

Three Realms 1191

Chapter 1191: Emperor Peafowls Whereabouts

The atmosphere suddenly froze. A long moment later, Emperor Void finally let out a long sigh.

“Unimaginable, truly unimaginable! To think that Pill King Zhen’s pill dao fortunes are this extraordinary. Everyone in Veluriyam Capital would be blind to give up such a genius. Alright, I will support young lord Zhen for as long as I, Void, am still in Veluriyam Capital. No one, whatever their ambitions may be, shall harm young lord Zhen while I still draw breath.”

Emperor Void had finally voiced his official support.

“Hehe, you’re not going to count the Coiling Dragon faction out, are you?” Emperor Coiling Dragon declared heroically. “Maybe there are others who thought that we’re supporting him out of either selfishness or past favors, but they don’t know that our decision is made out of consideration for Veluriyam Capital’s future as well. I’ve always believed that Veluriyam Capital will be brought to greater heights in young lord Zhen’s hands. This is also something Emperor Peafowl himself declared back when he was around.”

“That’s right. Who else but young lord Zhen could win such praise from Emperor Peafowl?” Emperor Void also nodded.

Of course, the king of Bluesky Nation was aware that their show was meant for him.

“Your Majesties, Chunyu may be weak, but I also know the saying that one should repay a favor many times over. I owe both Emperor Peafowl and young lord Zhen many favors, so of course I and Bluesky Nation swear to defend the orthodoxy of Sacred Peafowl Mountain to the very end!”

Emperor Peerless chuckled. “Well, I owe young lord Zhen my life, twice over. Of course I’m going to support him with all I’ve got.”

The four monarchs also seized the opportunity to declare, “We, the four monarchs, swear to defend Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s honor and young lord Zhen’s position to our deaths!”

They were beyond words right now. They were no fools; they knew what the Pinecrane Pill represented.

The human heart could be a very materialistic thing sometimes. Prior fame and contribution became quite flimsy when viewed through the lens of reality and one’s own interest. Many might admire young lord Zhen deeply and be sympathetic to his plight out of everything he’d done, but when push came to shove, they might not necessarily support him.

After all, any normal person would choose to support a great emperor who had made his name for the past thousand years over a new young lord. Such was reality. A great emperor’s strength and power were his dominant advantage.

However, “profit” was equally present in the world, and it was just as decisive as the other factors. It might not be possible to equate Pinecrane Pills with actual profit just yet, but who wouldn’t want such an amazing pill for themselves?

Right now, they had to choose a side. If they chose to join Emperor Shura and offended young lord Zhen as a result, they wouldn't be able to change their minds later. It would be a pipe dream to think that young lord Zhen would give them a Pinecrane Pill in any capacity after that.

The four monarchs were careful thinkers. It didn't take them long to realize that the Pinecrane Pill commanded tremendous strategic value in the upcoming Vassal Meeting.

At the beginning, they'd thought that young lord Zhen only had a ten to twenty percent chance to beat Emperor Shura in the upcoming Vassal Meeting. But after the Pinecrane Pill was factored into the equation, his chances of winning had ballooned to at least thirty to forty percent. It delighted them just thinking about it.

"A few vassals have arrived and are requesting to see you, young lord."

"The vassals of the Seven Southern Cities have requested to see you, young lord."

"Young lord..."

All of the kings and city lords would be arriving in a few days' time. Naturally, those who came to them first were those who had been personally promoted by Emperor Peafowl. As the line of visitors streamed continuously into the store, Taiyuan Tower's atmosphere grew lively. The four monarchs felt warmth grow in their hearts as they watched the stream of vassals coming to pay homage. They berated themselves for underestimating Emperor Peafowl and young lord Zhen's charisma.

A long time ago, Emperor Peafowl had gone against many opposing voices and promoted these people to importance. Naturally, they hadn't forgotten the kindness the great emperor showed them. As the saying went, strong winds prove resilient grass, and troubled times identify faithful ministers.

Those who had rushed over to visit young lord Zhen were reliable. Of course, it was entirely possible that there might be a spy or two in this crowd who had secretly joined Emperor Shura's side. They were here to spy and report back to the great emperor everything they knew, and it was impossible for the four monarchs to identify them. Still, the vast majority of the visitors had to be Sacred Peafowl Mountain's supporters.

Taiyuan Tower had made all sorts of preparations and had no problems welcoming the guests. Moreover, Emperor Coiling Dragon had opened his former residence to the public so as to add to the accommodations. All of this was sending a clear message that Sacred Peafowl Mountain didn't plan to give up just like that.

Of course, news of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's popularity had reached Emperor Shura's ears at first light.

"A lot of people rushed to meet young lord Zhen, you say?" Emperor Shura looked a little displeased. "They have no understanding of the times, I see."

Emperor Shura had greeted, hinted and even openly invited all these people to join him. Unfortunately, very few had actually accepted the olive branch he offered.

Traitors were few in the world of martial dao. Most hadn't forgotten their pride as a cultivator, and they weren't stupid either. They couldn't tell if the olive branch Emperor Shura offered them was just a

temporary measure. What if he turned against them after he came into a position of power? It was something they couldn't simply overlook.

Emperor Vastsea sneered. "These people were all done a favor by Emperor Peafowl in the past. According to my calculation, they number less than a third of the total, after deducting those we managed to pull to our side. Therefore, they are utterly incapable of overcoming you, brother."

Emperor Shura snorted coldly. "Veluriyam Capital stinks too much of a certain person right now. If we don't cleanse this city of his mark, we will never be able to break out of our shell and breathe some fresh air."

Naturally, the person Emperor Shura was referring to was Emperor Peafowl. He was right too. Emperor Peafowl's image in Veluriyam Capital was too strong. The great emperor's handiwork could be seen almost everywhere in the city. Emperor Shura had encountered a lot of friction when he attempted to spread his fame and power. Even he admitted that Emperor Peafowl was a tall mountain to overcome.

"He's not coming back though, hahaha!" Emperor Vastsea looked and sounded very pleased as he said this.

"Mm." Emperor Shura nodded. "All in all, we executed this rather cleanly. Had we failed, we would've had to live under his shadow for the rest of our lives."

"Are you absolutely certain he's not coming back, brother daoist? There is no room for carelessness here." Emperor Vastsea still sounded a little uncertain.

"There were a lot of experts who contributed in the ambush. There will be no problems." A trace of ruthlessness flashed through Emperor Shura's eyes.

"But no one saw his corpse, did they?" Although Emperor Vastsea was full of hatred when Emperor Peafowl was brought up, it wasn't without a trace of fear.

"He was attacked by multiple great emperors and had to escape with severe wounds. Unfortunately for him, the place he chose to escape to was the desolate wildlands. Do you think he can come out of there alive with his level of injuries?" Emperor Shura responded coldly.

"I wouldn't worry if he was anyone else, but he's Emperor Peafowl... I don't know why, but I can't help but feel unsettled for some reason." "What are you worried about? Emperor Pillzenith told me personally that even he wouldn't have been able to recover from those kind of wounds unless a pill emperor healed him on the spot. Even then, his chances of surviving was only one in a hundred, not to mention that he fled into the land of sealed demons. He may be powerful, but do you really think he's more powerful than Emperor Pillzenith?" Emperor Shura asked coldly.

"I think... they're at about the same level, aren't they?"

"Even if they are, Emperor Pillzenith himself said that he wouldn't be able to recover from those wounds. Do you think that he's better than Emperor Pillzenith in terms of pill dao? There's no doubt who's the inferior one in this regard!"

"Then I guess he really isn't coming back." Emperor Vastsea slowly relaxed. "Still, I think we should visit the desolate wildlands when the time is right. I would much prefer confirm this with my own eyes."

But Emperor Shura waved his hands. "There's no need. Even if he does manage to return from that place, there's no way he can recover from his wounds, and his cultivation would've fallen off greatly. Even better, he has nothing that could prove our involvement in this matter. Do you think the people would still obey his every whim if he becomes much weaker?"

The strong was king in the martial dao world.

No matter how powerful Emperor Peafowl used to be, it was law that he had to give up his position if his cultivation weakened. There was no such thing as a middle ground here. Maybe the populace would still respect a weakened Emperor Peafowl like they used to in the past, but they would never entrust their lives to him.

Emperor Vastsea began to chuckle. "Then all is well. The way you put it, I'm actually looking forward to him returning, brother."

"Why?" Emperor Shura frowned.

"Just think. What does it mean if his cultivation declines greatly? He will be a tiger without claws or teeth! I so want to see his sorry look!" For whatever reason, Emperor Vastsea seemed to hate Emperor Peafowl to the bone. Maybe it was because the latter's presence had prevented him from exercising his ambitions].

"Hehe, I understand what you mean, but it's not going to be easy in Veluriyam Capital. He is prestigious. We may be able to strip him of his position, but the people of Veluriyam Capital won't allow us to ridicule him."

"Hehe, of course I'm not going to do that in front of everyone. Still, I want to see him in tatters and low spirits. Say, what was the that poison Emperor Pillzenith used? How powerful it must be to prevent Emperor Peafowl's cultivation from recovering!"

"This isn't something you and I should worry about." Emperor Shura said coldly. He truly didn't want to discuss Emperor Pillzenith in any capacity because he was worried over whether his decision to ally with his enemy was correct or not. Emperor Peafowl had been eliminated from the board, but if Emperor Pillzenith decided to make a move and plunge his hands into Veluriyam Capital, he would be hardly be able to mount a resistance.

There was a saying called "to quench one's thirst with blood". His current situation was similar to that. He was so thirsty he couldn't stop himself from drinking poison to quench it.

"Your Majesty, the vassals have all been settled accordingly. Everyone is gathered in one place and are waiting for you to see them." Another reported to Emperor Shura.

Chapter 1192: Jiang Chens Allies

Emperor Shura had made many preparations over the years for taking over the throne. The waylaying of Emperor Peafowl was without question, the most important. Aside from this, he had also expended a significant amount of effort on buying the hearts of the capital's vassals. The ones waiting here for his reception today comprised of almost half of the total. This was a concerningly large portion.

Only a short while ago, Emperor Shura was still only Veluriyam's third emperor in name. Above him wasn't only the lofty Emperor Peafowl, but Emperor Petalpluck as well. To have gathered almost half the city's vassals to his side was an alarming accomplishment, the greatest guarantee for his work.

If he expended just a bit more effort, he would surely be able to win a few more over. Then, it wouldn't matter if the rest remained neutral. As long as the number of vassals supporting him exceeded those that did Sacred Peafowl Mountain, he could rightfully become the foremost emperor of Veluriyam Capital. The sovereign throne would be finally his.

The news of the numerous visitors at Emperor Shura's side travelled quickly to Taiyuan Tower and into Jiang Chen's ears. It was the last three days before the Vassal Meeting formally began. Competition for people was growing all the fiercer.

"Young lord, those people are merely attempting to curry favor. I don't think that all of them are particularly loyal to Emperor Shura. He has grasped less than half of the vassals after exhausting his methods. That alone shows the extent of general dislike of him. If Emperor Peafowl were still here, who of the roughly nine hundred vassals would dare misbehave? Would they disagree about anything he did?"

"That's right, young lord Zhen. Emperor Shura's forces look intimidating, but it also exposes his lack of control over them. His roots are too shallow in the end."

"If we can win over all the neutral ones, perhaps we will surpass Emperor Shura in terms of popular support." There was a plethora of different voices, but most supported the idea of Jiang Chen competing with Emperor Shura for support.

The young lord of Veluriyam waved his hands, smiling. "Everyone, we can't begin competing so openly for vassals before the gathering has even begun. Besides, a battle of words at the beginning is unavoidable."

"I suppose that's true. I don't believe Emperor Shura is eloquent enough to beat young lord Zhen," grinned Emperor Coiling Dragon.

Emperor Void nodded. "Of course, we cannot ignore the other emperors' attitudes either. Young lord, the vassals are spread out widely over the entire city for the time being, but I think we should try to sway the hearts of the other emperors."

