the worst, Sacred Peafowl Mountain won't fall into obscurity with you around."

Both emperors trusted Jiang Chen implicitly. They saw undeniable talent and ability in the youth. This insight was the most important reason for their continued loyalty. Their typically congenial relationship with the faction was a strong contributing factor, but Jiang Chen's future abilities was more crucial.

"Young lord Zhen, our forces are still somewhat weak with only two emperors' support. If you can win the allegiance of Emperor Petalpluck, Emperor Shura will almost certainly be shut out of the picture."

"Emperor Petalpluck?" Jiang Chen frowned, remembering the low-key emperor who maintained neutrality.

That emperor's heritage was Buddhist in nature, requiring peace, serenity, and detachment from the world. This made Jiang Chen all the more perplexed. If Emperor Petalpluck was so detached, why would he decide to cast his vote for Emperor Shura? How had Emperor Shura convinced this relatively indifferent emperor?

Among the seven emperors remaining in the city, all five besides Coiling Dragon and Void had shown support for the convention of the Vassal Meeting. That meant that the supposedly aloof Emperor Petalpluck had taken a side in the end.

"Young lord Zhen, we've visited Emperor Petalpluck in private as well. He says that his choice was based on concern for the city's future prospects. If you can persuade him with a show of your talent and

ability, I think it's quite possible that he'd be amenable to switching sides instead." Emperor Void evaluated in a low voice.

Chapter 1183: Jiang Chens Worries

"Persuade him?"

Frankly, Jiang Chen's understanding of Emperor Petalpluck was pretty much close to zero. This was a great emperor who normally kept apart from worldly affairs, so he shouldn't have chosen a side at a critical moment like this. However, it was also a fact that Emperor Petalpluck had agreed to attend Emperor Shura's Vassal Meeting while glorifying it as an act for the greater good.

In reality however, Veluriyam Capital's future would've been better if nothing had changed. It wouldn't have fallen into disorder as quickly if the general summons hadn't been issued. But now, all kinds of conflicts had arisen and changed the direction Veluriyam Capital was heading towards.

"Yes, persuade him and Emperor Mountaincrush as well. Emperor Mountaincrush was forced into supporting the Vassal Meeting because he couldn't withstand the combined pressure of Emperor Shura and Emperor Vastsea. His relationship with Emperor Shura is average at best, so it's impossible that he would support this willingly. Emperor Shura and Emperor Vastsea aren't alone now as even Emperor Skysplitter has joined their side. They now stand as a united front."

The power structure of Veluriyam Capital's great emperors was shifting from complex to increasing clarity. Emperor Shura, Emperor Vastsea, and Emperor Skysplitter had formed an alliance while Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void were allied with Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Had Emperor Peafowl been still around, he wouldn't even need an ally to get himself out of this predicament. He could've easily crushed any opposing force who stood in his way.

But after the rumors that Emperor Peafowl had been lost to the demon race had spread, the situation in the capital suddenly became uncertain. Worse, Emperor Petalpluck and Emperor Mountaincrush had temporarily foregone their neutrality and chosen to support the Vassal Meeting, whatever their reason might be.

Although they still couldn't be considered as allies of Emperor Shura, the scales were slowly tipping in the enemy's favor. It was now up to Sacred Peafowl Mountain to counter the momentum. If they played their cards right, they could overturn the tides. But if they played their cards wrong, then Sacred Peafowl Mountain would lose all influence and become Emperor Shura's next target for elimination. Reality was truly a cruel mistress.

Jiang Chen pondered for a moment before sighing softly. He responded in a serious voice, "Their alliance is not my greatest worry."

"What is then?" Emperor Void and Emperor Coiling Dragon were both puzzled.

"Why is Emperor Shura so confident? How did he dare issue the general summons? Isn't he afraid of maddening Emperor Peafowl? And does Emperor Shura know something? Or does he know where Emperor Peafowl is right now?"

"Young lord Zhen, you mean?" Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void's expressions instantly turned ugly.

They had run through all the worst case scenarios before. They just weren't willing to accept it in any capacity, even now. After all, Emperor Peafowl was invincible to them. They didn't believe that Emperor Shura had the ability to kill Emperor Peafowl.

In fact, the three enemy great emperors shouldn't be able to defeat Emperor Peafowl even in tandem, not to mention that Emperor Vastsea hadn't left Veluriyam Capital all this time.

While it was true that Emperor Shura and Emperor Vastsea had made brief trips out of Veluriyam Capital one after another, it was impossible that they could defeat Emperor Peafowl, much less silence him before the great emperor could send word of his demise. No matter how they looked at it, it was just plain impossible.

Still, they couldn't help but be worried for Emperor Peafowl. It was also undeniable that the great emperor had left for a very long time without a single word. If Emperor Peafowl really was safe and sound, would he really allow Emperor Shura to do as he pleased and wreak havoc in Veluriyam Capital?

Jiang Chen frowned. "I believe that Emperor Peafowl is still alive. At the very least, I don't believe that Emperor Shura can cause his demise. He simply doesn't have the power to do so, even if every great emperor in Veluriyam Capital were to attack Emperor Peafowl together. He may have been defeated, but there's just no way he would die."

Jiang Chen was at least certain about this. He had given Emperor Peafowl a drop of Kunpeng blood, which happened to be extremely compatible with Emperor Peafowl.

If Emperor Peafowl had refined the blood, his strength would've increased by leaps and bounds. It wouldn't be a surprise if he instantly broke free of the shackles of a great emperor and ascended to the empyrean realm.

After all, the great emperor had detected the laws of the world and felt the beckoning of the empyrean plane a long time ago. If he hadn't suppressed that calling, he might have ascended already.

With the assimilation of the Kunpeng bloodline into his bloodline, Emperor Peafowl would assuredly be equipped to break through. So how could a half-step empyrean cultivator possibly be killed by a couple great emperors?

While Jiang Chen was extremely confident in Emperor Peafowl's abilities, there was one last nagging worry left in his mind. He was worried that Emperor Shura might collude with external forces. He originally hadn't thought that Emperor Shura would fall so far no matter how much he coveted power and position.

But after Jiang Chen returned to Veluriyam Capital and saw that pill store right next to Taiyuan Tower, he was no longer certain that Emperor Shura would preserve his bottom line. At the very least, Jiang Chen didn't think that Pill King Hong belonged to Emperor Shura.

Emperor Shura's faction had far more shallow pill dao foundations than Sacred Peafowl Mountain, so there was no way they could've nurtured someone like that. Moreover, Pill King Hong didn't carry himself in the way of Emperor Shura's faction at all.

Jiang Chen strongly suspected that Pill King Hong hailed from a foreign power. That was why he'd made a bet with Pill King Hong and forced the poor fellow to jump into his trap. He had wanted to figure out a true identity.

Unfortunately, he hadn't expected his opponent to be so shameless as to kill their own men. Bonds and ties hadn't come into consideration at all. The fact that this enemy would eliminate witnesses so ruthlessly worried Jiang Chen even more so. No matter who his opponent might be, it was enough to make his blood run cold. Would an enemy who could kill even their own man show any mercy?

"Young lord Zhen, if you don't believe that the combined force of every great emperor in Veluriyam Capital is enough to kill Emperor Peafowl, then what exactly concerns you?"

"I'm worried that Emperor Shura might've colluded with foreign powers." Jiang Chen finally voiced his doubts.

"What?" Emperor Coiling Dragon jumped to his feet. "He colluded with foreign powers? He... Does he have no morals at all?"

Emperor Void's expression also changed drastically. "Colluding with foreign powers? If that really is the case, he will be condemned as a traitor! It's true that we have done all kinds of things for power since ancient times, but we've never colluded with a foreign power. Veluriyam Capital has its own pride, and we've always dealt with our internal issues ourselves. Emperor Shura can't possibly be foolish enough to break this ancient rule no matter how bold he is, can he? Assuming that he did collude with another foreign power, how on earth does he plans to obtain the support and acknowledgement of everyone in Veluriyam Capital?"

Jiang Chen sighed. "I wish that I've made an error in judgment as well, but my words aren't just empty accusations. I believe that both of you have heard about about the incident of Vermillion Bird Avenue some time ago, correct?"

"You mean that store that opened right next to Taiyuan Tower?"

"Mm, that's the one." Jiang Chen nodded. The pill king who gave lectures there possessed a deep foundation. It's extremely unlikely that he's a member of Veluriyam Capital."

"A pill king who doesn't belong to Veluriyam Capital, able to open a pill store in the most prosperous street that is Vermillion Bird Avenue, and give a lecture without care? That is indeed suspicious."

Jiang Chen's words caused the two great emperors to form ugly expressions on their faces. Emperor Coiling Dragon muttered angrily, "Now that you mention it, it's strange that that has happened. The pill factions of Vermillion Bird Avenue are normally very xenophobic. That pill store must wield incredible power and foundation to open right next to Taiyuan Tower in challenge."

"Before I came, I received a secret report saying that someone had caused a stir at that store. That lecturing Pill King Hong was then killed on the spot by an unknown power. Following that, an uninvited guest entered the store and caused quite the disturbance."

Jiang Chen responded indifferently, "I'll be honest. I was that uninvited guest."

“Ah?” Both Emperor Void and Emperor Coiling Dragon stared at him with stunned looks. “W-was it really you?”

Jiang Chen nodded. “I have proof. Please come with me.”

He led the two great emperors into a private room. The door slid open automatically to reveal the high rank emperor realm old man whom Jiang Chen had captured. Right now, the old fellow was sealed from head to toe and curled up in a ball at the corner of the room. He looked as sorry as a dead dog.

“This old man is in charge of that store. I captured him and brought him here. Do any of you recognize him?”

