

Three Realms 1211

Chapter 1211: A Loss in the First Battle

Pill dao battles were one of the most popular in the world of martial dao. It was a method of competition only slightly inferior to martial dao. Beginning with pill dao and finishing with martial was a way of generating anticipation.

Of course, it was difficult to come up with topics for pill battles of this level. Though Emperor Petalpluck was the judge, he wasn't proficient enough to compose a sufficiently challenging and fair question. Therefore, he asked the two sides to agree on the method of competition themselves, with the caveat that they had to agree on it.

The second part was the significantly harder of the two. After some lengthy negotiations, the two sides finally arrived at an agreement. There would be three rounds, each involving different pill-related fields.

The first was refining pills; a rather straightforward and primitive way of doing things.

The second was pill analysis. This round required both sides to present the other with an unknown pill. Each party was to analyze the pill. The side that identified more materials would be declared the winner. As for exactly which pills were eligible, anything went as long as it was effective in confounding the opponent. Naturally, no cheating was permitted. An automatic loss would be awarded if any was found.

The third was the opposite of the second. Both sides would prepare correct and incorrect ones materials ahead of time. Their opponent had to find the type of pill most appropriate to the materials prepared, and successfully refine it. If both sides succeeded, the side that did so first would win.

Both sides had to send in three different competitors. As for who was chosen to compete for what, that would be decided via random draw.

"I have no expertise with pills, so I'll refrain from participating and messing things up," laughed Emperor Peerless.

Jiang Chen nodded. "For the pill battles, I will take Huang'er and Cloudsoar Monarch." Among the four monarchs, Cloudsoar was likely the best at pills. He might not be as good as Emperor Peerless in actuality, but neither person had a chance against a candidate from Pillfire City. Therefore, it was better to some face for the great emperor.

As expected, Shura Retreat sent out the two followers of unknown origins.

"Huang'er, I can definitely win against Emperor Shura for this one. I don't think Cloudsoar has a chance, so if you can tie with your opponent, that would be for the best." Jiang Chen attempted to relieve some pressure from his female companion with a silent message.

"Let's see how the drawing turns out," Huang'er returned a slight smile.

Cloudsoar Monarch was picked for the first pill-refining round. Jiang Chen was delegated to the third—the one that required material preparation and synthesis. Huang'er was given the responsibility for the second round, pill analysis.

Jiang Chen had no problem with any of the three rounds. He was absolutely confident that he would win against Emperor Shura a hundred percent of the time. He could say the same when it came to anyone, honestly.

“Alright, the draw is complete. Let the first round begin. Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s Cloudsoar Monarch versus... Shura Retreat’s Pill King Ce!” Emperor Petalpluck announced.

Cloudsoar’s opponent was a man with a large mole at the base of his earlobe. His name was Pill King Ce. Whether that was his real name or pseudonym was as much of a mystery as the rest of his background. However, Jiang Chen could tell from the man’s bearing that he was likely quite proficient with pills. In fact, he was probably superior to Pill King Lu Feng and Bu.

The pill-refining round was extremely clear-cut. There was no flourish or flair. Ability, handiwork, and technique were the only elements at stake. The type of pill to be refined was also decided by random draw. Emperor Petalpluck selected an arbitrary type from more than a dozen of similar difficulty.

From the look on his face, Cloudsoar Monarch was very relaxed. There was no pressure to be found in his expression.

“Young lord, do you think that Cloudsoar will be able to win this one?” Chronobalance Monarch asked Jiang Chen uncertainly, his voice hushed.

“This is just the first round,” Jiang Chen smiled back. “It doesn’t matter whether we win or lose. It’s fine to test the waters for now.”

These were words of consolation. Truthfully, each and every one of the thirteen rounds was important. However, he didn’t want his subordinates to worry too much. It had taken quite a bit of effort to pump up morale. He wasn’t about to let it deflate so easily.

As he had foreseen, the unknown pill king was extremely adept at his art. While the man didn’t betray much of his skill in the beginning, the prowess he began to display in the middle of a round was equivalent to at least a ninth rank pill king’s. He performed even better as time went on.

Though Cloudsoar Monarch performed extraordinarily well considering his actual skill level, it wasn’t enough to overcome their foundational difference in the end. Pill King Ce finished the refinement process a full thirty minutes before the monarch, with pills that were higher quality than his opponent’s to boot.

The first round’s winner was patently obvious. Emperor Petalpluck and company all agreed that Pill King Ce took home the victory.

“The first round goes to Shura Retreat!” proclaimed the kindly emperor.

Emperor Shura broke into a satisfied smirk. He was greatly encouraged by the act of drawing first blood. Pill dao was Shura Retreat’s perennial weakness. Scoring an initial victory here was a palpable blow to Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s morale. The depressing looks on their followers was evidence enough. The first round’s victory was not as simple as winning just one round. Of course, it was very important to win the next round as well.

“You have accomplished a great deed in winning the first battle!” He motioned to Pill King Ce joyfully, then turned his head to another man in silver robes. “Pill King Hui, you’re up.”

“No problem. How learned could a soft, weak girl like that be, even if she started learning pill dao in her mother’s womb? The second win is as good as mine!”

The second round’s battle was actually rather abstruse. It tested the competences of both parties to their limits. The prerequisite for participating was having an esoteric pill, and a complexly constructed one at that.

This was in itself a trial.

Huang’er didn’t refine pills often herself, and though Jiang Chen did as a matter of course, his pills were largely varieties that had made their way into the hands of the public. Because of this, they had already been thoroughly analyzed by countless people.

Not knowing the refinement process was one thing; discovering the pills’ component materials was a much easier task. Thus, any remotely standard pill could not be used. Though Jiang Chen had countless recipes in his brain, he needed to have a finished pill on hand for the round.

He had plenty of finished pills, but the only remotely esoteric one was the Pinecrane Pill. There was no guarantee that the others in his collection were sufficiently unknown. Pillfire City’s wealth of knowledge was a given, after all.

Jiang Chen grit his teeth. He relented on giving a Pinecrane Pill to Huang’er in the end. The Pinecrane Pill was a very skill-intensive pill. In terms of technique, it required more than many empyrean rank pills did. Even Emperor Pillzenith would have a hard time making heads or tails of it. Now that a pill as precious as this was on the table, he was truly all in.

“Second round, Miss Huang’er of Sacred Peafowl Mountain versus... Pill King Hui of Shura Retreat!”

The disparity in ages between the two competitors created shocking contrast.

“Hold on,” Emperor Shura suddenly interjected.

“Do you have something to say, Daoist Shura?” frowned Emperor Petalpluck.

“The contestants must be isolated this round. Otherwise, what if someone cheats? It’s quite easy to remotely slip a couple details to someone onstage.” Emperor Shura was very wary of Jiang Chen. He wanted to cut out all the risks he could. However, his suggestion put Emperor Petalpluck in an awkward spot.

Jiang Chen snorted in derision. “Emperor Shura, you seem so scared of me! In that case, why not just give up trying to oppose Sacred Peafowl Mountain?”

The emperor harrumphed. “Scared of you? You must be daydreaming or out of your mind. I’m worried that someone will secretly interfere. I would hate to see something that impolite.”

“Emperor Petalpluck, we can go with isolation.” Jiang Chen smiled faintly. “I’m sure that both parties will be equally well-isolated, of course. It simply wouldn’t do to have any wolfish behavior in the open... only barbarians sleep with wolves, no?”

He alluded to Emperor Shura once more.

The second round proceeded under isolated circumstances. The Pinecrane Pill was an inscrutable pill indeed. Pill King Hui noticed how extraordinary the pill was the moment it entered his hands.

Inhaling sharply, the pill king was infused with countless excited thoughts. Before he came into the ring, he had been instructed by Emperor Pillzenith to get news on the Pinecrane Pill. He had a very strong hunch that this pill was the one and only.

The spirit energy and powerful vitality it emanated...

He almost wanted to stow it away and keep it. But reason overcame impulse in the end. He was in an arena. There was no way he could smuggle it out and even if he tried, he would first become the laughingstock of the town.

While this was happening, Huang'er received an unknown pill as well. She didn't know what it was, but she had been mentally prepared not to. Before the round began, Jiang Chen had taught her how to analyze a pill that was foreign to her.

Because the competition did not allow for breaking apart the pill, great finesse was demanded. Without that rule, one could come up with a few conclusions just by carefully dissecting the pill. With it, the only tools remaining were one's eyes, nose, and consciousness.

Chapter 1212: Are You Masochistic?

The pill battles had the same time limit as the martial dao battles: four hours.

As seconds flowed into minutes, the only thing the audience could do was anxiously wait with bated breath. Thanks to the fact that both were competing in isolation, no one outside knew what they were doing.

Four hours were almost up. According to the rules, each person could only write a maximum of seven answers. A correct answer was awarded a point, but an incorrect one didn't result in a penalty. Points were understandably deducted for extra answers, so the contestants would write seven answers at most.

Huang'er had only written two answers upon her scroll so far. Both were ingredients she was reasonably sure about. She had a few ideas about the remaining blank spaces, but was still deliberating. The answers in her mind resided on the border of plausibility. There was some supporting evidence for them, but they were largely blind guesses.

The passage of time meant that she could no longer delay. Near the four-hour limit, Huang'er wrote all her guesses down on the scroll. She was out of time and had nothing to lose by doing so. The round ended as she wrote her last few letters.

With that, the contestants were finally released from isolation. Huang'er's expression was neither happy nor unhappy. Pill King Hui, on the other hand, looked quite a bit more serious, with a hint of uncertainty mixed in.

Both answer scrolls were submitted.

Out of respect for a nominally courteous contest, each contestant marked the opponent's scroll. No one was foolish enough to try any underhanded tricks here. Oaths had been sworn beforehand, and deceit was easily identified at this stage.

Pill King Hui was somewhat surprised that Huang'er had two correct answers. His provided pill had been quite obscure. He had expected the girl to be completely stumped, honestly.

I wonder if she actually figured it out or not? Maybe they're lucky guesses. The pill king found it hard to believe that someone so young had the skills needed to connect those particular dots. He had done the same for the Pinecrane Pill, though both were auxiliary materials. He hadn't a clue as to what the pill's main materials were.

Both parties identified two materials each.

"Because the number of materials identified is equal, the second round ends in a draw." Emperor Petalpluck was as taken aback at the result as anyone else. Because a battle like this was very technical, he had been of the opinion that the remarkable girl from Sacred Peafowl Mountain was likely going to lose. A tie with a pill king... how unexpected.

Sounds of bewilderment echoed through the crowd. The first tie had come upon them so quickly! Pill King Hui was a little upset. He hadn't wanted to settle for anything less than a victory. But life was often a series of disappointments, and he received an outcome that was merely adequate.