"I'm not worried about the emperors or the vassals," interjected Emperor Peerless suddenly. "I'm much more concerned about the possibility of Emperor Shura's collusion with outsiders. If that happens, then the situation will shift in very unexpected ways."

Colluding with external enemies was a very sensitive matter. Still, Emperor Peerless had stoically laid the subject out on the table.

Emperor Coiling Dragon nodded in agreement. "We cannot eliminate the possibility. We must prepare for this with certain countermeasures."

"What do you think, young lord?" asked Emperor Void.

Jiang Chen inclined his head. "I've considered it just like everyone else. A few days ago, I extended invitations to the Great Yu Skysword Sect and the Celestial Cicada Court to join us at the Vassal Meeting as observers. I am uncertain whether the Court will come, since I've received no certain reply, but there should be no problem with the Great Yu Skysword Sect. I think the two Han sect heads should be arriving quite soon."

The two Han brothers from the Skysword Sect respected Jiang Chen immensely. They had offered immense sums to Jiang Chen to try to get him to become their guest pill emperor. The layer of amiability meant that there was no reason they wouldn't endorse Jiang Chen at such an occasion.

Jiang Chen wasn't stubborn and inflexible. He was almost certain that Emperor Shura had invited outside help. If he made no preparations whatsoever to counter that, he would be in a very passive situation. Alas, he had limited connections here in the Upper Eight Regions. He could only think of the Great Yu Skysword Sect and the Celestial Cicada Court.

Though he'd completed a formation mission for the latter party, it was up in the air whether they would return the favor. He'd used some tricks to help his cause, of course. In his message, he had made many allusions to the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's formation records in order to draw their interest.

When completing their mission, Jiang Chen had speculated whether the Celestial Cicada Court was vaguely related to the ancient sect. He'd mentioned it to Venerated Skysoarer during his time in the Veluriyam Pagoda. The old man's response had been that he should pay some attention to the sect. If a connection did exist, then it would be beneficial to reach out to them.

Jiang Chen had set the bait. Whether the Celestial Cicada Court was willing to take it, and thereby participate in Veluriyam Capital's internal feud, was wholly up to them.

The Great Yu Skysword Sect and the Celestial Cicada Court were both first rank sects in the Upper Eight Regions, and each respectively ruled over one of the regions. Their prominence was uncontestable.

Though Jiang Chen had a sister, Xu Qingxuan, over at the Tilted Moon Region as the Moon God Sect's holy maiden, he couldn't extend an invitation to her faction. The Tilted Moon Region was a bit closer to Pillfire City. More importantly, Xu Qingxuan was only a holy maiden, not the sect's main head quite yet. Announcing a relationship now would only put her in a dilemma.

Therefore, Jiang Chen refrained from inviting anyone from there in the first place. They wouldn't answer his call in the first place, and anyone who did come would work actively against him.

Just as the Great Yu Skysword Sect was being discussed, there was a secret report that made its way in. Their timing of arrival was almost devilish.

"Young lord, the two sect heads from the Great Yu Skysword Sect have entered the city already. Should we give them a high-profile welcome, or keep them well-hidden for now?"

"Well-hidden for now," commanded Jiang Chen. "If Emperor Shura's side doesn't bring out external help, we don't need to play our card."

No matter what, having an external faction work on one's behalf was a little disgraceful. The Han brothers were only intended to serve as an additional guarantee.

The last few vassals trickled in during the last three days. Veluriyam Capital's atmosphere and situation became heavier and heavier. The occasional skirmish carried the scent of violence far and wide.

Fortunately, Jiang Chen was serious about this potential problem throughout the period. He sent the Peafowl Guard on patrol in the streets. Because Sacred Peafowl Mountain was still nominally the ruler of the city, even Emperor Shura's Guard had to yield to the Peafowl Guard.

It was too key of a time to introduce unnecessary problems. Emperor Shura was in no rush for these last few days, and instructed the Shura Guard to lay low for a while. They were instructed to stay close to the ground and avoid causing any incidents, especially with the Peafowl Guard. Any gossip right now was unwanted.

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"Hey, did you hear?"

"What?"

"I hear there's yet another huge piece of news from Sacred Peafowl Mountain."

"What news?"

"Do you really not know? There's a miracle pill called the Pinecrane Pill. It allows emperor realm cultivators to live a thousand years longer. It even works to a certain extent on great emperors!"

"How can this be? That sounds pretty baseless." Some didn't believe what the news.

"Hmph, Sacred Peafowl Mountain has a very trustworthy reputation. They never spread fake news."

"Perhaps it's not from them, though. Maybe their supporters did it with ulterior motives."

"Nonsense. What do you mean, ulterior motives? I heard that Taiyuan Tower was where it was first announced, and young lord Zhen personally confirmed it."

"Personally confirmed? Did you hear that with your own ears or see it with your own eyes?"

"I'm not interested in wasting time arguing. For once, this rumor is backed by cold, hard truth. There's a mountain of evidence."

"What mountain of evidence?"

"Don't you know about Emperor Coiling Dragon? You should still remember the Coiling Dragon Clan crisis, right? The clan lord was almost at the end of his mortal life, and was very close to having his cultivation dissipate. I think everyone in the city knew about it at the time, no?"

"What? What are you trying to say?"

"You still don't understand? How did the lord of the Coiling Dragon Clan go from the edge of dissipation to a seat among the other great emperors? He used young lord Zhen's Pinecrane Pill! The young lord first lengthened his life by a few years using a secret art, then learned and refined a masterful pill recipe. With something as peerless as the Pinecrane Pill, the Coiling Dragon Clan lord received another thousand years of life. His body improved, he was finally able to break through his mortal and cultivation

limits to ascend as a great emperor!" The person who had related the story told it with a certain animation, as if he'd seen everything himself.

"Tsk tsk, it almost sounds real. But do you think such a thing is actually possible? An emperor realm cultivator living another thousand years? You make it sound as easy as eating and breathing! Then according to you, nobody would die of old age in the world of martial dao. If you use your brain to think about it for a bit, then you'll come to a more reasonable conclusion!"

"What are you talking about? Are you saying I don't have a brain?"

"Do you think you do?"

"My brain is much better than yours, you fool. You're amazingly ignorant, but still pretend you're all that. Hmph, don't forget where the Longevity Pill came from. Before that came out, there was no pill that could extend the lives of sage realm cultivators. But what about now, hmm?"

"The Longevity Pill is its own thing. Sage realm cultivators are plentiful in the human domain. There's nothing wondrous about that."

"You just don't believe in young lord Zhen, at the end of the day. It doesn't matter whether you do or not, though. His accomplishments are plain for all to see. Who defeated Pill King Ji Lang from Pillfire City? Who healed the Moon God Precious Tree in the Tilted Moon Region? Who comprehended all nine Veluriyam Obelisks within the Pagoda?" The speaker was clearly a diehard fan of Jiang Chen's. He rattled off a string of the youth's works almost effortlessly.

Similar arguments were taking place everywhere in the city.

News about the Pinecrane Pill spread further and further in an inexorable tide. Within a day, everyone and everything in the city knew about this shocking piece of information. Even some who weren't the city's subjects had gotten wind of it.

Chapter 1193: External Forces

"What? The Pinecrane Pill?" In a secret chamber somewhere in Veluriyam Capital, Emperor Pillzenith was completely astounded by the news. He'd been involved in Veluriyam Capital's internal strife from the very beginning. Before this, he'd never have thought that Emperor Shura would voluntarily invite him to join forces against Emperor Peafowl. He simply couldn't believe that Emperor Shura could be this dumb.

In fact, he'd even suspected at first that this was a ruse by Emperor Peafowl to lure him out of Pillfire City. But after a long and thorough observation, he realized that this wasn't a setup after all. Emperor Shura really had been dropped on the head when he was a child. It was risky cavorting with the enemy, but he didn't mind taking advantage of the situation.

And so, they began to collaborate with each other. Not only that, Emperor Shura had also reached out to Eternal Celestial Capital. The three factions had joined forces against Emperor Peafowl.

Of course, the one who contributed the most was still Emperor Pillzenith. He'd taken the most powerful poison available in Pillfire City and resorted to all kinds of underhanded methods to defeat Emperor

Peafowl. Even though there was no corpse, Emperor Pillzenith was absolutely certain that Emperor Peafowl was dead. Pill dao giants like him had complete faith in their poisons.

He firmly believed that Emperor Peafowl was dead. With that, his next target was Pill King Zhen. In Emperor Pillzenith's opinion, Pill King Zhen was much more annoying to deal with than Emperor Peafowl. The emperor was incredibly strong and Veluriyam Capital had flourished under his rule, but the capital was still only at the same level as Pillfire City.

Veluriyam Capital's pill dao foundation was only a fifth of Pillfire City's. They posed as no threat in that particular field. Unfortunately, that was ancient history now. Things were completely different with young lord Zhen's appearance in Veluriyam Capital.

The young lord had completely slaughtered Pill King Ji Lang in the duel over the Longevity Pill. Moreover, he'd even pretended to be a pill king from Myriad Abyss Island and slipped into the city to join the Bounty Arena, completely dominating every pill king in the city.

But that wasn't even the worst of it. When Pill King Ji Lang was driven to his wit's end over the Moon God Precious Tree, the young lord had swooped in and solved the issue with a few words. The pill king had indisputably lost to the young lord yet again. It was an enormous blow to the proud and lofty city.

Emperor Pillzenith was concealing himself within Veluriyam Capital to help push Emperor Shura to the throne while looking for a chance to get rid of Pill King Zhen. Swallowing Veluriyam Capital whole wasn't as easy as it seemed. Emperor Pillzenith had an enormous appetite, but not even his gluttony would induce him to do such a thing. After all, both territories were on opposite ends of the region. To swallow the capital whole, he'd have to traverse through the entire Upper Eight Regions.

Even if his appetite was really that voracious, it was unlikely that he'd be daring enough to do such a thing as the masses would be completely livid over his actions. If any of the other factions grew furious over his ambitions, they might suddenly see him as a threat and join forces to obliterate his faction. If he wanted to meddle in Veluriyam Capital's matters, he'd have to do so from the shadows.

Besides, so long as the capital was in Emperor Shura's hands, it would sooner or later decline into a second rate faction even without any meddling from Emperor Pillzenith. They'd no longer be on the same level as Pillfire City then. But of course, the prerequisite was that Pill King Zhen had to die and Sacred Peafowl Mountain destroyed. It was hard to predict what could happen as long as Pill King Zhen was alive.

For some reason, Emperor Pillzenith was deathly afraid of the young pill king. The mysterious youth seemed to be capable of making the impossible, possible. Thus, his great reaction couldn't be faulted when he heard about the Pinecrane Pill. It was yet another thorn in his side.

"How on earth does he have so much knowledge? Is there no end to what he knows!?" Emperor Pillzenith exclaimed with frustration. It went without saying that Pill King Zhen had something to do the Pinecrane Pill.

"Your Majesty, we're in deep trouble if the pill is truly as miraculous as the rumors. With the pill, Veluriyam Capital could definitely deal a lethal blow to our city!"

This was no exaggeration.

The Longevity Pill's impact was negligible as it was only meant for the lowly sage realm cultivators. Their numbers were aplenty, but not a single one of them could dictate the human domain's future. However, the Pinecrane Pill worked on emperors and for some extent, great emperors! This was earth shattering news!

Equipped with unparalleled strength, this level of cultivators was the demographic that could steer the human domain's future. If everyone in this demographic flocked towards the Sacred Peafowl Mountain and formed a long term relationship to get their hands on the pill, the faction would surely expand and grow at an astounding speed!

Ten years... one hundred years... five hundred years... With the passage of time, the mountain would surely catch up to Pillfire City in pill dao.

The thought of that happening sent a cold chill down Emperor Pillzenith's spine. He'd only felt some embarrassment and rage from loss of face after Pill King Ji Lang had lost to Pill King Zhen twice. But after learning about the Pinecrane Pill, he felt threatened as he foresaw complete and utter peril.

