

Three Realms 1241

Chapter 1241: Jiang Chens Decision

The group reached a common consensus after some internal discussion. They greatly liked Jiang Chen's future plans for the capital. They understood how Pillfire City had come to surpass Veluriyam Capital after hearing his explanations and why the gap between the two factions was growing wider and wider.

The next day, the vassals gathered at Sacred Peafowl Mountain to discuss the founding of the pill dao academy. They were all very enthused, to say the least.

"Young lord Zhen, you must be the headmaster of the academy! We have complete faith in your knowledge of pill dao!"

"Yeah! We're in complete favor of the academy construction! The Bluesky Nation will contribute fifty million saint spirit stones to the cause!"

"Heh! The Great Qin Nation will contribute fifty million as well!"

"So will we!" The vassals were more than happy to donate generously. They were the leaders of their own respective factions. Veluriyam Capital oversaw a vast and expansive territory, rich with resources and fertile lands. Thus, many of them were quite wealthy.

What they lacked instead were opportunities and knowledge, and the pill dao academy would fill precisely that spot. Once the academy was built, their children and disciples would have easy admission as they'd contributed to its construction.

The crowd was riled up. Jiang Chen smiled faintly and listened to their chatter without interruption. Their enthusiasm was clearly due to personal reasons. By donating generously, they were hoping that they'd gain some recognition and benefits for their own factions.

He wasn't too bothered by that as it was proof that they were still hopeful and wanted something from Veluriyam Capital. Words alone wouldn't be enough to unite Veluriyam. He'd have to fulfill their personal desires and combine various self-interests into a common goal. Mutualism was the answer to a tightly knit society.

He'd combine common goals, his personal charisma, and various other governing techniques to propel Veluriyam towards a more prosperous and well-governed future.

The discussion was still roaring strong after three days and three nights. Various titans of Veluriyam Capital were also involved in the discussion. Finally, there was a unanimous decision to build the academy on the Luoja Ridge as it had fertile lands and good fengshui.

It was the region where spirit herbs were widely grown and harvested. The mountain ridge spanned thousands of miles and was located in the northwestern region of Veluriyam Capital. It acted as a natural barrier, shielding the capital from any threats. It was also a hunting ground.

Building a academy there was clearly the best choice and an enormous undertaking that wouldn't be completed in a day. Fortunately, the vassals were more than willing to donate. The great emperor factions were also very generous and supportive of Jiang Chen's proposal.

Money was no longer an issue, but the same couldn't be said for labor and materials. Normally, vast territories like Veluriyam Capital wouldn't have an issue with either as long as money was in abundance. However, Jiang Chen wasn't going to be half-hearted and lazy if he was going to build a academy.

He wanted the academy to be big and monumental. It would become a sacred ground for pill dao in the Upper Eight Regions! Jiang Chen had very lofty goals. He wasn't just aiming to snatch the crown away from Pillfire City. It would become the new hub for the entire human domain.

Veluriyam Capital would come to mind first whenever pill dao was brought up, not Pillfire City. Thus, he couldn't afford to skimp on the construction of the academy. He'd much rather extend the construction period a little.

"Everyone, I've long contemplated whether I should found a academy. If I'm going to build one, I intend to make it the holy land of pill dao. My goal is to make everyone think about our academy instead of Pillfire City whenever pill dao crosses their mind. This isn't something we can achieve in one day, but I hope to gain your support in this matter. I'm but one man. No matter how exceptional I am, I can never achieve this goal without your strenuous support!"

Jiang Chen spoke with utmost sincerity. He glanced at the crowd and continued. "I know that you may still have some doubts and think that my ambitions are incredibly unrealistic, but that's perfectly fine. Keep your doubts and give me the chance to prove you wrong. After I was made young lord, Emperor Peafowl tried to entrust Veluriyam Capital to me. I was too young then and never gave him a clear answer. With his disappearance, Veluriyam Capital is in greater peril than ever. If I don't do anything, we'll be targeted by the other factions like a piece of dangling meat. I'm not trying to raise false alarms. When Emperor Peafowl was around, no outsider would ever dare spy on our capital. However, snakes and rats have come poking with the rumors. Do any of you really believe that Emperor Pillzenith and the Holy Emperor were merely passing through during the Vassal Meeting?"

"Young lord Zhen makes a good point. Emperor Peafowl has always been our guardian. He's the very reason we've led such peaceful lives all these years. Now that the rumors have spread, trouble will surely come our way. Young lord Zhen is building the academy to unite the various factions in Veluriyam Capital and to demonstrate our resilience to the outside world!" Emperor Petalpluck spoke solemnly.

"Yes. We shouldn't leave anything to chance. Only after leaving home will one realize what they once had. Emperor Shura has deserted our capital. Thanks to his abilities, he can defect to any faction he wants to. However, do you think he'll ever receive the same prestige he had here? I think not!" Emperor Void piped in meaningfully. "The same applies to all of you. If the capital collapses, you'll never be granted the same title again even if you defect to another faction. No one will take a stray dog seriously."

The vassals nodded as they reflected upon those words. This wasn't a hoax. They were respectable vassals in Veluriyam Capital, but this title would be theirs no longer if the capital collapsed. Even if it was, their position would no longer be as secure as before. Also, they'd have to adapt to a new environment and face all kinds of prejudice and bigotry. Life would be so much better in their current territory.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "Everyone, you needn't overly worry. Veluriyam Capital will not collapse easily as we've been blessed with endless fortune since the ancient times. Moreover, Emperor Peafowl gave

us a contingency plan before he left. It'll give us moments of respite during dire times. Haven't we already seen how Emperor Pillzenith ran away with his tail between his legs this time?"

