

Three Realms 1201

Chapter 1201: The Competition Begins

Every great emperor had expressed their stance on the matter. Emperor Shura understood that a transition period was necessary, even if he was quite irritated by it. He would appear too unsightly otherwise. Moreover, he knew better than anyone that Emperor Peafowl was never returning to Veluriyam Capital. His injury was so severe that even Emperor Pillzenith had declared there was no way the man would survive.

Emperor Peafowl was undoubtedly strong, but he was far from being invincible. Even if he did somehow survive his injuries, the place he'd run to was the desolate wildlands. Could he really escape the demon race's wrath in the state he was in? That was why Emperor Shura didn't care if the power was temporary or not. It was only a matter of time before Veluriyam Capital fell into his grasp.

"Then we shall do as everyone says. This way, we can avoid being disrespectful to Daoist Peafowl." Emperor Shura wore a sanctimonious look.

Emperor Petalpluck nodded and ordered someone to prepare the jade tokens. A head count revealed that there were a total of eight hundred and twenty six vassals in Veluriyam Capital.

"We have prepared eight hundred and twenty six jade tokens to represent everyone present today. All of you will receive a jade token each. These jade tokens contain a unique mark of my own, and you need to inscribe the name of your desired temporary ruler onto them. Once the voting is complete, the great emperors will count the votes together. The one who acquires the most votes will become the temporary ruler of Veluriyam Capital. Are there any objections?"

Emperor Petalpluck waved his hand and ordered his subordinates to pass over the jade tokens into the vassals' hands.

"This is my warning to all of you: don't cheat. You must fill in your jade token with your signatures and unique mark, or render the vote invalid." Since Emperor Petalpluck was the main person in charge of the voting process, he wanted to make sure that no party could exploit holes in the voting process in their favor. The vote would be meaningless otherwise.

It didn't take long before every vassal had a jade token of their own. Individually, the tokens might not mean anything. But together, they could determine the very future of Veluriyam Capital.

Emperor Petalpluck shot a glance at Jiang Chen and Emperor Shura. "Do either of you wish to say anything?"

Emperor Shura hurriedly said, "It's fine, it's fine. I'm sure everyone is tired of our voice already. Let us get this process started already. Cultivators shouldn't fool around, right?"

It wasn't that he had nothing to say. He just couldn't beat young lord Zhen in a verbal spar no matter what. Young lord Zhen was such a silver tongued devil that the great emperor was at risk of losing supporters every time the young man spoke.

Jiang Chen smiled as he shot Emperor Shura a meaningful glance. "Emperor Shura, is it just me, or did you look a bit afraid just now? What is it? Are you afraid that I'll expose how lily-livered you are?"

Emperor Shura smiled arrogantly. “Young lord Zhen, I know you’re just putting up a front! If you’re afraid, I can give you a bit of leeway since you’re a junior and all.”

“Enough, both of you. Keep this up and those below will laugh at you.” Emperor Petalpluck reminded with a frown.

Jiang Chen shrugged and fell silent. He had done everything he could in this meeting, and truthfully he didn’t care what the final results might be. He had already mentally prepared himself to face the possibility of defeat.

Even if Emperor Shura really did win the election, it wasn’t like Jiang Chen would be ruined in one fell stroke. At worst, he would sheath his edge and bide his time. If everything went well, Jiang Chen believed that it was absolutely possible for him become a great emperor within a hundred years.

Even if he didn’t, he was confident that he could outstrip Emperor Shura in every way the moment he reached peak emperor realm. When that happened, Sacred Peafowl Mountain could easily regain control over the capital.

Currently, he was more worried about Emperor Peafowl’s whereabouts. Emperor Shura’s wrath and revenge didn’t worry him in the slightest. He had the Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation at Sacred Peafowl Mountain. It would take at least a couple of great emperors to break open, so no matter how powerful Emperor Shura might be, the possibility of a breach wasn’t really a concern.

Jiang Chen had both a plan of attack and retreat. It was why he was able to keep as calm as he was. If there was one nagging worry in his mind, it would be Pillfire City, especially after he saw the holy emperor of Eternal Celestial Capital and Emperor Pillzenith himself here today.

Emperor Peafowl had long since seen through that Emperor Shura was a man who lacked the courage to carry out his ambitions. That was why Jiang Chen’s worries deepened. If a man like Emperor Shura really was colluding with foreign enemies, it would be no different from leaving Veluriyam Capital wide open to attack.

Jiang Chen didn’t want to see Emperor Peafowl’s efforts and three thousand years of prosperity washed down the drain because Emperor Shura had invited the enemy into their midst.

In a way, his relaxed composure gave the four monarchs of Sacred Peafowl Mountain some more confidence. After all, they couldn’t help but be a little worried. Although the young lord had recruited many helpers to his fold, such as the unanticipated Emperor Peerless, Emperor Shura had been a great emperor of Veluriyam Capital for three thousand years. He was the second most senior in the capital’s history besides Emperor Peafowl. Even if he had contributed nothing to Veluriyam Capital, three thousand years of accumulated authority wasn’t so easy to overcome.

The vassals holding the jade tokens all had serious looks on their faces. Both sides had been awash with emotions when they’d been hurling abuse at each other earlier, but when it actually came time to vote, the matter required serious thought. They all know what this token truly symbolized.

For a time, the atmosphere grew extremely heavy. There was an unanimous stifling presence that descended on everyone. Emperor Petalpluck didn’t urge them to make a decision either.

Emperor Shura stared firmly at the vassals beneath him like a hawk, but Jiang Chen acted with relaxed indifference. He didn't try to exert more psychological pressure because he knew that Emperor Shura's efforts were pointless. The people wouldn't give him a vote just because he was glaring at them. Most of the people who were present today had likely decided who they wanted to vote for a long time ago.

If Emperor Shura wanted to play the bad guy, Jiang Chen didn't mind playing the good guy. He wouldn't be an effective bad guy anyway since he was younger than Emperor Shura, so he might as well be more generous.

A little more than an hour passed, and the jade tokens were passed onto the stage one after another. The great emperors besides Emperor Shura and Jiang Chen were helping with the collection efforts, with Emperor Vastsea and Emperor Coiling Dragon being the most eager of the lot. It was obvious that no one wanted to lose out in this situation.

Emperor Vastsea might have pretended to be friends with Emperor Petalpluck earlier, but the great emperor was quite the paranoid person. He watched Emperor Petalpluck closely throughout the process, worried that the great emperor would break impartiality.

Just the same, Emperor Coiling Dragon was worried that Emperor Petalpluck had been bought out by Emperor Shura. Although there were many signs pointing to Emperor Petalpluck not being an ally of Emperor Shura, much less a friend, it was still better to be safe than sorry.

Some time later, all eight hundred and twenty six jade tokens were collected. Emperor Petalpluck inspected every single jade token personally to ensure that none of them had been switched out, putting an end to all possibilities of cheating.

"Everyone, I guarantee that nothing is wrong with the jade tokens. Now, shall we begin calling the votes?" He looked at the other great emperors.

"Then let us begin. I'm sure that everyone is anxious to know the results." Emperor Vastsea smiled. Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void exchanged a glance with each other. They both knew that the announcement was going to go through whether they liked it or not.

Emperor Mountaincrush volunteered. "I can call the votes."

In the end, Emperor Petalpluck decided that Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Vastsea would supervise himself calling out the votes. Meanwhile, Emperor Void and Emperor Skysplitter would supervise Emperor Mountaincrush tallying the votes. This way, fairness to both Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Shura Retreat was ensured.

"One vote to young lord Zhen..."

"One vote to Emperor Shura..."

The most intense moment of the process had finally arrived. Everyone beneath the stage was waiting with baited breath. Would Emperor Shura replace Sacred Peafowl Mountain and change the three-thousand-year old structure of power in Veluriyam Capital? Or would Sacred Peafowl Mountain continue to rule Veluriyam Capital with young lord Zhen as the temporary ruler?

Everyone had their own expectations and thoughts. The good news was that Emperor Petalpluck didn't report the names of the vassals. Otherwise, the atmosphere would've become even more oppressive. Even then, everyone was tense to say the least. A single spark could set the place on fire.

To Emperor Shura's annoyance, both sides shared almost an equal number of votes. Although he was a few votes ahead of young lord Zhen, they were close enough for it to be a draw.

The fact that he couldn't pull ahead of Jiang Chen irritated Emperor Shura greatly. Before this, he'd thought that his plans and the number of factions he controlled guaranteed a pleasing conclusion. He'd even managed to persuade the vassals of other great emperors and even Emperor Peafowl's to join his side.

All things considered, he should've had near to six hundred votes at least. Even if great numbers of them ultimately couldn't bear to support him and abstained, he should still have around five hundred votes. This should've been a landslide victory! Emperor Shura was right about one thing at least. A lot of people had chosen to stay neutral. However, the dream in which he achieved overwhelming victory over young lord Zhen still hadn't happened.

It made Emperor Shura very unhappy. Even Emperor Vastsea was seething on the inside. The latter was cursing inwardly about the vassals not keeping to their promise and changing their votes at the last minute. That being said, Emperor Shura was still in the lead.

Chapter 1202: An Unexpected Draw

However, the lead was small enough to be nonexistent. Four votes was next to nothing in the grand scheme of things. It was an advantage that small could disappear in an instant.

But still, there was a great deal of excitement from Sacred Peafowl Mountain's side. The four monarchs were quite appreciative of the poll's evenness. They were very clear that many of the Sacred Peafowl Mountain supporters were people who had received favors from Emperor Peafowl. A few neutral vassals filled out the remainder of their ranks, either out of adoration for Emperor Peafowl or admiration of young lord Zhen.

It took less than an hour for the eight hundredth vote to be called. The present situation deepened Emperor Shura's frown even further. Only a two-vote advantage remained for him. Two votes for young lord Zhen in a row would render everything equal. The ambitious emperor could no longer maintain his composure when it came down to the final twenty-six.

Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void were both gratified and anxious. They were gratified that young lord Zhen had remained so hot on Emperor Shura's heels, but their anxiety came from the all-important question: could he overcome the two-vote gap? Could he possibly even overtake his rival and win?

But truthfully speaking, whether young lord Zhen won or lost today no longer mattered. Sacred Peafowl Mountain was already a winner today. That a young lord under such disadvantageous circumstances was able to tie with someone as powerful as Emperor Shura... this was itself a formidable achievement!

After all, young lord Zhen had very shallow foundations in the city. His name had been known for scarcely a decade, and his position as Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord had only been adopted for a few. The young lord essentially had nothing to lose. Even if he lost now, he had a bright future ahead.

But if he happened to win, it would greatly embarrass Emperor Shura. After all, the emperor had spent tremendous effort on calling together this Vassal Meeting in order to clear the way for his own rise. An eleventh-hour failure would be a fully-powered, self-delivered slap to the face.

One by one, Emperor Petalpluck announced the remaining votes.

When there were only five tokens remaining, Emperor Shura's lead narrowed by yet another vote. There was now only a one vote difference. The suspense became the thickest in the final votes.

"A vote for Emperor Shura!"

The fifth-from-last vote was Emperor Shura's. This relieved his tense nerves somewhat. Good. He was leading by two votes again. If he was able to secure just two of the remaining four, he would have the election in the bag. Emperor Shura was reasonably certain of his chances there.

"A vote for young lord Zhen!" The fourth-to-last went over to Jiang Chen.

Emperor Shura felt like he'd been drenched with a bucket of ice-cold water. His just-settled mind was disturbed once more.