"The art of refining the Pinecrane Pill was said to have been passed down to Pill King Zhen from a master of unknown origins. When he was in our city, he claimed that he was from the Myriad Abyss Island. Perhaps his master is truly an empyrean pill saint from that island?"

One couldn't blame Emperor Pillzenith for running to such conclusions. Even though he was one of the titans of the pill dao world, he couldn't help but feel a little worthless in the face of Jiang Chen's seemingly boundless pill dao knowledge. In fact, he'd even begun to feel ashamed of himself.

This cannot do. I must get my hands on Pill King Zhen. He's practically an inexhaustible source of pill dao knowledge. Emperor Pillzenith was determined. If I can't get my hands on him, then I must make sure that he dies. Sooner or later, he'll definitely become a mortal enemy of my Pillfire City.

Emperor Pillzenith was scared. He never imagined that someone would one day threaten the very foundations of Pillfire City. He realized that city wasn't as indestructible as he first thought. He only had that misconception because no one with the skills to challenge it had ever appeared, until now. Pill King Zhen obviously possessed that level of skill and potential.

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The Holy Emperor of the Eternal Celestial Capital was also in the capital. A few of its holy kings met up with their emperor.

"Saint Holy King Mu, did you hear about the Pinecrane Pill during your stay in the capital?"

"No, Your Majesty. I've only heard about the Longevity Pill. Could this be a hoax from Sacred Peafowl Mountain?"

"This subordinate believes that it's a hoax too. The Longevity Pill is already beyond imagination. No matter how I look at it, the Pinecrane Pill just doesn't seem realistic."

The holy emperor snorted. "The world is huge and full of wonders. Just a few years ago, no one thought that the Longevity Pill could possibly be real, but now everyone has accepted it as the norm. While it

may be true that we haven't seen the Pinecrane Pill in person yet, the Coiling Dragon clan lord's story does seem plausible if you actually think about it."

Saint Holy King Mu was caught by surprise. "Your Majesty, do you truly believe that the Pinecrane Pill is real?"

"It's impossible to know whether it's real or a hoax, but the Coiling Dragon clan lord's sudden transcendence from cultivation dissipation to great emperor realm is worth a look."

"Your Majesty speaks wisely. Perhaps the Pinecrane Pill is actually real as Pill King Zhen does seem capable of everything."

"Pill King Zhen..." The Holy Emperor furrowed his brows. "Are you still unable to tell if that brat has anything to do with Jiang Chen yet?"

"But Your Majesty, he's the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain... we did have an opportunity to find out the truth, but Emperor Peafowl interrupted us. Our hands are tied in the capital..."

A look of fear surfaced briefly on the Holy Emperor's face when he heard Emperor Peafowl's name. Even though he was the lord of a first rank sect, he was nowhere near Emperor Peafowl in terms of strength and fame. The latter was the ruler of Veluriyam Capital. Everyone knew that the capital held enough heritage to rival at least two or three first rank sects!

It was the reason why he feared Emperor Peafowl so much. Fortunately, the ruler of Veluriyam Capital was long gone and would never come back. The Holy Emperor's ambitions began to run wild. The Eternal Celestial Capital's territory was rather near to Veluriyam Capital. Without Emperor Peafowl, Veluriyam's territory would soon be nibbled away by nearby factions.

Perhaps the Eternal Celestial Capital could also have a piece of the pie!

It was why they agreed to help Emperor Shura kill Emperor Peafowl in the first place. Everything had been done in the name of profit. After hearing about the Pinecrane Pill, the Holy Emperor's heart began to fill with greed again.

Last time, the Eternal Celestial Capital was able to get their hands on the Longevity Pill, but the Sacred Peafowl Mountain had taken it right from their hands. The faction's hate for Veluriyam Capital had grown exponentially ever since that incident. How could the Holy Emperor let this chance slip by?

The Longevity Pill was already incredibly enticing. The Pinecrane Pill however, was at least a hundred times more appealing! It'd be impossible for the Holy Emperor to not be moved by it.

"Your Majesty, if the Pinecrane Pill is real, we must get our hands on part of that pie. Pillfire City will not sit idly by. We need to make our move as soon as possible. Even if we can't have it for ourselves, we must talk to Pillfire City and make sure that we get a cut of the profits too."

These men had set their eyes on the Pinecrane Pill.

Chapter 1194: The Celestial Cicada Court

If news about the Pinecrane Pill got out, all eyes would be on him. Jiang Chen had naturally already prepared for this consequence. The Pinecrane Pill was also a piece of bait. He wanted to see how many large fish he could catch with.

How many factions with ulterior motives were hiding in Veluriyam Capital?

In fact, though revealing the pill had been somewhat involuntary, doing so was also quite clever. It was possible that cracks might develop in Emperor Shura's alliance with his external help if they squabbled over it. It wasn't that part that was clever, however.

Of the eight titled emperors currently residing within Veluriyam Capital, Emperor Dragon Coil and Void naturally supported Sacred Peafowl Mountain. The two neutral parties, Emperor Petalpluck and Mountaincrush, were shocked by the rumors about the Pinecrane Pill. They both attempted to verify its veracity. Having been convinced of it, their hearts were greatly disturbed by the new discovery.

"Young lord Zhen... young lord Zhen..." The usually forthright Emperor Mountaincrush was heavily conflicted. "I know what's right and wrong, but Emperor Shura went too far this time. If I didn't have my own difficulties, there's no way I would have agreed to his convening the Vassal Meeting... ah..."

On the other hand, Emperor Petalpluck remained relatively calm.

The rumors about the Pinecrane Pill continued to fester. Though Emperor Shura was incensed by the new development, he didn't have a good counter to Sacred Peafowl Mountain's temporary advantage. On the other hand, Jiang Chen had no follow-ups either.

Time passed very quickly. Soon enough, there was only one day remaining before the Vassal Meeting. Gazing to the southeast, the young lord of Veluriyam sighed softly. "So, the Celestial Cicada Court isn't coming after all?"

Deep down, he'd been somewhat expectant. Since he had already decided to invite external factions, two was definitely better than one. As he lost himself in idle speculation, an abrupt secret report arrived.

"Young lord, the Celestial Cicada Court's foremost sect head has arrived. She has a vice sect head in tow, as well as a group of her most loyal subordinates. They're already at Vermilion Bird Street. Shall we lead them to Taiyuan Tower, or is Taiyuan Lodge better?"

"Taiyuan Lodge is fine." That the Court had arrived on the last day before the Vassal Meeting was wholly unexpected. Still, Jiang Chen was pleased. "It seems that my lure was effective enough, haha!"

The Celestial Cicada Court's willingness to come meant that they were very interested in what he'd mentioned in his letter. As long as that was the case, Jiang Chen was absolutely certain about his ability to draw them close.

An appropriate secret room was swiftly prepared for the meeting. The Court evidently attached a great deal of importance to this event; their main sect head, Su Huanzhen, personally led the expedition. Accompanying her was Sect Head Xia, who had first met Jiang Chen back in Pillfire City.

Su Huanzhen was the most senior sect head, but Sect Head Xia was the most junior vice sect head. Besides the two sect heads, there were a few young genius disciples along for the trip as well. It was the cream of the sect's crop.

"Young lord Zhen. Should I call you Pill King Zhen, hmm? Or would Sir Shao be better, perhaps?" After both guest and host were seated, Sect Head Xia opened with an amused expression.

"Anything you like, Sect Head Xia," chuckled Jiang Chen. "Thank you for gracing us with your radiant presence."

In terms of seniority, Su Huanzhen was the same generation as Emperor Peafowl. In fact, they'd been involved in a brief liaison when they were younger, but things hadn't worked out in the end. Naturally, Emperor Peafowl had mentioned nothing of the sort to Jiang Chen. Su Huanzhen, however, hadn't forgotten entirely about that portion of the past.

Her emotions had become complicated ever since stepping inside Veluriyam Capital territory. Jiang Chen's sentence snapped her awake, returning her to a sect leader's composure.

"Young lord Zhen, I've heard stories of your fame even in the southeast. Truly, the younger generation surpasses the older, and the pupil surpasses his master. You haven't made your way into the world for more than a decade, yet you're already as well-known as Emperor Peafowl. I'm quite impressed."

Her words were largely a token of nicety, not meant to be taken entirely seriously. "That is praise much too high for me. You make me blush, Sect Head Su," grinned Jiang Chen.

"You know how direct of a person I am, young lord Zhen, so let's cut to the chase." Sect Head Xia smiled as well. "You sent me a letter about some formation diagrams, yes? You said that they were quite relevant to the Celestial Cicada Court's origins. Is that correct?"

Jiang Chen immediately presented her with a scroll. "Please take a look, Sect Head Xia."

Opening the scroll, the junior sect head didn't look at it straightaway. Instead, she passed it to Su Huanzhen. "Senior Sect Head, you should look over it first."

Respecting seniority was important, especially in public.

Su Huanzhen opened up the scroll. One look instantly magnetized her eyes to the writings within. She seemed entirely glued to them. Her expression elicited Sect Head Xia's own curiosity. She began to peruse the scroll from the side as well. Her reaction was exactly the same as the more senior sect head's.

The two were unsatiated even when they reached the end of the scroll and started over from the beginning. They did so five times in total before they put the scroll away carefully and set it off to the side with reluctance. Their expressions were an interesting study now.

"Well?" Jiang Chen asked merrily, a composed smile playing around his lips.

"Young lord Zhen, where did you get this formation scroll?" Su Huanzhen asked forthrightly.

There was no use in a formation diagram by itself. Without the foundations of the formation or further content, the most they could tell was that this formation was tremendous, but had no idea how to set it up.

But one thing was certain, and that was the formation was the same style as the ones of their sect. They shared the same heritage, and the one within the scroll surpassed the Celestial Cicada Court's own in terms of both rank and content.

"Last time at Pillfire City, I heard you talk about the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect," said Sect Head Xia. "Those four words are also mentioned in our sect's ancient writings, but there's no clear indication that our Court is descended from one of their branches."

Su Huanzhen nodded as well. "If I may ask, young lord Zhen. Are you and the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect related in some way? How else can you draw such detailed diagrams?"

As a real expert, she perceived that the diagrams hadn't been made up on the spot to trick them. A great deal of mystery was contained within those diagrams, deep knowledge that was difficult to decipher.

"One guess is enough for you to discern the truth, Sect Head Su," laughed Jiang Chen. "As expected of the leader of a prominent sect."

"Young lord Zhen, are you really related to the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect?" Su Huanzhen's expression became rather serious. "Does that mean that you share a common origin with the Celestial Cicada Court as well?"

"That depends on what you think, Sect Head."

Whether there was a connection or not depended on whether the Celestial Cicada Court recognized the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect as its ancestor. More importantly, did it want to identify with its ancient forebear?

Su Huanzhen exchanged a sober glance with Sect Head Xia. "Over the generations of the Celestial Cicada Court's heritage, our writings have mentioned the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect more than once. However, our descent from that sect has never been stated in no uncertain terms. At this time, I cannot make a decision about the restoration of our proper ancestry."

Jiang Chen completely understood the caution. Without overwhelming evidence, it was indiscreet and inappropriate to declare ancestry so arbitrarily. The Celestial Cicada Court was a first rank sect. If it affiliated itself carelessly and the decision turned out to be incorrect, then the sect would look quite foolish.

Moreover, foolishness was the least of their concerns. If there was a certain mastermind with ulterior motives who was trying to steal away the Celestial Cicada Court's foundations, there would be a bigger problem.

Therefore, the sect heads could not stomach the prospect of identifying with an ancestor so quickly. Regardless of what they thought about its veracity and unmistakability, they could not afford to make rash decisions. Moreover, the sheer amount of time that had passed between the ancient times and present day was more than enough to erode the closeness associated with ancestry.