Emperor Void and Emperor Coiling Dragon studied the old man’s features for a long time. They finally shook their heads. “He looks like a stranger to me.”

“Then he probably isn’t a Veluriyam denizen. Still, this old man seems to be quite powerful.” Emperor Void looked a little surprised.

“He’s a high rank emperor cultivator. I caught him by surprise.” Jiang Chen didn’t try to hide anything.

“You? You caught a high rank emperor cultivator?” Emperor Coiling Dragon’s eyes widened with astonishment. He couldn’t help but examine Jiang Chen anew.

Of course, he was aware that Jiang Chen was an unbelievable genius who was equally monstrous in both pill dao and martial dao. However, it was still rather shocking that he was able to capture a high rank emperor cultivator alive. If the captor was themselves, great emperors, then it would be a piece of cake. But Jiang Chen... what was his cultivation level again?

Jiang Chen had performed exceptionally during the Genius Ranking battles of the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering, but he was currently at best a half-step emperor cultivator. Even if he had power beyond his apparent realm, an initial emperor cultivator should be his limit.

But he had captured a high rank emperor cultivator alive. What the hell was going on here? For a moment, the two great emperors felt like they needed a couple more brain cells to comprehend this unbelievable twist.

“Gentlemen, if either one of you can pry his background out of his mouth, we will practically be one step away from the truth.” Jiang Chen smiled.

Emperor Coiling Dragon nodded before looking at Emperor Void. “Daoist Void, you are more familiar with interrogation than I, aren’t you?”

Emperor Void nodded darkly. “Leave it to me. I’ll get something useful out of his mouth no matter how tough he might be!”

Chapter 1184: The Frightening Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation

Roughly two hours later, Emperor Void walked out of the secret room with a complicated expression.

Emperor Coiling Dragon was first to greet him. “Daoist Void, how was it? Did he speak?”

Emperor Void nodded, but his face was still as grim as ever. “He spoke. There’s no way he wouldn’t yield to my interrogation techniques.”

“Who is he? What’s his background?” Emperor Coiling Dragon asked in rapid succession.

Emperor Void flashed a complicated look at Jiang Chen. “Young lord Zhen, Daoist Coiling Dragon, that person... is from Pillfire City.”

“What?!” The news caught Jiang Chen and Emperor Coiling Dragon by surprise.

“Pillfire City?” Jiang Chen was extremely dumbfounded. “Emperor Void, did he really say that he’s from Pillfire City?”

“Yes. I could also tell that he wasn’t lying. With my specialized interrogation technique, I can immediately tell if he’s lying or not.”

“Pillfire City...” Jiang Chen flashed a complicated look and suddenly raised his eyebrow out of suspicion. “Did he also mention Emperor Shura?”

Emperor Void sighed with a shake of his head. “He didn’t mention anything about Emperor Shura. He claims that he was sent to our city by his superiors on a mission. The one who gave him the mission was a high ranking executive in Pillfire City. He knows nothing about the co-conspirators, and if they have anything to do with anyone from our capital.”

“Does this really mean that he’s unaffiliated with Emperor Shura?” Emperor Coiling Dragon was feeling rather conflicted.

Both emperors looked at Jiang Chen with complicated expressions.

The situation in Veluriyam Capital was truly concerning. If Emperor Shura was trying for a coup, they had ways to deal with him, but they’d have to tread carefully if Pillfire City was the one pulling strings from behind the scene.

If Emperor Shura was colluding with Pillfire City, things would be a lot more difficult. As the saying went, a thief from home is much harder to fend off than an outsider. However, the prisoner had declared that he was unaffiliated with the great emperor. Did Emperor Shura really have nothing to do with this, or did the captive just didn’t know better?

Both scenarios were completely plausible.

The first scenario would be a lot easier to handle. But if it was the second, things would be extremely complicated. Outside influence was always the scariest thing during an internal conflict. It was an enormous hidden danger that could cause Veluriyam Capital to collapse.

Pillfire City was filled with unbridled ambition and viewed themselves as the leader of the Upper Eight Regions. They’d been pressuring Veluriyam Capital for a long time with their influence. Veluriyam Capital would be in jeopardy if they’d infiltrated the capital and was cooperating with Emperor Shura. With their appetite and ambition, they’d surely swallow the entire capital whole and take complete control over it.

Jiang Chen had to investigate this thoroughly if Pillfire City was involved

“Gentlemen, we must attend to this matter immediately. Since we can no longer stop the Vassal Meeting, we’ll have to come up with a counterplan. You may leave the planning to me.

At the end of the day, Jiang Chen wasn’t afraid of Emperor Shura. The only reason he hadn’t taken the Shura faction head-on was because he didn’t want the capital to fall into internal conflict. Since the emperor was already acting on his ambitions, Jiang Chen would no longer keep the peace.

“Daoist Void, for some reason, seeing young lord Zhen being this confident puts me at ease!” Emperor Coiling Dragon exclaimed with a laugh.

He knew Jiang Chen better than Emperor Void and often interacted with the young lord. Jiang Chen had also saved his life. His support for the young lord came from the bottom of his heart.

Emperor Void laughed in response. “Pill King Zhen has created many miracles in our capital over the years and this incident will no exception!”

They were both wise and accomplished experts. Since they’d found a direction, they no longer had to fret over the matter. In the worst case scenario, the two sides would just erupt in civil war. Even if they couldn’t beat Emperor Shura’s faction outright, in combining both their armies with the Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s army, they could at least put up a good fight. Would true men be afraid of a battle or two?

Jiang Chen didn’t immediately reveal himself after the two great emperors left. Instead, he cultivated in the young lord residence for a few days and completely ignored the situation outside.

During his trip to the Great Scarlet Mid Region, he hadn’t just rescued Wei Xing’er, but also obtained an extremely important treasure, the Earth Bodhisattva Orb. Jiang Chen had learned about the orb’s origin from the Venerated Skysoarer. It was a signature treasure from the Earth Bodhisattva Sect, a sect unrivalled in formations during the ancient age.

After refining the orb, Jiang Chen could sense that his earth attribute cultivation had improved by leaps and bounds. However, he didn’t gloat over his improvement. He’d refined the orb, yes, but he hadn’t even unearthed a tiny sliver of its potential.

He’d experienced the might of the orb first-hand when he was at Cloudshatter Mountain. Even an advanced cultivator like Jiang Chen was afraid of its frightening pulses. One could only imagine how powerful it could be when its true potential was unleashed. In fact, its potential wasn’t in the least bit inferior to the magnetic golden mountain. The power that the magnetic golden mountain possessed was frighteningly powerful, and so were the Lord of the Golden Seal’s attacks. It was a treasure with limitless value.

Jiang Chen also hypothesized that the magnetic golden mountain was also a signature treasure from an ancient sect. It was the only way to explain the depth of its potential. However, it was merely a hypothesis and would likely remain that way for a long time as he didn’t have a way to prove yet.

Since the magnetic golden mountain had been found in sixteen kingdom alliance territory, itself a cataclysmic warzone in the ancient times, there was a high chance that it was actually an ancient treasure. It was impossible that the alliance could wield such a powerful treasure with its current foundation.

Regardless of their origins, the fact remained that Jiang Chen was still unable to unleash both of the treasure's full potential. Since the orb originated from the Earth Bodhisattva Sect, the orb's greatest strength was in the construction of formations.

Jiang Chen didn't possess any of the sect's formation heritage, but that didn't matter as he had the inheritance from the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect. The orb wasn't only limited to compatibility with the formations from the Earth Bodhisattva Sect.

Since the Earth Bodhisattva Orb is an earth attribute treasure, what formation would best complement it? Jiang Chen pondered deeply.

"Maybe the Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation?" It was the first formation that came to his mind. It was the most powerful formation in his current arsenal, but it wasn't too compatible with the orb.

"Or the Great Dream of Spring and Autumn Formation?" This formation was somewhat compatible with the orb, but it was merely a restrictive formation. It would gain some potency if combined with the orb, but it wasn't something to write home about.

"Hmm... the Minor Artifice Formation, the Major Artifice Formation, and the Ancient Slaughter Formation of Seven are also very useful formations, but they're not quite compatible with the orb either..." He was flipping through the various formations in his head. Suddenly, he recalled the last formation that Venerated Skysoarer had given him.

"The Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation... is a slaughtering formation that seals off an area to form a domain. Combining it with the orb would make the formation effective both above and below ground. It would be a formation without flaws! Mm... if I also incorporate the magnetic golden mountain into it, the formation will likely become much stronger as well..."

Jiang Chen's mind began to churn with excitement. He wasn't a martial dao hatchling. On the contrary, his mind was filled with all kinds of knowledge. He could come up concepts just by coming through the knowledge in his mind.

He was extremely excited after forming his theories and could see how incredibly heaven-defying the formation would be after incorporating both the Earth Bodhisattva Orb and the magnetic golden mountain.

"The orb can seal the surface and earth, obliterating all with its pulse, while the magnetic golden mountain seals the surrounding air with its frightening magnetic field. Meanwhile, the Heavenly Chalice Formation forms a vortex to rip everything apart! It's the perfect combination!"

The more Jiang Chen thought about it, the more excited he became. He took out the Heavenly Chalice Formation diagram and studied it meticulously.

"The formation requires eighty-one flying swords which must all be forged with True Heavensfall Iron. Even one sword would be hard to come by, let alone eighty-one."

The rest of the requirements were doable. The only issue was that the materials required for the flying swords were extremely hard to come by.

“Tsk tsk. This formation is truly extraordinary.” The more Jiang Chen studied it, the more impressed he became.