"A vote for Emperor Shura!" Thankfully, the third-last was his.

His lead became two votes again. There were only two votes left. Emperor Shura's eyes glittered. If just one of the last two was his, he would be the victor!

Emperor Vastsea locked onto the second-last voting token in Emperor Petalpluck's hands. He muttered under his breath, shining desire evident on his face. In that moment, he wanted Emperor Shura's name to be called more than anything else.

Unfortunately for him, the second-last vote belonged to Jiang Chen. "A vote for young lord Zhen," Emperor Petalpluck called out.

Only the final vote remained.

It was surprising that this election came down to the thinnest wire. If the last vote was Emperor Shura's, he would be declared the new ruler of Veluriyam Capital. If it was young lord Zhen's, then the election would result be a tie.

Emperor Petalpluck's arm tensed as he reached for the last jade slip. How could he not, when it decided the city's future?

Light gleamed in Emperor Shura's eyes. He stared feverishly at the object in Emperor Petalpluck's hands. If he could, he would've pounced to write his name upon it. He desired the win far too much. In that moment, he was jittery enough to forget about his resentment against those who'd agreed, but hadn't actually voted for him.

Who did the final vote belong to?

Emperor Petalpluck glanced at the jade slip. His customary smile was gone, an expression of seriousness and solemnity replacing it.

"The final vote goes to... young lord Zhen!"

Those eight words were met with thunderous cheers from Sacred Peafowl Mountain's side.

Emperor Coiling Dragon roared with laughter. "Good, good, good! It seems that Sacred Peafowl Mountain still holds a dear place in the hearts of the people. I'm sure that everyone can see now that Sacred Peafowl Mountain is the city's future!"

He was the quickest to the draw and managed to speak before everyone else.

"Coiling Dragon, you're speaking nonsense. The vote is tied. Where are you getting your absurd conclusion from?" Emperor Vastsea snarled coldly.

Emperor Coiling Dragon flashed back an easy-going smile. "Oh, isn't it obvious? Young lord Zhen has only had his position for a few years, but he's garnered such plentiful support. When he matures in just a few more years, his popularity will soar for sure. Daoist Shura, if I may be so blunt, the age of us old-timers is almost at its end. We must all pave the way for the younger generation. If I were you, I would stand aside and give the young ones your full devotion. No one can deny that young lord Zhen is Veluriyam Capital's future. Not you, not I, and not any other one of us old codgers!"

Jiang Chen hadn't realized the full extent of the emperor's eloquence before. It seemed that Emperor Coiling Dragon was giving Sacred Peafowl Mountain's defense his all. Still, he was just as stunned at the tie as everyone else. The notion of a perfectly even split between eight hundred twenty-six votes was rather ridiculous and incomprehensible.

Eighty-six votes had abstained, and half of the remaining votes went to each candidate, leading to a draw. This result elicited joy in some and sorrow in others.

Sacred Peafowl Mountain's side was mostly cheery. Evidently, they hadn't anticipated young lord Zhen's popularity to equal Emperor Shura's. Whether it was because of Emperor Peafowl's lingering greatness or conquest through the youth's own charisma, there was widespread support for young lord Zhen in Veluriyam Capital.

And this was a vote from the vassals only. If all the cultivators living in Veluriyam Capital were allowed to vote, they firmly believed that Emperor Shura would have absolutely no chance. After all, young lord Zhen's popularity was mainly concentrated in the capital. The vassals were scattered in the region's reaches, most of them a great distance away. Though young lord Zhen's fame was far-reaching, stories were far less convincing than personal experience.

Smiling faintly, Emperor Petalpluck looked toward Emperor Shura. "No one expected a tie to occur, Daoist Shura. It can only be explained as the will of heaven. What say you?"

"If that's the case, then either the great emperors or the nobility of the city must vote as well," Emperor Shura replied coolly.

"That cannot be allowed," Emperor Petalpluck shook his head. "We titled emperors and the factions beneath us should not participate in the voting process. Otherwise, the city will surely fall into chaos."

The kindly emperor was insistent on this point. As an expert from Emperor Peafowl's generation, he understood Veluriyam Capital quite well regardless of his usual placidity. If the great emperors were allowed to become involved, the conflict would be brought into the open. Two separate factions would

be formed. No matter who actually won, the losing side would be beyond outraged at the winning. From that point on, cracks and an eventual split were inevitable.

Emperor Petalpluck was extremely worried about this eventuality. In actuality, he had agreed to convening the Vassal Meeting because of his fear that Veluriyam Capital's situation would spiral out of control. If the city's vassals each went their own ways because of idle suspicions, Veluriyam's integrity would no longer be whole.

"Yes, perhaps Daoist Petalpluck is right," Emperor Mountaincrush interjected suddenly. "It just might be the will of heaven. We should not carry on with our bipartisan conflict. Maybe Daoist Peafowl really is safe and sound?"

Though Mountaincrush's statements seemed to have no connection, everyone in the world of martial dao respected heaven's mysterious will. It was enough to lead the crowd down another mental path. So, Emperor Peafowl was fine? The heavens didn't want Veluriyam Capital to fall into civil unrest? Was that the reason for the tie?

Emperor Vastsea glared fiercely at Emperor Mountaincrush, clearly unsatisfied with his 'delusional explanation'. For Emperor Shura's faction, gaining control of the city was their sole object. They could not finish so poorly after such a fine start. They wouldn't settle for merely a sheepish departure. There was no stopping before they accomplished their goal.

"Everyone, isn't it a bit silly to end things so hastily here just because of a tie? It took a lot of effort for the vassals to gather. We can't send them off without a conclusion. How are we supposed to solve the city's present dilemma then? Should rumors be allowed to fly unimpeded everywhere? Veluriyam Capital needs someone in charge." Emperor Vastsea spoke with great agitation.

Emperor Coiling Dragon snickered. "Vastsea, your tone sounds like you almost want something bad to have happened to His Majesty Peafowl. Or do you know something we don't?"

This was a thinly veiled jab at his peer.

Vastsea instantly roared with fury. "Coiling Dragon, what are you trying to say? Always with the slander, hmm?!"

"One who walks the straight path does not fear crooked shadows," smiled Emperor Coiling Dragon. "Compared to young lord Zhen's forthright honesty, I've become rather suspicious about the very real possibility that the rumors are manufactured by a certain someone."

"I completely agree," nodded Emperor Void stoically. "Someone must be behind them for sure. The news of Emperor Peafowl's death is an elaborate plan, a ruse meant to stir Veluriyam Capital's pot for personal gain."

The tie filled the two emperors with renewed confidence. They knew now that the people weren't as in love with Emperor Shura as they had feared. Since that was the case, it was time to go on the offensive!

Chapter 1203: To Decide Via Martial Might?

Emperor Petalpluck's brow was deeply knotted. He was at an impasse. The two sides were becoming more and more belligerent and a fight seemed about to break out at any moment. This wasn't something that he wanted to see.

Motioning downwards with both palms, he patiently counseled both parties. "Please, friends. Your complaints against each other right now are unsubstantiated. What point is there in throwing empty words around? What Veluriyam Capital needs most right now is stability, not hostility." Emperor Petalpluck cast his gaze into the guest area. "We have so many honored guests here today. If we get into a heated argument in front of them, isn't that shameful for the entire city? We'll be the laughingstock of the Upper Eight Regions."

Emperor Petalpluck no longer cared about appearances. He exercised as much restraint as he could muster. Thankfully, his words were effective enough to noticeably defuse rising tempers on either side.

"Daoist Petalpluck is right," Emperor Vastsea nodded. "Coiling Dragon, Vastsea, your unfounded claims will only bring about embarrassment. If you're as confident as your words indicate, why don't we have a straightforward bout to decide things? In the world of martial dao, strength still reigns supreme."

A straightforward bout? Though Emperor Vastsea wasn't exactly loved, his suggestion nevertheless won the approval of many. A bout was far more interesting and attractive than an election.

"A good fight is what we need!"

"Exactly. Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Shura Retreat have always been two stalwart pillars of the city. Only a contest of strength will reveal who is stronger in the end. Why vote when a fight can decide things so much more easily and directly?"

"A fight? How do you propose they actually do it? How old is young lord Zhen and how old is Emperor Shura? The emperor should feel ashamed of himself at having to engage in such a thing."

"Heh heh, that doesn't matter. Your age doesn't matter in the world. The selection of a leader favors experience. Youth isn't an excuse. Youngsters shouldn't participate in such competitions in the first place. It's not good for young men to seek power so desperately." Though this was pure sophistry, it was delivered with perfect matter-of-factness.

Emperor Petalpluck fell silent. He pondered Emperor Shura, then glanced at Jiang Chen; he wanted to see the reactions of both parties.

For once, Emperor Shura spoke in a bold and forthright way. "I'm up for anything, anytime."

The kindly emperor turned to Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord. Jiang Chen glanced instead at Emperor Shura himself with a half-smile.

"Emperor Shura, I've been curious for a while to see where your courage comes from. Why are you so set on usurping the throne? You're even willing to openly fight someone thousands of years younger than you. You didn't have the courage to confront Emperor Peafowl himself for your entire life. Well, congratulations, now's your chance to take on Sacred Peafowl Mountain." The youth's mockery was relentless. "Still, no one here is a fool. You've lived a few thousand years, yet you're fighting a young cultivator who's not yet thirty. A win for you is nothing less than unfair, and a loss, nothing more than disgraceful."

"I wouldn't fight you if personal benefit was the only thing at stake," retorted Emperor Shura impassively. "My heart beats for the public good. It aches for Veluriyam Capital's future. Since you won't back down yourself, I have no other recourse but to fight. Any misunderstandings are collateral."

The public good? Jiang Chen couldn't help but laugh when he heard that. He ignored the ambitious emperor entirely, inclining his head instead to Emperor Petalpluck.

"There's something I'd like to ask, sir. Have you heard of a millennia-old great emperor dueling a twenty-something cultivator? If there's any instance of that happening at all in our history before now, I have no problem obliging."

Emperor Petalpluck couldn't do much more than laugh in helplessness. Something like that was unheard of, not only in Veluriyam Capital, but the entire human domain. But Emperor Shura's cronies were uninterested in stopping until they had reached their goal. The emperor himself was tossing aside any semblance of self dignity. Such a change was difficult to deal with, presenting a painful quandary.

"Young lord Zhen, we're picking the future leader of Veluriyam Capital here," said Emperor Petalpluck with a wry smile. "I cannot favor you on account of your age alone."

Jiang Chen gave a slight nod in acknowledgment. He cast a serene gaze outward at the crowd all around.

"If there's to be a fight," he proclaimed, "let it be all all-out contest! There must be a competition of both pill and martial dao. This is a clash of Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Shura Retreat's fortunes. Only having a simple duel between Emperor Shura and I, and having that decide things would be a little frivolous. Doing things this way would only attract widespread contempt. I'm not opposed to deciding things with a competition, but I insist that it be on a grander scale between our faction's foundations. Let's make a spectacle of it!"

"Hmph, do you think that everyone has as much time to waste as you do?" Emperor Shura sneered. "The world of martial dao is ruled by might. Everything else you talked about is meaningless."

"That's why you've never been able to sit on the highest throne, Emperor Shura," Jiang Chen jeered back. "You're far too short-sighted. I can already predict that if Veluriyam Capital falls into your myopic hands, everything the city has will be lost in a hundred years."

Given the emperor's disgusting behavior, there was no reason for the young man to save his opponent any humiliation.

"Young lord Zhen," Emperor Petalpluck cut in. "What do you mean by an all-out contest?"