There was no reason for them to deny it outright, or do so at any time with any amount of vehemence. The Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect was one of the greatest formation sects in the ancient times. The diagrams provided by young lord Zhen were also definitely profound, unmatched by anything that the Celestial Cicada Court had. There was cause for a great deal of internal struggle.

Tapping his index and middle fingers against the surface of the table, Jiang Chen was contemplative for a while.

“Young lord Zhen, your formation diagrams have inspired the Celestial Cicada Court a great deal.” Sect Head Xia was the first to break the silence. “More than worthy of us having made this trip, at any rate. Despite our distance to the capital, we’ve heard of the housekeeping problems you’re having at the moment. Even without any benefit from you, we would still unconditionally support Sacred Peafowl Mountain without hesitation. Your faction has ruled Veluriyam Capital for several thousand years. That’s a situation that we’re not interested in seeing a change to.”

The Celestial Cicada Court was situated in the southeast of the Upper Eight Regions, and Veluriyam Capital, the southern region. The two factions could be said to be relatively similar. In fact, they had quite a bit of adjoining territory.

Though they had superior strength compared to their neighbor, Veluriyam Capital had never invaded a single inch of the Celestial Cicada Court’s territory. It was true for all of their adjacent factions, in fact. At minimum, the Court and Veluriyam Capital were on fairly good terms.

Jiang Chen was mildly surprised by this. They would support Sacred Peafowl Mountain unconditionally, without any benefit? Was that merely a courtesy?

“You shouldn’t consider our words idle wind, young lord Zhen. Our foremost Sect Head Su here has some past history with Emperor Peafowl—a friendship of sorts, even. You probably just don’t know about it,” smiled Sect Head Xia.

Past history? An old friendship? Jiang Chen was more interested in striking a deal. It was an age-old truth that relationships were often maintained at the cost of money. With the discussion at this point, could he really withhold the diagrams from them?

Chapter 1195: The Vassal Meeting

Thankfully, the diagrams that Jiang Chen drew were mostly second-rate formations. He had only drawn one of the ten great formations belonging to the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect.

Su Huanzhen had an exceptionally keen eye. She picked out the latter formation out of the rest with only a single glance, impressed with its clear superiority over the rest. At once, she knew she wanted that formation most of all.

“Sect Head Su, Sect Head Xia. I didn’t draw these formations to tantalize you.” Because they’d said they would unconditionally support Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Jiang Chen had to return the favor.

Su Zhenhuan was pleased with this comment. “Are you really going to teach the Celestial Cicada Court all of these formations, young lord Zhen?”

“Sacred Peafowl Mountain doesn’t have much need of them. However, they are nothing short of treasures for the Celestial Cicada Court. Given that, why shouldn’t I teach them to you?” Jiang Chen spoke only his honest mind.

Regardless of whether the Celestial Cicada Court admitted to it or not, it was definitely connected to the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect of yore. It was fine that they didn’t accept it yet. Jiang Chen had plenty of time and ways to slowly acclimate them to the truth. He had his medallion as a last resort, but he wasn’t interested in scaring the Court. There was no need to go down that path.

Identifying with one’s ancestors needed to be a consensual thing. Otherwise, the people forced in question wouldn’t necessarily be convinced even if one brought out the associated records. Candidly handing the diagrams to Su Huanzhen and Sect Head Xia, Jiang Chen patiently explained to them the meanings and intents inherent in the formations.

This surprised both of the two women. After his tutorial, their previously prepared haggling was all but useless.

“Young lord Zhen, your frankness and readiness deserves reciprocation. Though we at the Celestial Cicada Court mostly have women at our helms, we will not be outshone by the valor of men. If you need us any time during the Vassal Meeting, just say the word. We are not officially allies of Veluriyam Capital, but our years of being neighbors have acclimated us to the peace. There’s no reason for us to sit out for either public or personal reasons in the city’s affairs,” Su Huanzhen declared seriously.

“Plus,” giggled Sect Head Xia, “we’ve always admired Emperor Peafowl’s exemplary conduct. Isn’t that right, Big Sister Su?”

The last part was a bit tongue-in-cheek, but Jiang Chen was oblivious to it. “Such charitable treatment from you two sect heads deserves my sincerity. If I’m in trouble, I absolutely won’t hesitate to call.”

He was pleased with how a few formations had been enough to deepen his relationship with the Celestial Cicada Court. With both the Court and the Great Yu Skysword Sect at his side, his number of allies was slowly increasing. The Upper Eight Regions was a complicated place, but the support of two first rank sects beefed up Jiang Chen’s confidence considerably.

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The universally-awaited Vassal Meeting had finally arrived and was being held in the large square before the Veluriyam Pagoda.

Emperor Peafowl’s absence lent a rather strange air to this particular Vassal Meeting atmosphere. Of course, Sacred Peafowl Mountain still sat unquestioned at the master’s seat. There was no need for pleasantries from Jiang Chen now. He was the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain and deserved this place. The Vassal Meeting was targeting him and his position. Continuing to remain affable was a sign of brain damage.

For whatever reason, Emperor Petalpluck’s faction conceded their second seat to Emperor Shura. There wasn’t even a superficial refusal from the latter. The emperor and his entourage took the offered place without a shred of deference.

The remainder of the emperors seated themselves as follows: Emperor Petalpluck, third seat. Emperor Vastsea, fourth seat. Emperor Mountaincrush, fifth seat. Emperor Void, sixth seat. Emperor Skysplitter, seventh seat. Emperor Coiling Dragon, eighth seat. The vassals arranged themselves below according to their own rank. For them, the process was equally orderly. There was no debate whatsoever about who should go where.

Cloak-and-dagger activities aside, the power structure in the city hadn't changed yet. Everything had to be as they were before, or one would risk leaving an opening available for criticism. Naturally, there was seating for guests as well. A cursory scan was enough to reveal to Jiang Chen the presence of Emperor Pillzenith. He was seated in the most prominent position in the guest area.

The young man's face darkened immediately. He'd guessed that Emperor Shura would invite a snake in a long time ago, but actual proof of it still angered still. How could the emperor conspire with Pillfire City?

Who under the heavens didn't know that Pillfire City was Veluriyam Capital's mortal enemy? Wasn't allowing one's enemy in tantamount to playing with fire? Jiang Chen directed an impassive gaze towards Emperor Shura. The emperor smiled unassumingly back, but locked eyes with the youth in a show of power.

"Shameless." The young lord moved his lips, but said nothing aloud.

Unfortunately for Emperor Shura, the movements alone were enough for him to decipher what Jiang Chen was saying. He furrowed his brow, projecting a frigid, murderous gaze. It was almost as if he wanted to dismember Jiang Chen with his look alone.

Chuckling, Emperor Vastsea abruptly stood up. "Everyone, the Vassal Meeting is a..."

"Shut up!" Emperor Coiling Dragon shouted without warning. He spared Emperor Vastsea no courtesy, glaring at the man with displeasure. "Emperor Vastsea, you've tenured here in Veluriyam Capital for a long time. Shouldn't you understand the rules here? Wait your turn to speak."

In his haste, Emperor Vastsea had gotten carried away. He had no words with which to vent his anger at Emperor Coiling Dragon's reproach. The other emperor was right. It wasn't appropriate for him to speak.

Why had he done so without thinking? Tossing Emperor Coiling Dragon a hateful stare, Emperor Vastsea glowered. "I only wanted to make it easier for Emperor Shura to start his speech. Given that Daoist Peafowl isn't here, Daoist Shura rightfully deserves the first word as the most senior. Moreover, he was the one that called for the Vassal Meeting in the first place. Isn't that right, everyone?"

The speech both covered up his embarrassment and brought Emperor Shura to the forefront. It ignored Sacred Peafowl Mountain's presence entirely.

Emperor Void was the one to step in this time. "You're being rather funny today, Vastsea," he sneered. "Even if Emperor Peafowl is busy and absent, Sacred Peafowl Mountain is still in attendance. Their people sit at the head seat. The ruler of Veluriyam Capital has not yet changed, hmm? Why have you taken away Sacred Peafowl Mountain's right to speak?"

Once again, every bit of the accusation was true. Emperor Vastsea was quite embarrassed. Chuckling, Emperor Shura signaled to his ally. "Brother Vastsea, please take a seat. Actually, the primary reason

that we're here today is to talk about Daoist Peafowl. I think it's absolutely right that Sacred Peafowl Mountain puts a word in. Young lord Zhen, some concerning rumors have surfaced recently. The question I want to ask is very simple: do you know where Daoist Peafowl is?"

It was an attempt to stop Jiang Chen before he even set off. Emperor Shura knew the answer to his own question better than anyone else. Smiling faintly, Jiang Chen showed no reaction whatsoever. Instead, he stood up and brandished a medallion high in the air.

"Everyone, this is the Progeny Feather Medallion. His Majesty Peafowl passed it onto me so that I may inherit Veluriyam Capital at a crucial time. I know of His Majesty's whereabouts. Several years ago, Emperor Peafowl told me that he had begun to comprehend the laws of heaven and earth. He was already half-step empyrean realm back then, and was at the threshold of breaking through. Therefore, His Majesty has vanished for one purpose, that of venturing into the great realm beyond!"

Breaking through to empyrean realm? The news was incredibly momentous. It deafened and stunned all who heard it. To... empyrean realm?

That was absolutely unheard of. The human domain hadn't had an empyrean expert in countless years. Emperor Peafowl was breaking through? So all the rumors about his fall were false?

Emperor Pillzenith frowned in the guest area when he heard Jiang Chen's words. He gave the young lord a few extra glances, snickering to himself. "This Zhen kid is quite the slippery eel. He is very dishonest. A bare-faced lie like that comes quite easily to him, and his delivery is flawless. For the average person who's not in the know, it is very hard to suspect anything from his words."

Emperor Shura was unhappy. He hated the fact that he couldn't declare the truth. He was the best witness that Emperor Peafowl had in fact, died.

"Young lord Zhen, has Daoist Peafowl really broken through to empyrean realm? Why haven't I heard of something that amazing from him personally?" The antagonistic emperor feigned confusion.

"You know as well as I that His Majesty prefers humility and privacy. Plus, a breakthrough to empyrean realm requires almost divine inspiration. How can the heavenly secrets be divulged to mortal men?"

"How do you know about it, then?" Emperor Shura pressed frostily.

"I am his personally designated young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Obviously, he had to tell me the truth in the process of passing on his rulership."

All three of Jiang Chen's friendly titled emperors found this pretentious explanation superbly amusing. Even they were convinced to a slight degree that Emperor Peafowl had perhaps indeed left to break through to empyrean realm.

"Young lord Zhen," growled Emperor Shura. "Everyone here hopes wishes that what you say is true. But according to my detailed investigation, Emperor Peafowl is embroiled in great trouble."

"Do you have any proof?" Jiang Chen retorted coolly.

The emperor braced himself, but his mouth showed no signs of slowing down. "I used a secret art that only great emperors can use," he said, "and tried to contact Emperor Peafowl. There has been no reply. That's my proof."

Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void had used this art as well, so what Emperor Shura had said was reasonable enough.

“You tried to reach him during such a key time? He’s trying to reach break through to empyrean realm! Aren’t you just causing more trouble for him?” Jiang Chen snorted. He was stirring up the pot with everything he had. The situation called for it.

“Young lord Zhen. With how much you’re trying to cover up Emperor Peafowl’s whereabouts, I’m beginning to suspect your motives!” Emperor Shura suddenly lashed out.

Chapter 1196: Im Not Planning to Give You A Chance

Jiang Chen didn’t think that Emperor Shura would turn around and try to implicate him.

Emperor Vastsea also stood up. “Everyone, all I want to ask is this. Where was young lord Zhen when Emperor Peafowl went missing?

“I’m sure that everyone here is also curious as to where our famous and ingenious young lord Zhen hails from. Sacred Peafowl Mountain seems to have never taken in a disciple like young lord Zhen, hmm? So how did he suddenly appear and become young lord? Aren’t we all a little surprised by his appearance?” Emperor Vastsea suddenly turned on Jiang Chen.