He didn't have time to mope, though. He messaged Emperor Pillzenith as soon as he left the stage. "Your Majesty, the pill I analyzed just now had an aura of incredible vigor. I suspect it may be the Pinecrane Pill we're after."

It was a stunning piece of news, right out of the blue. Countless thoughts popped in Emperor Pillzenith's mind, most of them half-formed.

The Pinecrane Pill, eh? Greed filled the great emperor's heart. His great status only intensified his desire. Does a pill as miraculous as the Pinecrane Pill really exist in this world? Where did Pill King Zhen get it from? Who taught it to him? In addition to his greed, emperor felt a concentrated dose of envy as well.

Finally, his heart settled on a resolution. I have to get my hands on it. No matter what, I have to have the Pinecrane Pill!

Emperor Pillzenith did not doubt Pill King Hui's judgment. The man was one of his most trusted subordinates. Despite not showing himself almost at all in public, Pill King Hui's pill dao knowledge was phenomenal. The emperor trusted him implicitly. The pill king's near-certain attitude meant that it was more likely than not the real thing.

From Sacred Peafowl Mountain's perspective, there could be nothing more impenetrable. Emperor Pillzenith knew what pills Taiyuan Tower carried, as did many pill kings who paid attention to their peers. Therefore, it was impossible for young lord Zhen to pick one from the selection there. He had to resort to something far more enigmatic.

The Pinecrane Pill was the most reasonable candidate that fulfilled that criterion.

Huang'er's tie was neither good news nor bad for Sacred Peafowl Mountain. At least Sacred Peafowl Mountain wasn't disadvantaged by the pill dao battles as a whole. The third round pitted young lord Zhen against Emperor Shura, but everyone instinctively felt that the former was the sure-fire victor.

The proceedings went as predicted. Emperor Shura tried to struggle, but he had little expertise to speak of that would be useful. He couldn't even match up to his former subordinate Pill King Bu, much less the likes of Pill King Hui or Ce. That was partially why Pill King Bu had been so valued at Shura Retreat several years ago. Alas, his provocation of Jiang Chen led to him being involuntarily taken in as the young man's disciple. Shura Retreat had lost a top rank pill king that day.

Jiang Chen fulfilled public expectation by winning against Emperor Shura rather easily. The latter wasn't much embarrassed by the loss, though, since pill dao was a pursuit he hardly cared about. He was much angrier about the fact that Pill King Cui hadn't won the second round. This cast a shadow into his heart. Still, coming out with one win and one loss wasn't too bad. This was a field in which Sacred Peafowl Mountain had an advantage. There was nothing unacceptable about Shura Retreat's performance.

The pill dao rounds having concluded, preparations for the subsequent subject's rounds were underway. Formations, talismans, and beast taming all had two dedicated rounds each.

Drawing lots revealed beast taming to be the next topic. Because beast taming was a comparatively scarce area of expertise, most cultivators outside specialized sects were unfamiliar with it. But this wasn't an absolute conclusion. Lack of expertise didn't stop some cultivators from taming spirit beasts as their familiars or mounts.

After some discussion on Sacred Peafowl Mountain's side, it was decided that Jiang Chen and Huang'er would step forward. Truthfully, Huang'er knew nothing about the subject. Unfortunately, neither did Emperor Peerless and Cloudsoar Monarch. So in the end, she was the best choice. The other person was almost guaranteed to lose. Having someone close do so allowed some appearances to be maintained. An expert like Emperor Peerless could not be permitted to show fear.

Emperor Peerless had a tamed beast, having almost entirely used his martial power to force it under his command. He'd done so with significant help from a friend with the needed talent. He had no skills of that sort, which meant that he would accomplish very little even if he forced himself to participate.

However, Jiang Chen was different. He was quite the accomplished beast tamer. In the Boundless Catacombs, he had relied on the ancient beast language to draw Mang Qi's non-malicious interest in him. Moreover, his connection to Long Xiaoxuan had also been sparked by his knowledge of draconic language. That was the benefit of being well-read and studied.

One had to learn a beast's language in order to tame one. Beasts came in all shapes and sizes, but ancient beast language was a typical common tongue. The reason Jiang Chen had been able to befriend Long Xiaoxuan was his mastery over it. This was also the cause of his natural intimacy with the Astral White Tiger cub.

Why else would such proud species willingly associate with a human?

Shura Retreat sent out Emperor Shura and Pill King Hui. If it wasn't for the rule that both factions' leaders were required to participate in one round per area, the emperor would have much preferred

sending both Pillfire's pill kings. The two of them were surprisingly adept beast tamers in addition to their pill-refining skills.

Emperor Shura was no slouch at taming beasts himself, though. He was actually moderately proficient.

"Young lord Zhen, your Sacred Peafowl Mountain has no chance in the beast taming competition." The emperor couldn't help but snicker when he saw that Jiang Chen brought Huang'er out with him.

"If you're so confident, shall we call off the thirteen rounds? We can decide the winner with a single round instead, yes?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

The words delivered a stinging slap across Emperor Shura's face. His expression froze with a slack jaw. He didn't know what to say. He found it difficult to answer Jiang Chen's counter-challenge. If he didn't take it, didn't that mean he shouldn't have been so uppity about his chances? Why say Sacred Peafowl Mountain has no chance, then?

But Emperor Shura couldn't just agree to it, either. His heart was disturbed by Jiang Chen's confident smile. He couldn't shake off the feeling that a conspiracy hid just behind it. The emperor knew better than anyone by now that Jiang Chen was no ordinary young genius.

In his opinion, the young man had terrifying potential. He might still be catching up to Emperor Peafowl's level, but if he was allowed to grow, it was quite possible that he would become one of the emperor's toughest enemies. Emperor Shura instinctively feared his youthful opponent.

Naturally, he refrained from falling for a potential trick with Jiang Chen's counter. It was much safer to stick with thirteen rounds. His initial comment became a blow against himself because of it, though. There was a patch of laughter from beneath the stage. Mocking sounds made their way up to the contestants. Emperor Shura's posturing and fear to fight worsened the vassals' opinion of him yet again.

"Hmph, I'm not interested in getting a free win from my juniors. Nor do I care for casually breaking the rules. If you're scared, young lord Zhen, it's not too late to beg for forgiveness."

"Beg?" Jiang Chen snorted. "If you're not afraid, Emperor Shura, then why are you changing the subject? If you're not afraid, why not accept my deal? I'm curious. How come you're picking a fight with me when you actually don't want to be aggravated? You never have anything to back up your words. Perhaps you're actually a masochist?"

Chapter 1213: The Black Winged Drake

Emperor Shura felt deeply humiliated after Jiang Chen countered his taunts. He knew that it was foolish to spar words with young lord Zhen, so he settled for a snort. "Young lord Zhen, you're something when it comes to smooth talking, but you need true skill and knowledge to win the competition."

"The fourth round begins. Miss Huang'er of Sacred Peafowl Mountain versus Pill King Hui of Shura Retreat!"

The beast taming part of the competition was a very primitive one. Huang'er didn't have any special attainment in the art of beast taming, so she surrendered after a token appearance. It was already Sacred Peafowl Mountain's plan to give up this round, not to mention that Pill King Hui was obviously well versed in the art of beast taming.

An arrogant smile spilled out of the corners of Emperor Shura's lips when Huang'er conceded without hesitation. Huang'er's surrender made him realize that Sacred Peafowl Mountain was probably completely lacking in the area. They wouldn't have given up so easily otherwise.

"Pill King Hui of Shura Retreat wins the fourth round. The fifth round begins is young lord Zhen of Sacred Peafowl Mountain versus Emperor Shura of Shura Retreat! We will draw straws to decide the match format."

There was much to choose from when it came to beast taming. There were on-the-spot beast taming, summoning contracted beasts to do battle...

The format Huang'er and Pill King Hui had drawn earlier was on-the-spot beast taming. That was what Jiang Chen hoped was the result as well. It would best use his mastery in the ancient beast language, but reality often ran counter to one's wishes. When the result of the draw was out, the match format turned out to be a fight between the participants' contracted beasts. It was the most primitive and direct match format there was. Whoever had the stronger contracted beast would win.

Emperor Shura almost laughed when he saw the match format. He thought that victory was already in his grasp. As a great emperor, the beast he contracted was almost advanced emperor realm. In fact, he had come across this spirit creature by accident.

Everyone knew that the higher the level of spirit creature, the more difficult it was to tame. If Emperor Shura wasn't learned in the art of beast taming and not lucky enough to encounter such a beast, he wouldn't even be able to acquire an initial emperor realm beast, much less a mid realm one.

Encounters like these were completely up to luck. There were a lot of great emperors whose contracted beasts were lower than emperor realm. In fact, some didn't even have a contracted beast to begin with. They weren't lacking in the ability to contract a beast, but the ones they found were either unsuitable or too low level. No one wanted a beast like that.

A beast needed to be either at a high cultivation level or possess great potential. If they didn't have either one of these qualities, there was no point in taming them at all. This was especially true in the case of a great emperor, where a shoddy contracted beast would only be a loss of face.

Emperor Shura's contracted beast had great cultivation and potential. His spirit creature had only been initial emperor realm when he first contracted with it. After a dozen years of care, the beast was now approaching advanced emperor realm.

It was perfectly capable of evolving to peak emperor realm in the future. Whether or not it could become a great emperor was completely dependent on its own luck and abilities.

Emperor Shura was very proud of his own contracted spirit creature. He didn't think that even Emperor Peafowl was his equal in this area, much less someone as young as young lord Zhen. What level was young lord Zhen's cultivation? How powerful could his contracted beast possibly be? Young lord Zhen would have one at sage realm at the most!

Not even sects famous for their beast taming arts could tame a beast at the same level as their cultivators. Thus, it was no wonder that Emperor Shura felt so optimistic. The very first step to taming a spirit creature was to defeat it by force and make it submit with superior martial prowess.

Jiang Chen felt a little depressed when he saw the result of the straw. It was the format he least liked out of all the possible selections. He wasn't afraid of inadequacy, but his mastery of the ancient beast language was completely useless with this format.

Strictly speaking, he didn't have a contracted spirit creature. However, he did have a lot of contracted beast allies. For example, he had Long Xiaoxuan, the Goldbiter Rats and the Astral White Tiger cub.

Of course, he wasn't going to send the Astral White Tiger cub into battle since it hadn't completely awakened. As for the Goldbiter Rats, they had admittedly grown a lot since he first met them, but it was against Ole Gold's nature to ferociously fight Emperor Shura's contracted beast on open ground. In the end, Long Xiaoxuan was his only choice.

It wasn't that he couldn't ask the dragon to do something, but that he really didn't want to reveal Long Xiaoxuan's presence unless absolutely necessary. After all, a true dragon bloodline was extraordinary, and the circumstances of exposing it were unimaginable. He had to discuss the situation with Long Xiaoxuan, so he sent the dragon a message. "Brother Long, I cannot afford to lose this match, so I need your help here. However, there will be consequences after your true self is exposed to the world. I won't blame you if you wish to sit this one out."