“If I have those flying swords in my possession and use them with the Heavenly Chalice Formation, I can fight toe-to-toe with peak level emperors! If I combine it with the magnetic golden mountain and the Earth Bodhisattva Orb, killing one wouldn’t be impossible!” Jiang Chen was feverish with excitement.

He possessed trump cards that could kill a peak level emperor, but the trump cards came from his equipment and not his own skill, and could only be used a limited number of times. By mastering the sword formation, he could finally achieve such feats with his own abilities. It was more reliable to use his own abilities to slaughter his enemies.

“True Heavensfall Iron... It seems that finding it will be my next goal. After forging the flying swords, I will gain another trump card. The sword formation will also become more powerful as I get stronger. The formation is truly extraordinary!” Jiang Chen was now completely fired up.

Chapter 1185: Jiang Chen Prepares For Battle

Jiang Chen didn’t have the requisite flying swords for the Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation. However, the other formation that he’d received from the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect was available for refinement. The Great Dream of Spring and Autumn Formation was a deadly one.

Having braved the formation twice, Jiang Chen had firsthand experience of its power. Plus, Venerated Skysoarer hadn’t given him just the formation’s diagrams, but a set of flags made from Divine Trees of Dreams with which to create the foundation. Wood from that type of tree was one of the best materials for the Great Dream of Spring and Autumn Formation.

Three more days passed before Jiang Chen finally exited his closed door cultivation. His first order of business after doing so was to summon the four monarchs.

The quartet had remained at Sacred Peafowl Mountain ever since their last visit. The situation in Veluriyam Capital put them at considerable unease. Though they’d previously not entirely been satisfied with the young lord, they were acutely excited at his new summons.

“You’re finally, finally back, young lord!” Cloudsoar Monarch was moved by the mere sight of the youth.

“Come, everyone. Let’s sit down before we talk,” waved Jiang Chen. His laid-back demeanor was infectious, cooling down the four’s emotions somewhat. “I know the gist of what’s happened in Veluriyam Capital.”

Jiang Chen was very upfront. “Emperor Shura and his minions are showing their true colors. They have declared war on Sacred Peafowl Mountain. The anxiety on your faces is likely because of this.”

Cloudsoar Monarch inclined his head. “So you knew already, young lord. We...”

“Young lord, if you’ve summoned us when you know already, you must already have a plan, correct?” Plumscore Monarch cut him off.

“It’d be a pretty incredible claim if I say I have a perfect plan. It’d also be an irresponsible and unrealistic statement. But, I can clearly tell you that as long as we stay calm, no faction will be able to wrest control from us.” Jiang Chen’s eyes were placid as he looked towards the four monarchs. “I summoned the four

of you to judge the strength of your resolve and see how determined you are to defend Sacred Peafowl Mountain's glory."

There was assessment in his gaze as he brushed it across the monarchs' faces. Jiang Chen wasn't afraid of Emperor Shura, nor was he worried he would lose control of the situation in the capital. However, one had to put one's house in order before tending to external affairs. He had to at least know whether the four monarchs would back him fully. The alternative was failure at a key moment.

Plumscore Monarch harrumphed. "We were all cultivated personally by Emperor Peafowl. Our lives were dedicated to Sacred Peafowl Mountain a long time ago. What can we be scared of? We will stop at nothing to defend this place!"

"That's right, young lord. There is no need to probe us. Heaven and earth can bear witness to our loyalty to Sacred Peafowl Mountain." Cloudsoar Monarch chimed in as well.

Jiang Chen nodded slightly. "I'm not concerned about your loyalty," mused the youth. "I simply wanted to ask whether that loyalty extends to me. This is extremely important. If all of you decide to act against me, I cannot give you any guarantee whether Sacred Peafowl Mountain will survive this incident."

There was no time to beat around the bush and Jiang Chen cut straight to the chase. The question was the heart of the matter. The four monarchs looked at each other, uncertainty reflected in their eyes. To tell the truth, none of them suspected each other's loyalties to Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

But how loyal were they to its current young lord? They had to probe their own hearts for this answer. It wasn't that they were opposed to young lord Zhen. Quite the opposite, they all felt quite supportive. However, deep down, their concern of whether he could take command of these turbulent circumstances was very real. No matter Jiang Chen's excellence prior to this point, his youth could not be denied.

To the four monarchs, he was not yet mature enough to lead Sacred Peafowl Mountain's counterattack against the likes of Emperor Shura. But the young man's eyes keenly pursued their own. The four monarchs all felt the pressure on them.

"Please, my friends. Speak your minds," Jiang Chen said coolly.

Suddenly, Cloudsoar Monarch lost his evasiveness. His eyes gained a new clarity. "Young lord Zhen!" he shouted, "Emperor Peafowl was the one who made you young lord. I still remember him talking to me about the decision. Since you are the young lord, we will absolutely support you with all of our strengths. As long as you do not retreat, we'll be behind you every step of the way."

"Quite so, those words exactly!" Chronobalance Monarch clamored. "We'll be behind you every step of the way."

Wildfox Monarch chuckled. "We only have one hope in this eleventh hour, and that is that you don't let us down. Don't be frightened into fleeing the scene and leaving a mess behind."

Plumscore Monarch was uncharacteristically silent, but her eyes said everything.

Jiang Chen smiled serenely. "Do I look like a coward to you?"

"If I'm brave enough to venture the depths of Pillfire City, what reason do I have to retreat in home territory?"

Jiang Chen's acts in Pillfire City and the Tilted Moon Region had spread far and wide. The Great Yu Skysword Sect's intentional embellishment of the events had informed the entirety of the Upper Eight Regions that young master Shao Yuan and Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord Zhen were the same.

The news brought honor to the four monarchs' faces. After all, their young lord's increasing fame meant the same for them as well. And as young lord Zhen's reputation grew, so did Sacred Peafowl Mountain's. A strong reputation helped to solidify the faction's control over Veluriyam Capital.

They had been quite pleased until the abrupt change in the city's circumstances, and specifically the rumors about Emperor Peafowl's downfall. The appearance of this piece of hearsay took Veluriyam Capital for a sharp nosedive.

Gossip was a potent tool. It alone was sufficient to rewrite the structure of the capital. Within the storm, Emperor Shura's faction began to rear its ugly head, taking general initiative and ownership bit by bit into their hands.

As for Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Emperor Peafowl's disappearance and young lord Zhen's inaction amplified suspicions about it from the outside. Because the problem was allowed to fester, the four monarchs gradually became discontent with Jiang Chen. Under these circumstances, they thought that Jiang Chen had the duty to show himself as Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord.

Unfortunately, the young man in question had been in the Great Scarlet Mid Region's Cloudshatter Mountain at the time. Immediately after that, he had been sucked into the Veluriyam Pagoda. He had known nothing about what was going on. Thank heavens that he had been able to show up at the last minute. Whether the four monarchs actually believed Jiang Chen, they had no choice but to stand staunchly behind him.

If even they doubted young lord Zhen, how could Sacred Peafowl Mountain instill confidence in the capital's other factions? How would it continue to hold the reins?

"Young lord, things have been quite awful lately. We've been worried sick about your apparent absence. In light of that, there may have been a few misunderstandings. Please don't dwell on that," explained Cloudsoar.

"Not at all. I had some serious matters to attend to recently, and I didn't expect this sudden storm to descend. But I suppose that's good in a way. Emperor Shura has restrained himself for an astoundingly long time, and this ticking liability is finally about to blow up. Better now than later, hmm?"

"Better?" Plumscore sounded displeased. "If you underestimate Emperor Shura, young lord, then I can already predict your abject failure in the Vassal Meeting soon after... perhaps even your widespread infamy!"

Plumscore Monarch was an ill-tempered woman. Aside from Emperor Peafowl, she showed decorum to no one. Jiang Chen was too youthful to have fully won over this monarch, despite his repeated shows of mastery.

“Young lord, Plumscore is well known for her directness and attitude. Please be generous towards her. However, she’s not wrong. Emperor Shura is an ambitious villain and cannot be underestimated,” urged Cloudsoar.

“It’s not just Emperor Shura you have to worry about. Emperor Vastsea and Skysplitter have allied themselves with Emperor Shura. I hear that even the normally neutral Emperor Petalpluck and Mountaincrush have been convinced. There is a momentum in Veluriyam that gives off the feeling that Emperor Shura is going to inherit the throne.”

“Ah, if only Emperor Peafowl were here. Emperor Shura wouldn’t have dared to stir anything up in the first place!”

Jiang Chen understood the four monarchs’ dismay, but he didn’t accept it a bit. His face darkened.

“Friends, I hear zero confidence in your collective tones. Is your show of support just a facade? Do you not have the courage in your heart of hearts to stand against Emperor Shura?”

His own tone was harsh and candid and the young lord’s rebuke rang loud and clear. The four monarchs were momentarily lost for words.

“Excuse us, young lord. We’re simply dejected because of His Majesty Peafowl’s absolute silence,” Cloudsoar Monarch sweated.

“Emperor Peafowl is busy with greater things right now. This city and region is no longer his center of attention. Besides, if Emperor Shura really had the ability to rule Veluriyam Capital, Emperor Peafowl would have been more than happy to pass it to him. What would be the point of all this power-hungry scheming?” Snickering, Jiang Chen continued. “Why has Emperor Shura never received Emperor Peafowl’s approval? There’s only one reason, because he does not qualify!

“What does that mean? He has neither the strength nor the charisma, nor any other characteristic required of a great ruler. That’s why he’s destined, this time as every time, to just waste his time!”

Though the four monarchs didn’t know where Jiang Chen’s confidence had come from, his speech reassured them.

“Young lord Zhen, did Emperor Peafowl give you a plan when he left?”

“That’s right, perhaps Emperor Peafowl predicted Emperor Shura’s betrayal?”