"Oh, it's simple enough. An attempt to measure whose fortunes are greater between Sacred Peafowl Mountain and the Shura Retreat absolutely needs an all-out contest. Only through a comprehensive competition can the two factions' strengths and foundations be compared. If martial dao is the only ruler, nothing useful will come of just one result."

Even some of the Shura vassals found Jiang Chen's explanation very convincing. A mere duel between young lord Zhen and Emperor Shura was an insult to the audience's intelligence. That a great emperor with three thousand years of renown wanted to fight a twenty-something cultivator was close to utter shameless. There was no honor in winning a fight like that. Neither would the other party's definite loss mean anything. What comparison was there to make in a match decided before it even began?

Moreover, Jiang Chen's suggestion allowed the audience an opportunity to enjoy a show. It would be a good opportunity to verify the abilities of people from both factions. A much fairer proposition, that was for sure. In comparison, Emperor Shura's adamant insistence about solely competing through martial dao was unreasonable and ignoble.

In the guest area, Sect Head Han Qianzhan of the Great Yu Skysword Sect made his loud laughter known. "As an outsider, it's not really my place to speak. Still, I wanted to point out that a potential leader of Veluriyam Capital should lead in every aspect of life. In terms of martial dao alone, I doubt any of the great emperors here would be certain of their victory over one of their fellows. In any case, those of us in sects have always believed in foundation and fortune."

"We of the Celestial Cicada Court agree with Sect Head Han's opinion," Sect Head Su Huanzhen chimed in smoothly. "Daoist Peafowl cared about fortune a great deal even many years ago. I would think that none of you here would be willing to violate his historical principles."

"Fortune is a nebulous concept," objected the lord of the Eternal Celestial Capital. "I think a decision made through martial dao is much cleaner."

Though Emperor Pillzenith was supposed to be on Emperor Shura's side, he was unexpectedly silent this time. The latter felt a mild pang of disappointment when his support didn't arrive.

The visiting great emperor kept his eyelids mostly shut, as if he had entered meditation. However, his mind remained quite active. In theory, he should have helped the one who'd invited him here. But the thought of Pill King Zhen and his mythical Pinecrane Pill stirred something inside Emperor Pillzenith. He wanted to use the chance he had today to assess the extent of Pill King Zhen's mastery over pill dao. That was why he was being silent and unsupportive of his host.

Truthfully, the only reason that Emperor Pillzenith had helped in ambushing Emperor Peafowl wasn't because he held any goodwill for the backstabbing emperor. Nor was it out of any kind of necessity. At the end of the day, he had done so for only one reason: to weaken and subdue Veluriyam Capital, and perhaps even gain control over it in the future. With Veluriyam Capital undermined, there would be even fewer factions that posed a credible threat to Pillfire City in the Upper Eight Regions.

Having heard all of the guests' opinions, Emperor Petalpluck looked at Emperor Mountaincrush. "What do you think?"

"I still think that we should be done with all of this." The other neutral emperor broke into a wry smile. "We should not disobey the will of heaven, hmm? Isn't it better to reach a happy conclusion by ending with a tie?"

What he wanted was a compromise and remain friends with both sides.

"What do you say, friends?" Emperor Petalpluck looked towards the other titled emperors.

There was no need to ask Emperor Shura's two allies. Both of them wanted martial dao to be the sole decider, considering the rest to be time-wasting novelties.

Emperors Coiling Dragon and Void walked in lockstep with Jiang Chen. They knew that regardless of young lord Zhen's talent, the gap of age and experience between him and Emperor Shura was almost impossible to bridge. Of course they supported a larger-scale competition. If pill dao and whatever else

was brought out onto the table, Sacred Peafowl Mountain would have no chance of losing. Their reduction in strength from Emperor Peafowl's absence wouldn't mean nearly as much. In particular, Emperor Coiling Dragon was supremely confident in Jiang Chen's pill dao skill.

"Daoist Petalpluck, why has Sacred Peafowl Mountain been able to rule over Veluriyam Capital for three thousand years? Is it because of His Majesty Peafowl alone? Has everyone ignored Sacred Peafowl Mountain's own wealth of fortunes and resources?" Emperor Coiling Dragon's voice was steady. "Victory must be decided through a comprehensive competition. The vassals deserve to see the full extents of the two factions' abilities. Only then will they know who they should support, and thereby choose the best leader to light the city's way forward!"

"If you don't have the courage to agree to even this, Daoist Shura, how will you persuade the populace that you are a worthy leader? Even if you chance upon the throne, do you think that they will endorse you the same way they endorsed His Majesty?" asked Emperor Void coolly.

Would they?

Obviously not. If Emperor Shura won against young lord Zhen with martial strength alone, the entire world would ridicule him. Everyone knew that such a victory was close to meaningless.

"If you don't receive the undivided adoration of all, then your foundations will not be firm. Your authority on the throne will be easily shaken. If you are fit to rule, then you shall doubtless enter into it in time. Otherwise, you cannot force upon yourself something that isn't yours."

Emperor Void's advice was benevolent on the surface, but he was in fact pushing Emperor Shura into a corner. The truth was just as he had said. An unjust victory would not earn any respect from the people or the world at large. In fact, he wouldn't even obtain the support of Veluriyam Capital's own vassals.

Chapter 1204: Closing In Step-By-Step

Emperor Shura felt very conflicted.

He hated Emperor Void's advice because it was the painful truth. He swept a glance at the vassals and noticed that many seemed to agree with Emperor Void. Even the ones that supported him were keen for a comprehensive competition.

If he insisted on taking the throne through a martial competition, he might really never gain the complete trust and adoration of the citizens. The perfect ruler should be able to silence all naysayers by being multifaceted and exhibit a dominating advantage in every discipline. Otherwise, there would always be room for contention.

Emperor Peafowl was a leader who possessed those exact qualities and Emperor Shura was confident he did as well. Young lord Zhen had requested a large scale competition merely to show off his dominance in pill dao. Other than pill dao, Emperor Shura was certain that he had complete advantage over the young lord.

Emperor Petalpluck looked at Emperor Shura with an inquisitive expression. It was obvious that he agreed with Jiang Chen. This wasn't just a competition between Emperor Shura and young lord Zhen, but a measure of fortunes between Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Shura Retreat as well.

“Daoist Shura, why don’t we let the vassals decide if there should be only a martial battle or a comprehensive competition?” Emperor Petalpluck suggested.

Emperor Shura swept another glance at the vassals and instantly realized that a comprehensive competition was unavoidable if the final decision was left to vote. The audience’s eyes were already glittering in anticipation of an entertaining show.

If Emperor Shura insisted on having a single battle, his standing would suffer disastrously. He was already on shaky ground as the number of his supporters was on par with the young lord. If he lost any more supporters, the amount of vassals that supported him would surely decrease.

As the decision was going to be forced by a vote, he might as well make himself seem more generous and magnanimous. “Since young lord Zhen is so motivated, how can I say no? I will entertain him until the end. I only wanted to spare him from complete embarrassment.” Emperor Shura smiled blandly.

Jiang Chen burst out laughing. “Spare me from complete embarrassment? Let’s hope that you truly mean this, Emperor Shura, and not that you have no better option.”

Of course he could tell that Emperor Shura had no other choice.

Emperor Petalpluck breathed a sigh of relief. Since both parties were willing, he could save the effort of trying to convince them. “Daoist Shura and young lord Zhen, what disciplines do you wish to include in your competition?”

Jiang Chen was very generous. “Emperor Shura can have the first choice. I’ll defeat his faction in whatever discipline he’s most confident in!”

The crowd was flabbergasted by those words. Such dominance! He was going to beat Shura Retreat at their own game? That would be incredibly heaven-defying! Was young lord Zhen really that well rounded at such a young age?

Emperor Vastsea hated seeing Jiang Chen strut around like this and laughed from anger. “Young lord Zhen, boasting to attract attention to yourself is truly distasteful.”

Emperor Coiling Dragon was about to respond in kind with an insult, but Jiang Chen stopped him with a wave of a hand. He shot an indifferent glance at Emperor Vastsea and smiled faintly. “Emperor Vastsea, I know that you and Emperor Shura are on the same boat. Since you believe that I’m boasting, feel free to challenge me with a discipline your faction is most confident in.”

Emperor Peafowl had once instructed Jiang Chen to learn about the individual emperor factions in Veluriyam Capital. After his investigation, he learned that a majority of the great emperors here were incredibly committed to martial dao. They did put in some effort to improve other disciplines, but the harvests from their labor wasn’t great. Jiang Chen was actually rather unhappy with the great emperors’ lackadaisical attitudes.

Every powerful faction should have talent in unique specializations. Martial dao was important, but so was pill dao, formations, talismans, traps, beast taming and other disciplines. There were unparalleled geniuses in every single discipline in the ancient times. It was the reason why the ancient age was also called the flourishing era. Various sects reached the pinnacle through the disciplines of pill dao, martial dao, formations talismans, and more.

In fact, such sects could be found in the modern age as well. A sect or faction would hold boundless potential if they were allowed to flourish in their own respective disciplines.

Pillfire City's influence was able to creep above Veluriyam Capital because they were much more open to the development of various disciplines, while setting up suitable platforms for them. Various talents and experts gradually gravitated towards the city, vastly accelerating progress. It was something which Veluriyam Capital sorely lacked.

The capital had a certain attractiveness, but it wasn't captivating enough to attract unparalleled geniuses of various disciplines due to the lack of a platform for them to continually improve. This was her greatest flaw.

Emperor Peafowl had noticed this and put forth great effort to improve pill dao. Unfortunately, the capital was simply too vast and there was only so much one man could do. He'd been hard at work all these years, but the results had been less than spectacular.

It wasn't Emperor Peafowl's limited capabilities either. Veluriyam Capital's foundation and heritage in these disciplines simply couldn't be compared to Pillfire City's. Jiang Chen wanted to use this opportunity to cast off stagnation and inject some vitality into the capital.

It was why he requested a comprehensive challenge. He wanted to have the other factions realize that there was so many more disciplines worth exploring other than martial dao, and that these disciplines could also bring them to the pinnacle. Jiang Chen had seen many powerful experts reach the apex through various disciplines in his previous life. Martial dao wasn't the only way.

Emperor Vastsea was thoroughly enraged by Jiang Chen's words. Feel free to challenge me? The young lord was clearly looking down on him!

"Fine! We shall see how much depth there really is to your cockiness!" He yelled furiously.

"In what discipline do you wish to compete?" Jiang Chen asked while looking at Emperor Shura with a cold smirk. "Emperor Shura, does he represent you?"

Emperor Shura was a little hesitant. He was worried that Emperor Vastsea would carelessly walk into Jiang Chen's trap. It'd be a waste if they lost a round for nothing.

"Why are you so hasty? The rules and scope of the competition hasn't even been set yet," he answered blandly and turned to face Emperor Petalpluck. "Daoist Petalpluck, what might you suggest for the scope of the competition?"

"You should discuss that among yourselves. If I suggest any, one might suspect me for being biased." Emperor Petalpluck refrained from giving any suggestions.

"Martial dao is naturally the most important discipline in our world. Other disciplines are only complementary. I suggest that we allocate three rounds for martial dao, one for pill dao, and one for talismans, to form a best of five competition." Emperor Shura muttered.

He suggested talismans instead of formations because he'd heard that young lord Zhen was incredibly adept in the latter. It was only logical to avoid something his opponent was good at. Pill dao however,

was something he couldn't avoid. It wouldn't be illogical if he did. The crowd would think that he was afraid of young lord Zhen.