Emperor Coiling Dragon was certainly not going to take this lying down. He shot to his feet and roared, “Young lord Zhen is the successor Emperor Peafowl raised in secret. He and young lord Fan were like light and shadow. This is something a trusted aide of Emperor Peafowl such as I was aware of a long time ago. But you, an outsider to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, are worrying about our internal matters? Why don’t you find something else better to do with your time, you old codger?”

“That’s right, young lord Zhen is the successor that His Majesty secretly cultivated. In the end, his fortunes outstripped young lord Fan’s. This is something all four of us monarchs are aware about.” This time, the one who stood up in defense of Jiang Chen was Cloudsoar Monarch.

Emperor Vastsea sneered disdainfully. “Who gave you the right to speak, little cultivator? This is a discussion between great emperors!”

Cloudsoar Monarch responded neither obsequiously nor superciliously, “When it comes to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, yes, I’m more qualified to speak than you are.”

Emperor Vastsea’s face darkened. “How dare you! A little emperor dares rebuke a great emperor and yell during the Vassal Meeting?!”

Plumscore Monarch sneered before Cloudsoar Monarch could speak. “Oh, stop trying to frighten people with your cultivation already. I only have one question to ask. Did you ever dare raise your voice against me when Emperor Peafowl was present? Look at how fast you’ve changed your tone after the emperor is temporarily away? Can I rightfully call you a bully?”

The Vassal Meeting had just begun, and sparks of conflict were already flying all over the place. No side was willing to yield a single step to the other.

Emperor Shura suddenly waved his hand and stopped Emperor Vastsea from speaking. He stared deeply at Jiang Chen. "Young lord Zhen, I'm going to ask this again. Why have you done everything in your power to conceal Daoist Peafowl's whereabouts? What are your true motives?"

Jiang Chen answered disdainfully. "I have a better question. How exactly do you know that Emperor Peafowl is dead? Did you see it with your own eyes, or did you kill him with your bare hands? Should I interpret these rumors as something you've intentionally spread to further your purposes?"

"Slander!" Emperor Shura retorted expressionlessly.

"The heavens watch our every move." Jiang Chen pointed at his heart, and then up towards the sky. "I know what you think, and you know what you did, Emperor Shura. I can swear a heavenly oath right now and clear my name, but do you dare? If you dare swear a heavenly oath right now and prove that Emperor Peafowl's current whereabouts have nothing to do with you, I will immediately declare Sacred Peafowl Mountain's withdrawal from Veluriyam Capital and turn over authority to you completely."

Jiang Chen couldn't be bothered to waste any breath on these people. He cut straight to the heart of the matter. At this point, he was certain that Emperor Peafowl's disappearance absolutely had something to do with Emperor Shura. Even if the emperor wasn't a direct participant of the ambush, he must have participated in the plan.

Emperor Shura looked disdainful as he spoke in an indifferent tone. "You are truly a child. There would be no conflicts in this world if everything is decided by swearing a heavenly oath. All I can say is that you're really behaving inappropriately. I have no idea how someone like you is qualified to be the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain."

Jiang Chen laughed. "Emperor Shura, you can't hide the fact that you're guilty no matter how hard you try to change the topic. You're a man who doesn't dare bear the consequences of your actions. Emperor Peafowl once told me that he was waiting for you to rebel against him and declare that you want to succeed him. However, you never dared venture even a squeak when you were in his presence. No wonder he said that you have the ambition, but not the courage, and that's putting it nicely. In my opinion, you are nothing but a coward. The truth is that you dare not even make a simple oath! What else does it prove except that you're a coward?"

Emperor Skysplitter suddenly broke his silence. "Young lord Zhen, why don't we forget about these rumors. If you want to talk about rumors, we even heard that you're of demonic bloodline and that the demons sent you to spy on Veluriyam Capital. They say that you're the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain because you charmed Emperor Peafowl with your demonic powers. Are you asking us to verify these claims by making you swear a heavenly oath? How childish would the world be!"

Jiang Chen smiled. "I can swear the oath right now if you wish."

"How absurd!" Emperor Skysplitter said disdainfully, "Here's some advice, young lord Zhen. This is the Vassal Meeting. The more childish you act, the more unreliable people will think you are."

Although Emperor Skysplitter's words were meant to save Emperor Shura from his predicament, they did make a little bit of sense.

“Emperor Petalpluck, Emperor Mountaincrush, what do you both think?” Emperor Skysplitter asked smilingly.

Emperor Petalpluck sighed quietly. “These rumors are all so fantastic. Personally, I believe that it was spread with malicious intent to fracture the trust between us and start a civil war in Veluriyam Capital. Therefore, I suggest that we don’t bring up these groundless rumors any longer. What we should do now is to solve the problems of Veluriyam Capital.”

“I agree with Daoist Petalpluck’s suggestion. We need to steady morale. Arguing will only make the situation worse.” Emperor Mountaincrush also expressed his opinion.

Emperor Shura cupped his hands. “You are well known for your noble character and unquestionable integrity, Daoist Petalpluck. How do you think we should strengthen morale?”

“A sun must hang in the sky, just as there must be a ruler in a country. Veluriyam Capital is unsteady right now is because we lack a central pillar,” Emperor Petalpluck expressed his opinion straightforwardly. “Therefore, I suggest that we elect a pillar to steady the situation until Daoist Peafowl returns. No matter where he’s gone, we can return power to him once he comes back. But if he doesn’t, then the temporary ruler shall become the permanent ruler of Veluriyam Capital.”

Emperor Vastsea chuckled. “Alright. In that case, so who do you think is currently the most suitable ruler, Daoist Petalpluck?”

“That’s up to everyone to decide.” Emperor Petalpluck didn’t take up the cue that Emperor Vastsea had prepared. The latter was displeased and cursed silently.

“I recommend Daoist Shura to rule Veluriyam Capital. To begin with, his prestige is second only to Emperor Peafowl. If he’s given the chance to train and prove himself, he will not be subpar to Emperor Peafowl!” Emperor Vastsea declared loudly.

Emperor Skysplitter also nodded. “No matter how you look at it, Daoist Shura is the best and most acceptable candidate for now. I would recommend him as well.”

Emperor Void sneered. “Recommendation? What recommendation? Of course the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain is to rule Veluriyam Capital in the absence of Emperor Peafowl. Or did you think that young lord Zhen’s Progeny Feather Medallion is mere decoration? I may be a foolish man, but even I know that young lord Zhen and the Progeny Feather Medallion are both the gifts of Emperor Peafowl to Veluriyam Capital. They are the representation of his will!”

“Daoist Void is right. Nothing cannot be done without following the rules. If anyone can change the rules as they please, then why can’t I rule Veluriyam Capital tomorrow after you rule it today? Veluriyam Capital has stood for many years not because it is sustained by the ambitions of a few, but because everyone obeys the rules. If we lose even this bit of principle, then we will be Veluriyam Capital no longer.” Emperor Coiling Dragon commanded great eloquence. Both he and Emperor Void made it clear that they supported Sacred Peafowl Mountain and young lord Zhen.

The standoff was two on two right now. This outcome wasn’t beyond anyone’s expectations.

Now it was Emperor Petalpluck and Emperor Mountaincrush's turn to vote. There was no need to ask Emperor Shura or Pill King Zhen's opinion because they were the candidates. Of course they would support themselves.

"Daoist Petalpluck and Mountaincrush, you two will choose a side, won't you?" Emperor Vastsea asked plaintively. He was obviously trying to coerce the two great emperors into making a decision.

Emperor Petalpluck smiled. "Young lord Zhen represents Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but Daoist Shura is more experienced. This is a difficult choice, so I shall abstain from voting."

Emperor Mountaincrush hurriedly followed up with, "This is a difficult decision to make, so I'm going to abstain as well. Why don't we let the vassals who should be our temporary ruler?"

In the end, Emperor Mountaincrush didn't want to be an accomplice to the devil. He didn't want vote for Emperor Shura.

Emperor Shura's face darkened. He shot Emperor Mountaincrush a meaningful and chilling glance. They were at an impasse. However, the answer would be clear if the nine hundred or so vassals were to make their votes. Emperor Shura stared at Jiang Chen. "I'll give you a fair chance to compete, young lord Zhen, just so that no one accuses me of bullying juniors."

Jiang Chen taunted. "You got that reversed, old man. I'm the one who's giving you a fair chance. Just in case you've forgotten, you're just the third greatest great emperor of Veluriyam Capital. Honestly, how on earth did you get the idea that you're the one who's giving me a fair chance?"

It was a vicious counter, but the worst was yet to come.

"I'm the holder of the Progeny Feather Medallion, so I can call for a Vassal Meeting whenever I want to. Meanwhile, you have to do everything in your power and use every trick in the book to just manage to get every great emperor to agree. What you need all the strength in your body, down to your littlest pinky, to achieve is something I can do with the raise of a palm. Now tell me, who do you think is giving his competitor a fair chance?" Jiang Chen sneered.

Emperor Shura wasn't a match for Jiang Chen in terms of verbal sparring, so he wasn't able to think of anything to retaliate. But Jiang Chen wasn't done yet. "By the way, all I'm trying to say is that I'm not planning on giving you a chance."

Emperor Shura's face turned cold, and Emperor Vastsea's eyes glinted with murder. This brat is making fun of us!

Chapter 1197: Strong Animosity

"Young lord Zhen, don't be mistaken. The Vassal Meeting has been convened to discuss the future of our capital. It's not a place for you to swagger about!" Emperor Vastsea had finally had enough.

Jiang Chen smiled mockingly. "Unlike you, I have no need to throw my weight around. I'm only saying all this out of the consideration for the capital. Emperor Peafowl has already declared that Emperor Shura isn't suitable to rule. Out of my respect for Emperor Peafowl and consideration for the capital's future, I have to carry out my duties as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain."

“Hmph! You can twist his words however your like! Without any proof, who’d believe you? I can also say that Emperor Peafowl has decided to make Daoist Shura his successor!” Emperor Vastsea was also very good with words.

“Without proof?” Jiang Chen sniffed coldly and continued in charged tones. Emperor Peafowl had indeed said those words, but he really did have no proof. “You’ve also claimed without any proof that Emperor Peafowl has fallen, conjured blatant lies, tarnished my background, and assembled the Vassal Meeting. What a wonderful show of hypocrisy!”

Emperor Shura answered blandly. “Young lord Zhen, we’re not lacking proof. We’ve launched an investigation and found out that there’s a great chance that Daoist Peafowl is dead with his disappearance. Even if he’s still alive, rumors of his death are enough to instill fear and anxiety in our citizens. Our capital needs a new ruler and I was elected by everyone as a potential candidate. My actions are lawful and honorable. How can you claim that I’m trying to seize the throne?”

“Lawful and honorable?” Jiang Chan burst into a cold laughter. “I suppose it’s lawful and honorable to hire Pillfire City to assist you in your plans as well?”

Emperor Shura’s expressions darkened as he shifted his gaze towards the crowd. “Young lord Zhen, don’t mouth groundless rumors. Emperor Pillzenith is merely passing by our capital and came to visit when he heard about the Vassal Meeting. He’s a guest and should be treated as one. We may have some differences, but mortal enemies we aren’t. Why can’t a citizen of Pillfire City visit our capital? Didn’t you just recently slip into their territory while concealing your identity?”

Emperor Shura was also very gifted with words. Over at a guest box seat, Emperor Pillzenith burst into laughter. “Everyone, I have no interest in participating in your squabbles. Daoist Peafowl and I have known each other for a long time. He once told me that Emperor Shura is the only qualified successor if he wasn’t around one day. These were his exact words, and I believe that it’s right that I tell everyone this.”

As expected, Emperor Pillzenith was on Emperor Shura’s side.