Jiang Chen didn't want to use high-falutin' principles to coerce Long Xiaoxuan into helping him.

The dragon snorted coldly. "Will you stand by and do nothing if I'm being hunted?"

"What kind of question is that? Of course I won't! You and I have been brothers for so long!" Jiang Chen was quite annoyed by the stupid question.

"That's exactly my point." Long Xiaoxuan said indifferently, "It's only a matter of time before my existence is revealed anyways. It's also rather irritating that a noble true dragon is forced to hide from the world."

In the beginning, Long Xiaoxuan had been shy and afraid of the world because he knew nothing about it. He was much more familiar with it now and had formed his own opinions, long since shedding his initial worries and fears. Moreover, he was gradually awakening all the memories and natural pride of a true dragon. He didn't want to hide from the world forever either. In his opinion, it was practically blasphemy to his heritage.

"You must think carefully about this, Brother Long." Jiang Chen reminded again.

"There's no need. The crouching dragon must eventually soar in the skies one day." Long Xiaoxuan responded indifferently but firmly.

"So, you've truly made up your mind then?" Jiang Chen sucked in a deep breath.

"You are so long winded." Long Xiaoxuan sounded quite pompous, but it was also a clear indication that he didn't mind exposing himself to the world.

Jiang Chen could understand him. The Long Xiaoxuan today was a far cry from the Long Xiaoxuan who'd just entered the world from the wood spirit spring. Since he'd entered emperor realm, his strength and his memories had been growing nonstop. It was only inevitable that Long Xiaoxuan's restlessness would

reach its breaking point one day, not to mention that the dragon was likely bored to death with living like a rat day after day.

Let them come then! A burst of passion rose in Jiang Chen's heart.

"You may surrender now if you're afraid, young lord Zhen. Don't keep me waiting any longer." Emperor Shura's arrogant voice came from afar.

A large, fearsome, and pitch black spirit creature was standing behind the great emperor. It looked like it had just crawled out of hell, and a cross between a beast and an avian creature. Not only did it possess powerful limbs, but it had a pair of flesh wings that were big enough to cover the skies. Nearly half the arena was covered by its exceptionally large wings. The creature was completely black, but there was a green light shining from its forehead. Its glinting green eyes looked more like they belonged in the head on of a hell wraith.

Roar!

The beast suddenly flapped its fleshy wings, creating a turbulent wind to kick up a wild gale of sand and rocks. The skies darkened and thunderclouds loomed. A change seemed to come about the land. The shrill cry it let out seemed capable of penetrating a cultivator's soul. Be it in terms of physical qualities or presence, this creature was both eerie and intimidating.

Jiang Chen was surprised by the black creature. "Is that the black winged drake?"

The black winged drake wasn't a natural species. It was a mixed race that originated from the ancient times. Some people claimed that it was the offspring of an ancient dragon and a fanged creature, one of the fiercest in the world.

The authenticity of the rumors aside, there was no doubt that the black winged drake was as fearsome as the legend said. An average cultivator couldn't command a creature like this. Its tamer had to be a great emperor well versed in the art of the Shura and murder like Emperor Shura. Temperament wise, the black winged drake was extremely compatible with Emperor Shura. No wonder it didn't look unwilling or unhappy to have a master like Emperor Shura.

Emperor Shura mistakenly thought that Jiang Chen was stunned by his contracted beast when he noted the complicated look in the young man's eyes. Pleased beyond words, he taunted proudly. "You had quite a smart mouth earlier, didn't you, young lord Zhen? What's wrong? Are you so scared that you can't move your legs?"

The black winged drake undoubtedly had a fearsome appearance and presence. But Emperor Shura was dreaming to think that this was enough to scare Jiang Chen.

Completely unmoved by the creature's imposing appearance and presence, Jiang Chen slowly climbed up the arena steps with an indifferent look on his face. He taunted openly. "It has a strong appearance, but nothing more. You want to frighten me with just this, Shura? How naive."

Emperor Shura laughed sinisterly. "Still unwilling to admit defeat, I see. I wonder how you'll possibly fight my contracted beast?"

Jiang Chen tsk'ed scornfully. "You must feel so very pleased with yourself. You think that victory is already in your grasp, isn't it?"

"But of course." Emperor Shura replied leisurely. He did believe that victory was already in hand. He didn't believe that there was anything Jiang Chen could do to win despite the counter question because of his confidence in the black winged hunting drake's abilities. If the drake's violent nature was fully aroused, it would exude a presence several times stronger than the enemy's. Even peak emperor human experts would have to be on their guard. This enabled it to beat enemies stronger than itself!

Chapter 1214: A True Dragon Reveals Itself

Emperor Shura was clearly putting on a show to take Jiang Chen down a notch. He whistled gently and made a sweeping gesture. The black winged drake bellowed as it raised its neck towards the sky. It expanded the large, fleshy wings on its back and fanned them.

Whoosh!

A frighteningly powerful gale hurtled towards the stage and enveloped the arena. The drake's bellows also contained a terrifyingly baleful aura that roiled towards Jiang Chen.

"Young lord Zhen, don't tell me that you don't even have a contracted spirit creature?" Emperor Shura was incredibly haughty and full of himself. He was a hunter playing with his prey.

Jiang Chen gently opened his eyes and put on a mocking smile. "Shura, I merely wanted to see what your black winged drake is capable of. By the looks of it, it's actually rather mediocre. Forget great emperor realm, the furthest it'll ever reach is peak emperor realm. This drake of yours is only useful as a deterrence for the layman and as an object to keep up appearances. I don't understand why you're so proud of it."

Emperor Shura had shown off the black winged drake's heaven-defying aura to stifle Jiang Chen's arrogance and make him yield. However, the young lord wasn't even intimidated in the slightest. In fact, his response even elicited a sense of panic within Emperor Shura.

T-that brat... he actually recognizes the black winged drake? He... actually possesses an eye for such things too? Emperor Shura felt an inexplicable sense of annoyance.

The black winged drake wasn't a common beast. It was a ferocious halfblood that one couldn't hope to encounter more than once every millennia. The common populace wouldn't even recognize it.

Emperor Shura had done very extensive research and hired many beast taming masters to identify the ferocious beast. However, young lord Zhen hadn't taken even a minute to identify it! This greatly diminished his haughtiness. He wanted to crush his opponent with his trump card, but was instantly called out on it. This feeling was as disgusting as being eaten by maggots from the inside out.

He snorted coldly as humiliation turned into rage. "Young lord Zhen, since you already know what it is, you should admit to your loss! You may bide your time, but there's nothing you can do to change the result. You can't win against me in beast taming!"

The vassals sucked in breaths of cold air when they saw the black winged drake. They could feel the ferocity and the bloodthirst emanating from within it. Its aura felt so powerful that it seemed like it could shred everything into dust.

The vassals that sided with Jiang Chen couldn't help but break out in a sweat. Almost everyone from Sacred Peafowl Mountain had their brows knitted in a frown. They feared the black winged drake greatly and were extremely anxious. Huang'er and Emperor Peerless however, was as calm and collected as before.

Jiang Chen threw a sharp glance at Emperor Shura. "Shura, do you know why you'll never rule Veluriyam Capital?"

"Hmph! Are you still trying to mislead the crowd with your delusions?" Emperor Shura was quite displeased.

"It's because you're a frog in a well. You're so narrow minded that all you can see is the small piece of the sky in front of you. You'll forever be ignorant of the expanse of the outside world. If a mere black winged drake is enough to elicit such a smug look on your face, prepare to be shocked by what I show you!" Jiang Chen suddenly raised his voice and projected it far and wide.

Prepare to be shocked? The crowd stared at Jiang Chen curiously with anticipation. They wondered what kind of trump card was he going to show. How could he remain so calm and confident when he was facing the black winged drake? Did he really possess such an incredible trump card?

Everyone knew how good young lord Zhen was at creating miracles. Time and time again, he'd made the impossible, possible. What surprise did he have in store this time? Was he going to create yet another miracle?

Jiang Chen's words caused an imperceptible crack to appear on Emperor Shura's unyielding and stone-like dao heart. Brat, what game are you trying to play? He was a little dumbfounded, not because of Jiang Chen's words, but because of the young lord's composure and haughtiness throughout the entire situation.

Does he actually have a trump card? Emperor Shura was beginning to doubt himself. However, he remained certain that there was no way for Jiang Chen to summon a beast stronger than his black winged drake.

With young lord Zhen's current cultivation level, there was absolutely no way he could tame a beast stronger than the drake. A beast of such strength could kill him in a single strike. There was no feasible way for him to tame something like that.

That brat is insane! Emperor Shura's mind was filled with doubt, but he ultimately decided that the brat was crazy.

Jiang Chen wasn't insane. Far from it. In fact, his head was clearer than ever before. His conversation with Long Xiaoxuan had cleared his doubts and fears. After crawling for so long, it was time for the true dragon race to take the skies once more!

He suddenly raised his head towards the sky and sucked in all of the surrounding air to form a deafening howl. Dragon Roar! It was an art that he'd once shown during the Veluriyam Pagoda Battles.

Jiang Chen performed a flurry of hand seals while the dragon roar was still echoing through the air. A ray of blinding light shot out from his hands, causing menacing clouds to roll through the air. Moments later, Long Xiaoxuan's majestic true body was seen vaguely meandering within the clouds.

Roar! Long Xiaoxuan's true body was revealed!

A true dragon's dragon roar wasn't like any other common art. When paired with Jiang Chen's dragon roar, it turned into a frighteningly powerful sea of sound waves that seemed it wanted to overturn the heavens and earth.

Thunder and lightning formed a symphony as the clouds roiled. A true dragon was dancing through the skies!

The crowd was completely and utterly stunned. It almost seemed like the blood of every cultivator present had been lit ablaze. Heat was welling up in their chest.

"Dragon! It's a true dragon!"

"No way! There's a living true dragon in the human domain?"

"Unbelievable! Is that young lord Zhen's contracted spirit creature? That's too ludicrous!"

"True dragons are supposed to exist only in the legends! Young lord Zhen has truly tamed a true dragon?"

"Heavens! According to the legends, only those who control the heavenly fates will be chosen by dragons! Is young lord Zhen actually the chosen one?"

"I'm staggered! With such great fortune, young lord Zhen can only be the chosen one! Emperor Shura must be kidding himself if he thinks that someone as insignificant as him has the right to seize Sacred Peafowl Mountain's throne!"

"The one chosen by true dragons... Tsk tsk, I've made up my mind. I shall give my undying support to young lord Zhen!"

"Me too! Not even Emperor Peafowl could hold a candle to young lord Zhen when it comes to fortune! No wonder he has so many great achievements at such a young age! He's blessed by the very heavens itself! One day, he'll definitely become a widely recognized leader of the human domain!"