“Yes, everything should be easy with a plan from His Majesty. No matter how much Emperor Shura prances around, we will prevail in the end.”

However, Jiang Chen’s only response was to shake his head. “His Majesty didn’t give me a plan. What he did give me was a line of thought.”

This wasn’t a flat-out lie.

Chapter 1186: Tales of Heroes

Emperor Peafowl had indeed given Jiang Chen a line of thought and even predicted Emperor Shura’s eventual breaking with Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Not wishing for this day to actually come, he had advised Jiang Chen to garner the support of the other great emperors. The young man had worked to

this end by visiting them rather frequently, but his shallow foundations and preoccupation with rescuing both his father and Wei Xing'er had put a temporary damper on that goal.

He hadn't expected the situation in Veluriyam Capital to deteriorate so rapidly, and so soon. The suddenness of the drastic change left Jiang Chen feeling slightly unprepared.

"Friends, His Majesty entrusted a grave responsibility to me. Success or failure, it is my duty to see this through. Don't be too worried. Sacred Peafowl Mountain has ruled Veluriyam Capital for three thousand years, and its fortunes will not disappear overnight. Those who aren't fated to rule will be left with nothing, despite all their \scheming." Jiang Chen's words were uniquely infectious, giving the four monarchs some peace of mind.

"You all are Sacred Peafowl Mountain's fundamental pillars. Whether it will hold together through this trouble is up to you. Though I am the young lord, I am also relatively inexperienced. Only through your unwavering loyalty can Sacred Peafowl Mountain remain a fortress of iron. Otherwise, I will be able to accomplish nothing without your comprehensive support."

Plumscore spoke up. "His Majesty was born with wisdom. Everyone that he had an eye on has proven themselves in time. There must've been a reason that he made you young lord, and so my words are just as before. As long as you have the responsibility and the bearing for it, I will be behind you every step of the way. Let the heavens decide the rest."

"My thoughts exactly," agreed Chronobalance.

The eagerness in Cloudsoar Monarch's eyes was palpable. "Young lord, His Majesty has spoken to me of many things about you in the past. I firmly believe that you will be able to lead Sacred Peafowl Mountain to prosperity. His Majesty has even prophesied that you will be able to bring this city to greater peaks of fortune than he did, all those years ago."

Wildfox Monarch blinked, glancing towards his fellow. "Did His Majesty really say such a thing?"

Everyone knew that Cloudsoar was the emperor's closest confidante. That was why he was the steward of Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

"I hadn't mentioned it before," sighed Cloudsoar, "because of my own uncertainties about the matter. But the Vassal Meeting is one of the best proving grounds for verifying whether His Majesty had spoken truly."

Though the other three monarchs all displayed varying degrees of shock, they nodded at Cloudsoar's follow-up statement.

"If that is His Majesty's prediction, then it gives us all the more confidence."

"Quite. Under these circumstances, we must support young lord Zhen with all of our strength. We will fight Shura's faction to the bitter end!"

Only after renewed declarations of fealty did the monarchs depart. However, Plumscore Monarch returned halfway.

Jiang Chen was surprised to see her do so. "Plumscore Monarch, do you have something else to talk about alone?"

“Young lord, do you remember your visit to Plumscore Retreat?” The monarch’s expression was as frigid as ever. It was one of her unique characteristics.

Of course Jiang Chen remembered his trip. He’d visited after the Ranking of Young Lords, before his ordeals in the Veluriyam Pagoda.

“Yes, I do.” A slight smile hung on his face.

“The things I said to you back then still apply now. I’ve seen your accomplishments here in the capital, but don’t think they can be counted as particularly magnificent feats. Certainly not enough to elevate you to a heroic status. But if you can pass this trial ahead of you, if you can save the day despite the odds against us... then I shall defer to you without fail for the rest of my life.”

Plumscore Monarch had indeed talked to Jiang Chen about this a few years ago. She naturally appreciated his acts in Veluriyam Capital, but was of the opinion that only in a time of dire crisis could one’s ability and nature truly be discerned. “Young lord, whether you will be able to shoulder responsibility in times of hardship—this, and only this, will decide your future level of achievement.”

Jiang Chen broke out into laughter, then nodded. “I remember your words still. The Vassal Meeting seems rather more interesting now.”

There was no lack of challenges in the world of martial dao. For the present young lord of Veluriyam, the Vassal Meeting was one such experience. Since his arrival in this new world, he had encountered many challenges big and small. In terms of danger, his recent fight against Demon Emperor Bloodmalva had been fraught with it, though victory for that was purely decided with martial dao.

In terms of overall difficulty, the amount in this challenge was unprecedented for him. A first.

Martial dao was not the only deciding factor here. It was even more so wit and intellect, and personal charisma on top of that. Perhaps it could be classified as a clash of fortunes. Would Emperor Shura’s faction seize the day? Or would Emperor Peafowl’s forces hold fast? That was the answer lying behind the curtain of the Vassal Meeting.

Plumscore Monarch scrutinized Jiang Chen carefully before nodding once more. “Do you remember the girl you met when you came to my retreat, young lord?” It was a sudden change of subject.

“Nian’er?” The adorable little girl’s figure popped into Jiang Chen’s head. She had been as delicate and charming as porcelain. Thinking of her warmed his heart. Because of his strong impression, her name rolled off his tongue in an instant.

Jiang Chen’s emotion elicited a rare tinge of warmth on Plumscore Monarch’s face as well. “Yes, Nian’er. She’s been asking for you for quite a while. There are sometimes strange and invisible ties that form between the unlikeliest of people. My Plumscore Retreat has housed a plethora of people, and Nian’er’s seen no shortage of outsiders, but you’re the only one that she keeps on her mind. She’s always talking about your good points, young lord.”

Images of the kind, innocent little girl filled his thoughts. Her expressive eyes, her snow-white outfit...

Jiang Chen swelled up with affection.

“Nian’er has heard of your name, young lord Zhen. She knows your exploits here in Veluriyam. You’re her hero and one of the greatest of this city, in fact.”

Jiang Chen laughed in spite himself. He knew he had a lot of fans in the city, but he hadn’t expected the girl to be one of them. It had been so long since the time they’d met, and she wasn’t even ten, yet...

His heart felt a bit peculiar.

“Is Nian’er still at your Plumscore Retreat?” He recalled that the girl was the daughter of Emperor Peafowl’s foster daughter, Miss Dan’er.

“Emperor Peafowl asked me to instruct her. Alas, my unexceptional skills are wasting her talents somewhat.” Plumscore Monarch paused, squinting at Jiang Chen again meaningfully. “Young lord, I simply wanted to tell you that Nian’er sees you as her hero. I hope that you don’t let her down during this Vassal Meeting.

“Plus, you have supporters in great numbers here in Veluriyam Capital. The hearts of the people are a useful resource. Since this is such an important time, maybe you should take a few walks. The kings and lords who are participating in the Vassal Meeting should be arriving soon, and you would do well to win at least some of them over.

“And now, I must take my leave,” said the monarch with a cupped fist salute. She drifted off without further ceremony.

Jiang Chen didn’t know what to feel as he watched Plumscore Monarch’s figure disappear in the distance. He hadn’t expected the typically frosty Plumscore Monarch to talk to him alone like she had just now. For someone as distant as her, the comments had been nothing short of heartfelt. That was an extraordinarily rare occurrence for her.

The hearts of the people are a resource? Admittedly, the monarch had a very good point. The vassals from Veluriyam’s territories were almost upon them. If he remained within the young lord residence all this time, they would likely have a poor opinion of him. Either they would think he was a coward that shied away from the grand occasion, or that he was a haughty youth who thought he was above the rest of them.

A proper leader must garner the love of his followers. The young man found nothing wrong about this axiom.

Why had his father in the previous life been able to sit so securely on his throne as a Divine Emperor? His father hadn’t been simply competent. He had also maintained a strong grasp over the hearts of his subjects. They were bought, quashed, appeased, and intimidated in various ways.

Grace and authority had played equal part in maintaining his rule. Both the light rain of generosity and the thunderous storm of punishment were necessary. In this way, the rebellious were daunted and the loyal, rewarded.

“Brother Chen, Plumscore Monarch’s advice is very reasonable,” said Huang’er suddenly, who had been silent up until now.

"Our minds are one, Huang'er. I was thinking about it as well." Jiang Chen laughed. "I hadn't paid much attention to such details in the past, but our viewpoint is different now. They must be given serious consideration."

Because Jiang Chen had not been Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord in the past, he had only passively bought the hearts of others. Historically, his actions had only done so as an added benefit. However, he was now a holder of power. As a young lord, he had to do things that he previously hadn't cared for.

"You already have a starting point for it, Brother Chen. Veluriyam Capital's peoples are disturbed in large part due to the circulating rumors. If you can step forward, a large portion of them will be rendered ineffective." Though Huang'er had a serene nature, she saw problems from a vantage point that was often higher than most others. She had a clear view of the majority of affairs.

Chapter 1187: The Chance to Reach Empyrean Realm

"Haha, you've finally showed up, brother. I would've gone to look for you if you were absent any longer!" Emperor Peerless laughed heartily when he saw Jiang Chen. It was obvious that the great emperor and his wife were having a good time in the young lord residence. Thanks to the Pinecrane Pill and the baptism of the wood spirit spring, Madame Yun was approaching full recovery.

Both Emperor Peerless and Madame Yun appreciated these blissful, carefree days. The madame had been injured almost the moment they fell in love, and it had been the heaviest burden they'd borne for the longest time. Emperor Peerless had to depart very often in search for a cure. As a result, they spent more time apart than together.