This 'contingency plan' was a white lie. Jiang Chen knew that he needed to comfort his people during such times of insecurity. The best way to do that was to borrow Emperor Peafowl's name.

Even though the emperor hadn't given Jiang Chen any contingency plans, he did give important advice on how to rule the capital. Jiang Chen was told to rope in the other great emperor factions to keep Emperor Shura in check.

That particular angle had worked nicely. Without the complete support of the other emperors, Emperor Shura didn't have enough momentum to stir up much of a storm. It was a testament to Emperor Peafowl's judgement.

Jiang Chen suddenly turned towards Emperor Peerless. "Old Brother Mo, I have something to ask of you."

"Old Mo is currently Sacred Peafowl Mountain's honorary esteemed elder. Young lord Zhen, please feel free to speak your mind." Emperor Peerless emphasized Jiang Chen's status by publicly calling him 'young lord Zhen' instead of 'younger brother'.

"Old Brother Mo, since you were a renowned titan amongst the wandering cultivators, do you think that it's possible for us to host a gathering in the upcoming months?"

"A gathering of wandering cultivators?" Emperor Peerless was taken aback. He pondered deeply.

"They're proud and unbridled. It won't be easy to get them to attend. Unless..."

"Unless I tempt them with an offer they can't refuse?" Jiang Chen smiled meaningfully.

"Yes. I'm rather familiar with the wandering cultivator community. I have an old group of brothers that will surely heed my call, but I daren't place any bets on my ability to summon the rest of them."

Jiang Chen nodded. "Enticing them with profit is the best course of action."

Wandering cultivators were very different from cultivators belonging to a sect. They were more self-minded and independent. Or in other words, egoistic and self-centered.

Most of them had very cautious and proud personalities, and would never let themselves be ordered around. It was the biggest difference between them and the members of a sect.

One couldn't rely on power or authority to gather wandering cultivators. Only those who possessed great charm could do such a thing. They did exist, but they were far and few between. Profit was the best and surest way to summon the wandering cultivators.

"Young lord, why are you hosting a wandering cultivator gathering?" Emperor Peerless suddenly asked.

"I won't lie. Veluriyam Capital is in desperate need of talent and there are many crouching tigers and hidden dragons amongst the wandering cultivator community..."

Emperor Peerless smiled wryly before Jiang Chen could finish his sentence. "Young lord Zhen, surely you're not planning to recruit them?" His expression clearly implied that this would be no easy matter.

“Then I’ll cut straight to the point. There’s no lack of powerful experts amongst the wanderers, but the stronger they are, the more eccentric and difficult to handle they are. The mediocre ones are of no use either. Like a pile of loose sand, they can’t be relied on during a crisis. Loyalty is very hard to come by among the powerful. Truthfully, I don’t think that it’s a good idea to recruit them...”

Emperor Peerless was the only one who dared speak in such a blunt and straightforward way.

Chapter 1242: The Three Benefits

The others looked at Jiang Chen confusedly. Was young lord Zhen mad enough to pick a solution at random? Countless powerful factions had attempted to gather the strength of wandering cultivators for their own over the ages, but success was exceedingly rare.

There were more wandering cultivators than fish in the sea. A single sect or faction couldn’t possibly take them all. Moreover, they tended to be an unfriendly bunch. Some were eccentric and bad-natured, others overly competitive and tough to handle.

A single wandering cultivator often fared better alone than a disciple from some sect. But in a group, they were nothing more than a ragtag bunch; hardly comparable to the disciplined team of disciples from the same sect working together.

If a wandering cultivator went up against a sect disciple who was on the same cultivation level and powerful treasures were banned on both sides, then the former would likely win out.

Their world was a crueller one. Wandering cultivators were forced to drift about, risking their lives at every second. Their survival ability and instincts far surpassed those of a sheltered student’s.

But things would turn out rather differently if it was a hundred against a hundred. With equal cultivation levels, the wandering cultivators would be slaughtered by the sect disciples without question.

Sect disciples were strenuously trained from childhood; they were instilled with a sense of the group and knew how to coordinate with each other. Wandering cultivators, on the other hand, tended to fend for themselves.

That was why relying on them was considered a universally foolish maneuver. Many sects and experts had met with failure in their attempts. Too many to count, in fact. Some were even brought to ruin because of it. Wandering cultivators were just too complex a group. Neither martial prowess nor power alone could regulate them.

Maintaining his smile, Jiang Chen met his audience’s eyes openly. Confusion was plain in their gazes, but he didn’t mind their temporary misunderstanding. “Carry on, Old Brother Mo,” he urged. “Let’s discuss the problems associated with that idea. We can decide whether it’s doable or not afterwards.”

“There are many problems, as I’m sure you understand. The crux of it is that wandering cultivators are hard to govern. They prefer to be the masters of their own destinies. The whole will always be less than the sum of the individuals. I’m a wandering cultivator myself, so I’m not intentionally besmirching them. A singular wandering cultivator is stronger than most sect disciples, but a group of them is far inferior.

“Experts through the ages have dreamed about gathering wandering cultivators’ support, but success is infrequent. The great war in ancient times was one such occasion. Wandering cultivator experts accomplished myriad heroic deeds in that conflict.” Emperor Petalpluck was a deft historian.

Ancient times? That was too far in the distant past for most. Only a few scant volumes of literature remained from back then.