Losing a single pill dao round was fine. He could catch up in the martial dao and talisman rounds. He was quite confident in his mastery of talismans. Moreso since there were no rumors about young lord Zhen's exceptional talent in talismans.

Emperor Coiling Dragon laughed coldly before Jiang Chen could respond. "That's strange, why did you bring up only pill dao and talismans when there are multiple other disciplines? Is the art of formation making, beast taming, traps, and weapon refining unimportant?"

Jiang Chen smirked in response. "It's not often that we get to summon a vassal meeting. We should put on a show worth watching. I suggest that we let the vassals discuss, and we compete in whichever discipline they choose. It's the least we can do to thank them for making such a long and arduous journey to the capital. Also, we get to showcase the foundations of our factions in full."

Emperor Shura could hardly contain the urge to give Jiang Chen a fierce slap to the face. The young lord had been constantly currying favor with the vassals by being docile and tending to their wishes. If this went on any further, many would lean towards him. That would be extremely disadvantageous.

"Hmph! Our competition isn't child's play! If we have to compete in every single trifling discipline, we'll be going at it for who knows how long?!" Emperor Shura couldn't accept this.

Jiang Chen smiled. "Emperor Shura, the competition hasn't even begun yet. Why are you trembling in your boots already? How are you going to be the ruler of Veluriyam Capital if you're like this?"

Emperor Shura nearly snapped.

"Young lord Zhen, can I say that you're stalling for time?" Emperor Shura's voice was cold and harsh.

"Why would I?" Jiang Chen smiled blandly.

"If that isn't true, why are you being so unreasonable?" Emperor Shura's voice was suffused with a hint of anger.

"Me? Unreasonable? You summoned the Vassal Meeting, yet refuse to listen to their opinions. You've been rambling by yourself the entire time and picked subjects that best suit yourself. Don't you realize how discourteous you're being?"

Chapter 1205: Trump Cards

Emperor Shura was quite depressed. He'd always known that young lord Zhen was an annoying pest. But before convening the Vassal Meeting, he'd also been sure that the throne was as good as his without Emperor Peafowl around. All signs had pointed to it.

Someone like young lord Zhen was far too immature, regardless of how brilliant he might be. From what Emperor Shura remembered, the young lord was perhaps a bit more excellent than his favorite disciple, Li Jiancheng. But, at the end of the day, he was just another young genius. How could someone like that stand up to an emperor, much less compete with him in the Vassal Meeting?

But harsh reality lay cruelly before him. Bit by bit, young lord Zhen had fortified Sacred Peafowl Mountain's position. He was actually pressing towards Emperor Shura in a gradual advance. If the emperor made one misstep, it was quite likely that his machinations would fail entirely.

With what he's been doing so far, is he truly a master of everything? Or is he merely saying all this to play up to the vassals and put me in a bad light?

The ambitious emperor was in a bind. Though he verbally opposed the suggestion, he knew deep down that young lord Zhen's proposal was both suitable and well-received. The standstill forced Emperor Petalpluck to intercede.

"Please, you two. If we leave everything to the vassals, then there really will be no end in sight. So let me put in an impartial word. In order to decide a victory or loss between the candidates, there must be an odd number of rounds. Five, seven, nine, and so on. Only then can the result be clear-cut. Since both of you say that your factions' fortune and resourcefulness are being tested, I wouldn't recommend a one-on-one competition just between the two of you. Instead, why not pick out a few candidates from either side and compete in a variety of fields? That would be a much better display of intrinsic superiority."

The vassals showed overwhelming agreement with the kindly emperor's words.

"Absolutely. It's boring to watch a competition between two people. We need many more than that to have a good show."

"Why not send out five people from both sides? Eleven or thirteen rounds sounds pretty good. The more participation there is, the better our judgment!"

"Why do it any other way? And the more rounds, the better!" The crowd had become a circus once again. However, the vassals who raised their voices this time were mostly the ones who'd voted to abstain.

There were a fair few among Sacred Peafowl Mountain's supporters as well, since they understood that young lord Zhen's youthfulness would suffer in an even match with Emperor Shura. The more participants and rounds there were, the more it would reduce the older emperor's advantage.

Shura's supporters were understandably unenthusiastic. Their biggest asset was Emperor Shura's overwhelming superiority. If that asset's usefulness was negated, then the Shura Retreat wouldn't be able to overcome Sacred Peafowl Mountain with guaranteed reliability.

Unfortunately for them, the clamoring from the other two groups in the crowd drowned out their voices. Plus, many of his supporters had voted because of temporary or emotional reasons.

Now that there was a show to be had, they were more than happy to make some noise in support, not that they could openly express that sentiment, of course. Instead, they settled for the passive strategy of staying quiet.

Emperor Shura was cornered by the clamoring from the audience. A raging fire burned in his heart. He hadn't thought that the Vassal Meeting would come anywhere close to this point. It was supposed to have been a piece of cake, but the delicacy had blown away in a gale. The emperor felt absolutely miserable.

As he moped, his consciousness received a message from Emperor Pillzenith.

“Don’t worry, Shura. Take the fight forward and feel free to add a couple extra pill dao rounds. My Pillfire City has handed you several cards already. Why not play a few of them?”

The voice was like a light in the darkness, shining on new hope to the desperate emperor. He did have a few more chips to toss into the game. He hadn’t wanted to use them before now because of his natural wariness for Emperor Pillzenith. He knew as well as anyone that inviting the ruler of a rival city was like inviting wolves into one’s home. It was no better than quenching thirst with poison. But now, what other recourse did he have?

How would he have gotten rid of Emperor Peafowl if he hadn’t requested help from Emperor Pillzenith? Taking the throne for himself would’ve be a pipe dream. Today’s similarly critical situation required him to use the resources that he really hadn’t wanted to use.

Never mind. The emperor hardened his heart. I’ll owe him a few extra favors for now. When I become strong in time, he will no longer have any power over me. He won’t be able to do much to me on Veluriyam soil. If he’s too uppity... then I can get rid of him too!

The emperor’s thoughts became callous and ruthless. Someone simple or soft wouldn’t have been able to become a great emperor in the first place, and Shura was no different. In fact, he’d had a few considerations of his own with his invitation of Emperor Pillzenith, even though it looked like he was sleeping amongst wolves.

There was the very real prospect of finding an opportunity, after things were settled, to gather up Veluriyam Capital’s own titled emperors and ensure that Pillzenith wouldn’t live to make a return trip. It was two birds with one stone. He would get rid of Emperor Peafowl—a most annoying obstacle—as well as the biggest threat in Pillfire City in Emperor Pillzenith. It had been little more than a daring possibility at the time.

Emperor Pillzenith was a man who no doubt had more than sufficiently prepared for the dangers of treading on enemy soil. Therefore, Emperor Shura could not elicit any suspicions in his provisional ally. It was a better idea to listen to Pillzenith’s advice, then lethally strike while his guard was down.

‘You don’t need to worry about anything related to pill dao. Try to probe for any information about the rumored Pinecrane Pill during the pill contests. Even if you cannot find out the recipe, you must try to find out if there is a pill like that in the first place. Remember the favors you owe me! I am willing to call all of them off as long as you help me acquire the Pinecrane Pill. After that, you can consider us even.’

Though Emperor Pillzenith had his machinations regarding Veluriyam Capital, it no longer posed a threat to him or his faction after Emperor Peafowl’s departure. As about taking over the city, he didn’t have the appetite to do so. It was an impossible project anyway, since the two were located so far apart. The most he could manage was secret control over a few elements of society. Given Emperor Shura’s lack of ability and intelligence, Emperor Pillzenith didn’t think subverting the city in the future would be particularly difficult.

Young lord Zhen and the Pinecrane Pill were more important goals for the present. The appearance of the Longevity Pill had caused great waves to crash through the world of pill dao. The product was nothing less than revolutionary. From the sound of it, the Pinecrane Pill was a hundred times better than

the Longevity Pill. If he could get his hands on it, Pillfire City would have a monopoly over the pill market!

Emperor Shura was apprehensive about the attitude of his temporary ally. If he helped him get the Pinecrane Pill, then things would be even between them?

It sounded wonderful on the surface. He wasn't interested in owing any favors to Emperor Pillzenith, since any outstanding ones would make for excellent blackmail. If he could repay the other emperor with just the Pinecrane Pill, then that was definitely a great outcome.

But Emperor Shura had heard of the rumors around the Pinecrane Pill himself. If it was real, then it would turn the pill dao world upside down. The pill market in the human domain would be completely recast in a different image. The Pinecrane Pill was a pill that had the potential to sweep the entire market clean. No other pill could compare.

Good healing pills was hard to find in the open market. Pills that could be used by emperor and great emperor cultivators were even more rare. Single pills were often sold for outrageous sums. That was the primary reason why Pillfire City occupied most of the pill market. It had an insurmountable advantage with regard to high-end pills.

And this fabled Pinecrane Pill utterly outshone all of their high-end pills.

Even a fool knew the value of a pill that extended an emperor realm cultivator's life by a thousand years. The fact that great emperors could also benefit from it only served to raise the stakes. It was a snap judgement to decide whether healing injuries or prolonging lifespans was more valuable.

The best of the best healing pills, able to rescue people from the brink of death, were extremely difficult to find. They could not possibly be mass-produced. A single pill was a priceless treasure. If the Pinecrane Pill could be manufactured in bulk, then it was much more precious financially. A key to immense profit.

Therefore, Emperor Shura was a bit conflicted about the request. His ability to acquire the recipe aside, he wasn't sure that he was willing to simply give it up at any point. Was he supposed to allow Pillfire City to continue their reign over the world of pill dao? That wasn't something the proud emperor could accept.

Emperor Shura was an aggressive and ambitious man. He didn't want his rule of Veluriyam Capital to be immediately outdone by Pillfire City's efforts. He wasn't content with being the equivalent of a second-class serf. Simply put, such an outcome was not an eventuality that he could accept at any point.

"Daoist Pillzenith, I am afraid that the kid probably made up the rumors about the Pinecrane Pill." This was Emperor Shura's reply.

"You should investigate it regardless of veracity." Emperor Pillzenith quickly realized that Emperor Shura was probably unwilling to part with the pill, should it actually exist. "Are you reluctant to give it to me, Shura?" The displeasure in his tone was palpable.

"Daoist Pillzenith, I simply think that such a miracle pill sounds extremely unrealistic. If it's real, then it would be worth an inestimable amount of stones."

“Hmph, you should have voiced your worries about money up front. Alright, I’m willing to concede to you twenty percent of profit if it’s real. What do you say?” So it was a problem of self-interest in the end.

Chapter 1206: Thirteen Rounds to Decide the Victor

Twenty percent of profits? Emperor Shura burned with fury at this. Is he fobbing off a beggar?

“Daoist Shura, if the Pinecrane Pill is real, then the profit should be an even split between us. Veluriyam Capital should fully participate in the pill’s development and production. Our cities must operate with equal importance.” Emperor Shura never backed down from profit. In his opinion, an even split was already tremendously advantageous for Pillfire City.

Emperor Pillzenith was furious, but the current situation did not allow him to erupt in anger. In an unusual display of acquiescence, he accepted the offer. “Let it be as you say. We shall have an even split. However, you must try as hard as you can to acquire the recipe.”

It wasn’t going to be easy to get one’s hands on Pinecrane Pill’s recipe. Emperor Shura didn’t have a clue about the Longevity Pill’s, much less this elusive, more wondrous variant. He couldn’t show weakness however.