But after so many years of travel and hardships, Madame Yun's injuries were now finally healed. That was why Emperor Peerless felt extreme gratitude towards Jiang Chen. The couple were loyal people who greatly valued the ties of friendship, and Jiang Chen had done them an enormous favor. They also rather liked Veluriyam Capital. Given that the three had been close for a while, the couple were beginning to feel like settling here.

"Old Brother Mo, your wife has essentially made a full recovery. From hereon, the two of you can be the happy couple you've always wanted to be."

"Hehe, it's all thanks to you, brother. I can't even imagine how I should repay you. I'll set aside the niceties. I hear that Veluriyam Capital's current situation is souring and someone's trying to challenge your authority. Is that true?" Mo Wushuang asked in a low tone.

Jiang Chen had known it'd be impossible to hide this matter from someone like Emperor Peerless. He sighed quietly. "Well, they can try. In the end, they're nothing more than insignificant clowns."

"Very good! I like your confidence. If these words were to come from anyone else, I would've thought they were being insufferably arrogant. But you? You definitely have the right to say such a thing." Emperor Peerless praised. "I haven't met Emperor Shura myself, but rumors of him have reached my ears. His martial dao strength is beyond questionable, but his breadth of mind, bearing, choice of methods and charisma are far inferior to Emperor Peafowl. I believe that your ceiling of potential is far, far higher than even Emperor Peafowl's. If Veluriyam Capital's citizens aren't completely foolish, they should know to choose you as their ruler instead of this Emperor Shura!"

Madame Yun agreed deeply. "Emperor Shura is the kind of expert that every great force in the Upper Eight Regions possess. There really isn't anything special about him. Emperor Peafowl is the reason why Veluriyam Capital is one of the most prominent powers of the Upper Eight Region, not him."

This was something obvious even to an outsider. At best, Emperor Shura was the third great emperor of Veluriyam Capital. Emperor Petalpluck sat ahead of him as the second, but the emperor was low-key and seldom became involved in these conflicts. That was why Emperor Shura was the more famous one. However, to outsiders, Veluriyam Capital's rise to prominence was all thanks to the extraordinary Emperor Peafowl. Without him, Veluriyam Capital would be no better than a first rank sect.

"Brother, I believe your sister-in-law's suggestion isn't bad. Every vassal of Veluriyam Capital will be at the meeting. You may be the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but your roots are ultimately shallow compared to others. The best thing you can do during a time like this is to visit others and garner some support. In fact, you should do something big and let everyone know that your status wasn't gifted, but earned."

"You're very right, Old Brother Mo." Jiang Chen acknowledged.

"Haha, considering the disorder that's plaguing Veluriyam Capital right now, I'm quite worried that someone wishes to harm you, so I'm going to stay close and be your bodyguard for a while. Ah Yun, you're fine with this, right? Hahaha!" Emperor Peerless laughed.

Madame Yun responded seriously. "But of course. I would've advised you to do this even if you didn't ask, my beloved. Our brother is at a critical moment in his life. If you don't help him now, when will it ever be the right time?"

Jiang Chen was very touched by Madame Yun's breadth of mind. He hadn't saved her life with reciprocation in mind, but was grateful that she was doing so. He couldn't deny that the presence of a great emperor would make things a lot more convenient.

"Let's grab the Geng brothers as well." Emperor Peerless laughed. "They're both my sworn brothers, and they've been very impressed by you thus far."

"I shan't pretend that this isn't exactly what I hoped for." Jiang Chen was overjoyed to hear this.

The Geng brothers were extremely powerful. They might not be great emperors yet, but they were at least as strong as the four great monarchs.

With Emperor Peerless, the four great monarchs, and the Geng brothers by his side, his faction now boasted formidable strength. This was even before mentioning Emperor Void, Emperor Coiling Dragon and their many powerful subordinates.

"Brother..." Emperor Peerless pondered for a moment before starting, "Forgive me for saying this, but there have been a lot of rumors in Veluriyam Capital as of late. Emperor Peafowl's whereabouts is what worries me the most right now."

"What is on your mind, elder brother?" Jiang Chen looked over.

“Alive or not, I’m almost certain that Emperor Peafowl has run into some trouble. There’s no explaining Emperor Shura’s sudden gall to spread such heinous rumors otherwise. I’m worried that... do you think that another power might be interfering with Veluriyam Capital’s internal strife?”

As a great emperor, Emperor Peerless’ instincts were incredibly accurate. Jiang Chen’s face hardened with gravity, and the young man sighed quietly after a long time. “I’ll be frank, Old Brother Mo. The same possibility has crossed my mind. A few days ago, after just returning from my journey, I discovered a new pill store right next to Taiyuan Tower. As it turned out, it actually belongs to Pillfire City. To this day, I can’t ascertain if Pillfire City was taking advantage of our moment of weakness of their own accord, or if Emperor Shura was the one who’s led the wolf into our city.”

“Pillfire City?” Emperor Peerless arched an eyebrow in response.

Madame Yun’s gentle expression also became clouded with some complications. Obviously, the name “Pillfire City” was something neither the great emperor nor his wife were keen to hear as Emperor Pillzenith was the source of Madame Yun’s injuries.

That emperor had been a thorn in Emperor Peerless and Madame Yun’s side for the longest time. Countless geniuses had sought to win her affection when the madame was young, but her heart belonged to Emperor Peerless alone. What was supposed to be a beautiful love became muddled when Emperor Pillzenith decided to fight for Madame Yun’s affection too.

In the end, the two great emperors fought a decisive duel and Emperor Peerless had come out just a little short. In a moment of danger, it was Madame Yun who jumped in and took a blow meant for Emperor Peerless. That was how she came by the long term injury.

When the battle was over, Emperor Pillzenith was furious, incensed, regretful, and apologetic for what he had done. That was why he’d never really stopped Emperor Peerless from entering Pillfire City in search for a cure. But it wasn’t that he didn’t want to strike down Emperor Peerless. He was more afraid that he would damage his reputation and inspire Madame Yun’s eternal hatred after the act.

Jiang Chen also hated Pillfire City to the bone. He had crossed paths with the faction before, and had recently discovered that they were the ones behind the disorder of Veluriyam Capital. This was something the young man absolutely couldn’t allow. Veluriyam Capital was his domain and Taiyuan Tower was his private property. Anyone who attacked Taiyuan Tower was attacking him as well.

“Brother, are you sure Pillfire City is the culprit behind this?” Emperor Peerless asked gravely.

“I interrogated someone to get this information. I am absolutely certain that it is them.”

“Mm. If Emperor Shura really did lure the wolf into his own city, then I must say that he is far dumber than I imagined. Gratitude means nothing to Pillfire City. I guarantee he will regret his decision down the line if he really is the one behind all this.” Emperor Peerless uttered angrily with impatience.

Madame Yun quietly hugged Emperor Peerless’ arm. “Calm down, darling Mo. Our wise younger brother is an exceptional genius. He doesn’t fear even Pillfire City. Do you forget that he’s soundly defeated Pill King Ji Lang twice already?”

Emperor Peerless laughed loudly with a slap of the table. "That's right, Pill King Ji Lang was supposedly the number one successor of Pillfire City, but even he's suffered defeat twice at the hands of our wise brother. This means that the next generation of Veluriyam Capital is far superior to Pillfire City's!"

Jiang Chen smiled before his eyes suddenly colored with seriousness. He looked at Emperor Peerless. "Old Brother Mo, would you like an opportunity to utterly crush Emperor Pillzenith?"

"Oh? Please elaborate." Emperor Peerless' eyes lit up. Other than healing Madame Yun, crushing Emperor Pillzenith was practically his greatest wish over the years.

Although his wife was now fully recovered, the humiliation of defeat at the hands of Emperor Pillzenith hadn't passed at all. Emperor Peerless was willing to accept any price in exchange for crushing Emperor Pillzenith.

"Brother, are you sure you're not just teasing me?" Emperor Peerless asked with a wry smile.

Jiang Chen shook his head. "I do not make empty promises. However, this must remain a top secret."

Emperor Peerless slapped his chest. "Brother, you should know what kind of person I am. If you can fulfill this wish of mine, I swear to obey your orders for the rest of my life. I won't even frown if you want Yun'er and I to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain!"

Jiang Chen smiled easily. "Brother, I know you're comfortable leading a free, wandering life, so I wouldn't impose on you with such a request. However, you and I are kindred spirits. I'm sure I'll be uneasy if I don't gift you this opportunity."

"Oh?" Emperor Peerless' chest tightened when he discovered that Jiang Chen didn't seem to be joking. "Brother, please don't leave me hanging any longer. You know I'm an impatient person."

Jiang Chen nodded. "Old Brother Mo, Madame Yun. This matter is of the utmost importance. All I ask is for this to remain a secret, because a leak will put Old Brother Mo in grave danger."

Madame Yun covered her mouth after a soft cry. This time, she couldn't help but stare at Jiang Chen with eyes clouded by doubt and worry. She couldn't keep calm at the thought of danger to Emperor Peerless' life.

"Brother. Do I look like someone who's afraid of danger? What kind of danger do you think I haven't encountered yet after wandering the world for so many years?" Emperor Peerless sounded nonchalant however. It was obvious he didn't take Jiang Chen's warning too seriously.

The young man shook his head. "It's different this time. If news of this is leaked, you may be hunted by every great emperor in the entire world."

"It's that serious?" Emperor Peerless goggled at Jiang Chen.

"Mm. It may even be worse than that, honestly." Jiang Chen opened his palm and revealed an intricate bottle. "Brother Mo, this bottle contains a drop of blood of the ancient kun'peng. Once you've refined it, you will be gifted an empyrean opportunity. In the future, it will guarantee your ascension to empyrean realm, and if you're lucky, you may surpass even that."