Jiang Chen nodded. “I know the disadvantages associated with them. But nevertheless, I trust that there will be a good number of wandering cultivators who may be convinced. You, for example, Old Brother Mo... or the Geng brothers. You are characters at the pinnacle of the wandering cultivator world. There are many characteristics unique to you that experts from sects don’t share. You’re unconventional, faithful to promises, unpretentious, and straightforward. You make your allegiances extremely clear.”

Mo Wushuang roared with laughter. “That is true for many sect experts as well! You can’t stick with generalizations.”

“You’re right! It’s wrong to make sweeping statements about anything. Therefore, it’s not too much to expect there to be gold hidden amongst wandering cultivators, people with unfulfilled ambitions. There are three reasons for convening this meeting of wandering cultivators. I’ll go over them shortly.”

His audience grew serious upon hearing those words. They were ready to listen.

“First of all, the wandering cultivator world has many heroic men like Old Brother Mo and the Geng brothers. We’re good friends, and they’re all terrifyingly proficient. This shows that there are crouching tigers and hidden dragons even amongst wandering cultivators. Even a few fragments of gold sifted from a sandy riverbed is more than a worthwhile effort.

“Second, consider that they can spread news throughout the world like no other. If we at the Veluriyam Capital are founding our own pill dao academy, our endeavor would be greatly enhanced with their assistance.

“Third, we’re mired in rumor and gossip at the moment. No matter how we attempt to clarify things, the outside world believes that Emperor Peafowl is now gone. They’ll see us as easy targets. We must use this opportunity to announce to them that they are incorrect. That quite the opposite, Veluriyam Capital will climb to greater heights still.”

Jiang Chen’s explanation was quite detailed. Everyone sank into silence after they heard it. After mulling it over, the young lord’s words made a lot of sense.

“I didn’t expect you to have pondered the issue so deeply, young lord Zhen,” mused Mo Wushuang. “If you’re not planning to recruit a large group of wandering cultivators under your banner, I think it’s doable. Otherwise, there’ll be too much chaff mixed in with the wheat. It wouldn’t be worth our while.”

“It’s ever been the case that a small elite group is superior to a large, undisciplined collective. It’s better for soldiers to be trained than numerous, and generals sly than bold. Veluriyam Capital isn’t so poorly off as to need a large group of wandering cultivators to embolden us. I simply felt that there are many promising men within their ranks. They have the possibility of a far brighter future ahead of them, but they are lost in the world and wasting away their youth. Their talents would be better used elsewhere.”

Mo Wushuang looked very thoughtful. He thought back to everything that Jiang Chen had given him, kunpeng blood included, and found himself in complete agreement.

"Don't worry, young lord. This old man will use all of my reputation to find you a few useful comrades," he declared.

"If your reputation is on the line, they're sure to come," Jiang Chen smiled. "That's not what I want, though. I want the city to have something that attracts their attendance."

"From what you're saying, young lord Zhen," Emperor Void suddenly piped up. "You want to enhance the grandness of the festivities?"

"Yes, the grander the better. If we can draw out a few antiquated hermits from their hiding places, so much the better. We want to make the best show of it that we can!"

"Yes. The more jubilant the affair, the greater the influence. Just as you said, young lord Zhen, Veluriyam Capital matches up evenly against Pillfire City in essentially every way imaginable, but the latter has focused on extending their influence. Meanwhile, we've been too demure about it as a whole. My guess is that you're using this meeting as a springboard to promote Veluriyam to the world at large," laughed Emperor Coiling Dragon.

"Exactly so. Veluriyam Capital must gain in influence. It must expand its reach. People from all the world should flock to it out of natural attraction. The reason that Pillfire City is so bustling is because of all the events that occur there. They've built up a lot of goodwill and authority. The satellite cities around it at the moment have intrinsically recognized their dominance."

"If that's the case, then there's a necessity for holding this meeting after all."

"How do we attract wandering cultivators here, young lord Zhen? Dangle profit before them? We'd have to spend a king's ransom to draw them in from all over the world."

"Profit is perfectly fine," nodded Jiang Chen. "But it's not for everyone. Something that everyone has ends up being worthless."

He smiled in cool confidence as he went on. "I only need to offer three things to bring them in. Firstly, the Pinecrane Pill."

"What? The Pinecrane Pill?" Everyone was stunned at the young lord's generosity. Was he giving away such a precious pill for free?

"Young lord Zhen, I thought you said that it was rare beyond comparison? Is it alright for you to simply donate it away?"

"No, not at all," Jiang Chen shook his head. "I only need to announce that there will be an opportunity to purchase the Pinecrane Pill."

Purchase? His audience's eyes collectively lit up. The Pinecrane Pill was a true miracle pill. Even giants who've secreted themselves would be tempted from their hideaways. Once word got out about the pill's amazing effects, the entire world of cultivation would be up in arms. News of the Longevity Pill had astounded people everywhere, and a new and improved version of the same could only produce better results.

Mo Wushuang slapped his thigh. "Genius. I think that idea is sound. What else?"

"Second, we will offer enrollment in the pill dao academy. If we open some slots to wandering cultivators, do you think that it will garner their interest?"

There were blinks all around, then gleaming eyes one by one.

"That's beyond tempting, young lord Zhen. Your pill dao is legendary in the Upper Eight Regions. Your fame surpasses Pill King Ji Lang's to easily rival Emperor Pillzenith's own. Wandering cultivators have always lacked avenues to better themselves, if they receive a chance like this..."

"There will be a mad dash in our general direction for sure."

"Haha, I'm a little worried now. How will Veluriyam Capital host so many people?"

"What's your third benefit, young lord Zhen?"

"The third thing I can offer is in-person martial dao exposure. I will invite a mysterious expert from Myriad Abyss Island to lecture."