“Remember this, Shura. You must listen to my instructions during the pill dao battles. Test for the Pinecrane Pill’s veracity first, then make an attempt to procure it,” advised Emperor Pillzenith.

“Don’t worry. If your method is effective, then I will follow it to the letter. You shouldn’t forget though, that none of this will matter if I cannot ascend to Veluriyam Capital’s throne through this gathering!” Emperor Shura was keeping the true goal of the Vassal Meeting closely in sight.

The Pinecrane Pill belonged to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, which meant that it belonged to Veluriyam Capital at the end of the day. As long as Sacred Peafowl Mountain continued to exist, he could get his hands on the pill recipe sooner or later. But if he failed to snatch up the right to rule, then Shura Retreat would still be second fiddle to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. How would he get his hands on the Pinecrane Pill then?

“Daoist Shura, we’ve discussed things for a bit. These five subjects are what we’ve decided on: martial dao, pill dao, formations, talismans, and beast taming. Do you have any other opinions?”

“What is there to compete for beast taming?” Emperor Shura asked, frowning.

“It was chosen from everyone’s opinion. The preliminary version is four martial dao rounds, two pill dao rounds, and one each of talismans, formations, and beast taming. Victory shall be decided in nine rounds. Four people must step up from each faction. You and young lord Zhen are obviously mandatory participants, and you can bring two followers and one personal disciple.”

“Two followers and a disciple.” Mulling things over a bit, Emperor Shura was reasonably confident in his best student, Li Jiancheng. The young man excelled in every category. Though he was probably a bit less capable than young lord Zhen, he would clobber the young lord’s disciple nine times out of ten. Did young lord Zhen even have any personal disciples? As for followers, Emperor Shura’s three monarchs—Sun, Moon, and Star—were very even with the four monarchs of Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

“I’m fine with the rules for the lineup,” answered the ambitious emperor. “Isn’t two rounds for pill dao too few, though?”

There was an uproar from the crowd. Two pill dao rounds was too few? Wasn’t Emperor Shura worried that young lord Zhen would defeat him with pill dao? Why had he suddenly changed so drastically?

Even Emperor Vastsea and Skysplitter were mildly astonished.

“Daoist Shura, there’s only four martial dao rounds. Two rounds for pill dao doesn’t sound too few in light of that, does it?” Emperor Petalpluck looked at Emperor Shura with some confusion, baffled at the hundred-eighty-degree turn.

“No, no. There should be at least three rounds. Maybe we should cancel the round for beast taming, hmm?” Emperor Shura was rather shaky on the last subject.

“Shura, there’s no need to cancel beast taming. Tell them to add another round each for pill dao and talismans,” messaged Pillzenith.

Having received his commands from Emperor Pillzenith, Emperor Shura changed his tune. “Actually, what if we add one pill dao round and one talisman round? Make it eleven rather than nine rounds, eh?”

“An extra round for talismans?” Emperor Petalpluck glanced at Jiang Chen uncertainly.

The young man flashed back a faint smile. “You’re certainly an astute schemer, Emperor Shura. Are you perhaps good with talismans? If we’re going to add extra rounds, then let’s add more than that! One each for talismans, formations, and beast taming. Four martial dao, three pill dao, and two for talismans, formations, and beast taming. Thirteen in total.”

Jiang Chen’s sentiment garnered far more popular support. “We agree with young lord Zhen!” Many vassals shouted from beneath the stage.

“Right! The Vassal Meeting is rarely convened. Why not let us watch a few extra rounds of fascinating demonstration?”

“Thirteen sounds better. The more fights there are, the better the comparison.” The vassals exhibited a marked preference for adding extra rounds. Nine rounds weren’t nearly enjoyable enough. Watching thirteen would be far more fun! All eyes were on Emperor Shura, awaiting his answer to the proposition.

Feeling the collected heat from the audience’s gazes, the emperor became somewhat uncertain. He silently calculated his odds.

Of the four martial dao rounds, I can take at least two. If the remaining two are between my Sun, Moon, and Star Monarchs and Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s four, it shouldn’t be hard to tie. If there are two tied rounds, then only results from eleven of the rounds will count. If I can win six of those eleven, then my victory will be absolutely guaranteed. If there are three pill dao rounds... those not young lord Zhen are nothing. It’ll be easy to win against them. I should win at least one talisman round, and perhaps even both. That way, even if I lose all the formation and beast taming rounds, I should still have the six needed to win.

His mental estimation revealed a pretty good chance of winning. A casual appraisal showed five or six guaranteed wins. As for the two rounds each accorded to formations and beast taming, he should be able to scrape one out of those, right? Maybe even two, if he was lucky.

"If everyone thinks that it would be more enjoyable to add a few rounds, then I don't see why not!" The ambitious emperor smiled graciously. "Holding thirteen rounds is perfectly fine. Four martial dao, three pill dao, and two for talismans, formations, and beast taming.

"Though, I do have a small suggestion" he followed up with a chuckle.

"What is it?" Emperor Petalpluck inquired.

Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void looked warily towards Emperor Shura, concerned that there would be yet another last-minute change. At such an important time, each and every detail was devilishly important.

"I think that each and every round should have a time limit. Martial dao rounds, for example. If the two parties are evenly matched, then dragging on a fight would only result in injury to both. It's damaging to both the participants and public peace, and I don't see how it could possibly be beneficial for Veluriyam Capital as a whole." For once, Emperor Shura's suggestion actually sounded like a good idea.

"I'm very pleased that you've thought of that, Daoist Shura," nodded Emperor Petalpluck. "You're thinking of the bigger picture. What say you, young lord Zhen?"

Jiang Chen didn't believe that Emperor Shura had anyone's good in mind except his own. He had to be scheming about something new, even though the young man didn't know what yet.

Thankfully, he found the emperor's suggestion quite agreeable. "Alright," he feigned some difficulty. "I suppose it's better to foster mutual goodwill to a degree."

Emperor Shura was secretly overjoyed at this development. He had made the request out of very selfish reasons. His followers would be picked from the three monarchs: Sun, Moon, and Star. For the most part, Sacred Peafowl Mountain's four monarchs were their near-equals in martial dao. It was possible that a winner would be decided after an extended, grueling fight, but Emperor Shura was only interested in two tied rounds with them. Indeed, his plan hinged on the two victories that his disciple Li Jiancheng and he himself would achieve instead.

Crushing young lord Zhen would be very easy. As for Li Jiancheng's fight against Jiang Chen's personal disciple, that was even easier. What disciples did Jiang Chen have right now? He couldn't send out old men like Pill King Bu and Lu Feng out, could he?

Those two old men were not Jiang Chen's martial disciples, and neither were they part of the younger generation. Therefore, it would be illegal for them to participate in that capacity. Because there was no opposition from Jiang Chen, Emperor Petalpluck moved forward with the proceedings.

"Then let us continue. The martial dao rounds have a time limit of four hours. If no winner is declared in that time, then it shall be declared a draw. Does that sound acceptable?"

"I have no objections," Emperor Shura readily answered.

“Nor I,” Jiang Chen concurred emotionlessly. Four hours? A jolt of satisfaction pulsed across his heart. He didn’t know what Emperor Shura was thinking, but the four-hour limit was a wonderful advantage for him. There was no way that the current him could defeat Emperor Shura. But if all he needed to do was last four hours without losing, then he had quite a few more ideas.

Emperor Petalpluck nodded at the two parties’ mutual concession. “Alright. Start picking your candidates now then. Remember, you cannot change your pick for whatever reason. Furthermore, each of them must take the stage at least once, but cannot be sent out more than once per subject. Finally, as the leaders of the two factions, the two of you must take the stage once, and only once, for each and every subject of competition.”

The process of choosing three others was also a test for the two candidates. As the leaders of their respective factions, Emperor Shura and Jiang Chen had to participate five, and only five, times. The remaining eight rounds would be battled out by the three picks from each side.

“You may begin discussions about your strategies now. Remember, two followers and one personal disciple. Those are the rules, and any picks found to be breaking them will be swapped out.”

The people of Sacred Peafowl Mountain gathered together, including Emperor Coiling Dragon and Void’s entourages.

“Young lord, I would like to take the field!” Cloudsoar Monarch volunteered.

“If you have need of me, young lord, I will withhold nothing in the oncoming fight,” matched Plumscore Monarch.

Monarch Chronobalance and Wildfox expressed similar sentiments.

Jiang Chen swept his gaze across the faces of everyone before him.

“Young lord Zhen, count this old man in.” There was a sudden, unexpected voice. It was Emperor Peerless! He usually called Jiang Chen ‘little brother’, but ‘young lord’ was what he had used just now.

Everyone else looked at the emperor in surprise. They knew that Emperor Peerless was Jiang Chen’s sworn brother, here to ensure his safety and lend strength. The competition required the picks to be from among followers. Emperor Peerless wasn’t young lord Zhen’s follower. He didn’t even formally belong to Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Chapter 1207: Joining Sacred Peafowl Mountain

There were many restrictions on who could be selected to take the field. Apart from Jiang Chen and Emperor Shura, the other three personnel selected had to be two followers and one personal disciple. Moreover, the disciple had to be a member of the younger generation. This meant that Pill King Lu Feng and Pill King Bu weren’t allowed to compete. Although these rules limited Sacred Peafowl Mountain greatly to some degree, they also meant that Shura Retreat couldn’t do as it pleased either.

Therefore, Emperor Peerless couldn’t participate because he was both just a friend and invited reinforcement. He wasn’t a real member of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, so it would be breaching the rules to have him take a slot. Although his offer was a surprise and delight, the group knew that it just couldn’t be done. This was a faction war between Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Shura Retreat.

Not even Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void could participate in this match. The same went for Emperor Vastsea on the Shura Retreat side, no matter how loud he barked. The atmosphere weighed a bit heavily. Emperor Coiling Dragon was aware of Emperor Peerless' reputation. He also knew that this legendary wandering cultivator had risen to fame earlier than either Emperor Void or himself, and was probably stronger as well.

"Daoist Peerless, your friendship with young lord Zhen is a great story to be sung for years to come. However, the rules are the rules. We all wish that you can show off your might, but..."

Emperor Void also nodded slightly. "Daoist Peerless is both famous and powerful. Our Emperor Peafowl may be the only great emperor in the entire Veluriyam Capital who can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you. We rather wish that you could take part in the competition, but alas, the rules are against us."

That was slight exaggeration. Emperor Peerless himself knew that Emperor Peafowl was better, despite his own fame. Emperor Peafowl aside, he truly feared no one else in the entire Veluriyam Capital, not even Emperor Shura. It was why he'd been furious when he learned that Emperor Shura was trying for a coup and wanted to harm Jiang Chen in the process. To the great emperor, Jiang Chen's troubles were his troubles as well.

Emperor Peerless nodded in response, but his eyes remained as determined as ever. He suddenly smiled. "I know. All participants must be a member of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, am I right?"

"Ai, it is as you say," Emperor Coiling Dragon also sighed.

"In that case, I hereby formally request to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Countless factions have tried to recruit me, Mo Wushuang, in the many years I roamed the world, but none have tempted me until Sacred Peafowl Mountain, and especially you, young lord Zhen. I wholeheartedly pledge allegiance to you, so I sincerely request to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Let this battle be my proof of allegiance!"

The famous Emperor Peerless wishes to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain?

Everyone suddenly felt that their brains were malfunctioning. The crowd stared at him with shock, trying to determine if the great emperor was joking or not. He wasn't, not in the slightest.

Can it be?