"I finally understand why Emperor Peafowl could bear to leave the capital without any worry. He is farsighted enough to see that young lord Zhen was actually a man of great fortune."

"You make a good point! Perhaps Emperor Shura is actually collaborating with Emperor Peafowl to test young lord Zhen?"

"I'm convinced. I've never felt so much veneration for anybody until today. It doesn't matter if young lord Zhen wins or loses this competition. In my heart, Veluriyam Capital only has one ruler, and it's him. As for the others, heh. They don't stand a chance."

A true dragon has revealed itself! The great emperors were flabbergasted. They held their breaths as they took in the miraculous sight.

The honored guests also had complicated expressions on their face. They stared at the true dragon intently, unable to form words. It was too terrifying! The scene before their eyes had overturned the very foundation of their beliefs! It was against everything they thought they knew about the world!

“The true dragon race... Brat Zhen, just what is your background?” Emperor Pillzenith’s heart was currently filled with uncertainty. A seedling of doubt had begun to sprout. Is it really worth it to go against young lord Zhen? Is it necessary?

The Holy Emperor was also filled with dread. “Young lord Zhen has contracted a true dragon as a spirit creature? Is he crazy? If he really is Jiang Chen, there will no longer be a day of peace for us...”

The Eternal Celestial Capital had been paying very close attention to Veluriyam Capital because they suspected that young lord Zhen and Jiang Chen were the same person. They were hoping that Emperor Shura would dethrone young lord Zhen so that they could verify their suspicions.

After what had happened today, the Holy Emperor could only pray that young lord Zhen and Jiang Chen was in no circumstance affiliated with one another. It would be a disaster otherwise.

Emperor Pillzenith and the Holy Emperor weren’t the ones shocked by the sight. Han Qianzhan and Han Qiansui of the Great Yu Skysword Sect were completely dumbfounded as well. They never imagined that their guest pill emperor was actually someone who had subdued a true dragon! They simply couldn’t digest the sight before their eyes.

Su Huanzhen of the Celestial Cicada Court knitted her brows in deep thought. It was clear that she too, was taken aback by the true dragon’s sudden appearance.

Emperor Shura’s sworn allies were also incredibly flabbergasted, especially Emperor Vastsea. He watched the entire scene unfold with his mouth agape while a raging storm brewed in his heart. He was consumed by doubt, jealousy, and disbelief. He simply couldn’t believe he’d just seen. Why!? Why does it seem like everything good has fallen to this brat?!

Chapter 1215: Morale Up and Down

The manifestation of a true dragon made an unforgettable impression in everyone’s hearts. It was a scene to be remembered for a lifetime. They all found it difficult to recover from their state of utter shock.

In the arena opposite of Jiang Chen’s side, Emperor Shura was the most astonished of all. His face was as dark as the night sky as he watched the fight between the true dragon and his black winged drake.

The drake was slightly superior in terms of level of cultivation, but every other characteristic was inferior. Whether it was aura, demeanor, or any other attribute, the drake couldn’t claim pre-eminence before the dragon. It was as if it had met its long-lost ancestor, before whom it couldn’t exert a tenth of its natural ferocity.

The true dragon race had a natural mighty presence. It was a trait passed down through its bloodline, demanding mandatory respect from all lesser relatives. The black winged drake had very little vestigial dragon bloodline to speak of. Though it was a crossbreed between a dragon and a fanged beast, it was significantly more bestial than draconic.

Still, the dragon part's existence could not be denied. Before a member of the true dragon race such as Long Xiaoxuan, it couldn't act out at all. This wasn't done not out of will, but out of natural instinct.

As long as it couldn't unleash its nature, its fighting abilities were kept in check. Though Long Xiaoxuan was only initial emperor realm, all of his racial methods combined allowed him to fight on an even footing with advance emperor realm entities. Moreover, the dragon had learned many fighting techniques from Jiang Chen during their time together. In particular, he knew how to abuse the unique advantages available to a dragon.

In less than fifteen minutes, the black winged drake whimpered, on the edge of being beaten.

Its fleeing form delivered a thousand cuts to Emperor Shura's heart. Self-esteem bled out with every passing second. He'd had the drake as a pet for a hundred years or so, and had seen it bully many other spirit creatures during that time.

This embarrassing performance, however, was a first. The panic with which the drake moved was like a child's, attempting to avoid a disciplinary lashing from his parent. Emperor Shura had never seen such behavior before. It felt like Jiang Chen was delivering a series of deliberate slaps to his face.

Before the true dragon had made its power evident, he'd shamelessly proclaimed that his opponent didn't have a chance. But things were different in the blink of an eye! Young lord Zhen had called him a frog at the bottom of a well. Well, he really did fit that description now.

The true dragon race... Emperor Shura's face was pale. He wanted more than anything to dive into a fissure in the ground. He was anxious, envious, reluctant, even a little afraid.

The conversations below were audible to him. The words "heir of the dragons" severely wounded his dignity.

Heir of the dragons? So what if young lord Zhen had a true dragon? He didn't believe a word of it. He had to win no matter what! Madness filled his eyes as the emperor stared Jiang Chen down. "I'd really like to know where you're from, Zhen!"

Jiang Chen saw what Shura was getting at very easily. He wanted to dump another bucket of dirty water on the young lord. But the emperor was foolish to do so at such a breathtaking moment. Everyone was enthralled by the true dragon's performance. Even if he admitted that he wasn't a native of the city, people would flock to make excuses on his behalf.

Who actually cared about his origins? As long as he wasn't a demon or traitor, most wouldn't mind if he even came from another plane. The show that Long Xiaoxuan had put on shook the audience to their cores. The sheer splendor of it all was enough to brainwash them on the spot, leaving an indelible mark in their collective hearts. In that instant, Jiang Chen gained a crowd of staunch followers. Emperor Shura couldn't do anything even if he shouted himself hoarse.

The beasts' fight didn't last very long. Under Long Xiaoxuan's 'discipline', the black winged drake fell over in pretend death, unwilling and unable to get back up. Luckily for the creature, Long Xiaoxuan didn't pursue his victory. Instead, he soared into the air, proudly holding his head high while circling the firmaments. He was fueling Jiang Chen's momentum.

“That’s enough, Brother Dragon!” Jiang Chen waved to his scaly friend. Instantly, the dragon turned itself into a ray of light. He shot toward Jiang Chen for only a moment before disappearing into thin air, little evidence of his presence and parting. There was another wave of surprised cries at the superb display of wondrous concealment.

Jiang Chen had expected all of this to happen. True dragons had almost never appeared in this world before. Thus, their exaggerated reactions and more were understandable. When someone’s expectations were entirely overturned, no matter who that person was, they tended to experience a period of blankness. A few moments were required to take in all that they’d seen.

“Does this need to continue, Shura?” The young lord of Veluriyam looked over at the emperor with a half-smile.

Emperor Shura looked agape at the black winged drake on the ground. He could see as well as anyone else that it hadn’t sustained injuries anywhere close to being life-threatening. Rather, it had been scared witless. It’d been traumatized and it no longer had the will to fight. The black winged drake was normally a ferocious beast. But the appearance of a true dragon was enough to terrorize it into playing dead on the ground, preferring that to actually fighting. His loss was as plain as day.

Emperor Shura was red in the face. The most he could do was gnash his teeth. “You’ve brainwashed everyone, Zhen. Still, I maintain my previous statement. Your origins are unknown. Who knows why you’ve come to Veluriyam Capital? Who knows if you have ulterior motives?”

Jiang Chen roared with laughter. “Your magnanimity knows no bounds, Shura. No wonder Emperor Peafowl always said you had poor vision and a tiny heart. This is only round four, and yet you’re already angry at losing. Do you want to continue? Do we need to?”

“Your tricks have led to you winning this round,” harrumphed Emperor Shura. “You’re getting too full of yourself, kid! The results so far are two wins, two losses, and a tie each. You have no advantage over me.”

“Tsk tsk, you make it sound like you’re the one that does, huh?” Jiang Chen retorted. It was true. The two sides had identical scores. By now, Emperor Petalpluck had recovered himself from his bewilderment. He examined Jiang Chen with a meaningful look.

“The fifth round goes to young lord Zhen, of Sacred Peafowl Mountain!” The kindly emperor announced.

There was instantly thunderous applause from all around. Not only did young lord Zhen’s initial voters clap, but many of the neutrals and a few Shura supporters as well. The participants did so with great passion, awed by Jiang Chen’s impressive demonstration.

A young genius from Sacred Peafowl Mountain had beaten Emperor Shura soundly in both pill dao and beast taming! This alone was enough to leave his name in history. It certainly earned more than sufficient respect from the entire crowd. Now that the bet was at this point, what did it mean if Emperor Shura won? He had the advantage with regard to martial dao, but there was serious suspicion that none of his other skill sets matched.

Even if the excuse was made that young lord Zhen had fame-making levels of expertise in pill dao, he had still differentiated himself with his beast taming prowess. Taming a true dragon wasn’t something

that could be chalked down to dumb luck. The young man's exceptional control over his companion was living evidence of that.

The dragon had come and gone at the smallest beck and call. This was real unity between man and beast. Meanwhile, Emperor Shura's black winged drake was splayed on the ground in a poor imitation of death. Anyone with half a brain could tell whose mastery was superior. Thus, the two beast taming rounds ended again with one win and one loss.

The two sides were still tied after these rounds. Neither had the advantage. Still, the atmosphere was filled with dragon-related euphoria. It took a long while for the crowd to recover from their reverie. The stupefaction was simply a bit too much. The people looked at Jiang Chen now with different gazes.

Even those on Sacred Peafowl Mountain's side beheld him with respect, admiration and whole-hearted reverence, the four monarchs included. They all looked at Jiang Chen with the same look they gave the Emperor Peafowl of yesteryear. It was at this moment that they began to worship him.

The shock that Jiang Chen had delivered to them today surpassed Emperor Peafowl's many times over. They had known for a long time of the emperor's supreme planning skills and methodologies. But even so, His Majesty had never brought them so many moments of epiphany and amazement.

That young lord Zhen was able to do so again and again distinguished him even more in the Sacred Peafowl Mountain supporters' eyes. It enkindled their hearts like never before.

Over with Emperor Shura, there was a significant drop in morale. Emperor Vastsea, previously the most active man present, lost much of his interest and energy. His eyes became turbulent.

But the show had to go on. It was time for the next round in the competition. Emperor Shura was stuck between a rock and a hard place. There was no getting out of this sticky situation.

After pill dao and beast taming were done, the next round belonged to formations. This, too, was an area of excellence for Jiang Chen.

As there were two rounds, Emperor Peerless volunteered for the other spot. He didn't specialize in them per se, but as the strongest cultivator present, he had the largest wealth of martial dao experience. Therefore, he had a better chance than almost everyone else.