Han Qianzhan, the sect head of the Skysword Sect, snorted. “That’s odd, I’ve known Emperor Peafowl for a long time too, but he told me that he was fostering young lord Zhen to become his successor and the next ruler of Veluriyam Capital. Daoist Pillzenith, perhaps the Emperor Peafowl that you and I speak of are not the same person?”

It was an impasse between the main opponents. It was time for the helpers to take the field. Emperor Shura had Emperor Pillzenith on his side, while young lord Zhen had Sect Head Han Qianzhan.

In terms of jianghu ranking, Emperor Pillzenith was ahead of Han Qianzhan. However, the latter was still the sect head of a first rank sect. Surrounded by his men, his presence didn’t seem any bit weaker than Emperor Pillzenith’s.

The Holy Emperor of Eternal Celestial Capital joined the conversation. “Daoist Han, I’ve never even heard about your relationship with Daoist Peafowl. Are you making this up?”

Su Huanzhen of the Celestial Cicada Court responded coldly. “When did the Eternal Celestial Capital suddenly gain so much interest in Veluriyam Capital’s matters? When it comes to knowing Emperor

Peafowl, I think no one knows him better than me. Based on my knowledge, the emperor did bestow young lord Zhen his position so that he can carry on Emperor Peafowl's legacy. Of this, I can guarantee with my life!"

The Eternal Celestial Capital and The Celestial Cicada Court were both first rank sects. All who previously spoke were incredibly influential people in the Upper Eight Regions. Yet, they'd all convened at Veluriyam Capital to engage in a battle of words.

Emperor Void yelled. "The older generation knows that Sect Head Su and Daoist Peafowl have some history together. Daoist Peafowl has always viewed Sect Head Su as his soulmate. Her words definitely hold more weight than these outsiders!"

Su Huanzhen and Emperor Peafowl had almost become dao partners, once upon a time. If not for an unforeseen circumstance, they would've become lovebirds.

Emperor Pillzenith and the Holy Emperor were the outside factions supporting Emperor Shura, while the Sacred Peafowl Mountain had the outside support from the sect head of the Skysword Sect and Celestial Cicada Court. The two sides were once again equally matched. Perhaps the capital's future really did lay in the hands of the vassals?

Emperor Shura glared at Jiang Chen disparagingly.

"Young lord Zhen, you're a smart man. This matter must be resolved today as a country can't be without a leader. You may leave if you're afraid. The capital doesn't need cowards!" His animosity for Jiang Chen was clear. He too, was good at making unfounded accusations. Jiang Chen had previously called him a coward and he'd returned the accusation in kind.

Jiang Chen laughed coldly. "Emperor Shura, I'm afraid you're the only coward here. Do you know that you had a very good chance of becoming the next ruler of Veluriyam Capital? It's unfortunate that you were too much of a coward in front of Emperor Peafowl. Timid like a cat, you couldn't even show an ounce of ferocity. You were already given a chance, but you threw it away. Do you really think that a person like you is deserving to be the ruler?"

Emperor Shura's expression darkened. He knew very well that Jiang Chen's words were true. Emperor Peafowl had indeed dropped a few such hints after young lord Fan's death, but he didn't go through with his decision for some reason.

Perhaps I was really too docile and meek in front of Emperor Peafowl? Jiang Chen's words struck Emperor Shura's sore spot.

"Do you truly believe that your cynical remarks can make my dao heart waver?" Emperor Shura snorted coldly. "Save your breath!"

"You must be mistaken. Why would I want to make your dao heart waver? Do you think that you have one? Would a person with a dao heart cavort with the enemy and harm his own brethren?" Jiang Chen laughed mockingly. "Stop trying to feign ignorance. Let me ask you one thing, how are you going to face Emperor Peafowl when he comes back one day?"

Emperor Shura was enraged. He didn't know why young lord Zhen was so certain that he was the one who'd harm Emperor Peafowl. Was it because of a hunch? If so, young lord Zhen was truly overstepping his boundaries.

Emperor Peafowl is never coming back! He screamed internally. But on the surface, he maintained a wise ruler facade. "I'd be more than happy if Emperor Peafowl returns. Naturally, I'll return power back to him."

Jiang Chen responded with a hearty laugh. "You speak as if the capital is already yours!"

"Do you think you're able to stop me?" Emperor Shura said nonchalantly. "It was only in the recent decade that you became famous, but I've been renowned for more than three thousand years. A mere half-step emperor like you wishes to go against a great emperor like me? In terms of connections and fame..."

"Connections and fame my ass!" Jiang Chen didn't hold himself back. "You're nowhere even near as qualified as Emperor Petalpluck in terms of seniority! Your martial prowess doesn't even stand out among the great emperors! Your reputation and your connections? Absolutely foul smelling as well! Your contributions to Veluriyam Capital? Nothing to write home about! You've been here for thousands of years, but what have you contributed to the capital? The biggest stir you've ever caused is probably today's rigged vassal meeting!"

"That's right!" Emperor Coiling Dragon clapped his hands in agreement. "One cannot defend a nation with only wit or win over the citizens with only brawn. Your past conducts are terrible and your contributions almost zero. A person like you actually wants to rule the capital? Everyone, will you really allow a person with no contributions like him to become the ruler of our beloved capital? He has the ability to contribute, but what has he ever done? He's lived under Emperor Peafowl's shadow for so long because he's lazy and cowardly. He only takes care of his own interest and hasn't bled a single drop of blood in service to our capital! If he becomes the lord, I can't help but be skeptical if he can truly lead us out of a difficult situation whenever it arises!"

One's contribution to the capital was truly an important criteria. Emperor Peafowl's position in the capital was so stable because everyone could see the blood and sweat that he'd contributed. His strength was also something that known to all.

Since all pretense and cordiality had been already shed, Emperor Coiling Dragon no longer held back. His argument won the hearts of many. Emperor Shura's personality was indeed too cold, lofty, and very unapproachable.

He was the opposite of Emperor Peafowl. If the citizens of Veluriyam Capital were to receive unfair treatment outside, Emperor Peafowl would definitely exact some justice for his citizens as a form of consolation. The people couldn't sense the same about Emperor Shura.

"Take a look at Pill King Zhen for comparison. It hasn't been long since he became famous, but he's always been working hard for the sake of our capital. He's helped us retain the Longevity Pill, defeat the overweening Pillfire City, and founded Taiyuan Tower and Taiyuan Lodge, which has given countless lectures over the years. His every action inspires all of us. Young folks now aspire to comprehend all nine Veluriyam Obelisks like him. He's still very young, but he's already emperor realm. For all we know, he

might become a great emperor within the century! How many geniuses have we ever seen that can do such a thing?" Emperor Coiling Dragon unloaded his thoughts in one go. Every single word he uttered was truthful and well-grounded.

Chapter 1198: An Election?

Emperor Coiling Dragon's words actually resonated with a lot of people. Emperor Shura had some fame in Veluriyam Capital, but no one other than his supporters felt much goodwill towards him.

Emperor Shura's subordinates were extremely domineering. For example, the late Majestic Clan had committed many crimes in Veluriyam Capital and rode roughshod over the general populace. The Shura Guard was highly disliked by the people as well.

In comparison, Sacred Peafowl Mountain's reputation was infinity better than Shura Retreat's. Emperor Peafowl's individual charisma was one reason, but the Peafowl Guard of Sacred Peafowl Mountain was also beloved. At the very least, they almost never interfered with worldly conflicts unless exceptional circumstances were involved.

Frankly, there weren't actually many willing to see Emperor Shura on the throne. If they had to pick one reason, it would be because the great emperor never made any contributions to the people. Nearly all of his fame had come from the power struggles within Veluriyam Capital's own four walls.

There were some who claimed that Emperor Shura was selfish, while others who said that Emperor Peafowl was so high up the totem pole that Emperor Shura was never given an opportunity to prove himself. Whatever the reason, the fact remained that Emperor Shura hadn't done anything for the people of Veluriyam Capital. It might be a little excessive to say that he was a ruler who couldn't subdue his people with either virtue or strength, but it wouldn't be a false statement either.

Compared to the other great emperors, his martial strength was indeed slightly ahead of them. However, his victory wasn't certain if his opponent was Emperor Petalpluck, the second great emperor of Veluriyam Capital. The two great emperors never really clashed against one another because Emperor Petalpluck was innately indifferent about fame or gain.

Of course, if Emperor Peafowl was still around, no one would even consider Emperor Shura as a viable candidate. But everyone in Veluriyam Capital felt worried after the rumors of Emperor Peafowl's demise were spread. Emperor Shura seized upon this to make a play for power. Although he was utterly incomparable to Emperor Peafowl, the same couldn't be said when his opponent was young lord Zhen.

As the representative of the young generation of Veluriyam Capital, young lord Zhen was quite beloved by the people. Although he had only just risen to fame, everyone could see what he done for Veluriyam Capital. Excluding all other achievements, his victory over Pill King Ji Lang alone was enough to win everyone's respect and admiration. It was a massive achievement that Emperor Shura failed to accomplish despite three thousand years.

Young lord Zhen had also passed the nine Veluriyam Obelisks after entering the Veluriyam Pagoda later on. After that, he'd travelled to Pillfire City and taken their pill dao scene by the storm in the Bounty Arena. Finally, he unwittingly defeated Pill King Ji Lang again by solving the crisis of the Moon God Sect.

Every bit of detail pointed towards young lord Zhen being a real, top class genius in both pill dao and martial dao. If a genius like this was allowed to develop and inherit Emperor Peafowl's seat, no one doubted that he could stand equal to or even surpass the great emperor.

Emperor Peafowl had made many outstanding contributions to Veluriyam Capital in the past three thousand years. He'd also clashed against some of the first rank sects of the Upper Eight Regions. The great emperor's beyond powerful might allowed him to firmly occupy the position of strength and mightily defend the Veluriyam Capital when it was challenged time and time again.

In reality however, Veluriyam Capital had always been inferior compared to Pillfire City. The two were located at the poles of the Upper Eight Regions, and they'd never engaged each other in any large scale martial conflicts. However, the two factions had clashed against each other many times in terms of pill dao. As the biggest pill dao faction of southern Upper Eight Regions, Veluriyam Capital had great influence in its own territory and surrounding regions.

But their influence had been on the decline for the past couple thousand years. Although Veluriyam Capital could still influence the regions around it, when it came to pill dao, the factions further away from them would rather seek out Pillfire City even if the former was closer.

Veluriyam Capital was fine in most aspects, but Emperor Peafowl was unable to make any progress in terms of pill dao no matter how many countermeasures he employed to combat this trend.

In terms of pill dao, the gap between Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City had never stopped increasing. Emperor Peafowl had always been troubled by this and he'd tried many things, such as cultivating a group of pill kings in Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He had also established Vermillion Bird Avenue with the express purpose of nurturing pill dao factions and encouraging other factions to come and contribute to the development of pill dao. Although these measures had caused a pill dao craze for a time, Veluriyam Capital's roots were ultimately too shallow. Moreover, an exceptionally brilliant genius hadn't appeared in Veluriyam Capital until recently. Jiang Chen's appearance was a powerful ray of light cutting right through the infinite darkness that had enshrouded Veluriyam Capital. He also injected an unprecedented amount of life to Veluriyam Capital's pill dao.

The battle for the Longevity Pill was especially important. In the name of Pill King Zhen, Jiang Chen had defeated Pill King Ji Lang of Pillfire City and created a milestone in Veluriyam Capital history.

After that battle, Veluriyam Capital's pill dao scene grew more lively than before. They weren't losing to Pillfire City at every turn either. That was why young lord Zhen was practically an idol to the people of Veluriyam Capital, second only to Emperor Peafowl. Some people even thought that young lord Zhen would surpass Emperor Peafowl and become the number one idol.

Emperor Coiling Dragon's words won a tidal wave of applause from the crowd.

To Emperor Vastsea though, the claps sounded so unpleasant that he had to yell, "Coiling Dragon, everyone knows that you're a former subordinate of Sacred Peafowl Mountain! It would be stranger still if you didn't try to whitewash Sacred Peafowl Mountain's image. But no matter what you say, you cannot change the fact that young lord Zhen is still far inferior to Daoist Shura!"