Emperor Peerless trembled all over like a bolt of lightning had struck. Madame Yun's face had turned completely white too. They were both flabbergasted by Jiang Chen's gift.

Chapter 1188: Gifting the Kunpeng Bloodline

"Empyrean? Are you certain that I can ascend to the empyrean realm?" When it came to such an important subject, even a man as great as Emperor Peerless was rendered a weak mortal. His voice trembled with anticipation.

In comparison, Jiang Chen was the image of calmness. "You're talented enough to become a great emperor as a wandering cultivator, Old Brother Mo. Breaking through to empyrean realm should be no problem at all."

"This... this bloodline's power! Is something like this allowed to exist?" Emperor Peerless was still doubtful. Not that he didn't trust Jiang Chen, but the prospect was a little too shocking for him to take in at once.

"The world of martial dao has things much more amazing than this," smiled Jiang Chen. "Empyrean bloodlines were relatively commonplace in ancient times, no?"

"The ancient times are just that, ancient," murmured Emperor Peerless. "We live in the present era, where not even a tenth of the heritages from back then have been passed down. The human domain right now can't rival even a tenth of the ancient times in resources and manpower. I've traveled the human domain for a long time, but I've never heard of any empyrean experts anywhere."

Having recovered from her shock, Madame Yun spoke up as well. "Wise younger brother, is it really possible to assimilate the empyrean bloodline? Can Brother Mo's mortal body really endure its stresses?"

"Don't worry, sister-in-law," laughed Jiang Chen. "If my brother couldn't, why would I give it to him so recklessly? The strength of this bloodline lies in its infinite potential. Old Brother Mo is a great emperor, but an advanced emperor realm cultivator would have a reasonable chance at using it just as well. It would be quite a bit more dangerous for them, of course, but it is possible. As for a great emperor as vigorous as old brother here, he should have almost zero risk."

"So there's a risk, after all?" As someone who'd been badly injured for a number of years, Madame Yun was more cautious than most.

"What are you worrying about, Ah Yun? Do you think my brother would hurt me?" Emperor Peerless's eyes glittered with enthusiasm. He rubbed his hands incessantly, breaking out into embarrassed laughter. "Actually, I was thinking your present to me is somewhat undeserving. Receiving something so precious out of the blue is... well, you know, it flusters me a little. There's so many other great emperors here in Veluriyam Capital..."

"I know there are many great emperors here in Veluriyam Capital, old brother, but not everyone is compatible with the kunpeng bloodline. Speed is already your strong suit, and you don't currently have any bloodlines that conflict. That's why this bloodline is most appropriate for you."

Jiang Chen had also considered giving the kunpeng bloodline to Emperor Coiling Dragon or Emperor Void. But after careful contemplation, he thought that it wasn't a good idea for the time being.

Of the three drops of kunpeng blood, one had been given to Emperor Peafowl. He was the man most compatible with the bloodline. Deliberation caused Jiang Chen to gift the second to Emperor Peerless. Recruiting a wandering great emperor to his side meant a wealth of hidden benefits, given the man's prominence in the wandering cultivator community.

As for the third, Jiang Chen hadn't yet settled on the best recipient for it. Emperor Coiling Dragon definitely didn't need it. The Coiling Dragon Clan possessed a true dragon bloodline already, the only problem being its excessive dilution. That was why Jiang Chen had given the true dragon blood to young master Ji San. Having assimilated the true dragon blood, his friend's new potential in martial dao was nothing short of monstrous.

"Little brother," Emperor Peerless's eyes shone with a keen light. He stared at Jiang Chen with great sincerity. "You're giving me a tremendous opportunity that I cannot honestly refuse. I would like to ask you one thing only. Once you've given me the kunpeng blood, what will you do for yourself?"

If Jiang Chen had been unwilling to use the only drop of kunpeng blood on himself, then Emperor Peerless couldn't accept it no matter his personal eagerness. This was a principle that he lived by.

"Don't worry about me, Old Brother Mo," smiled Jiang Chen. "Why would I give this drop of kunpeng blood to you if I didn't have something of my own?"

"Oh? Are you saying that you have an opportunity to break through to empyrean realm as well?" Emperor Peerless's eyes became even brighter.

Jiang Chen decided not to hold back. The old emperor was an intimate friend and they needed a morale boost. "Even if I don't use the kunpeng blood, there is no question that I will become an empyrean cultivator one day," declared Jiang Chen confidently.

"Well said!"

Emperor Peerless slapped his thigh, roaring with laughter. "Worthy words from my equally worthy brother. That's the confidence I like to hear!"

Jiang Chen's poise had won him over.

"To dwell further on this would be duplicitous of me. I'll take the kunpeng bloodline, and with it, a record of your great kindness." The rims of the emperor's eyes reddened in passion.

For the past several millennia, everyone in the human domain knew that emperor realm was about the highest extents that cultivation could reach. Occasionally, news of time-worn great emperors' disappearances would arise. According to rumor, they had ascended to empyrean and gone elsewhere. However, Emperor Peerless didn't personally know whether there were empyrean experts in the world. In fact, he had no idea whether he could break through at all.

After all, he was just a wandering cultivator, not a member of a sprawling faction. Experts who were part of the strongest sects often contained reclusive great emperors who would eventually leave clues about empyrean realm behind them.

Emperor Peerless had no way of obtaining anything of the sort. An opportunity from Jiang Chen to ascend to empyrean realm was something he simply could not refuse. Deep down, he didn't want to.

“Old Brother Mo, there’s no need for such talk between us brothers. When you become an empyrean expert one day, I too will bask in shared honor.”

“May things turn out just as you say,” chuckled the emperor.

Walking over with a serious stride, Madame Yun gave Jiang Chen a formal curtsy. “Good brother, I would like to genuinely thank you. Brother Mo making the acquaintance of a brother like you is one of the greatest blessings in his life.”

“You are too kind, sister-in-law. I’m not deserving of such lofty praise. In terms of blessings, you should be counted far greater than me. Isn’t that right, Old Brother Mo?”

“Slick words from a slick fellow,” chortled Emperor Peerless. “Still, meeting a brother as noble as you has definitely made my life worthwhile.”

“Then you should devote yourselves even more to our good brother’s affairs,” Madame Yun followed seamlessly.

“Hey! I’ve always been devoted,” objected the emperor, rather innocently.

Jiang Chen hadn’t worried about Mo Wushuang’s lack of devotion even without the gift, but with it, there was no doubt that the old emperor would become even closer to him.

.....

Within Emperor Shura’s retreat, there was a different sight.

“Fellow daoist, the first wave of vassals for the meeting should reach the capital around tomorrow.” Emperor Vastsea was one of Emperor Shura’s staunchest allies.

“Very good.” Emperor Shura inclined his head. His recent high spirits were written on his face. There was no hint of the depression from before.

The past few years had gone very poorly for the emperor. The Majestic Clan that he’d relied so heavily upon had been randomly arbitrarily taken out, the entire clan sentenced to death. At the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering, several of his most intimate disciples had been outshone in the trials. Though the rankings that they’d ended with had been spectacularly high, others had stolen all of their thunder in the nine obelisks’ test.

Most importantly, the outside world had all guessed that Emperor Peafowl would slowly transition him in as the next ruler of Veluriyam Capital after young lord Fan’s death. But out of the blue came a young lord Zhen, who was made heir almost on the spot, extinguishing his ambitions in an instant.

All of his loss had been due to one person: young lord Zhen!

That young man’s abrupt rise into the spotlight had caused Emperor Shura and his faction to meet with a string of bad luck. Thankfully, all that was in the past now. Emperor Shura was ready to turn the tides. The Vassal Meeting was going to be the moment that he would obtain full formal control over the city!

“Vastsea, is there any recent news from Sacred Peafowl Mountain?” The emperor turned his head, glancing askance at his junior peer.

“Heh, the Sacred Peafowl Mountain has mostly kept its head down. Taiyuan Tower being suppressed didn’t get anyone from them to come out. I think that young lord Zhen is either afraid or absent,” chuckled Vastsea.

“Absent?” Emperor Shura furrowed his brow. He was disappointed rather than pleased that the young lord wasn’t around.

Without him, the emperor wasn’t able to straightforwardly secure authority over the city. After all, Emperor Peafowl still ruled over Veluriyam Capital in name. In his absence, young lord Zhen would be the most proper successor.

If Emperor Shura wanted to seize the throne, the easiest way to do so would be for him to show his dominance over young lord Zhen in every respect. There could be no complaints from the other party then. But, if young lord Zhen wasn’t around, then there was a flaw in his takeover.

It was possible for young lord Zhen to one day overthrow him upon the former’s return. With the Progeny Feather Medallion in hand, Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s heir could convene a Vassal Meeting just as easily as he had.

“It doesn’t matter whether he’s here, fellow daoist. We will absolutely seize control of Veluriyam Capital this time. What will the current Sacred Peafowl Mountain fight you with?” Emperor Vastsea was much more optimistic.

“Vastsea, you’ve done a great deal for me in this. When my seat on the throne is secure, the spot of the second great emperor will be yours,” promised Emperor Shura.

A spark of enthusiasm flashed across Emperor Vastsea’s eyes. “I’m just worried that Emperor Petalpluck won’t agree to it.”

He was ignoring Sacred Peafowl Mountain entirely.

“When we have absolute command over the situation here, none of this will be a problem.” Emperor Shura waved a hand. “Right, did you happen to find any clues about what happened at that pill store last time?”

The mention of the incident troubled Emperor Vastsea. “Not yet. The person involved came and went with equal speed. He left no clues at all. Fellow daoist, do you think there will be any aftershocks from it?”