"What? An expert from Myriad Abyss Island?!"

"Are they... an empyrean expert, perchance?"

Jiang Chen smiled enigmatically. "I can't tell you what their cultivation level is. But I guarantee that their lecture will shock each and every cultivator from the human domain."

Emperor Petalpluck couldn't resist his curiosity. "Are you acquainted with mysterious experts from Myriad Abyss Island, young lord Zhen?"

"Truthfully," Jiang Chen chuckled, "I was taught by one in my youth. Where could my pill dao expertise come from otherwise?"

There was mass astonishment in all present. They'd heard rumors of his tutelage certainly, but no one had heard him admit it in person before. How could they resist their surprise?

Chapter 1243: The Boundary Steles

In the martial dao world, the more mysterious one appeared, the more one was regarded with curiosity and fear. The human psychology was odd sometimes; instinctual caution was exercised for anything unknown.

For example, Jiang Chen's high fame elicited curiosity about his pill dao inheritance. Emperor Peafowl was powerful, but not so powerful in the area of pill dao that he could nurture a genius like the young lord. So how had the young lord come by his pill dao knowledge?

There were all kinds of rumors. So far, the most incredible version was that young lord Zhen had been taught by a mysterious expert in his youth. Moreover, this mysterious expert likely hailed from the legendary Myriad Abyss Island. Only those possessing higher knowledge knew of this mythical place. Not many knew at all.

Many experts even suspected that Myriad Abyss Island was just a product of the imagination. They found it difficult to believe that human cultivators could reach the heights represented by it.

But no one could offer a concrete answer. No one had interacted with anyone from Myriad Abyss Island before. That all changed when Jiang Chen shattered everyone's doubts by confirming that Myriad Abyss Island was a real place.

Emperor Petalpluck asked in complicated tones, "Does Myriad Abyss Island really exist, young lord Zhen? Is it really not a myth?"

"Of course it's real. The Divine Abyss Continent is bigger than we imagine."

Mo Wushuang nodded. "He's right. I've traveled to all kinds of places in the human domain. I've seen the borders of desolate wildlands. I've even reached the boundary steles that demarcate the limits of the human domain and other races. Many times, I've tried to pass through the boundary to see what kind of world lies beyond it."

Everyone shot Mo Wushuang looks of apprehension and admiration. Wandering cultivators truly were some of the wildest kind of people out there.

The boundary steles had always been a taboo. For generations, sect disciples were warned not to intrude into the boundary grounds, not to disturb the arrangements that were laid since ancient times, and not to leave their own territory...

Nearly every faction and cultivator in the human domain followed the ancient teachings and stayed away from the boundary steles.

According to the ancient records, there were many races on Divine Abyss Continent. After the ancient great war, long-standing power structures crumbled and the continent was in shambles. Wary and antagonistic of each other, the races decided to split the map, create the boundary steles to demarcate their territory, and keep to their own areas forever.

It was mutually agreed that any entity who moved past the boundary be killed without mercy. The intrusion would be seen as an act of war.

Thankfully, the ancient boundaries weren't easy to break through. Powerful restrictions and chaotic streams of power prevented any cultivator from passing into another race's territory. It was why everyone felt apprehensive, despite being impressed by Mo Wushuang's boldness. Had he succeeded, it might have been the start of a racial war.

Mo Wushuang laughed when he saw their expressions. "Don't look at me like that, I didn't really try to breach the boundaries. Plus, I would've died considering my cultivation level, and I have no intentions to die just yet, heh!"

Jiang Chen didn't know much about the boundary grounds at all. In fact, neither Honored Master P'eng nor Venerated Skysoarer had mentioned anything about the boundary steles. This meant that these taboo places had been built after their generation. They were ignorant because they had already entered the Veluriyam Pagoda by then.

"The boundary steles safeguards our territory, so it's best if they remain as they are." Emperor Mountaincrush sighed. "This is a rule that Veluriyam Capital has always obeyed."

"Yes, the boundary grounds shouldn't be intruded upon lightly. That's an old adage that's been passed down since ancient times!"

Mo Wushuang shrugged and smiled in response. "I admit that we wandering cultivators are less concerned with such things. However, from my experience I believe that the boundary grounds weren't built to prevent racial conflicts or wars at all."

"What do you mean?" Jiang Chen asked. Everyone was just as curious. What basis lied behind Mo Wushuang's claim?

"My guess is that the boundary steles are a product of the ancient great war. The Divine Abyss Continent was in tatters after it, and all races had holed up in their own territories, focusing on rebuilding strength and avoiding the demon race. They were terrified that war would break out once more. No one wanted the demon race to invade their territory, so they decided that they might as well delineate boundary lines. Therefore, the boundary steles weren't created to prevent racial conflicts, but as a safety measure in case the demon race rose from the ashes."

Mo Wushuang's tone grew furious when he reached this point. "The human domain sits the closest to the desolate wildlands. This means that the boundary grounds aren't protections, but obstacles that prevent the human race from escaping should a second demonic disaster were to befall upon us."

Jiang Chen's eyes lit up when he heard this. He hadn't realized that Mo Wushuang was so experienced and knowledgeable, and he found himself agreeing deeply with analysis.

The many races on the Divine Abyss Continent used to attack each other frequently. Constant warfare hadn't given rise to the thought of boundary steles. It was only after the great demonic disaster and the Divine Abyss Continent left in ruins that the boundary grounds came to be.

The desolate wildlands were to the southeast of the human domain, whereas boundary steles could be found to the southwest and northwest. The steles and wildlands linked together to form a long chain.