Emperor Coiling Dragon sneered. "How so?"

Emperor Vastsea snorted disdainfully. "How is Emperor Shura inferior to a boy who's still wet behind the ears? In terms martial strength? His prestige? Or his experience?"

"Hahaha..." Emperor Coiling Dragon couldn't help but laugh loudly. "Oh Vastsea, I see that you're declining over time instead of improving. Martial strength? Aren't you ashamed of comparing a thirty year old genius to a three thousand year old great emperor? As for prestige, I truly don't believe that Emperor Shura is more popular than young lord Zhen right now. As for experience, why make the futile comparison between Shura Retreat and Sacred Peafowl Mountain?"

"We are comparing Daoist Shura and young lord Zhen right now! Don't try to change the subject!"

"Hah, are you telling me that Emperor Shura plans to rule Veluriyam Capital himself? Doesn't he need Shura Retreat's aid?" Emperor Coiling Dragon countered sneeringly.

Although Emperor Vastsea knew that Emperor Coiling Dragon's words were all sophistry, he actually couldn't retort against the latest statement.

"Alright, enough. There will never be a conclusion if you two keep arguing like this. This relates to Veluriyam Capital, so of course the people will be the ones to decide their ruler. Let us all who are present decide the future of Veluriyam Capital." Emperor Petalpluck finally broke his silence.

The second great emperor didn't involve himself in such matters, but he wasn't without influence and persuasion.

Emperor Vastsea agreed loudly. "Daoist Petalpluck is right! This relates to Veluriyam Capital, so the people of Veluriyam Capital will be the ones who decide their ruler. They will tell us if Daoist Shura is the most suitable candidate!"

Emperor Vastsea spoke in a way that hinted at closeness between him and Emperor Petalpluck, as if the latter was on Emperor Shura's side.

Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void shot Emperor Petalpluck a meaningful glance, but the calm, natural smile on the second great emperor's face didn't fade away. He didn't care that the two emperors were glaring at him viciously.

"What do you think, Daoist Mountaincrush?" From the side, Emperor Skysplitter suddenly asked.

He wanted to stay neutral until the end, so he was slightly displeased when he heard Emperor Skysplitter's question. A moment of thought later, he finally responded, "In that case, let us hold an election. Whoever has the majority vote wins."

Since most of the great emperors agreed that they should hold an election with the vassals as voters, Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void could no longer go against the tide. When they shot Jiang Chen a helpless glance, the young man smiled. "Since this is everyone's wish, then we shall have an election. It is a fair way to choose the next ruler of Veluriyam Capital."

Jiang Chen looked at the vassals below him with a gentle look. "Everyone, I'm going to say this again. All the rumors you hear about Emperor Peafowl is false. I guarantee that it is only a matter of time before Emperor Peafowl returns to us. You have nothing to worry about!"

Even now, Jiang Chen didn't believe that Emperor Peafowl was dead. No matter how confident Emperor Shura and his gang might be, he refused to believe that someone as great as Emperor Peafowl would die with a whimper like this.

Emperor Vastsea snorted coldly. "Young lord Zhen, maybe you should keep your mouth shut since the vassals will be voting later. Are you trying to win some sympathy votes?"

Jiang Chen sneered. "If that's the case, don't you think you should shut up as well? This doesn't have anything to do with you, unless you're planning to participate as a candidate?"

His words weren't excessive, but Emperor Vastsea's face turned completely red when he heard this. Emperor Coiling Dragon laughed loudly in response. "Well said! You're so involved that an outsider would mistake you as a candidate, Vastsea!"

Emperor Vastsea's complexion didn't look good. It was an incredibly embarrassing moment for him. Emperor Shura chose this moment to speak up. "Daoist Vast is my brother. His will represents mine too."

Emperor Coiling Dragon shrugged. "He still doesn't have the right to tell young lord Zhen to shut up even if represents you, does he? That was a complete disregard of the hierarchy just now. Are we throwing away all the rules of Veluriyam Capital just because Emperor Peafowl was gone for several months? Are we at a point where Sacred Peafowl Mountain can be humiliated anytime you wish?"

Emperor Coiling Dragon was blatantly trying to draw sympathy votes for Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Emperor Shura said coldly. "Speaking of the hierarchy, you've just ascended recently, haven't you? Did that factor into your actions just now when you were criticizing me?"

"I'm just telling the truth as it is. Or are you saying that you can't even handle the truth right now? 'Brother', you really need to broaden your mind a little. Back when Emperor Peafowl was still around, he could handle anything thrown at him."

Emperor Shura nearly exploded when he heard this.

Chapter 1199: Deciding on the Solution

Every blow struck Emperor Shura and his allies in their weak spots, making them both upset and powerless. However, the emperor managed to keep his cool. He knew that he had no chance of gaining a lead in further debate with Emperor Coiling Dragon.

Both Emperor Coiling Dragon and young lord Zhen were both eloquent men. If they were allowed to continue their grandstanding, they would only end up converting more and more people. He would end up with an even greater disadvantage than he had now.

"Daoist Petalpluck, we must come to a decision. The eight hundred vassals are all here. Why don't you preside over the proceedings?" Emperor Shura turned to his more neutral fellow.

Emperor Petalpluck smiled slightly, inclining his head in turn to the Emperor Coiling Dragon and Vastsea. "Gentlemen, now is not the time for an emotional dispute. The recent chaos in Veluriyam Capital requires resolution. A nation should not be long without a leader. For the people to be satisfied and placated, we must always have a ruler at the helm."

“That’s right. Anyone who tries to act up again is an enemy of the public peace. Clearly, it would be against the city’s interests and improvement!” Emperor Vastsea quickly followed up with this lofty label.

Jiang Chen waved to the two friendly emperors, signaling an end to the argument. “Emperor Petalpluck is correct. A nation should not be long without a leader. I can refrain from opposing to the events today, but I must say something harsh ahead of time.”

“Please do, young lord Zhen,” smiled Emperor Petalpluck.

“When His Majesty Peafowl returns, the throne must be returned to him,” stated Jiang Chen flatly.

“Does anyone oppose this motion?”

The serene emperor pondered this a moment, then nodded. “I do not at all. Daoist Peafowl is the best ruler we’ve had in a long time and certainly the most suited to lead.” Saying this, he turned to Emperor Shura. “What do you think, Daoist Shura?”

The man harrumphed. “If Daoist Peafowl comes back, then there’s no contest. Of course the throne should be returned.”

“I feel the same way,” smiled Emperor Skysplitter.

Since Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void belonged on Emperor Peafowl’s side in the first place, there was no reason for them to oppose, either.

“While we’re at this point,” Emperor Vastsea cut in suddenly. “I’d like to be upfront about something else as well. If Emperor Peafowl comes back, I hope that Sacred Peafowl Mountain will not suppress the vassals that vote for Emperor Shura today. Doing so would be taking revenge!”

Emperor Vastsea was quite sure that Emperor Peafowl would not return. He was saying this to accomplish two goals. One, to alleviate the worries of those who’d agreed to side with Emperor Shura, and two, to win free goodwill from the audience. It was essentially a clever pretense.

As expected, many vassals were reassured upon hearing his words. A current of warmth ran through their hearts. Emperor Vastsea cared a lot about their feelings, after all!

Jiang Chen saw through the tirade effortlessly. He knew that the emperor was gesturing to gain popularity. Smiling faintly, he maintained the same confident expression that he had adopted since the beginning of the meeting.

“Emperor Vastsea, you speak as if you’re not acquainted with Emperor Peafowl at all. Do you not understand the type of person he is? If Emperor Peafowl was the sort of man to hold vendettas, then Emperor Shura wouldn’t even be standing here to challenge him in absentia. To put it more plainly, Emperor Peafowl isn’t scared of anyone who’s able to rise up and surpass him.

“On the contrary, he’s concerned that no one will be able to take up his mantle when he’s gone. Do you think that he has any attachment to worldly power? He gained knowledge of more potent and fundamental truths about heaven and earth a long time ago. He could ascend to empyrean realm at any time. He sees things from a much higher point than everyone else. To be quite honest, you sound like you’re putting him in your—I daresay much smaller—shoes.”

His tranquil demeanor won him a fair bit of approval in his own right. Even those who disliked him had to admit that he was showing stellar decorum. This was a young man of considerable wit and temperament. Any other youth would be scared out of their own minds by the sole fact of having to sit beside seven titled emperors, much less be able to compete with Emperor Shura. But there was no hint of fear or nervousness in Jiang Chen.

The calmness he exhibited alone was enough to classify him as an extraordinary character. It was an old saying that the young shouldn't be bullied just for their lack of experience or resources. Many wavering vassals began to consider things anew.

A few others, previously already leaning towards Emperor Shura, were also shaken. There was an impenetrable aura of greatness on Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord. It was a feeling that forced every onlooker not to ignore him, and seemed to say, 'let anyone who does taste the consequences'!

Emperor Petalpluck chose this moment to chuckle. "Any move that we great emperors make will affect the grand scheme of things here in the city. Thus, I advise that all of us refrain from voting. No matter whose side we take, voting will only lay down the seeds of future strife. There is everything to lose and nothing to gain by doing so."

"What, are we titled emperors not to vote? How does that work?" Emperor Vastsea was shocked.

"Daoist Petalpluck has a very good point. The actions of we titled emperors have too much influence upon the rest. It would not do for cracks to develop between us at this juncture. If Veluriyam Capital sees civil unrest and a subsequent weakening, then we will all go down in history as criminals." Emperor Mountaincrush was clearly more than willing to abstain.

Deep down, he wanted to support Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but Emperor Shura's pressing demands had compelled him to acquiesce. Because of this, he was very conflicted. If he could abstain, then there was no longer anything to worry about.

"I have no objection to that." Upon seeing Emperor Petalpluck and Mountaincrush declare their stances, Emperor Coiling Dragon hurried to agree.

There was no reason at all for him to object. The two neutral emperors' solidarity only reinforced his statement. He had originally been anxious about their potential support for Emperor Shura, which would render young lord Zhen in a dangerous position.

Emperor Void inclined his head as well. "Daoist Petalpluck is a true voice of reason. We may have a few minor disagreements from time to time, but us titled emperors should maintain a good rapport."

Now that four titled emperors had voted on the resolution, the opinions of the three remaining emperors on Shura's side no longer mattered. The minority had to obey the majority.

"Let it be so, then. We great emperors shall refrain from voting," Emperor Shura affirmed indifferently. He had said those words unwillingly, but appearances were important to maintain. Otherwise, his intentions would be far too brazen to stomach.

"Hold on," Jiang Chen grinned.

"Hmm?" All eyes gathered on him.

The young man had turned toward Emperor Petalpluck in the interim. "I was feeling that something felt out of place, and I finally realize what it is. Why are the candidates only me and Emperor Shura? In theory, Emperor Petalpluck is the second-ranked great emperor in Veluriyam Capital. If there's only two candidates, shouldn't the second be ahead of the third?"

Everyone knew how disinterested Emperor Petalpluck was in power and fame. That was why he had been automatically ignored. The interjection from Jiang Chen, however, made it seem like something was genuinely awry. That's right! Why was the second-ranked emperor being put below the third?

Jiang Chen hadn't expected his ploy to push Emperor Petalpluck forward. He had only done so in order to cause Emperor Shura a bit of extra embarrassment, as well as douse his flames of arrogance.

Emperor Vastsea was the first to lose his cool. "Daoist Petalpluck is a sage above the problems of the world! His outstanding integrity tipped him off about Emperor Shura's wisdom and heroism. He knows when to step aside, unlike a certain ignorant youngster. It's important for people to know what their limits are!"

"Emperor Vastsea, I wonder what you were doing when you were my age?" smiled Jiang Chen serenely.