“Sigh. Pillfire City sent the people involved with the store. They haven’t made any demands of me yet, but I’m concerned that there’ll be problems down the line.” Emperor Shura frowned.

Chapter 1189: The Vassal Meeting

The convention of the Vassal Meeting livened up Veluriyam Capital significantly. Because of the arrival of kings and lords from everywhere, the city bustled with activity. Thirteen great nations, eight hundred cities, and all their associated retinues... all in all, a hundred thousand newcomers were slated to arrive.

Veluriyam Capital had no problem housing an additional hundred thousand. In fact, it could do so rather easily. Each vassal had his own background and patron. From them, Emperor Peafowl had personally cultivated at least a third. These people bore tremendous goodwill towards Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Because Emperor Peafowl had always been the foremost great emperor of Veluriyam for as long as anyone could remember, the kings and lords made visiting Sacred Peafowl Mountain the first order of their affairs upon arrival.

They had all heard about the rumors, of course. The vassals owing their positions to the emperor especially wanted to find out more once they were there. However, they heard another piece of news as soon as they entered the city's gates. Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord Zhen was in residence at Vermilion Bird Avenue's Taiyuan Tower.

"Has everyone heard? Young lord Zhen is back!"

"What? Weren't there rumors that young lord Zhen disappeared as well? Is he back, then?"

"Yes. The young lord has also announced that Emperor Peafowl isn't lost."

"Fantastic news! I mean, who under the heavens can kill an expert like Emperor Peafowl? I never believed the idle gossip about his death!"

"Exactly so. Only with Emperor Peafowl around can Veluriyam Capital maintain stability. No one can replace a man of his greatness in our great capital!"

"Shh, brother. You can't say that too loudly around here. Don't risk angering the wrong people."

"Hmph, I'm not scared of anybody. Emperor Peafowl is the only one I'll recognize. Even if he's not around any more, I'd rather support young lord Zhen."

"But... young lord Zhen is still young."

"So what if he is? Youth isn't correlated with ambition. Young lord Zhen has done many amazing things despite his age. Meanwhile, some people have lived several thousand years without doing much. How has Veluriyam Capital benefited? Can you give me some examples?"

These words were pointed directly at Emperor Shura's lack of contribution towards the city. To be fair to the man, the emperor had lived beneath Emperor Peafowl's shadow for a long time. He had done his share of work for the city's benefit, but Emperor Peafowl's own radiance dwarfed them into insignificance. It was quite likely that his influence over Veluriyam Capital couldn't match young lord Zhen's, despite the young man's very recent ascension to prominence.

"Eh. You can't talk like that. If tragedy really has befallen Emperor Peafowl, then the city needs someone to take the reins. Young lord Zhen is extremely young, after all. He would have trouble maintaining unity. How would he be able to shoulder the burden of running the entire Veluriyam Capital?"

"So what if he's young? Everyone is young once. Even Emperor Peafowl at his age would have a hard time being compared to our current young lord. As long as he has appropriate advisors, he'll have a good grasp of things within a hundred years."

"But can Veluriyam Capital wait that long? The Upper Eight Regions has some cutthroat competition. If you show the tiniest bit of indiscretion, you could be very well be consumed. Plus, a few centuries of transition with Emperor Shura could do the city some good. When young lord Zhen really grows up, it's quite possible the rule will return to him."

“That’s absurd. Would you want to give up the throne once you’ve gotten a taste of power? Would anyone abdicate willingly?”

“So according to you, an internal struggle here in the capital is inevitable?”

“That depends on whether certain people can control their ambitions. At the heart of it, Veluriyam Capital belongs to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. That’s been the tradition here for three thousand years.”

There was plenty of chaotic discussion in the streets. Some supported young lord Zhen, others, Emperor Shura. The vassals who’d been hand-picked by Emperor Peafowl felt a certain degree of increased assurance when they heard about young lord Zhen’s presence in Taiyuan Tower.

Their journey had been filled with worries. Just like everyone else, they’d heard of the rumor about Emperor Peafowl’s fall and young lord Zhen’s absence from the city. Such words were deeply unsettling to them. Clearly, the Vassal Meeting was being convened so that Emperor Shura could seize power.

Since they had been chosen by Emperor Peafowl personally, they were quite loyal to the man. None of them was willing to see Emperor Shura in power. Once that happened, they would be removed sooner or later as loyalists to the previous ruler. This wasn’t paranoid conjecture, but grim certainty. Therefore, they were extremely unhappy about the prospect of someone different at the helm.

But what did their feelings matter, in the absence of both Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s emperor and young lord? Without someone in their corner, they had no room to speak up even if they wanted to voice their opposition.

Young lord Zhen’s return to the city bolstered their gloomy spirits. Though they wanted Emperor Peafowl more, his designated heir wasn’t a bad second option. The young lord’s renown in the city rivaled any of the titled great emperors. In fact, he had likely done more notable things for the city than most of them. His battle with Pill King Ji Lang alone gave him irreplaceable prestige. As it should, given the unprecedented nature of the victory.

.....

Within Taiyuan Tower, Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void handed Jiang Chen a list of names.

“Young lord Zhen, this list should be comprehensive for the most part. There may be one or two omissions, but not more than that. Everyone here was hand-picked by Emperor Peafowl to their positions. There is no way they would support Emperor Shura.”

“But even so, we must take care that he does not win them over.” Emperor Void piped up afterwards.

“Oh, there’s no doubt that he’s going to try. But people look out for their self-interests and those that convert will be relatively few. Plus, Emperor Peafowl has always had a keen eye for men of quality.” Emperor Coiling Dragon laughed.

Jiang Chen glanced at the paper. It was a lengthy list of roughly three hundred names long.

“His Majesty promoted based solely on merit. There’s no incompetence mixed in,” Cloudsoar Monarch cut in.

"Of course. I trust His Majesty implicitly. Still, anyone that turns to Emperor Shura under the current climate is understandable." Jiang Chen placed the list down slowly; he heard the beginnings of a report from outside. "Young lord, the king of Bluesky Nation is asking for an audience."

Bluesky Nation? The young man recalled at once his trip to the Prancing Horse Inn. He'd also been to the nation's capital, Goldtower City. In fact, he had invaded the nation's royal palace.

"Granted."

The king of Bluesky Nation strode inside, an entourage of six trailing behind him. Four of them were guardsmen, but Jiang Chen was familiar with the remaining two. One was the nation's crown prince, and the other, his tutor.

Walking behind his father, the crown prince appeared mildly embarrassed. Clearly, he was reminded of certain past events as well. His thoughts ran uncomfortably around.

"Greetings to young lord Zhen. I am Li Chunyu, the king of Bluesky Nation. Here is my son, Li Mai." Bluesky's king bore himself in a remarkably kingly manner.

His son came forward at his father's introduction, respectfully saluting to Jiang Chen. "My humble greetings, young lord Zhen."

The young man addressed laughed in response, rather cheerfully. "How have you been, Crown Prince Li Mai?"

Li Mai was stunned by the reaction. "Young lord, you..."

"I was busy with other affairs on my visit to Bluesky Nation," smiled Jiang Chen. "It was somewhat disrespectful of me not to have visited its king."

As the nation's king, Li Chunyu knew a great deal about the goings-on of his demesne. Of course he was informed about Jiang Chen's visit to both Goldtower City and his palace. However, as long as the young man didn't mention it himself, he couldn't either as a member of a subject nation. But, since Jiang Chen was the one who had broached the subject, there was nothing more to worry about.

"My son made a few remarks about your visit, young lord. It is we who must apologize for our insufficient graciousness. We hear stories almost daily about your exploits back home in Bluesky Nation. Your incredible dual masteries of both pill and martial dao is unrivaled. Even the insufferably proud Pillfire City has suffered numerous defeats at your hand. My son still regales me about seeing your marvelous pill dao skills in person."

"You are too kind, my good king. Back then, I mentioned that Taiyuan Tower would be able to supply Bluesky Nation with Tiger Eruption Pills. How is that going? Were you able to receive the pills alright?" Jiang Chen asked.

"Ah, yes, yes. We received the pills, no problem," replied the king hurriedly. "There have been several shipments of them already. That aside... ever since he saw your pill artistry, young lord, my son has dwelled on it day and night. That's why he absolutely begged me to take him along for the Vassal Meeting—so that he could meet you again."

Prince Li Mai welled up with devotion. “Young lord Zhen, I’m from a small-time place. In Goldtower City, the best pill masters we have are pill kings barely over the threshold of high rank. I... I wanted to beseech you to allow me to stay here in Taiyuan Tower. I would be happy just to work as an apprentice!”

As a youth engrossed in pill dao, Li Mai wholeheartedly worshiped young lord Zhen.

“What do you think, King Li?” Jiang Chen glanced at the young man’s father.

“If you will have him, young lord,” answered the king. “It would be his greatest honor, a once-in-a-lifetime blessing. He should consider himself truly lucky to be allowed to stay.”

“You two are father and son, alright,” the young lord chuckled. “The words that come from your lips are equally sweet. I have observed Li Mai’s enthusiasm about pill dao. It’s rare for a large nation’s crown prince to refine pills in the royal palace. If he is sure about his decision, then he may stay. I will teach him myself if I have the time, and my best disciples can take my place otherwise. Do not worry, Your Majesty. Sacred Peafowl Mountain will return to you a pill expert of a prince!”

This wasn’t idle boasting on Jiang Chen’s part. He was a veritable miracle worker when it came to pill dao. Plus, it wasn’t like Li Mai was dull or untalented. As the crown prince, he was both gifted and resourceful—certainly more than a match for the typical scion of a great clan.