On the other side of things, Emperor Shura brought out Pill King Ce.

Chapter 1216: Three Victories Out of Three Battles for Young Lord Zhen

Jiang Chen wasn't at all scared of Emperor Shura. When it came to formations, he held countless within his grasp. His understanding and insight far surpassed any that his opponent claim. Even without his inheritance from the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect, Jiang Chen had learned a great deal in his past life. Though he lacked any systematic knowledge of formation, the sheer quality of his information overcame that problem.

In this lifetime, he had received an ancient sect's heritage and received its rival's treasure, the Earth Bodhisattva Orb. This meant that he had absolutely astounding proficiency with formations in general. On the other hand, Jiang Chen had no plans to help Emperor Peerless cheat. Indeed, he had no time to do so. It was difficult to learn the intricacies of formations in a day. To cram now would mean very little.

“Old Brother Mo, just try your best. We’ll have a very good chance of winning the competition as long as you win one of the martial dao rounds.” The young man tried to alleviate some of his sworn brother’s pressure.

Emperor Peerless chuckled in response. “Don’t worry, I’ll give it my all.”

That much was never in question. Jiang Chen had simply wanted to console the emperor ahead of time. That would lessen any embarrassment from a loss. It wasn’t that he thought little of his sworn brother. Rather, he considered it quite strange that the two followers Emperor Shura sent out were relatively unknown, yet had performed extremely well in two different areas.

At the end of the day, Emperor Peerless was a wandering cultivator. Besides his astounding martial dao talent, he wasn’t an expert at much else. This was the prime weakness of wandering great emperors. They lacked support and resources from their sect. Even if they wanted to learn several subjects at a time, they had no access to the necessary tutelage.

“For the sixth round, Emperor Peerless from Sacred Peafowl Mountain... versus Pill King Ce, from Shura Retreat!”

There were many ways to compete with formations, but the randomly decided method for Emperor Peerless’s match was quite insane. Both sides were to set up formations for the other until one went unrecognized. The time limit was still four hours.

This required a significant amount of expertise out of the competing parties. If one had insufficient foundational knowledge, the chance of losing at this kind of competition drastically went up.

Emperor Peerless hadn’t expected to draw the method he was most unwilling to compete with. For him, to do so was its own kind of suffering. The emperor hadn’t systematically learned about formations. Though he had some experience with them, he didn’t have the requisite knowledge to win the match before him.

He’d intended to use his immense martial prowess to break through his opponent’s formation, not go head to head in a contest of knowledge. But he was already embroiled here, and could only half-heartedly fumble forward.

Jiang Chen knew that there would be trouble as soon as the method of competition was decided. As expected, Pill King Ce was remarkably skilled with formations as well; certainly more so than Emperor Peerless. The emperor tried his best, but eventually lost.

“Ay, young lord Zhen. I’ve embarrassed Sacred Peafowl Mountain.” Emperor Peerless looked chagrined. After all, he had offered to come forward of his own volition.

“What is there to be sad about, Old Brother Mo? You’re no formation expert,” smiled Jiang Chen.

The emperor sighed softly upon hearing his young brother’s reply. “Still, young lord Zhen, you should be cautious,” he advised. “I didn’t think all of us would lose so handily. We’re relying on you to win all the rounds right now.”

Until now, Jiang Chen had been the only one to win at pill dao as well as beast taming. So it was true with formations as well, the young lord needed to win a round here to even things out. Both Emperor Peerless and Cloudsoar Monarch were mildly flustered at the thought of it.

“Don’t blame yourselves,” Jiang Chen grinned. “Shura Retreat has prepared for this in advance. They probably calculated these results ahead of time. We were caught somewhat unprepared, so it’s no wonder that we’re at a disadvantage.”

Six rounds had elapsed. Sacred Peafowl Mountain had won two, drawn one, and lost three. The situation was a bit precipitous.

“Don’t worry, I’ll take this one home for sure too.” Leaving a confident smile behind him, Jiang Chen flew out from his faction.

His multiple losses sustained at Jiang Chen’s hand taught Emperor Shura to brag no longer. He’d heard just as well as anyone else about the rumors of young lord Zhen’s prowess with formations. He didn’t have high hopes for this round, either.

Though Emperor Shura wasn’t completely clueless about formations, he wasn’t going to take home any prizes against a real expert. Instead, he was staking everything on the talisman and martial dao rounds. He only needed a tie this round. A tie would be more than enough. Winning would sweeten the deal. It was very hard, but he could dream.

He was a little depressed by the prospect of losing again. He’d already lost twice at pill dao and beast taming. If he went for three losses in a row, where would his dignity be?

“Those who accomplish great things should not mind small details,” the emperor encouraged himself. “As long as I win this gauntlet, I won’t care about temporary appearances. In this world, martial dao alone reigns supreme.”

“The seventh round. Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s young lord Zhen versus the Shura Retreat’s Emperor Shura!” Yet another proclamation from Emperor Petalpluck kicked off the ensuing round.

The round’s format was somewhat uncommon as well. It tested the parties’ formation-setting methods. Each person was given the same three formations and a ready supply of resources. Both sides began at the same time, and the first to finish was declared the winner. None of the three formations were particularly high rank, but the challenge was still tough. It pushed the formation-setter to his limits.

Emperor Shura wasn’t satisfied with the format of the battle. Just like Emperor Peerless before him, he’d hoped to roll something that involved breaking through formations rather than setting them up. He too wanted to exploit the situation via his cultivation strength. Unfortunately, the round wasn’t going to pan out as he had hoped.

To Jiang Chen, there was nothing wrong with the format. He had spent a modest amount of time over the recent years on formations, acquiring many insights about them in the process. Even large-scale formations were no problem for him, given his wealth of past experience with them. These low rank formations had no technical issues associated with them whatsoever.

He gleaned the three formations' mysteries in only a few passing moments. After he understood the diagram, the next things to do were etching the formation, setting the base, and using the most efficient methodologies to carry everything out. Jiang Chen was very skilled at all of these things.

As a man focused on martial dao, Emperor Shura had a partial investment in formations as well. But he didn't have the comprehensive education that Jiang Chen did on the subject. The round was therefore decided before it even began.

Jiang Chen completed all three when two-thirds of the allotted time had passed. Beside him, Emperor Shura had done only one and a half. The winner was crystal clear.

"The seventh round goes to young lord Zhen, of Sacred Peafowl Mountain!" Emperor Petalpluck marveled at the formations that Jiang Chen had set up. That youth's genius was absolutely monstrous. He was proficient in pill dao, indeed; but he showed off remarkable blessing with beast taming as well. And now the formation skills he was displaying rivaled a true master's. There wasn't a great deal of advanced technique involved with those three formations, but anyone who got them done so quickly was definitely an expert. That much was obvious to anyone watching. Emperor Shura was only half done!

The kindly emperor tossed Jiang Chen a few extra glances. Thunderous cheering erupted from the audience. Jiang Chen had won over the vassals with his incredible performance yet again.

It was essentially a one-man show at this point. Almost no one cared what Emperor Shura was doing. The only thing that emperor seemed to know how to do was lose. It was the same round after round.

Emperor Shura was purple in the face. He was flustered, angry, and spiteful. The poison of jealousy wormed about in his heart like a viper.

"You're amazing, young lord Zhen!"

"You're unbeatable, young lord Zhen!" Several slogans popped out from below. Only a few said them at first, but their voices were quickly swept up in a harmonious river. Hundreds of people, even thousands were shouting their hearts out in a frenzy.

The sound reverberated for at least a mile; the city's temperature visibly increased. Words of praise for Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord echoed through streets big and small. Like a pot of water, Veluriyam Capital was bursting with steam. The results just now had pushed it over its boiling point.

Young lord Zhen had more than his fair share of supporters in Veluriyam Capital before this. However, the news of the battle's results spread rapidly through the streets like wildfire. How could the city not be driven into a fever, given the results? His worship was enhanced by his triple victory over Emperor Shura. His opponent was completely humiliated.

The delirium in the city washed in wave after wave. Emperor Petalpluck and Mountaincrush traded glances, their expressions thoughtful. The sheer extent of young lord Zhen's popularity was stunning. Could Emperor Shura really bully someone like that into submission? Their opinions of the man began to fall.

Chapter 1217: Li Jianchengs Flirtatious Ways

Emperor Vastsea and Emperor Skysplitter had serious looks on their faces as well. Emperor Vastsea especially was a diehard supporter of Emperor Shura. He had done so many things to help Emperor Shura seize power that he was surely one of the most dedicated here. That was why he couldn't accept the great emperor's defeat. Emperor Shura must hold on, because his fate was tied to the great emperor's.

If Emperor Shura succeeded, he succeeded. But if Emperor Shura failed, he failed as well. On that note, if Sacred Peafowl Mountain successfully stabilized their rule over Veluriyam Capital, then a fall from grace for both Emperor Shura and him was only a matter of time. Meanwhile, although Emperor Skysplitter had chosen to follow Emperor Shura, he wasn't that close to Emperor Shura.

"Daoist Vastsea, these people are just bewitched by that boy for the moment. Veluriyam Capital will still be ours to rule if we take this round by force, won't it? In the end, the strong dictates what happens in this world. If we win the martial dao matches, there's nothing they can do to change things."

Seven matches had taken place, but both sides were pretty even considering that the score was three victories, three losses and one draw each. Emperor Shura would be lying if he said that the mountain of cheers didn't affect his mind. However, it would also be a lie if he said that his morale was shaken as a result. It was true that he felt humiliated by the current scores, but he felt that Shura Retreat's chances of winning were growing bigger and bigger.

They could win at least one talisman round. It didn't matter if they lose or tied for the other. Both were acceptable outcomes. The key here was the martial dao match-up. Emperor Shura was absolutely certain that he could win, and he believed the same for Li Jiangcheng when it came to that pretty little doll.

Pill King Ce or Pill King Hui would certainly lose to Emperor Peerless. It didn't matter if Cloudsoar Monarch managed a tie for the last round because Shura Retreat would have already claimed six rounds of victory. As long as Pill King Hui fought Cloudsoar Monarch to a draw, the score would become six victories and two draws in favor of Shura Retreat. No matter how well Sacred Peafowl Mountain performed after that, they could only manage five wins at best.

That also meant that Shura Retreat would win the entire competition. Even better, this was just a conservative estimate. Emperor Shura was very confident in his skill with talismans, and he was certain that he could win his match.

Meanwhile on Sacred Peafowl Mountain's side, Jiang Chen decided to bring Huang'er with him again. Emperor Peerless wasn't absolutely certain that he could win with talismans, not to mention that Jiang Chen didn't wish to send him up to the arena a second time.

"Brother Mo, your ultimate mission is to claim a victory for Sacred Peafowl Mountain in martial dao." Jiang Chen gave Emperor Peerless a reminder because he was afraid that the great emperor would have doubts.