"Well said!" Emperor Coiling Dragon clapped cheerfully. "You were still living under the protection of your seniors, eh, Vastsea? My guess can't be far off the mark. What right do you have to criticize young lord Zhen? He has only been famous for a handful of years, yet he's made more contributions than you, a great emperor of over a thousand. You're very brave to talk about people's limits, hmm? I wonder where your courage comes from? Were you the one that defeated Pill King Ji Lang?"

Once again, Emperor Vastsea was at a loss for words.

"Alright, alright. Enough is enough. I can smell the gunpowder in the air already." Chuckling, Emperor Petalpluck came forward to mediate. "There's no need to argue. I'm pleased that you think so highly of this old man, young lord Zhen. However, my nature has always been a placid one. I don't have the heart needed to rule over Veluriyam Capital. I see great determination and diligence in Emperor Shura, and remarkable youthful flair in young lord Zhen. One is experienced, the other energetic. You two are the best candidates. For the sake of this city, I will stand and bear witness."

Emperor Petalpluck's announcement nipped the impending conflagration in the bud. Despite that, Emperor Shura's hatred for Jiang Chen only grew stronger. Before now, he'd mostly hated Emperor Peafowl for not passing on the throne to him. But now, ever since he'd ambushed the senior emperor, his next obstacle was this young lord Zhen!

I'll let you run amok for a few more days, kid. When I hold the reins, you'll be the first person I get rid of! The emperor gnashed his teeth internally with frustration.

Emperor Petalpluck turned to the eight hundred vassals. "Everyone, I'm sure you know why we've convened this Vassal Meeting. The waters of Veluriyam Capital are too turbulent at present. We need a proper helmsman to navigate them, a captain that can grasp the situation firmly. Even if the job opening is only temporary, we still require someone to fill it. Is the diligent Emperor Shura more suitable? Or the energetic young lord Zhen? The choice is yours. Remember, this isn't a game. Please carefully consider the question and vote in who you think is the most appropriate. Very likely, it will decide what path the city walks down."

“Why vote? We’d rather have the strongest rule. We’ll pick who’s stronger!” A vassal shouted from below.

“That’s right, Emperor Shura is the strongest after Emperor Peafowl. Of course he should lead. Young lord Zhen? We have more than enough geniuses to go around. We can discuss him after he becomes a great emperor!” As soon as Emperor Petalpluck finished speaking, a large swathe of Shura supporters began to clamor in disagreement.

Chapter 1200: Jiang Chens Presence

Since there were supporters for Emperor Shura, there were naturally ones for Sacred Peafowl Mountain and young lord Zhen. They too joined the fray as more and more people raised their voices.

“Ridiculous! Sacred Peafowl Mountain should rule Veluriyam Capital. That’s how it has been for generation after generation. Anyone from any other faction should be considered an usurper!”

“We support young lord Zhen! He’s still young, but his potential and ability have both proven that he more than qualifies as the right successor!”

“I support young lord Zhen as well. He’s achieved so many amazing things in so few years. We’re willing to wait a hundred years for him. If that’s not enough, three to five hundred more years are fine too. In the long term, Veluriyam Capital needs a genius like young lord Zhen!”

“Absolutely. Emperor Shura has proven himself most fitting in the role of a lieutenant or third-in-line. As a proper leader? I feel like he’s missing presence and heart.”

There was utter anarchy in the crowd. So many vassals were present that no one felt obliged to hold their tongue. The two blocs instantly engaged each other in a war of words.

With Sacred Peafowl Mountain, there was a group of fiercely loyal subjects even with Emperor Peafowl’s absence. For the most part, they were composed of people who’d been raised up personally by the emperor. His favor to them could not be ignored.

Whether Emperor Peafowl was here or elsewhere, they saw Sacred Peafowl Mountain as their patron. As long as the mountain stood, their positions were safe. If it lost power, their own would go with it sooner or later. Despite Emperor Shura’s intimations about withholding future retaliation, most of the vassals didn’t believe a word of it. There was absolutely no cause for them to support him, no matter how many messengers he sent.

Firstly, Emperor Shura was not the most tolerant sort of individual. Secondly, Emperor Peafowl was the one who had promoted them through the ranks. Emotionally speaking, they couldn’t just turn on Sacred Peafowl Mountain at the drop of a hat. Finally, nobody knew whether Emperor Peafowl had actually died or not.

He’d ruled Veluriyam Capital for three thousand years, after all. In the eyes of the city’s vassals, Emperor Peafowl had long since become an invincible legend. The very thought of him succumbing so randomly was beyond incredible. Thus, even the few who were wavering slightly felt that it was no better than nourishing a viper in one’s bosom if they supported Emperor Shura at this point.

Supporting Emperor Shura was unlikely to yield particularly good results for them down the line. On the off chance that Emperor Peafowl made a triumphant return, they would be condemned by both sides. They'd be the definition of ingrates and traitors then.

With any amount of consideration, it wasn't difficult to realize that they had Sacred Peafowl Mountain's mark on them already. They were destined to be in the same boat as their backer.

Betraying Sacred Peafowl Mountain was tantamount to throwing their entire future away, regardless of who won in the end. The quarreling continued. Neither faction yielded to the other.

Jiang Chen cast a detached look over the crowd. There was no shortage of Shura supporters. It seemed that he had bought more than his fair share of friends over the years. Perhaps Emperor Peafowl always knew. It was simply that he didn't care about it, given his aloof position.

Emperor Shura's cronies aside, there were plenty of Sacred Peafowl Mountain loyalists as well.

"Sacred Peafowl Mountain's three-thousand-year rule of the city is paying off. Their roots here are profoundly deep. Even though gossip is flying all over the place, there has been no large-scale defection. Living proof of Emperor Peafowl's charisma, too, I think."

It was an easy observation that many of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's original vassals clearly supported their place of allegiance. Jiang Chen was secretly pleased by this. He didn't have much of a connection with those people. If Emperor Peafowl really had fallen, it was understandable that their devotions would end with their master's departure.

But the vassals had not abandoned Sacred Peafowl Mountain. They remained quite staunch in their loyalty. Jiang Chen was touched by the gesture. He was resolved all the more to strive for the city's rule with Emperor Shura, no matter how difficult it proved in the end.

Jiang Chen was well aware that it would be a colossally strenuous task to overcome the ambitious second-in-command, given the limitation of his current position and resources. Nevertheless, he was obligated to give it his all. For these sincere supporters, if nothing else.

Ah, Your Majesty. You have really given me a hard nut to crack this time. The thought of the wise ruler brought a wry smile to Jiang Chen's face. Even in this time of trouble, he was concerned about the older man's safety.

"Quiet down, please!" Emperor Petalpluck motioned downwards with both hands. His great emperor presence filled the space, suppressing the cacophony of noise to a minimum.

"What is the meaning of this hubbub?" Emperor Petalpluck didn't usually get angry, but he was not to be ignored when he did. "The decision has already been made. You have a single chance to vote for whoever you support. Remember, you're vassals of Veluriyam Capital first and foremost. You should consider the city's well-being rather than engage in pointless argument. "No matter who wins in the end, Veluriyam Capital cannot be allowed to torn asunder. Otherwise, it would be better not to have the vote at all!"

Emperor Petalpluck put a lot of weight in his words. He gazed thoughtfully toward Emperor Shura and Jiang Chen. "I have a piece of advice for the two of you. Whether it is Sacred Peafowl Mountain or the Shura Retreat that wins, I hope that you will be mindful of the bigger picture. You must accept the

results of this election; the loser should not cause trouble for the winner. Any separatism will be stamped out with great severity!"

The kindly emperor felt deeply indeed about Veluriyam Capital. His words were far harsher than was typical for him.

"Don't worry, Daoist Petalpluck," smiled Emperor Shura faintly. "I've worked diligently and without complain for countless years here in Veluriyam Capital. Have I done anything to either Daoist Peafowl or you, even though you two are ranked above me? What wrongdoing am I guilty of?"

"The past is the past," retorted Emperor Petalpluck. "I want a promise for the future."

"You don't need to worry," Emperor Shura declared emotionlessly. "I did not convene this Vassal Meeting out of a desire for personal gain, but for the sake of this great city. If everyone chooses young lord Zhen over me, and if the young lord really can lead Veluriyam Capital to greater glory, then I don't mind serving as his trustworthy assistant."

There was plenty of applause at his ceremonious words. Emperors Vastsea and Skysplitter both nodded, apparently impressed by the speech. They were the first to clap.

All eyes were on Jiang Chen, clearly interested in his response. A smile as gentle as the spring breeze hung perpetually upon the young man's face.

"Emperor Peafowl has always told me that I should view problems holistically. If Sacred Peafowl Mountain no longer holds the grace of fate, then I have no objections whatsoever. Emperor Peafowl has never taught me to turn against my allies. But, I have to say this ahead of time: I will certainly investigate His Majesty's whereabouts. If his disappearance has to do with anyone in this city, I will make the person responsible pay ten times over. He will perish, and his heritage with it!" Jiang Chen smiled serenely, his eyes turning to his rival candidate. "What do you think, Emperor Shura?"

The emperor was unruffled. "Exactly what I wanted to say. I likewise hope that you have a clear conscience, young lord Zhen!"

There was a rage-fueled fire in Emperor Shura's heart. How could he not have noticed that Jiang Chen was alluding to a connection between him and Emperor Peafowl's disappearance? Though he was actually responsible for it, he was still infuriated at such a bold-faced accusation. It felt as bad as being framed. Worse, maybe. Despite being the culprit, he had to bluff a righteous appearance. It was necessary to fire back a counter-accusation.

Jiang Chen harrumphed. "I owe Emperor Peafowl a great debt of gratitude, and my conscience is as clear as a mirrored pool. There is nothing I've kept hidden from daylight. Let the heavens bear witness to your deeds as well as mine. I swear that I have never done, and will never do, anything detrimental to His Majesty or his interests. If I break this oath, let me be destroyed by divine punishment on the spot!"

Such a transparent oath rendered everyone who'd been incited by Emperor Shura's words entirely speechless. There were people that suspected Jiang Chen's origins, of course. There was even the rare rumor that he was a double agent from the demons, here to haunt Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Veluriyam Capital.

Jiang Chen had heard no shortage of them in his time. That was why he had made this oath to heaven and earth. Its weight killed off any potential malicious rumors, both past and future.

"I'd like to know whether you're brave enough to make the same kind of oath, Emperor Shura." It was a sudden interjection from Emperor Coiling Dragon, standing coolly to the side.

There was a brief, awkward silence. Emperor Petalpluck glanced at Emperor Shura, only to see Emperor Mountaincrush doing the same. In fact, all eyes had turned to Emperor Shura.

"I never make pointless oaths because of baseless rumors," Emperor Shura responded matter-of-factly. "Why would I need one if my conscience is clear?"

His words weren't as assertive as Jiang Chen's had been, but they had a legitimacy that made them difficult to criticize.

"Your conscience is clear, hmm?" Emperor Coiling Dragon snickered.

Emperor Petalpluck probed Emperor Shura with a thoughtful look. "Alright. Information about Emperor Peafowl will surface eventually, I'm sure. Now, let us begin the election of Veluriyam Capital's temporary ruler." His tone was carefully indifferent.

"What's the 'temporary' part for?" Emperor Vastsea was taken aback

"Emperor Peafowl's current whereabouts are unknown. Of course the ruler we're electing now is temporary. If he doesn't return in another decade or two, we can safely take away the 'temporary' part away then. There's nothing wrong with a transition period."

"I quite agree, Daoist Petalpluck," Emperor Void hastily concurred. "A temporary leader is all that we need. Otherwise, it will be an affront to everyone involved upon Emperor Peafowl's return."

Emperor Coiling Dragon nodded. "That's the right of it. We're only sure that Emperor Peafowl is absent without leave. Anyone that fancies full rule of the city is attempting an insurrection."

"Let it be temporary, then," said Emperor Mountaincrush. "The change has my full support."

The great emperors not allied with Shura had all spoken their minds.