Does Emperor Peerless really wish to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain? Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void's eyes gleamed with enthusiasm. If Emperor Peerless really did join Sacred Peafowl Mountain, then the hole with Emperor Peafowl's absence would be mostly filled!

The thought lasted for only an instant. Who knew if Emperor Peerless wouldn't try to upstage his host, threaten young lord Zhen's status, or wrestle control from the young lord?

It wouldn't be funny if they fought off the tiger only to be backstabbed by the wolf.

It was normal for Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void to harbor such doubts because they hadn't interacted with Emperor Peerless before. Although it was rumored that the great emperor was a straightforward and upright man, not all rumors were to be believed. That was why they didn't dare voice an opinion, even though they suddenly felt very hopeful about the future.

The four great monarchs of Sacred Peafowl Mountain more or less felt the same way. They had volunteered to take part in the competition, but that didn't mean they felt confident. They weren't absolutely certain because Emperor Peafowl was missing. But if Emperor Peerless were to officially join them, his presence would undoubtedly be a great morale boost. He might even tip the balance just enough that the tides were overturned. He might not be the better of Emperor Peafowl, but he was at least the equal of Emperor Shura.

However, Emperor Peerless' great fame and influence worked against him as well. The four monarchs looked forward to his aid, but they couldn't help but harbor the same doubts as Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void. Everyone turned to Jiang Chen. Obviously, young lord Zhen should be the one to make a decision here.

He was also slightly taken aback by Emperor Peerless' offer.

"Brother Mo, I've heard your sentiments. But this relates to your freedom." Jiang Chen's worry was different from his subordinates. While everyone else was worried that Mo Wushuang would become too powerful and threaten to upset his position, the young man was worried that the great emperor would lose some of the freedom he enjoyed as a wandering cultivator.

Mo Wushuang laughed. "Are you worried that I'll lose my freedom after I joined Sacred Peafowl Mountain? Relax, I'm only going to join you as a guest elder. I won't be playing a part in any matters of Sacred Peafowl Mountain unless it's of utmost importance."

A guest elder?

Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void's eyes brightened even further. Now they could see how this arrangement might work. If Emperor Peerless made a lot of demands prior to joining Sacred Peafowl Mountain, then his participation might not be a good thing. But if he only wanted to become a guest elder with no responsibility at all, it was entirely acceptable as long as the young lord agreed.

Mo Wushuang frowned when he saw the young man still hesitating. "Young lord Zhen, you saved my life and Ah Yun's. Won't you give me a chance to repay the favor?"

There were too many people present in the scene, so Mo Wushuang couldn't speak as frankly as he might have. He even addressed Jiang Chen by his title of young lord Zhen instead of the usual "younger brother".

Now they understood why Emperor Peerless had acted the way he did. He was trying to repay young lord Zhen for saving his life. It was rumored that Emperor Peerless' wife was saved by none other than young lord Zhen himself. Many knew about this.

Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void felt sudden respect towards Emperor Peerless. The former spoke up. "Young lord Zhen, Emperor Peerless is a famous great emperor and leader in the wandering cultivator world. It isn't easy for someone at his level to act as fairly as he does, so I believe that you should consider his request."

"Yes, young lord Zhen. Sacred Peafowl Mountain will be a tiger with wings if Daoist Peerless were to join us," Cloudsoar Monarch echoed.

Emperor Peerless had already declared his intentions to become a guest elder with no real authority. This was recruiting a great emperor at almost no cost. The monarch would be very foolish to turn down such good business.

Jiang Chen sighed quietly. "Brother Mo, I would be pretentious if I turn you down any longer. Alright, on behalf of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, I sincerely invite you to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain. I've already thought of your title. You will be an esteemed guest elder."

It would be unreasonable to appoint Emperor Peerless as a mere guest elder. It wouldn't have matched Emperor Peerless incredible status outside. But an esteemed guest elder, now that was a different story. The word "esteemed" gave the post entirely new meaning.

"Good, good! This will be a wondrous story for generations to come!" Emperor Coiling Dragon rubbed his palms together and laughed loudly.

Emperor Void looked very elated as well. "On behalf of Daoist Peafowl, I welcome you to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Daoist Peerless. Your participation is a great boost to Sacred Peafowl Mountain's fortunes!"

Emperor Peerless knew that the two great emperors were Jiang Chen's friends and allies, so he cupped his fists in reply. "There is no need for such courtesy, my friends. I owe young lord Zhen such an enormous favor that I may not be able to repay it during this lifetime. To be honest, it is I who owes young lord Zhen, not the other way around."

He spoke from the bottom of his heart.

"Young lord Zhen..." The Geng brothers could no longer keep still. The elder brother, Geng Qianzhang, looked expectantly at Jiang Chen, "If a man like Brother Mo wishes to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain, then... we would be so thick-faced as to want to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain as well."

The Geng brothers were brothers of Emperor Peerless. They were also famous in their own rights. Although they were no great emperors, they were still a peak ninth level emperor realm and a peak eighth level emperor realm cultivator. Cultivators like them were top tier even in Veluriyam Capital.

The successive boons pleasantly surprised the members of Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Emperor Peerless chuckled. "Young lord Zhen, my two brothers have always had my back. If you don't mind..."

Jiang Chen smiled. "The Geng brothers are famous upright men in the wandering cultivator community. Why would I ever turn you down after you've shown me so much trust in me?"

"Good, good. Congratulations, young lord Zhen! Two more fierce tigers have joined Sacred Peafowl Mountain." Emperor Coiling Dragon smiled.

Jiang Chen nodded and looked at the Geng brothers. "Would you like to become esteemed guest elders just like Old Brother Mo?"

"Oh no, oh no. We aren't deserving of the title "esteemed". We are satisfied with just being guest elders," Geng Qianzhang hurriedly responded.

They weren't great emperors yet, so there was no way they would dare accept such a post. They were satisfied with just being guest elders of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, not to mention that they trusted Jiang Chen and wanted to follow Mo Wushuang further. Earning a lofty status wasn't part of their goals.

Mo Wushuang also said, "Young lord Zhen, my brothers aren't really interested in positions of power, so it's fine to make them guest elders of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. The important thing is that the public accepts their presence."

"Yeah, we brothers trust Brother Mo and are fully impressed by young lord Zhen!" Gen Qianchi also declared loudly.

Chapter 1208: A Completely Unexpected Candidate

Sacred Peafowl Mountain's morale grew tremendously after Emperor Peerless and the Geng Brothers joined the faction. The unexpected turn of events made the four monarchs extremely happy.

Powerful experts had joined the faction, yet their own authority and ranks weren't even slightly affected. It was the greatest deal of a lifetime. Only someone as highly revered as young lord Zhen could attract these legendary wanderers to join the Sacred Peafowl Mountain. It was a feat that not even Emperor Peafowl could achieve. Emperor Peafowl could compel much from other people, but it was highly unlikely that he'd be able to get Emperor Peerless to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain without any incentives.

"Alright, since Old Brother Mo has joined our faction, he shall be one of the followers. I trust that nobody has a second opinion?" Jiang Chen asked assessingly as he looked at the crowd.

"None at all." Cloudsoar Monarch was first to declare his support.

"Me neither." A person as cold and lofty as Plumscore Monarch would never oppose to it during such times either. She had a cold personality, but that didn't mean she was a fool. Emperor Peerless' participation would drastically increase Sacred Peafowl Mountain's winning chances. She'd have to be a complete idiot to say no.

Since there were no naysayers, Jiang Chen flashed a grin at Emperor Peerless. "Old Brother Mo, surely you wouldn't detest being called a follower?"

Emperor Peerless responded with a hearty laugh. "Young lord Zhen, do you think I would care about such trifling matters? I'd be fine even if I was called a slave! It's merely a title! I, of all people, know how you treat me."

Emperor Peerless felt a little agitated when he said this. When Jiang Chen had given him the Kungpeng bloodline, he felt a burning and unquenching desire to repay this favor. He understood that Jiang Chen had only given him the blood due to trust. The young lord had plenty of great emperor friends and didn't necessarily have to give the blood to him. It was the biggest reason why he volunteered to join the Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

He was a very proud person, but that didn't mean that he was conceited. He knew when to be grateful to others. It was thanks to his pride that he was able to see how great Jiang Chen was and felt thorough respect for the young lord. But when he received that precious gift from Jiang Chen, he'd made up his mind and resolved to follow the young lord.

He didn't feel that joining Sacred Peafowl Mountain was too brash of a decision. Quite the contrary, in fact. The more he got to know Jiang Chen, the more limitless the young mysterious man's potential seemed to be. He had the feeling that if he served under the young man, he would one day receive an even more unbelievable fortune.

Even if there was no great fortune ahead, the Kunpeng bloodline would already change his life. He was more than willing to let Jiang Chen order him around. After all, the opportunity to ascend to the empyrean realm was something one could only dream of.

Emperor Peafowl and Emperor Pillzenith had been great emperors for thousands of years, but none of them had transcended to empyrean realm yet. One could easily tell from this just how difficult it was to become an empyrean expert. And because of that looming difficulty, Emperor Peerless was able to understand just how significant a single drop of Kunpeng blood was. Jiang Chen had done him a huge favor!

Emperor Peerless' strong resolution warmed the crowd's hearts. They couldn't help but feel even more respect for him. They saw Emperor Peerless as a great man who truly knew how to differentiate friend from foe.

"We need one more follower now that Old Brother Mo has taken one spit. Who is up for the task?" Jiang Chen swept his gaze through the four monarch, the Geng Brothers, Pill King Bu, and Pill King Lu Feng. They were the only suitable candidates present.

Cloudsoar Monarch volunteered. "Young lord, we'll feel bad if you send the Geng Brothers to battle after picking Emperor Peerless. The second candidate must be from the four of us. I'm willing to go into battle."

"Agreed. Us four monarchs are Emperor Peafowl's handpicked subordinates. We'll defend Sacred Peafowl Mountain with our very lives if we have to!"

Pill King Lu Feng laughed mischievously. "Master, why don't you pick me instead? I have no confidence in martial dao, but I'm certain that I can bring us at least one victory in pill dao."

Pill King Lu Feng had learned a lot from Jiang Chen after so many years. The young lord didn't have much time to spend in personal tutelage, but the books he'd provided to them had provided much inspiration, which improved their pill dao knowledge by leaps and bounds.

Jiang Chen pondered deeply. "The second candidacy should be given to the four monarchs. It would a huge disservice otherwise. Moreover, outsiders might start rumors and give them a hard time."

It was the simple reality of things. The four monarchs were Emperor Peafowl's most trusted aides. It'd be most inappropriate if they didn't participate in the battle.

"You should discuss among yourselves to decide who'll be the most suitable candidate." Jiang Chen didn't name any names because he knew that he'd disappoint the other three. Having them discuss among themselves was the easiest way to pick the most suitable candidate.

After a brief discussion, Cloudsoar Monarch was elected. He didn't have a significant advantage over the other three in martial dao, but he was significantly better in pill dao. He was also slightly more well-

rounded. Now that Cloudsoar Monarch had been chosen as the second follower, one personal disciple was needed for the competition.

The candidacy for this spot was much harder to fill. Jiang Chen had a few direct disciples, but Pill King Bu and Pill King Lu Feng were both too old. The only suitable candidate left was Lin Yanyu.

Mu Gaoqi was Jiang Chen's fellow disciple from Regal Pill Palace and could be technically be sent into battle as his direct disciple, but both Mu Gaoqi and Lin Yanyu were a little wanting in martial dao. There were four martial dao matches in total, with each candidate having to attend one. Sending them out to battle seemed a little too dangerous.