This meant that the human domain was stuck between a rock and a hard place. If the desolate wildlands were breached, the demon race would pour straight into the human domain. Worse, Jiang Chen's homeland, the sixteen kingdoms alliance, was the first place to bear the brunt of the demonic invasion.

The good news was that Venerated Skysoarer had told him that he could reactivate the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement to stop the demon race.

During the ancient great war, the leaders of the human race had created the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement to seal the entire demon race. Unfortunately, the demon race was too cunning to fall for the trap. They'd sent out scapegoats to take the fall.

If reactivated, the formation would be a powerful barrier blocking the demon race from advancing. It would force them to circle past the human domain and enter another race's territory to leave. They'd be someone else's problem then. It would cost them far too much to circle back to the human domain, a completely worthless effort. Even if a demonic invasion was inevitable, the human race would have at least bought themselves some time. Therefore, Mo Wushuang's story gave Jiang Chen some ideas, but

he decided that it wasn't the time to reveal them just yet, not when Veluriyam Capital's morale was as low as it was.

Talks about the demon race would only add to the atmosphere of doom and gloom. Jiang Chen changed the subject with a smile. "Anyway, we're straying from the main topic. So, about the wandering cultivator gathering. Does everyone think that these three benefits are good enough reasons to hold a gathering?"

"Oh yes, definitely." Mo Wushuang was the first person to agree. "Any one of these benefits is enough to attract a large crowd of wandering cultivators, much less all three of them combined. That being said, I must remind you all that attracting such a large crowd of wandering cultivators isn't without its consequences. If we don't enforce proper rules and constraints, things can quickly dissolve into a mess."

Jiang Chen nodded. "This is where I require your help, great emperors. I need your elite troops to maintain order while the wandering cultivator gathering is ongoing. Everyone must contribute some effort in this event."

"Of course. We will do our best."

"I agree. it's our duty."

Ultimately, everyone thought that the benefits of a this gathering outweighed its cost. Veluriyam Capital needed a great event to show that they weren't headed towards a total decline. Also, everyone wanted to see what kind of surprises young lord Zhen would bring them. Jiang Chen looked at the vassals once more. "I also require our vassals to contribute in this event. First, everyone should keep an eye out for troublemakers. Second, we need to agree on a procedure to deal with the territories left behind by the traitors in the next few days. Should we send someone to take over now, or should we delegate them to other powers? At any rate, our first priority is to form a united Veluriyam Capital."

"That's right. No one can take advantage of us if we don't fight amongst ourselves."

"We especially must keep an eye out for people from Pillfire City. It's them or us. We can't let them out of our sight."

"Pillfire City..." Killing intent flashed through Jiang Chen's eyes. "One day, I will make sure that this name is no more!"

Jiang Chen and Pillfire City's relationship had deteriorated to the point of no return. He had known after the battle for the Longevity Pill that one of them had to disappear in the future. Moreover, he had a strong feeling that Emperor Pillzenith was involved in Emperor Peafowl's disappearance. There was no way the foreign emperor would dare cause trouble in Veluriyam Capital otherwise. Emperor Shura was also certainly a traitor who had sold his homeland for personal gains.

Jiang Chen went through the remaining tasks in similar fashion. He didn't need to worry about manpower at least. He was also worried about Veluriyam Capital's security, so he secretly sent out the Goldbiter Rats to patrol the surroundings. They would be able to report to him immediately if they noticed anything amiss. The Goldbiter Rats numbered over ten million in total. They could easily form lines of patrols that covered a radius several thousand kilometers around the capital.

Chapter 1244: The Moon God Sects Response

It wasn't long before news about Veluriyam's wandering cultivator gathering spread. It even had an extremely domineering name: the Dragon and Tiger Meet.

Young lord Zhen had named the gathering to celebrate the crouching tigers and hidden dragons of the wandering world. Of course, it was a pity that they were all unaffiliated free agents. The Dragon and Tiger Meet was a way to discover these dragons and tigers, and to display their talents for the world to see.

Emperor Peerless, a titan of the wandering world, had rallied his brothers and friends to the Dragon and Tiger Meet. He even assured that a huge surprise was waiting for them.

The news spread like wildfire. It only took a few days for it to disseminate throughout the human domain. Even northern based factions like Pillfire City and Tilted Moon Region received the news.

Within the Moon God Sect, a few high level executives had convened a meeting. The three sectmasters and a few holy maidens were in attendance. The chief sectmaster was holding a confidential letter in her hand with furrowed brows. She pondered deeply before handing it over to the second sectmaster.

The second sectmaster had a slightly more bigoted personality and was Holy Maiden Qingxuan's teacher. She was also the culprit that'd separated Jiang Feng and Xu Meng. Her mood soured after reading the letter. "Fame seeking miscreant! He's getting too big for his boots!"

Scorn appeared on her face as she threw the letter to the third sectmaster. This sectmaster was a little more pleasant and the most sweet-tempered among the three. She was slightly taken aback after reading the letter. "Such a huge shift has occurred in Veluriyam Capital? Dear sisters, this is a major news!"

Holy Maiden Qingxuan's heart skipped a beat when she heard 'Veluriyam Capital'. She had no feelings or attachment to that place in the past, but it was no longer the case. Ever since her parents had reunited, she no longer only had her mother. She now had a father and two brothers.

She'd actually known that she had a father and brother and had secretly sent men to the sixteen kingdoms alliance before to investigate. Unfortunately, they'd failed to bring back any findings.

Just when she'd accepted that Jiang Feng and Jiang Chen were long departed from this world, they suddenly barged into her life out of nowhere. The warmth of kinship filled her heart.