Emperor Peerless understood that Jiang Chen was saving his face in doing this, so he nodded. "Don't worry. I'll bring you my own head if I fail to take a match there."

Emperor Peerless was planning to go all in. As a representative of Veluriyam Capital, it would be humiliating if he couldn't take a single match off the enemy. Frankly, not even Emperor Shura might be

able to beat Emperor Peerless. But since the rules stated that the leaders must fight one another, Emperor Shura's opponent had to be young lord Zhen. Therefore, it would be most humiliating if he couldn't win over a pill king!

Unfortunately, Huang'er's attainment in talismans was so-so at best. Worse, talismans seemed to be Shura Retreat's area of proficiency according to the intelligence they'd gotten. It was the main reason Jiang Chen had decided not to gamble everything on the upcoming subject.

"Huang'er, we're at three wins, three losses, and one draw. We still have a chance even if we lose every round in this subject. The situation is even better for us if we manage a draw and a loss."

Huang'er smiled and responded silently. "I know what your plan is, Brother Chen. We'll do our best no matter what. If we can claim a victory and a loss here, Sacred Peafowl Mountain will have the ultimate victory."

If they managed a victory and a loss in the talisman match, the score would become four-four-one on both sides. This meant that the fights would decide everything. When it came to that, Emperor Peerless was absolutely going to take a match off Shura Retreat.

As for the duel between Huang'er and Li Jiancheng, Emperor Shura probably believed that Li Jiancheng would be the indisputable victor of this round. Jiang Chen knew that that was absolutely not the case. That match would be his "gift" to Emperor Shura and his trump card to win the entire thing. Li Jiancheng might be Emperor Shura's greatest young genius, but he still was inferior to Huang'er of Myriad Abyss Island, especially a Huang'er who was freed from the Generation Binding Curse.

A win in the talisman subject or a draw in the worst case scenario. Of course, two draws are even better. When it came to talismans, Jiang Chen understood that even a draw was a good result for Sacred Peafowl Mountain. If he could claim two draws, then the competition would be completely in favor of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Two draws or a win and a loss meant the exact same in this scenario.

There were many ways a talisman match could be conducted. The most primitive way would be to see who could make the better talisman or who could control their talisman better.

Talismans were actually Jiang Chen's weakness. He had theoretical knowledge thanks to his past memories, but lacked the ability to control them. Pill dao had interested him the most in the past. Although he had researched talismans, he didn't spend too much effort in the subject. He might have millions of years in his lifespan, but he didn't possess limitless mental and physical energy.

It was wondrous enough that he'd been able to achieve what he did in pill dao. He just couldn't pull off the same thing with talismans as well. He had used many talismans since arriving in this world, but he almost never dabbled in talisman creation before. He wasn't lacking in the foundations. On the contrary, his basics in this area were pretty solid, but he was unsure if the basics were enough to win him a match.

Surprisingly, Emperor Shura didn't bring Pill King Hui or Pill King Ce with him this time. Just like the last time, Emperor Shura and his personal disciple, Li Jiancheng, would be attending the match. This lineup surprised Jiang Chen. The young man shot an indifferent glance at the former number one genius of the Ranking of Young Lords.

Li Jiancheng met Jiang Chen's look with complicated feelings. Young lord Zhen had been far inferior to him at the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering. But just a few years later, his opponent had climbed so high that he was on equal footing as his own master. Worse, this bastard was looking at him like how a senior would judge a junior! It made him feel as uncomfortable as having swallowed a fly.

Emperor Shura had personally suffered Jiang Chen's psychological attacks before, so he quickly sent a message to Li Jiancheng. "Ignore him no matter how hard he tries to taunt you, Jiancheng. Solidify your heart and dao."

The warning made Li Jiancheng feel apprehensive. He nodded in response. However, he was quickly engulfed in a flare of jealousy when he moved his gaze to Huang'er. The young woman's temperament astounded him to say the least.

What's so good about that guy? Why is a beauty like her willing to follow him? Li Jiancheng had seen plenty of beautiful women before. In fact, one might say that beautiful women were everywhere in the world of martial dao. However, he had never seen one with a temperament like Huang'er's.

His jealousy was raging like a pyre. Young lord Zhen had taken everything that was good! He had been chosen as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain at a young age, and was the number one idol in Veluriyam Capital. Now, he even had a partner who looked like a living goddess.

For a time, Li Jiancheng felt like murdering Jiang Chen and robbing him of his partner.

He's a lucky guy, that bastard! My master will be fighting him, and this Miss Huang'er will be fighting me in a moment. I must put on a good performance and dominate her utterly in both strength and heart. Li Jiancheng's eyes burned with desire and possessiveness as he stared at Huang'er's amazing body and divinely posture.

"The eighth match is Miss Huang'er of Sacred Peafowl Mountain versus young lord Li Jiancheng of Shura Retreat."

Li Jiancheng worked hard to adjust his feelings so he would be at an optimal state for battle. Walking up the arena steps, the young lord bowed politely at Huang'er and clasped his hands. "How often do you leave Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Miss Huang'er? To think that a beauty like you lives in Veluriyam Capital, and I am somehow unaware of it! Are you actually a descended immortal from the upper realms?"

His statement wasn't really facetious, but it was also a great feat of flattery. He thought that all woman in the world loved praise no matter how extraordinary they were. Unfortunately for him, this was completely useless on Huang'er. She shot him an indifferent glance. "Come at me."

Li Jiancheng wasn't thwarted by a minor failure. He chuckled. "Miss Huang'er, Veluriyam Capital may be in a chaotic state right now, but Shura Retreat is certain to replace Sacred Peafowl Mountain. I truly feel sorry for you, Miss Huang'er."

"Sorry for what?" Huang'er responded indifferently. She was going to ignore his impolite words, but Li Jiancheng had refused to shut his mouth. It displeased her.

“Miss Huang’er, you are an amazing person, but you are being used by that Zhen fellow like a pawn! What a mood killer, he doesn’t know how to treat a lady at all! I just can’t bear to see you fall from grace along with Sacred Peafowl Mountain.” Li Jiancheng pretended to be generous.

Huang’er’s forehead wrinkled. “Just say what you want to say. Stop beating around the bush.”

The young woman had seen plenty of men who put on a mysterious front like Li Jiancheng. And in fact, she’d seen countless men on Myriad Abyss Island far superior to him in every way. She was completely immune to people like him.

Li Jiancheng was surprisingly patient. He smiled leisurely. “Since that is your command, I shall comply to your wishes. Sacred Peafowl’s destiny is at its end, and it is simply unwise to stay in that place any longer. There is a saying that goes ‘a talented person chooses a patron of integrity’. There is just no reason for you to decline alongside Sacred Peafowl Mountain when you’re such an amazing person yourself. But don’t worry, Miss Huang’er. I will protect you in Veluriyam Capital even after Sacred Peafowl Mountain has become history.” Li Jiancheng puffed his chest when he said this most confidently.

Chapter 1218: Cant Lose Another Round

Li Jiancheng was a truly conceited person. He’d always been unparalleled among the younger generation in Veluriyam Capital and didn’t think that he was in any form or manner inferior to young lord Fan.

He remained unconvinced of his inferiority to young lord Zhen as well, even though there was sense of defeat. He didn’t care that the young lord was unrivalled in pill dao and that he’d comprehended all nine Veluriyam Obelisks. To Li Jiancheng, martial dao ruled the world. He believed that his cultivation was much superior to the young lord.

It was why he refused to admit inferiority, even though he was very jealous of the young lord. After seeing how beautiful Huang’er was, he couldn’t resist the urge to take her from the young lord. To him, young lord Zhen was incredibly heaven-defying, but the young lord wasn’t going to have a future in the capital. Therefore, he had no issues with trying to snatch her away. It’d be a waste to bury this unrivalled beauty with young lord Zhen. He’d much rather have her by his side instead.

“Miss Huang, I’m not exaggerating in the slightest. If it’d been anyone else, I wouldn’t have told you this. I simply can’t let someone as charming as Miss Huang’er jump into the fire pit.”

Huang’er smiled wryly to herself. She knew that Li Jiancheng a very conceited person, but where on earth was he getting his confidence from?

“Li Jiancheng, is it?” She was well-cultured and would never overtly express her annoyance. “I don’t know where you get your confidence from, nor can I see any fortunes in Shura Retreat. In listening to you, I gather that you feel an overwhelming sense of superiority to young lord Zhen?”

Li Jiancheng laughed arrogantly. “I admit that young lord Zhen has great talent in pill dao, but this is a world where martial dao is most respected after all...”

Huang’er smiled blandly. “You can spare me your words. What I’m about to say might hurt your feelings, but I feel obligated to inform you this. You might be vastly stronger than your peers, but comparing yourself to young lord Zhen is something that can only be described with three words.”

“What three words?” Li Jiancheng was taken aback.

“Asking for humiliation.”

Li Jiancheng’s face darkened when he heard that and his tone grew ugly. “Miss Huang’er, I don’t know what lies young lord Zhen are feeding you, but I can assure you that his legend will be smashed into pieces after this competition.”

“You have a very strong imagination.” Huang’er smiled blandly. “Alright, I see little reason to speak about this any further. No matter how superior you think you are, compared to him, you’re nothing but a mere bug. You may take pride in your talents, but he’s in a completely different league.”

Li Jiancheng almost flew into a rage.

“Impossible!” He yelled furiously. “Soon we’ll see which one of us is correct! I will make him bow in front of me like a dog, and you shall know which young lord is most superior in Veluriyam Capital!”

Huang’er smiled nonchalantly and said nothing else. However, it was obvious that she thought him an idiot.

Li Jiancheng also knew that any words were useless now. The best thing he could do now was dominate her in the talisman duel. Yes. I’ll focus on conquering her!

As usual, there were multiple ways one could compete with talismans. The topic for Li Jiancheng and Huang’er’s duel was the most basic of them all, talisman making. It was a duel with heavy emphasis on one’s foundation.

Huang’er was sufficiently learned in talismans, but she hadn’t spent a lot of time mastering the subject. The Shura Retreat however, was one of the best in this subject. Li Jiancheng in particular had a great affinity for talismans. Thus, she was disadvantaged from the very start. Eager to show off, Li Jiancheng also performed beyond his normal capabilities. It was only natural that he won the matchup.

“Brother Chen, Shura Retreat has very deep knowledge of talisman dao. Huang’er has let you down.” Huang’er was a little depressed.

Jiang Chen laughed. “I already predicted the worst in the talisman duels.”

Huang’er nodded gently. “Li Jiancheng was incredibly rude and impudent. In the coming martial battle, I’ll show him just how big the world is and take him down a notch.”

Even someone as meek and reserved as her was enraged. This proved how much of a scumbag Li Jiancheng was.

“For the ninth round, young lord Zhen will be competing against Emperor Shura!”