"Esteemed master, please send this disciple to battle." Lin Yanyu stepped forward to volunteer.

"Brother Lin, let me instead." Mu Gaoqi volunteered too.

Other disciples such Gouyu and Xue Tong didn't add to the chaos as they were no match for either Lin Yanyu or Mu Gaoqi.

Jiang Chen had some reservations as well. Lin Yanyu and Mu Gaoqi were the obvious candidates, but they were truly a little too inadequate in martial dao. There were only three pill dao matches in total. Lin Yanyu and Mu Gaoqi would definitely dominate everyone in their age group, but they were still a little too young to go up against seasoned pill kings that were on the same level as Pill King Lu Feng and Pill King Bu. After all, Shura Retreat might not have Li Jiancheng participate in those matches. The two possible choices were incredibly talented, but too young. They weren't able to shoulder the pressure yet.

Suddenly, Ji San appeared from behind Emperor Coiling Dragon. "Young lord Zhen, maybe I can be your final candidate? I dare not be confident in other disciplines, but I can definitely defeat Li Jiancheng in martial dao."

Ji San's sudden request shocked everyone. Emperor Coiling Dragon was wide-eyed with disbelief. "Stop fooling around! Everyone knows your identity! How can you represent the Sacred Peafowl Mountain?"

Ji San explained himself. "Our clan was once directly under Sacred Peafowl Mountain. I should be able to represent the faction!"

Jiang Chen made a sweeping gesture. "Brother Ji, since Emperor Coiling Dragon has already founded his own faction, you're no longer directly under us. I appreciate your good intentions, but I cannot let you to represent us. Your status prevents me from doing so."

Ji San's mouth trembled a little, but swallowed his words once he saw the determination in Jiang Chen's eyes. He knew that there was nothing he could do to change Jiang Chen's mind once it was made up.

After receiving the drop of true dragon's blood from Jiang Chen, Ji San had attained sudden enlightenment which had improved his cultivation by leaps and bounds. His bloodline powers had awakened after he ascended to the emperor realm, and he was now in a cultivation growth spurt. If he hadn't heeded Jiang Chen's advice and kept a low profile, news of his rapid progress would have likely taken the capital by storm. Ji San was actually thirsting for battle. He badly wanted to crush Emperor Shura's number one disciple under his feet.

So Ji San was an inappropriate candidate while Lin Yanyu and Mu Gaoqi were both too green behind the ears. Things were in a quandary yet again. Jiang Chen looked at Lin Yanyu and Mu Gaoqi and was about to make a decision, but pleasant laughter suddenly echoed in his ears. "Why don't you let Huang'er try?"

A beautiful and elegant silhouette approached him from the side. She was breathtakingly beautiful, like a lotus that had just bloomed radiantly amongst the crowd. The crowd was struck by awe when they saw her presence in the group.

"Huang'er, you...?" Jiang Chen was also a little dumbfounded. Her words had truly caught him by surprise.

"Hehe, am I not a suitable candidate?" Huang'er smiled sweetly. She seemed to emanate an aura that made her accepted by others.

All eyes were on the girl. Everyone knew that she was young lord Zhen's dao partner. However, nobody expected that this young, kind, and generous lady would suddenly volunteer to take part in the battle.

"Just let Huang'er try!" Huang'er looked at Jiang Chen lovingly. "I definitely won't have you lose face!"

She wasn't used to speaking out in public like this, but she knew that she'd never forgive herself if she didn't help her beloved in his time of need. Lin Yanyu and Mu Gaoqi's foundations were simply too shallow. Huang'er knew that if she didn't volunteer, Jiang Chen would be forced to send someone that would drag the team down.

Chapter 1209: Debate Over the Choice of Candidates

Jiang Chen pondered for a moment as he looked at Huang'er. The confidence in her clear eyes tugged at his heartstrings. Nodding slightly, he turned towards Lin Yanyu and Mu Gaoqi. "Huang'er will take the field in this battle. Don't be dejected, the time for both of you to show off your abilities will arrive someday!"

If this had been in the past, Jiang Chen would never have allowed Huang'er to participate in a battle. The Generation Binding Curse flared whenever she used her consciousness or her martial skills, so there was always a chance she could swept away in an irreversible tragedy.

But the Generation Binding Curse no longer plagued her. With her level of abilities, what was there to be worried about? When the insufferably arrogant true disciple of the Ninesuns Sky Sect, Cao Jin, had caused trouble at the Regal Pill Palace, Huang'er had sent him scurrying away with just three moves.

She'd been born in Myriad Abyss Island. Although she was a year or two younger than Jiang Chen, she had reached emperor realm a long time ago. She wasn't on par with Jiang Chen in terms of pill dao, but the foundations of Myriad Abyss Island were bigger and deeper than the human domain's, not to mention that Huang'er had honed her skills in order to treat her own sickly body. She seemed unremarkable in this area because she preferred to keep a low profile, and had never put herself in the limelight through the years of Jiang Chen's journeys. Moreover, she gave off the impression that she was a management talent because she managed Jiang Chen's home while he was away. Over time, the people didn't even wonder if she had outstanding martial dao or pill dao talents.

In reality, Huang'er's talents could be said to surpass Jiang Chen's to some extent. If he hadn't been so heaven defying or benefited from so many fortuitous encounters, strength-wise, he was absolutely inferior to Huang'er prior to entering emperor realm. She had kept a very low profile until now. She didn't want to show off her talents, and she definitely didn't want to take Jiang Chen's limelight.

Of course, Huang'er led in terms of martial dao because she had a better background. However, the young woman personally thought that Jiang Chen had far greater potential than her. His level of attainment in pill dao, formation dao and other areas only impressed her more.

Thanks to her birth, Huang'er's standards were far beyond average. There was nothing a normal man could do to attract her attention. But Jiang Chen had conquered her heart step by step with his own charisma.

Both Lin Yanyu and Mu Gaoqi were extremely impressed with Huang'er. They had interacted with the lady at the young lord residence before, and they both knew that the seemingly quiet and gentle-natured Miss Huang'er was in fact an extraordinary person. Therefore, they had no qualms with Jiang Chen's arrangement.

Everyone else however, was a little caught off guard; even the four great monarchs looked a little surprised. He's sending a woman into battle? Although Huang'er was young lord Zhen's dao partner, none of them knew Huang'er well. They had not heard that she was extraordinarily talented in other areas than management. Is she really the right choice?

Jiang Chen was aware of their doubts. He smiled. "Huang'er normally keeps a low profile, but I can guarantee that she's the best candidate here."

Since the young lord himself had given his word, the four great monarchs had no reason to object. After all, Emperor Peafowl wasn't around right now. It was young lord Zhen's right to have the final say.

Emperor Peerless laughed. "So, young lord Zhen and Miss Huang'er will be taking the field together, hmm? This is a beautiful story in the making."

Everyone laughed loudly in response.

Emperor Shura's faction was a little surprised to hear laughter from Sacred Peafowl Mountain. They shot confused glances in their enemy's direction. How could Sacred Peafowl Mountain laugh at a moment like this?

Jiang Chen didn't care for Emperor Shura or his men's attention. "All candidates come to my side. Everyone else, stay here and be on your guard."

Shura Retreat was almost done selecting their candidates when Jiang Chen went up the stage to report his final list. When both sides appeared on stage with their candidates, a commotion broke out from the surrounding crowd. Both Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Shura Retreat had appeared with more than one unfamiliar faces in their midst.

On Sacred Peafowl Mountain's side, the only candidate the crowd knew of was Cloudsoar Monarch. The other two candidates were an impressive-looking man wreathed in unquestionable might and a spotless beauty. It was obvious at first glance that they were extraordinary people. No one thought that they were just a generic participant.

On Shura Retreat's side, Emperor Shura and Li Jiancheng were also accompanied by two unfamiliar faces. Everyone knew that Emperor Shura's strongest subordinates were Sun Monarch, Moon Monarch and Star Monarch. However, the candidates standing on the stage right now were utterly unrecognizable to them.

Jiang Chen's gaze clashed against Emperor Shura's. They noted the intense heat of judgment in each other's eyes.

In the guest area, Emperor Pillzenith frowned when he saw Emperor Peerless standing behind Jiang Chen. He immediately sent a message to Emperor Shura.

"Shura, that man on Sacred Peafowl Mountain's side is Emperor Peerless of the wandering cultivator community. He isn't qualified to participate in this battle on behalf of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Watch out."

Emperor Shura snorted coldly after this information, going on the offensive. "Young lord Zhen, the candidates behind you is quite unfamiliar. Since when did Sacred Peafowl Mountain have such personnel? If I'm not mistaken, the man behind you is the famous wandering cultivator Emperor Peerless? Since when was Emperor Peerless affiliated with Sacred Peafowl Mountain? How is he allowed to fight on behalf of Sacred Peafowl Mountain?"

Emperor Shura cupped his hands at Emperor Petalpluck's direction. "Daoist Petalpluck, it is so disappointing to see how far Sacred Peafowl Mountain has fallen. I suspect that Daoist Peafowl is no longer with us, and that Sacred Peafowl Mountain is under the control of an outsider."

A traitor's bite went deep. Emperor Shura was clearly talented in talking up a storm.

Emperor Petalpluck frowned and turned to look at Jiang Chen. He was waiting for an explanation.

Ridicule filtered through Jiang Chen's expression as he smiled at the two unfamiliar candidate standing behind Emperor Shura. "Look at you trying to shift blame away from your guilty self. Are you telling me that the two standing behind you belong to Shura Retreat as well?"

Emperor Shura said coldly, "I will explain myself after you explain Emperor Peerless' presence."

In response, Emperor Peerless smiled proudly with disdain. "Shura, are you truly planning to seize the seat of power with your level of knowledge and experience? How amusing. They all say that you're ill-informed and narrow-minded, and personally, I think you should believe it. Young lord Zhen saved my life some time ago, so the thought of joining Sacred Peafowl Mountain has been present for quite a while. I'm an esteemed guest elder of Sacred Peafowl Mountain now. So tell me, am I qualified to fight on behalf of Sacred Peafowl Mountain?"

What? His words were a thunderbolt that struck Emperor Shura right on the forehead. His mind was buzzing with disbelief. Emperor Peerless has joined Sacred Peafowl Mountain?

This wasn't good news at all. In recruiting a great emperor almost as famous as Emperor Shura, the gap left behind by Emperor Peafowl was nearly completely refilled. It was undoubtedly a disastrous blow to Emperor Shura's plans to seize power.

Esteemed guest elder? Everyone from the great emperors to the vassals were completely stunned. Emperor Peerless was a wondrous figure, yet he would lower himself to join a faction like Sacred Peafowl Mountain? Didn't this mean that Veluriyam Capital had gained a new great emperor, and an incredible one at that? Even Emperor Petalpluck was speechless for a time.

Emperor Shura thought rapidly and responded with a cold snort. "Do you think you can join Veluriyam Capital however you like? Who knows if you're just joining us temporarily? Who knows if you'll leave once this is all over? If you can join Veluriyam Capital however you like, then I can recruit ten or so great emperors myself!"

He certainly had quick reactions, and seized on a supposed weakness. Emperor Vastsea also shouted from the stand. "You must be fair, Daoist Petalpluck. Sacred Peafowl Mountain is playing a trick that completely shames the rules set for this battle!"

"What a joke, what a joke!" Emperor Skysplitter was shaking his head as well.