Chapter 1190: The Shocking Appearance of the Pinecrane Pill

As king of Bluesky Nation, Li Chunyu naturally didn’t lack perception or wits. Taiyuan Tower and Sacred Peafowl Mountain might seem closely related, but their differences couldn’t be bigger. They’d asked for an apprenticeship for Li Mai at Taiyuan Tower, but young lord Zhen promised that the Sacred Peafowl Mountain would train the prince into a pill dao extraordinaire instead.

Young lord Zhen was expressing his fullest sincerity in offering to develop Li Mai’s talents using Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s resources, instead of abandoning the crown prince at Taiyuan Tower. Taiyuan Tower was very excellent, but it was merely a pill shop in the end. Even though young lord Zhen was closely associated with the shop, it’d been a while since he even set foot in its premises.

Being invited to Sacred Peafowl Mountain was a completely different ballgame. Li Mai would receive personal pointers from young lord Zhen and be taught by the young lord’s true disciples! The royal duo were very aware who the young lord’s true disciples were. Pill King Bu and Pill King Lu Feng were some of the best ninth rank pill kings in Veluriyam Capital. The young Lin Yanyu was rumored to be an extremely talented pill dao genius as well. Li Mai would never be mediocre if he could learn from these elites.

“Young lord Zhen, the kindness you’ve shown to us is undeserved. The Li clan of Bluesky Nation swears completely allegiance and fealty to you. Emperor Peafowl raised me into my power, and now you’ve done the same for my son. Even if our bones are ground into dust, the Li Clan solemnly swears to repay this debt of gratitude!”

This was a proclamation of his allegiance to Jiang Chen. The Bluesky Nation was ranked top three amongst Veluriyam Capital’s thirteen nations. Guarding the capital’s borders, they were one of the most influential nations.

Emperor Void broke his silence with a laugh. "Brother Chunyu, I knew that Daoist Peafowl helped you into power. You've done well over the years. My brother's efforts hadn't been in vain."

Li Chunyu naturally recognized Emperor Void. "I'm ashamed. There's plenty I have to improve on."

Emperor Coiling Dragon laughed. "Us old fools no longer have any pointers to give, but the things Prince Li Mai can learn from young lord Zhen will be useful for the rest of his life. I'm not exaggerating one bit. To be frank, the reason I'm still alive and well today is all thanks to the young lord."

When Emperor Coiling Dragon was still a great clan lord, he'd exhausted his lifespan and was on the verge of death. Many speculated that the Coiling Dragon Clan's days were numbered. Even the emperor himself had lost hope and had begun to pave the way for the clan's future generations.

However, young lord Zhen's sudden appearance had changed his fate forever. Thus, his loyalty to the Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Jiang Chen was unrivalled. He hadn't told a single soul about the incident, but he could no longer contain the impulse anymore.

The crowd stared at him curiously, to which he responded by giving Jiang Chen a cupped fist salute.

"Young lord Zhen, there are some matters which you've ordered me not to disclose, but I believe there's no longer a need to hide it. Everyone, my lifespan once neared its end and I was on the verge of cultivation dissipation. However, young lord Zhen suddenly appeared out of nowhere and extended my life by a few more years with a secret art. After some fortuitous encounters, I finally obtained some exotic spirit herbs and treasures that further extended my lifespan and gave me a chance to break through the great emperor realm. The young lord gave me a new lease in life. Without him, I'd be a bag of buried bones right now and wouldn't be here talking to all of you."

It was the first time Emperor Void had heard of this as well.

"Daoist Coiling Dragon, I hadn't known." Emperor Void was extremely flabbergasted. "Does young lord Zhen truly possess a lifespan extending art?"

Jiang Chen laughed. "It was a secret art that I received during a fortuitous encounter. It can only extend one's life by a few years. Didn't you hear what Emperor Coiling Dragon said? His lifespan was only further extended due to exotic spirit herbs and treasures."

He was wondering if he should tell everyone about the Pinecrane Pill. There wasn't much of a reason to keep it a secret any longer. In fact, revealing it to everyone might even benefit him. Every bit of fame was incredibly important right now.

Emperor Void displayed great interest. "Such treasures are as scarce as a hen's teeth! Brother Coiling Dragon, forgive me if I overstep my boundaries, but what exactly is this treasure that can extend one's lifespan?"

Rare treasures that extended one's lifespan really did exist and could be found on every plane. Such spirit herbs were actually a common sight in the heavenly planes. For example, a bite of a fruit from the Heavenly Peach Tree that took three thousand years to bloom, three thousand years to bear fruit, and three more thousand years to ripen would yield tens of thousands more years of life.

Another exotic herb called the Ginseng Fruit would also yield similar results. These kinds of treasures were less common in the secular world, but they definitely existed.

At the same time, they were a lot less effective and often yielded only dozens or hundreds of years worth of lifespan. It was practically impossible to find one that could yield five hundred more years, which was why Emperor Void was so excited.

Emperor Coiling Dragon glanced at Jiang Chen and laughed. "It's better if we leave this topic for the future."

Without Jiang Chen's consent, the emperor would never tell a soul about the pill. He'd solemnly promised to keep it a secret after all. The emperor was clearly trying to improve Jiang Chen's prestige.

"Actually, it's not an exotic herb or treasure. I've merely refined two treasures into a pill that extends one's life." Jiang Chen said with a smile.

"A pill? The Longevity Pill?" Emperor Void asked curiously.

"No, not the Longevity Pill." Jiang Chen shook his head. "That pill is only suitable for sage realm cultivators. The pill I'm talking about is called the Pinecrane Pill. It's only suitable for emperor realm cultivators. Great emperors may consume it too, but its effects will be greatly reduced.

The Pinecrane Pill! The name of the pill left a deep impression in Emperor Void's heart. The convoy of six from Bluesky Nation were completely flabbergasted by the conversation and remained slack jawed for the longest time.

"There's actually such a miraculous pill in this world?" Li Chunyu murmured. "Young lord Zhen's talent in pill dao truly knows no bounds! You're a pill savant indeed!"

A look of worship flashed across Li Mai's face. He was practically taking Jiang Chen for a god.

Li Chunyu glanced at his subordinates sternly. "Everything you hear today must remain in this room! You're not to spread news of this to anyone! Understood?!"

He was being extremely cautious, but since Jiang Chen had talked about the Pinecrane Pill, that meant the young lord no longer cared if it was publicly known. There was no longer a need to keep it a secret.

He'd also gifted it to Third Master Jing and Gu Xintang at the Tilted Moon Region. Attempting to keep the pill a secret under such circumstances was a little counterintuitive. Jiang Chen smiled. "King Chunyu, you needn't be so nervous. It doesn't matter if news of it spreads."

It was merely the name of the pill anyways. Even if the ingredient list were to spread, not every Wang, Chen, and Lin could actually refine such a pill. It took a great amount of knowledge to actually achieve such a feat.

"The Pinecrane... Pill. That's wonderful!" Emperor Void slapped his thigh. "Isn't the pill an enormous asset to Sacred Peafowl Mountain?"

Emperor Void was very farsighted. He believed that the Pinecrane Pill would be a huge asset to the sacred mountain. Those who planned on joining Emperor Shura's side would definitely have to think

twice now. Were they really going to choose Emperor Shura over a pill dao savant like young lord Zhen? What could the emperor possibly bring to the table for Veluriyam Capital?

Young lord Zhen's miraculous achievements were proof of what he could bring to the capital. He was the capital's only hope of ever defeating Pillfire City and becoming the foremost pill dao faction in the Upper Eight Regions.

Emperor Shura was strong, but he was rather mediocre when compared to the rest of the Upper Eight Regions. He wasn't an overwhelmingly powerful individual like Emperor Peafowl.

There was a scale in everyone's hearts that they were using to weigh the pros and cons.

Emperor Coiling Dragon slapped his thighs with elation. "That's right! Why didn't I think of that sooner? Daoist Void, why don't we immediately spread news about the Pinecrane Pill?"

Emperor Void smiled. "As we should."

Emperor Peerless had sat beside Jiang Chen throughout the ordeal without saying a word. As a guest and Jiang Chen's bodyguard, he didn't want to stand out. But he couldn't help but speak out after hearing the exchange between the other two great emperors. "Fellow daoists, do you mind if I add a word or two?"

Emperor Peerless was widely revered throughout the Upper Eight Regions. He wasn't on the same level as Emperor Peafowl or Emperor Pill Zenith yet, but he definitely belonged in the upper echelon.

Emperor Void and Emperor Coiling Dragon was more than glad to have him as Jiang Chen's guest and bodyguard and naturally wouldn't stop him from speaking.

"Absolutely! We wait with bated breath!" Emperor Coiling Dragon broke into a hearty laugh.

"Brother Mo, please speak your mind." Emperor Void nodded.

Emperor Peerless nodded without any reserve. "Maybe you've heard about me before. My cultivation isn't exceptional, but I have ambitions of my own. So why do I willingly serve as younger brother Zhen's guest?"

Why?

Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void were incredibly curious, but not as much as King Li Chunyu. They'd heard some rumors, but the actual facts had eluded them. Since Emperor Peerless had volunteered to talk about it, they would naturally listen with ears wide open.

"The reason is very simple. Not only has young lord Zhen saved my life, but also my dao partner as well. I owe him two lives. The very thing that saved my dao partner was the Pinecrane Pill. I saw the pill work its magic with my very own eyes. Many in the Upper Eight Regions should know about my dao partner's injuries. I believe that everyone also knows I scoured the region for a thousand years to find a cure. And now, my dao partner is now fully cured without any side effects. Isn't the Pinecrane Pill simply miraculous?"

The Pinecrane Pill saved the life of Emperor Peerless' dao partner?

The crowd could no longer keep their calm. They figured that there was a reason behind Emperor Peerless' complete devotion to young lord Zhen, but they were still surprised by the truth.