Her brother was currently in Veluriyam Capital as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. A huge shift in Veluriyam Capital? Is he affected? Fraught with worry, she couldn't help but glance at the letter.

The third sectmaster smiled. "Qingxuan, do you want to have a look tii?"

Xu Qingxuan nodded without hesitation. "Isn't Veluriyam Capital one of the strongest faction in the Upper Eight Regions? What could've possibly happened?"

The second sectmaster's face darkened. "Qingxuan, you were never this enthusiastic. Why are you so concerned about matters related to Veluriyam Capital?"

Xu Qingxuan smiled playfully. "Honored master, you complain when I'm not interested in worldly matters, yet when I show concern, you say that I'm being too enthusiastic! Your disciple is at a loss!"

Xu Qingxuan had trained under the second sectmaster for many years. Naturally, she had her ways of dealing with her master. Most of the time, butting heads with the second sectmaster would only end in disaster. It was more likely to work if she took the opposite approach and spoke light-heartedly. After reading the letter, she passed it to Holy Maiden Xu Shan in a seemingly unintentional manner.

Xu Shan had been in charge of taking care of the Moon God Precious Tree, and her Yin Yang Reverse bloodline had caused the tree various ailments. Jiang Chen discovered the crux of the problem and unearthed Xu Shan's unique bloodline. He'd nursed the tree back to health and gave the sect a top notch genius with a unique bloodline.

Once widely regarded as trash, Xu Shan had leapt to the place of a holy maiden under the chief sectmaster. Her fame had even surpassed Holy Maiden Xiyuan, another one of the chief sectmaster's holy maidens.

Because of that, Xu Shan was extremely grateful towards her savior, Sir Shao Yuan. Later, rumors began to spread that Sir Shao Yuan was actually Veluriyam's young lord Zhen. The Moon God Sect had been skeptical at first, but after digging deeper, they verified that the rumor was actually true. It was a major shock to the sect. But to Xu Shan, her savior would always be her savior. His true identity didn't matter to her.

When she heard that a major incident had happened in Veluriyam Capital, she couldn't help but worry. She looked at Xu Qingxuan gratefully when the letter was passed to her. Without further ado, she immediately scanned the contents. Her frown grew deeper and deeper as her eyes scammed across the sentences.

A major power shift had occurred in Veluriyam Capital. Emperor Peafowl was gone missing and the second-in-line, Emperor Shura, had attempted a coup, threatening Sacred Peafowl Mountain's position.

In the most crucial moment, young lord Zhen turned the tides and led Sacred Peafowl Mountain to victory against Shura Retreat. Emperor Shura declared his departure from Veluriyam Capital soon after. The letter also mentioned that young lord Zhen was building a pill dao academy and was recruiting students from the entire human domain.

Other than that, Veluriyam Capital was also hosting a wandering cultivator gathering. All wandering cultivators were welcome to attend. Xu Shan was secretly worried for young lord Zhen after reading the letter. Hosting a wandering cultivator gathering was simply too much trouble for what it's worth.

Holy Maiden Xiyuan had taken note of Xu Shan's expressions. She was already incredibly unhappy about Xu Shan's meteoric rise. However, her rage had reached new heights just now when Holy Maiden Qingxuan had passed the letter to Xu Shan instead of her.

"Younger sister Shan'er, Why do you seem so worried for Veluriyam Capital when it's on the other side of the world?" Holy Maiden Xiyuan asked with mock concern. The crowd looked at Xu Shan curiously.

She had unsteady foundations as she'd just recently risen to the rank of holy maiden. She lacked the confidence to defend herself. Thus, Xu Shan was extremely flustered when she was put under the spotlight.

“Let me guess. It must have something to do with young lord Zhen, right?” Holy Maiden Xiyuan flashed a harmless smile, but her heart was filled with all kinds of malicious intent.

It was common knowledge that holy maidens weren’t allowed to fall in love. Once they did, they would lose their position and their line in the succession. It was a long established rule in the sect. No one was exempted from it.

The sect cultivated quite a number of holy maidens and a majority of them would have a dao partner one day. However, they were never allowed to choose their partners. They were merely tools for creating marriage alliances.

Many factions in the Upper Eight Regions took pride in having a holy maiden as a bride. The Moon God Sect often capitalized on this and used a majority of the holy maidens for this purpose. Holy Maiden Xiyuan looked like she was making fun of Xu Shan, but she was actually pushing the latter into the flames.

As expected, the chief sectmaster’s expression darkened. “Shan’er, it’s a miracle that you’ve escaped a life of mediocrity. Surely you wouldn’t waste this opportunity by falling prey to worldly temptations?”

Xu Shan turned as red as beet. “H-honored master... T-this disciple... doesn’t dare.” She stammered.

Holy Maiden Xiyuan laughed. “Hah! You dare say such things with cheeks as red as yours? I don’t blame you. Young lord Zhen is the future ruler of Veluriyam Capital, a peerless young genius, and a sensation in the cultivation world. Moreover, he was your savior! I’m sure that young lord Zhen holds an unrivalled position in your heart.”

Xu Qingxuan interrupted bluntly. “Holy Maiden Xiyuan, your imagination runs rather wild! Young lord Zhen has done Xu Shan a great kindness. Surely she has a right to worry about her savior? Why does it sound like a sin when it comes out of your mouth?”

Holy Maiden Xiyuan hated Xu Qingxuan just as much. The latter was the strongest holy maiden in the sect. Her popularity was much greater than Holy Maiden Xiyuan’s. Many young geniuses visited the Moon God Sect just to sneak a peek at Xu Qingxuan’s visage. Some even attempted to find out more about her through Holy Maiden Xiyuan.