But Emperor Peerless suddenly laughed loudly. "Shura, you're not half bad at making things up. Who told you that I'm joining Veluriyam Capital temporarily? Who told you that I'm going to back out once all this is over? I see many heroes present today, so I might as well make the declaration now. From hereon, I, Mo Wushuang, am the esteemed guest elder of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. I will not leave Sacred Peafowl Mountain unless I'm dead, and I will carry out all of young lord Zhen's commands. I'm not going to tell you the details, but young lord Zhen saved me and my wife from death. Therefore, he is a worthy master to die for. You lot may imagine the reasons behind my decision however you like, be it to repay a favor or climb the social ladder, but my joining of Sacred Peafowl Mountain is one fact that will not change. If I ever go against my word in the future, may the heavens smite me."

His loud, resounding reply silenced Emperor Shura and Emperor Vastsea entirely. Before the Emperor Shura could gather himself for a reply, Jiang Chen stared coldly at the two cultivators behind him.

"Emperor Peerless has willingly joined Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He will never betray us. However, I'm not so sure about the two behind you. Why don't you introduce them to us, Emperor Shura? If I'm not mistaken, their backgrounds are pretty sketchy, aren't they? Do they hail from Eternal Celestial Capital, or do they come from Pillfire City?" Jiang Chen had no intentions of mincing words with Emperor Shura. Ever since seeing Emperor Pillzenith, he'd had a feeling that something nebulous was going on between Emperor Shura and Emperor Pillzenith.

If it was just Emperor Shura, then Emperor Peafowl had every way to turn the tables once he returned to Veluriyam Capital. But if Pillfire City was involved, then the outcome wouldn't be as clear as he hoped.

If Emperor Pillzenith really did manage to gain a foothold in Veluriyam Capital and entrench himself, then not even Emperor Peafowl would be able to turn back time. Therefore, he mustn't allow Emperor Shura to succeed no matter what.

Since they were now completely at odds with one another, Jiang Chen had no reason to hold anything back. He voiced his doubts directly, questioning their backgrounds and even bringing up Eternal Celestial Capital and Pillfire City. As expected, the crowd immediately exploded into a furor.

Although Emperor Peerless was a famous great emperor, everyone knew that he was a wandering cultivator with no sect or foundation to support him. There was no reason to suspect his intentions for joining Sacred Peafowl Mountain because wandering cultivators normally had spotless backgrounds.

However, Eternal Celestial Capital and Pillfire City were a different story altogether. Bluntly speaking, they were the enemies of Veluriyam Capital. Things would get very complex if factions like these were involved in Veluriyam Capital. Emperor Shura would certainly be despised by the entire capital if he had recruited the aid of enemy cultivators.

Chapter 1210: Starting Off With Pill Dao

Emperor Shura had wanted to call the kettle black when he first saw Emperor Peerless, but the latter was now genuinely a member of the Sacred Peafowl Mountain?? His opponent had then turned the tables on him by questioning the backgrounds of his two followers and naming the Eternal Celestial Capital and Pillfire City.

These two factions had tried to wrestle the Longevity Pill from Veluriyam Capital. Pillfire City especially was Veluriyam Capital's long established rival. The citizens hated these with a passion and would abandon Emperor Shura in a heartbeat if he was found to be affiliated with them. Thankfully, he was already prepared for this development that Sacred Peafowl Mountain would give him trouble over their origins.

"They are deathsworn that my faction has secretly raised. They have never shown themselves outside." He answered coldly without any hesitation.

"Oh? And we're expected to take your word for it?" Jiang Chen was relentless.

Emperor Shura surely had a private army of deathsworn, but Jiang Chen didn't believe that his faction would be able to raise ones with abilities that exceed the Sun, Moon, and Star Monarchs. They were mostly likely hired help from Pillfire City.

Jiang Chen raised a cupped fist salute at Emperor Petalpluck. "Emperor Petalpluck, I don't want to make a huge fuss, but this is a competition between Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Shura Retreat. If the participants are of foreign background, it will render all of this meaningless." He turned to face the vassals. "Surely no one wishes to watch such a meaningless competition?"

Emperor Shura was thoroughly enraged. "Young lord Zhen! You haven't even cleared all of your own suspicion yet! What are you trying to accomplish in turning things around on me?"

Jiang Chen smiled blandly. "Our faction has always been honorable and forthright in our actions. What suspicions are there on us?"

"Hmph! I shall forget about the previous matter with Emperor Peerless, but who is this personal disciple of yours? I didn't know that you've accepted such a disciple!" Emperor Shura shifted tactics to attack Huang'er.

He'd thought that Jiang Chen would send Lin Yanyu out to battle as the latter was a publicly recognized disciple. But the young lord had brought an unfamiliar girl with an exceptional aura instead. But Emperor Shura couldn't be blamed for not knowing who she was. Huang'er very seldomly appeared in public, and even if she did, she'd wear a mask or put on a disguise of some sort.

Huang'er had shown herself with her real appearance today. The crowd was stunned by her looks, but were equally curious about her background.

Jiang Chen burst into laughter. "I knew you would say that! Huang'er is my dao partner. This is a widely known fact at the Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Any more questions?"

"Dao partner?" Emperor Shura snorted coldly. "If she's your dao partner, surely she has no right to join the battle as your personal disciple?"

Huang'er flashed a gentle smile. "I've been thoroughly impressed by young lord Zhen's talent in pill dao ever since we met. Since I'm still his pill dao disciple, how do I have no right to join the fight?"

She could shape the story however she wanted. Nobody could disprove it as it was a Sacred Peafowl Mountain internal matter. What mattered was that she was genuinely from the Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

"Emperor Shura, perhaps it's time for you to prove the identities of your followers?" Jiang Chen wasn't planning on letting up at all.

The one dressed in silver behind Emperor Shura walked up. "We are both Emperor Shura's deathsworn, loyal to him and him alone. If someone like Emperor Peerless is allowed to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain, there should be no questions about our loyalty to Emperor Shura."

Emperor Peerless looked at two men with a dark expression. "I swore a solemn vow to prove my undying loyalty. Can you two do the same?"

He could naturally tell that there was more to their backgrounds than it seemed.

The two nodded after exchanging glances, swearing decisively without the slightest hesitation. "We swear that we will be loyal to Shura Retreat for as long as it exists. May the heavens smite us with thunder if we renege on our words!"

Emperor Shura was a little surprised by their actions, but glowered at Jiang Chen after the vow. "Young lord Zhen, do you have anything else to add?"

Jiang Chen burst into laughter. "They should've made things easier and just sworn earlier!" He paused and glanced at Emperor Shura with a supercilious smile. "Don't say that I didn't warn you, there's some technicalities in their sworn vows. They said that they'll be loyal to Shura Retreat for as long it exists. So that means the day they decide to leave might be when it's time for your faction to end."

Jiang Chen didn't actually know for certain if there was such a technicality, but his instincts told him that something was off with the vow. He didn't mind sharing his findings with Emperor Shura. He could make the great emperor uneasy and cause some strife between the emperor and Pillfire City in one go. He was certain that these two had nothing to do with Emperor Shura, but since they'd already sworn their vows, being too unrelenting would make him seem uncouth.

Jiang Chen had nothing to fear even if they were from Pillfire City. He'd made some careful calculations for the thirteen rounds. Emperor Shura was extremely confident about his chances, but so was Jiang Chen. Each had their own trump cards and plans. It was a matter of who got the last laugh.

Since there was no longer any dispute over the legitimacy of the candidates, Emperor Petalpluck took the opportunity to begin. "Alright, since there's no longer any disputes, we shall revisit the rules! The candidates are chosen and no further revisions are allowed. In addition, since this is a martial dao competition, death and injuries are difficult to avoid. Both sides must also agree on whether the fight should end before blood is shed, or leave the outcome to fate?"

It was an important decision.

If the fight were to end before blood was shed, they had to be extremely cautious and in no circumstance were they allowed to kill. If the outcome was left to fate, death was much more likely to occur.

"Young lord Zhen, if you fear death, I might consider going easy on you. But as a cultivator, why even participate in a battle if you're afraid?" Emperor Shura might sound like he was giving Jiang Chen a choice, but he was actually coercing Jiang Chen into choosing the second.

Jiang Chen smiled. "Shura, you sound like you've already won! In that case, why don't I leave it to you to decide? Shura Retreat is the challenger after all. As the defending host, we're gracious enough to give you as much!"

What?! Emperor Shura glowered. Even in the face of death, young lord Zhen's mouth is as heinous as ever. Leave it to me to decide?

He sniffed coldly. "Very well, in order to make the competition more entertaining, we shall leave the outcome of our martial dao battle to fate!"

"Very well, as you wish." Jiang Chen couldn't care less.

"Additionally, if no outcome can be determined within four hours, the martial dao battle will be a draw! Do both parties agree on this rule?" Emperor Petalpluck brought up the matter again.

Emperor Shura naturally wouldn't object since he was the one who'd proposed it. "How can a battle between two experts take longer than four hours? If it goes on for longer than four hours, then it's definitely a draw."

Both of his followers were half-step great emperors. They were fighting in the stead of the Sun, Moon, and Star Monarchs because they were more well-balanced in other disciplines, especially pill dao. In other words, Emperor Shura had brought them to the competition just so that they could win in two pill dao segments.

But now that Emperor Peerless had appeared out of nowhere, all of his plans were thrown into disarray. However, he knew that it was too late to change anything. All he could do was hope that Emperor Pillzenith's men would be able to exceed their very best.

Seeing that there was no objections, Emperor Petalpluck continued. "Since the other competitions might be affected by death or injuries inflicted during the martial dao battle, this subject shall be moved to the very back. Instead, we shall start the competition with three pill dao battles. Are there any disagreements?"

Start with pill dao? Jiang Chen was a little taken aback, but he was absolutely fearless when it came to pill dao. Emperor Peerless had some attainments in pill dao, but he wasn't exactly the cream of the crop. In fact, his knowledge of pill dao might not even exceed Huang'er's.

Nobody had really seen the true depths of Huang'er's foundation in pill dao. Not even Jiang Chen. The young lord wasn't completely sure that it was a good thing to start with a pill dao battle, but since the arrow was already notched to the string, it was too late to consider anything else.

"Old Brother Mo, Huang'er, do your best, don't feel burdened." Jiang Chen encouraged them through his consciousness. "We can still win the competition even if we only manage to win one round in pill dao."

Emperor Peerless and Huang'er nodded. They were already Sacred Peafowl Mountain's best candidates. Even if they were replaced by someone else, the situation would most likely be the same.

If Emperor Shura's followers were truly from Pillfire City, Jiang Chen was the only one who could possibly face them head on. Even if Pill King Lu Feng and Pill King Bu were here, it was unlikely that the situation would be any better. As for Lin Yanyu and Mu Gaoqi, they were still too young to shoulder such weight on their shoulders.

"Daoist Shura and young lord Zhen, since you're both leaders of your own respective factions, you're required to battle against each other in every subject. As for your candidates, they should also face their equals in all subject except the martial dao battles. Do you have any more rules that you might want to add?" Emperor Petalpluck asked both of them.

It was a necessity to have the leaders battle against each other. If Emperor Shura and young lord Zhen was allowed to fight the others, the entire competition would lose its meaning and entertainment value.

Jiang Chen smiled blandly. "Absolutely none."

Emperor Shura knew that Jiang Chen was extremely exceptional in pill dao, but he couldn't back down now. He was prepared for a loss in pill dao. But weren't there to be three pill dao battles? Emperor Shura glanced at Emperor Peerless and Huang'er, a bizarre smile forming on his lips.