The competition had moved into the ninth round, with the remaining duels extremely crucial. Crowds that sided with Sacred Peafowl Mountain were very solemn as Jiang Chen walked into the arena.

The four monarchs were especially anxious. Out of eight rounds, Sacred Peafowl Mountain had brought home four losses, three wins, and one draw. They were in a very precarious position. If they lost the

ninth round as well, that would be five losses total. The consequences of that would be brought over to the four martial dao duels.

Even though everybody had a lot of faith in young lord Zhen, the four monarchs didn't believe that their young lord would be able to defeat Emperor Shura. To the four monarchs, that duel was a definite loss and would raise the total number of losses to six. Moreover, they didn't know much about Miss Huang'er's battle prowess. She didn't seem like she'd be able to defeat Li Jiancheng in the martial dao duel.

Adding up all these factors, Sacred Peafowl Mountain really did seem to be in a tough spot. The only thing they knew for certain was Emperor Peerless' victory in the martial dao duel. There was little chance that the rest of the duelists, including Cloudsoar Monarch, would win.

If Cloudsoar Monarch fought hard, there might be a chance that he'd end up in a draw. But a draw wouldn't be enough to significantly affect the results. Sacred Peafowl Mountain was in a great disadvantage no matter how one looked at things.

Don't lose this match! The crowd from Sacred Peafowl Mountain quietly prayed. However, could young lord Zhen really defeat a talisman master like Emperor Shura? No one knew for certain.

Everyone would have more confidence in young lord Zhen if the duel was related to pill dao or formations. However, they really didn't have much faith when the duel was related to talismans.

Jiang Chen was as calm as ever. His goal was clear. He'd make this round a draw. But even if he failed, it still wouldn't be the end of the world.

Emperor Shura was extremely confident this time as well. He was rather well-learned in talismans.

"Young lord Zhen, has it occurred to you yet that if you lose this round, Sacred Peafowl Mountain's loss will essentially be guaranteed?" Emperor Shura's words hadn't come out of nowhere. If Jiang Chen lost this duel, his faction would possess five losses, three victories, and one draw. There would be a lot of pressure in the successive martial duels.

Of course, Jiang Chen was the kind of person that performed his best in stressful situations. He kept a straight face despite Emperor Shura's provocations and mocked back without reservation. "You should keep your mouth shut until you finally win. You've been boasting again and again, but if I remember correctly, you haven't won a single round against me yet, have you?"

Emperor Shura's face darkened. Indeed, he hadn't won in either pill dao, beast taming, or formations. He'd been certain of his victory in beast taming, but an unexpected turn of events had blindsided him. He no longer dared to be too confident of his victory.

The topic for the next duel was drawn, revealing itself to be etching of talisman runes. They had to draw ten talisman runes within a given timeframe. This was a pleasant surprise for Jiang Chen.

"Remember, the party who completes the most runes within the given time is the winner. If both parties are able to complete the task, the first to finish is the winner. If both parties finish at the same time, it shall be a draw." Emperor Petalpluck announced the rules.

Jiang Chen felt a great boost in confidence when he heard the topic. Rune etching was the most fundamental part of creating talismans. The runes etched onto talismans were very similar to the ones found in formations. These runes formed the backbone of talismans and provided large amounts of energy.

There were some differences between a talisman rune and a formation one, but some similarities as well. Rune etching was part of constructing a formation and took up only one tiny segment in the layout. But for talismans, rune etching was the most essential step.

In order to create a powerful talisman, one had to draw the runes before they could transfer their energy into it. The process was the same for any talisman. If the runes were drawn incorrectly, the entire talisman would be nothing but a waste of paper.

Jiang Chen already possessed some knowledge on talismans and was extremely knowledgeable in formations. A competition in rune drawing was definitely most advantageous for him.

He went into a state of deep concentration as soon as the duel began. He was a little rusty at the beginning, but grew better after completing the first two talismans. By his third talisman, he'd found his groove and temporarily entered a trance. As though aided by a deity, he grew faster and more skilled as he went on. The knowledge from his previous life soon came into play. Inspiration flooded endlessly into his mind.

The crowd from Sacred Peafowl Mountain kept their eyes glued to the arena. They were so incredibly nervous that their hearts had leaped into their throats. There was no room for any error. The enormous stone weighing down on their hearts grew heavier and heavier with the passage of time. The stress was almost debilitating. Jiang Chen was the only one immune from all of this. He was so focused that he'd completely forgotten that the fate of the entire capital was in his hands.

Chapter 1219: The Martial Dao Rounds Begin

Emperor Shura had invested countless years in studying talismans, so rune etching was just the basics to him. He was angry that his side had suffered three consecutive losses at the hands of Sacred Peafowl Mountain and wanted to turn things around here.

The great emperor was very intimidating when he was bent on revenge. He injected one hundred percent of his concentration into the task at hand. So far, everything was progressing smoothly. He could practically see the flag of victory waving at him as he completed the final strokes of his talisman.

Emperor Shura inspected his talisman carefully to make sure that he hadn't committed any mistakes. After a long sigh of relief, pride surged. He was certain that he was going to claim victory this round. He shot a mocking glance in Jiang Chen's direction.

However, the sight nearly caused him to jump from fright. The repulsive Pill King Zhen was actually rising to his feet! What does this mean? Has he finished as well? As the terrifying thought flashed through his mind, Emperor Shura subconsciously rose to his feet as well and declared at nearly the same time as Pill King Zhen, "I'm done."

The scene stunned everyone who was present. They'd completed their task at the same time? Wasn't that a bit too much of a coincidence? Also, was it just them, or had young lord Zhen risen first despite speaking at nearly the same time?

If both sides had completed their tasks, then their completion time was identical. Was it to be another draw? Was it even possible to tie in a talisman match? The vassals watching beneath the arena were stupefied by this turn of events. Talisman etching was a complicated process, and someone was always slower than the other. It was an unbelievable coincidence for this round to end in a draw.

Meanwhile, Emperor Shura was feeling a little faint. How did young lord Zhen finish so quickly? Impossible. He couldn't have! I've also never heard that he was exceptionally talented in talismans. He must have made his declaration in haste!

He had every intention to win this round and was extremely annoyed by the turn of events. He reminded, "Daoist Petalpluck, please inspect the talismans thoroughly. An inferior talisman can't be allowed to pass the round."

Emperor Shura thought that young lord Zhen must have sacrificed quality for speed.

Unfortunately, Emperor Petalpluck gave a disappointing answer when he finished the inspection. "I've inspected the talismans and judge that both entries are completely eligible. I didn't find any flaws in either one of the talismans."

"What?" Emperor Shura's expression changed so drastically, it was as if a heavy hammer had struck him. He was filled with regret and self-blame. "Why, why did I waste time on inspecting my work? I could've won if I hadn't done that!"

Emperor Shura had purposely double-checked his etchings. Although the confirmation didn't take too much time, time was still inevitably lost during the process. Who could've known that a tiny delay like this was all it took to turn a victory into a draw?

He was green with regret. If he'd lost because of less skill, then that was that. A bit depressing, but a fair loss was a fair loss. This time however, victory had slipped right through his fingers! He'd allowed the opponent to turn his victory into a draw! But the result was already set in stone. He couldn't change this no matter how regretful he felt.

Emperor Petalpluck declared. "The ninth round is a draw!"

The word "draw" hurt Emperor Shura deeply. He didn't understand what'd possessed him to inspect his work earlier. Talisman etching wasn't a difficult task, and he hadn't found any flaws after double checking. So why had he lost confidence in that crucial instant? Had the three consecutive losses really cause a crack to appear in his dao heart? He had to admit that that was exactly the case, no matter how much he loathed to admit it.

"Don't be discouraged, master. We are at four wins, two draws and three losses right now. Victory will still be hours as long as we win two rounds in martial dao." Li Jiancheng was actually comforting Emperor Shura instead.

The great emperor knew that the situation was still under control. He was just annoyed that he'd thrown away a victory just like that. His annoyance at his own cowardice far exceeded his disappointment.

Meanwhile, at the side of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, everyone except Jiang Chen and Huang'er had low morale. The score was three wins, two draws and four losses for Sacred Peafowl Mountain. They were now teetering in a precarious position. The remaining four rounds had to do with martial dao, and no one felt like Sacred Peafowl Mountain had much of a shot at victory.

Jiang Chen and Huang'er immediately noticed the heavy atmosphere enveloping their camp the moment they returned.

"What's wrong? Why're you all looking so dejected?" Jiang Chen asked with a light tone. He didn't want to see his people in low spirits.

"Young lord, we're at a severe disadvantage right now." Cloudsoar Monarch was a participant himself, and sounded very guilty right now. "It's all my fault. My poor skill dragged everyone down."

Beside him, Emperor Peerless piped in, "You absolutely mustn't say that, Cloudsoar. None of us except young lord Zhen and Miss Huang'er were able to produce good results either. You aren't the only one who's at fault. We all are."

Jiang Chen hurriedly consoled them. "The competition isn't over yet, is it? Don't you think we'll be able to turn things around in the last four rounds?"

Of course everyone wanted to turn things around, but their chances were low to say the least. In fact, it would be more appropriate to call it a near impossible task.

"Chin up, everyone. We're at a disadvantage only because we're unprepared, and they are. They even recruited outside help for this. Is there anyone who seriously believes that Pill King Ce and Pill King Hui are Emperor Shura's subordinates?"

Personally, Jiang Chen didn't believe this at all. If Shura Retreat had challenged Sacred Peafowl Mountain fair and square, talismans would've been the one and only area they had an advantage in. Pill King Ce and Pill King Hui were the main reasons Sacred Peafowl Mountain was pushed to the edge of defeat right now. Emperor Shura himself was doing poorly.

Plumscore Monarch muttered hatefully, "Emperor Shura lost three out of four rounds and tied one round against our young lord. Where does he find the courage and face to keep up this farce? Suppose we lose the competition, does he really have the face to rule Veluriyam Capital? Does he really think himself qualified after this is all over?"

Emperor Shura had lost three rounds in a row at the hands of a young genius. They were undoubtedly major blemishes in the great emperor's life history. Even if he managed to take control of Veluriyam Capital in the future, it would be very difficult for him to convince the masses to obey him.

But Jiang Chen smiled and pressed downward with his hands. He looked at Emperor Peerless with determination. "Old Brother Mo, you absolutely must win a round in the martial dao match, alright?"

"I guarantee it." Emperor Peerless was very firm.

“Cloudsoar Monarch, you’ll be facing Pill King Ce or Pill King Hui. Neither of them are great emperors yet. It’ll be nice if you can beat them, but if you can’t, do you think you can get a tie for us?”

Cloudsoar Monarch slapped his chest and declared, “I won’t have the face to stay in Sacred Peafowl Mountain if I fail to claim even a tie, young lord!”

“Good. This means that we still have a chance.”