A vain and narcissistic lady like Holy Maiden Xiyuan would never live this down and bore great amounts of hostility towards the other two holy maidens. One girl had stolen her limelight and the other threatened her position in the sect.

She lost her temper in an explosive burst when Qingxuan stood up for Xu Shan. “Qingxuan, this is a matter between sisters of the same faction! Why are you getting all agitated for?”

Xu Qingxuan was no slouch either. She laughed coldly. “Don’t kid yourself. Who wouldn’t notice your ruse? Matters between sisters? Who would ever want to be sisters with scum like you? Are they asking for eight generations of rotten luck?”

“Qingxuan, watch your mouth!” The second sectmaster immediately yelled as these words insulted the chief sectmaster’s faction.

Qingxuan stuck her tongue out at her master and giggled playfully. "Chief sectmaster, master, and third sectmaster, haven't we gone off topic?"

The chief sectmaster had also noticed Holy Maiden Xiyuan's ruse. "Alright, that's enough." She said with a bland glare.

She turned her gaze towards Xu Shan immediately after that. "Shan'er, there's still no distinct proof that Sir Shao Yuan and young lord Zhen are one and the same. Even if they are, you have no business worrying about the debt that we owe him. You mustn't let your dao heart waver, nor should you ever fall prey to worldly temptations. Understood?"

Xu Shan nodded obediently.

"Alright, let us freely discuss Veluriyam Capital's matters. Second sectmaster, what is your thought on this?" the chief sectmaster asked as she shifted her gaze towards the second sectmaster.

"Do you really want my opinion?"

"Speak. Everyone is allowed to voice their opinions freely." The chief sectmaster was very open minded.

"Then I'll cut to the chase. Veluriyam Capital is on the other side of the Upper Eight Regions. We in the northwest while they're to the south. There are so many factions and nations between us, I'm hard pressed to see how their matters would affect us. Surely there's no need for us to discuss this?" The second sectmaster was the kind of person who would turn her back even on a friend. Her gratitude wasn't guaranteed even if young lord Zhen had saved the entire sect.

Chapter 1245: Holy Maiden Qingxuans Great Support of Her Brother

Vast disagreement rose when Xu Qingxuan heard the second sectmaster's words. Although she revered her master, she wasn't blindly loyal. Otherwise, she wouldn't have brought her mother to meet with her father and brother behind her master's back. Despite all of the brainwashing she'd endured over the years, it still hadn't been successful. She'd retained her own mind.

Her master's words struck her as biting the hand that'd fed them. Xu Qingxuan was quite dismissive of this. Her brother had saved the sect's Precious Tree!

The holy maiden liked to think in the long term as well. Ever since her parents had found each other, she'd begun considering the possibility of the family reuniting. If that were to happen, she'd have to spend some effort here to make the Moon God Sect accept Veluriyam Capital and young lord Zhen. Only when that happened could the dream of a family reunion become possibility.

Otherwise, that road ahead was fraught with difficulties in the current situation. It'd be better if it was up to the senior sectmaster. She at least was a bit more reasonable. Qingxuan knew her master quite well. That was a heavily prejudiced woman. In the second sectmaster's eyes, Xu Meng was a traitor and the shame of the faction. She hadn't killed Xu Meng only because she'd been worried about the effect on Xu Qingxuan. It was also the only reason why Xu Meng had been allowed to remain within the sect.

However, her master was her master. Although Xu Qingxuan was deeply disapproving of these actions, she would never openly rebuke her master.

"And what of you, number three?" The senior sectmaster turned to the third leader with a smile.

The third sectmaster smiled faintly in return. "Sacred Peafowl Mountain is indeed a bit far from us, but if it's proven that young lord Zhen is indeed the Sir Shao Yuan who cured our Precious Tree, I think we still need to keep this favor in mind. Perhaps we don't need to offer tangible help, but we're ethically obliged to support him. So perhaps we should offer a pronouncement that we support young lord Zhen taking control of Veluriyam Capital?"

The third sectmaster was a mild soul with clear separation of right and wrong. She wouldn't take a favor for granted.

"Support young lord Zhen? How can we do that?" The second sectmaster couldn't help but break in.

"And whyever not?" The senior sectmaster looked back, amused. "What are your thoughts?"

"Simply that we can't be certain that young lord Zhen is Sir Shao Yuan. Since we can't prove it, then we can just play dumb. I'm not being miserly, but we really can't release that kind of announcement. Pillfire City and Veluriyam Capital are bitter rivals, and young lord Zhen even more so. If we support him, that means we're offending the enormous entity by our side."

The second sectmaster was a pragmatist. She always approached issues from the perspective of the sect's profits.

Pillfire City was on the western edge of the Tilted Moon Region. A few steps northwest would bring them into Moon God Sect territory. They were neighbors in the truest sense. The sect was very wary of and sometimes even found Pillfire's domineering to be unbearable. But no matter what they thought about the pressure, this enormous faction would always be by their side. That fact would never change.

Since they couldn't change that fact, then they could only get used to having such a tyrannical neighbor. They had to endure things even if that meant coming off worse for the wear sometimes. Compared to Pillfire City, the first rank sect's foundations and strength was still on a different level. Such a great entity was absolutely someone they couldn't afford to offend.

Holy Maiden Xiyuan expressed her thoughts at this time. "Honored master, this disciple thinks that the second sectmaster makes a great deal of sense. As wonderful as Veluriyam Capital may be and as great a genius young lord Zhen is, they're still too far away. They're so far away that they have absolutely no effect on us. Anything that happens there feels like the stuff of story tales, with absolutely no impact on our lives. But Pillfire City is right next to us. Even a casual stomp is enough to send us reeling."