Jiang Chen shot a glance at Huang’er. He was absolutely certain that his partner was going to claim victory. Li Jiancheng’s head might be in the clouds, but he was absolutely inferior to Huang’er when it came to martial dao.

He didn’t have anymore time to explain things because Emperor Petapluck was already declaring, “The next rounds are the climax everyone’s looking forward to. Both sides, please send out your participants of the martial dao match. Remember, the leader will fight the leader, the follower will fight the follower, and the true disciple will fight the true disciple. You are not allowed to switch up the order.”

The rule was set to prevent either faction from playing petty tricks and scoring a cheap victory.

The first person to emerge from Emperor Shura’s faction was Pill King Hui. Pill King Hui was slightly stronger than Pill King Ce.

Shura Retreat was obviously making a small gamble here. They were hoping that Sacred Peafowl Mountain would send out Cloudsoar Monarch first. However, Jiang Chen declared with a smile on his face. “Go take this first round for us, Old Brother Mo.”

Sacred Peafowl Mountain needed a morale boost because of their disadvantage. Jiang Chen hoped that the great emperor would be able to take the first round by storm and get Sacred Peafowl Mountain off to a good start.

Emperor Peerless was also the participant with the highest chance of victory out of all of them. Although he hadn’t refined the Kunpeng bloodline yet, the great emperor should have no problems defeating a peak emperor expert.

“For the tenth round, Emperor Peerless from Sacred Peafowl Mountain versus Pill King Hui from Shura Retreat!” Emperor Petapluck declared loudly. “In the arena, the heavens decide your fate, so I’ll serve you all a reminder. Surrender if you find your strength lacking, or you may not have a chance in the heat of the battle.”

Emperor Petapluck hoped that the participants would be able to keep their cool. He didn’t wish to see any casualties after the match was done.

Pill King Hui was very annoyed when he saw that Emperor Peerless was Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s first choice. He was hoping to take a round off Cloudsoar Monarch, but Emperor Peerless? He would be very lucky to survive this fight with his pride.

Emperor Peerless had felt humiliated ever since losing the formation match. He was going to do everything in his power to claim a victory here.

“Come at me.” Emperor Peerless declared with a deep look. He mercilessly pressured his opponent with his great emperor aura.

Pill King Hui was a peak emperor expert, so he barely managed to retain his composure as he clasped his hands together. "Please be merciful."

His opponent was already showing weakness before they even started fighting, but Emperor Peerless didn't allow himself to be moved by Pill King Hui. As the saying went, all was fair in the martial dao world. Pill King Hui could just be trying to distract him.

Chapter 1220: Clawing Back Forcefully

Sure, dark horses arose occasionally in martial bouts. There were examples of peak emperor realm cultivators defeating great emperors. The rarity didn't make it impossible. There were always some unique geniuses that conquered in the face of adversity. Some even performed reverse sweeps.

However, such occurrences were fairly rare as a whole. Whenever an instance of this did occur, it would be widely publicized as a story to encourage the weak. They were usually labeled miracles, and rightly so.

Pill King Hui was a master of many subjects, but he was no miracle-maker when it came to martial dao. More importantly, Emperor Peerless wasn't a great emperor fresh into his power. His fame was long-standing and well documented. The great emperor distinguished himself even amongst his peers. How could a man who led the wandering cultivator community be so easily defeated?

Pill King Hui had perhaps entertained delusions of grandeur before the fight began. But when he engaged in combat against the great emperor, he sadly realized his deluded naivete. They were not on the same level.

Emperor Shura had given him an Imperial Advent Defense Talisman and Onslaught Talisman as temporary boosts to his strength. But in the heat of the fight, he hesitated. The talismans he had received were extremely precious. He'd planned on using them, but was there really a need to?

Given the state of things, he could maybe last two hours more even with them. Unfortunately, the time limit for these rounds was four hours. Even if he wanted to struggle towards a tie, he had to last two more hours. Could he hold out for that long?

Obviously not.

His body wasn't necessarily even able to maintain both talismans at the same time. Moreover, they only lasted two hours each. He had absolutely nothing for the two remaining hours. Was he going to struggle against a thousand-year great emperor with ninth level emperor realm?

That was simply absurd!

Pill King Hui was reasonably talented, but he had no supernatural gifts with martial dao. He didn't have the capital to fight someone so much stronger than him. He didn't have any confidence for doing so against Emperor Peerless especially.

Emperor Shura saw it too. Before Emperor Peerless, the moderately capable Pill King Hui had no chance whatsoever. It was a luxury of luxuries to hope for four hours of resistance, unless the pill king had some trump card up his sleeve.

The battle yet continued.

Though Emperor Peerless didn't go for the throat right away, he nevertheless attacked with tremendous ferocity. His emperor domain took the initiative immediately, and within several exchanges, he had full control of the flow of battle. The emperor's display of strength comforted the four monarchs a little and astounded them as well.

"As expected of a great emperor! Pill King Hui is like a child before him."

"How could it be any other way? It's always been said that Emperor Peerless is one of the forerunners of the wandering cultivators. I didn't expect his cultivation to be this impenetrable. He hasn't used any of his signature moves yet, but I don't think he's very much worse than Emperor Peafowl himself."

Emperor Peafowl was one of the strongest great emperors in the Upper Eight Regions. If Emperor Peerless was comparable to him, that made the wandering emperor's abilities notable indeed.

"Emperor Peerless can definitely win this one," confirmed Plumscore Monarch.

"Yes. If Emperor Peerless wins this one, then we will be tied once more. Four wins, four losses, four ties," smiled Chronobalance Monarch.

Wildfox Monarch smiled wryly. "I'm not worried at all about Emperor Peerless, but I'm not sure about the three other rounds. Even Brother Cloudsoar can't guarantee he'll win his bout. As amazing of a genius as young lord Zhen is, against Emperor Shura, he'll still..."

He cut off mid-sentence. The score was even, but things weren't looking good for Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

"Let's not be too down," said Chronobalance. "Young lord Zhen is very composed. Perhaps he has a plan up his sleeve... a few unplayed aces, maybe? Or what if Miss Huang'er defeats Li Jiancheng? Everything is possible in the world of martial dao!"

Miss Huang'er, defeat Li Jiancheng?

Wildfox Monarch glanced between the two in puzzlement. He couldn't see how the girl had the ability to defeat Shura's top disciple. He was uncertain if young lord Zhen himself would be able to, in fact.

Not that they were intentionally belittling him, but the young lord had obtained only eighth in the Ranking of Young Lords. Li Jiancheng had ranked first! That in itself wasn't a decider, but young lord Zhen was much younger than Li Jiancheng as well. They hadn't made their way in the world for nearly the same amount of time. It was quite likely that young lord Zhen wasn't as mature in martial dao as Shura's young lord.

Over at the opposing side, Li Jiancheng's eyebrows were knotted into a frown. "Master, didn't you give two Imperial Advent talismans to Pill King Hui? Why isn't he using them?"

Emperor Shura smiled faintly, but said nothing. He understood what the pill king was thinking. If there was no victory to be had regardless, then the man was probably reluctant to use the talismans so wastefully.

A few moments more scarcely passed before Pill King Hui proclaimed loudly, "Hold on, Emperor Peerless. I'm not as skilled as you. I admit defeat!"

The pill king had enough self-awareness to know that he would die in another fifteen minutes if the fight continued. Emperor Peerless showed no signs of pulling his punches. He could even feel the older man's murderous intent. If not for the fact that the emperor cared about his reputation, he would have used his signature moves immediately to cut the pill king down on the spot. But that was no longer possible, given the surrender.

"Turning tail and running, hmm? Did Emperor Shura tell you to do that? Or maybe it was Emperor Pillzenith?" Emperor Peerless smiled coldly. He'd heard Jiang Chen say that Pill King Hui and Ce were exceptionally likely to be Emperor Pillzenith's proteges, sent to assist Emperor Shura. The emperor spared no niceties for the subordinates of his mortal enemy.

Pill King Hui gasped for breath. His hair was caked with sweat, and he was in quite bad shape. He felt like he'd just survived a brush with death. Not daring to fire back any witty retorts at Emperor Peerless's mockery, he made a straightforward cupped fist salute in surrender.

Emperor Peerless no longer had an outlet to vent his frustration. Still, he was a man who cared about decorum. He wasn't going to hunt a man down after his opponent's voluntary retreat. He represented Sacred Peafowl Mountain, and had to mind his manners in light of his faction.

"The tenth round goes to Sacred Peafowl Mountain's Emperor Peerless," announced Emperor Petalpluck.

Emperor Peerless nodded. His victory today was matter-of-fact; there was nothing worth celebrating. A faint smile was the extent of his expression. He stepped off the arena without further ceremony.

"I succeeded, young lord. Too bad I couldn't cut him down on the spot." Emperor Peerless sounded mildly displeased about allowing his opponent the chance to surrender.

Jiang Chen didn't mind, though. "Winning in the first martial dao round will help morale. Thank you for your valuable contribution, Old Brother Mo."

The 'help' to morale was just a consolation prize at best. Real strength was necessary in the martial dao arena. No matter how high morale was, it wouldn't matter without sufficient strength to match.

Still, Cloudsoar felt a bit more confidence creep into his heart. "Pill King Hui seems to be a bit stronger than Pill King Ce," he heard Jiang Chen say to him. "Maybe they thought we would send you out first. Your second opponent has already been decided. It's the other pill king."

"Don't worry, young lord," Cloudsoar nodded. "I will at least tie this round. Of course, I will also try my best to win."

The monarch didn't dare boast about ensuring victory. After all, nobody knew what Pill King Ce had up his sleeve either. It was better to maintain a confident tie, then attempt to break through a standstill after that was assured. Having decided on his strategy, Cloudsoar Monarch strode toward the arena with large steps.

"Eleventh round, Sacred Peafowl Mountain's Cloudsoar Monarch versus the Shura Retreat's Pill King Ce!" declared Emperor Petalpluck.

Cloudsoar Monarch had some supporters amongst the vassals. He had been at Emperor Peafowl's side for a very long time, a kind of steward at Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Many visiting vassals had gone through him on their visits to Emperor Peafowl. Therefore, it was natural for them to harbor a healthy amount of respect for him. Plenty of passionate applause could be heard as he made his way forward. This gave him extra confidence.

"Sacred Peafowl Mountain has really run out of talent, huh? They're sending out someone like you?" Pill King Ce looked over his opponent derisively, his expression snide.

Cloudsoar was a worldly veteran, and easily saw through his opponent's provocative ruse. "I'm one of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's four monarchs," he sneered back. "It's my right and responsibility to represent my faction here. On the contrary, I'd like to know where you crawled out from, my questionable opponent!"

"Hmph. Right and responsibility, eh? Then let me show you how weak you four monarchs really are!" Though Pill King Ce was weaker than Pill King Hui, he was no slouch at psychological warfare.