Her meaning couldn't be clearer. They couldn't support young lord Zhen no matter what, even if he had done the sect a great deed.

Holy Maiden Xiyuan seemed impartial and objective, but personal motive was the real driving force. She felt irritated at the mere thought of young lord Zhen. If it wasn't for that jerk sticking his nose where it didn't belong, how would Xu Shan have climbed to her current height and be a threat to her position?

Just cure the Precious Tree, what did you go dig up some Reverse Yin Yang Bloodline for?? Don't you know how unfair this is to other people?

These were the holy maiden's deepest thoughts. She was completely unable to accept the situation, so she hated that busybody young lord Zhen as well. Now that he was in trouble, she wished fiercely for the matter to become even more serious. It'd be best if there was civil war and a ton of people died!

Have her support young lord Zhen? Dream on!

Dejection flashed through Xu Shan's eyes when she heard her peer's words. But when she swept a look across Xu Qingxuan's face, she was startled to see that the latter was looking at her encouragingly. This bolstered the self-conscious holy maiden a little.

"I wouldn't dare agree with senior sister Xiyuan's words. Clearly knowing what's right and wrong is a basic requirement for cultivators. This is to be applied for everything from our own nature to the reputation of the sect. We might appear to be sly and clever if we play dumb, but we'll definitely become the laughingstock of the entire world. Whenever others talk of the Moon God Sect, they'll add on the description of heartless ingrates."

Even Xu Shan herself was surprised at how smoothly she delivered these thoughts. The senior sectmaster had always wanted to increase Xu Shan's confidence, but she knew that this wouldn't be accomplished overnight. So when she heard how her disciple had spoken up and was disagreeing with Holy Maiden Xiyuan, not only was she not unhappy, but rather pleased.

Xu Shan's martial dao potential had been verified, and her bloodline was indeed unparalleled. But if her confidence levels couldn't be enhanced, then even the greatest potential would be wasted on her.

So now four had expressed their opinions. Two were in support and two against. The senior sectmaster smiled and looked towards Holy Maiden Qingxuan. "Qingxuan, weren't you quite lively earlier? Let's here from you."

"Senior sectmaster, I'm not falling for that!" Xu Qingxuan giggled. "If I say what I think, I know my master will be unhappy again."

"You brat, say what you want to say, don't blame everything on me." The second sectmaster had a dark expression on her face.

"Then I'll say what I think?"

"Say whatever stupid nonsense you've got!" The second sectmaster had a fiery temper.

"Hehe! This disciple also thinks that we should support young lord Zhen. There's another reason apart from the help he's given us."

"What is it?" This drew general curiosity, but the senior sectmaster threw her a glare. She was irked by her disciple not backing her up, but was also used to her disciple being a headache.

"You darned girl, what do you know? What other reasons are there? I'm going to punish you severely if you can't think of a serious reason why!"

"Hehe, my reason is very important! But before I tell everyone, I'd like to ask, is Pillfire City and Veluriyam Capital the two strongest factions in pill dao in the world?"

"How can Veluriyam compare to Pillfire? It's at most one third of Pillfire's foundations, or even less!" Xiyuan instantly fired off.

"Then let's put it this way, if one thinks of Pillfire, they also need to consider Veluriyam. We can all agree on this, right?"

“What do you want to say?” Xiyuan smiled coldly.

“Simply that while it may currently look like Pillfire is ahead of Veluriyam by a lot, it’s a different story when it comes to their heirs. We’ve all witnessed Pill King Ji Lang’s empty showmanship and flashy theatrics. We’ve also seen young lord Zhen’s mature generosity. I think it’s quite obvious whose fortunes are greater. I don’t think that Pillfire has anyone who can compete with young lord Zhen in pill dao in the future. The young lord is definitely a monster genius who appears once in ten thousand years.

“Isn’t there talk of a Pinecrane Pill? The pill who can extend lives of emperor realm cultivators by a thousand years? Can Pillfire refine such a pill? Or setting that aside, can they even manage a Longevity Pill?”

“What’s most frightening about young lord Zhen isn’t that he understands pills that no one knows of, but that his knowledge stores are much too vast. We all saw how he cured the Precious Tree, right?”

Her long speech won the senior sectmaster’s approval.

“Quite right. Qingxuan, your comprehension abilities are indeed uncommon. You also analyze problems from a very deep angle. In my eyes, Pill King Ji Lang’s fortunes are one fifth, or even one tenth of Sir Shao Yuan’s. If the gentleman is indeed young lord Zhen, then I look very favorably upon Veluriyam and his pill dao academy!”

The senior sectmaster’s personal proclamation surprised the second sectmaster.

“Senior sectmaster, do you mean that we’re going to openly support the young lord? Even if he can defy the heavens in the future, we still have no need to offend Pillfire right at this very moment!”

“It has nothing to do with offending or not offending Pillfire. We just need to express our stance. Young lord Zhen rendered us a great service and out of this gratitude, we support his authority over Veluriyam. This is a very right and proper thing to do. Even if Pillfire is unhappy, they can’t use this as an excuse to oppress our sect. Since when did a vaunted first rank sect have to consider the feelings of others when conducting our business? Pillfire is our neighbor, not our ruling nation!”

This was a clear announcement of the sect’s attitude.

Chapter 1246: An Irate Pillfire City

“Senior sectmaster, please reconsider!” the second sectmaster urged.

The senior sectmaster waved her hands dismissively. “The decision has been made. We’ll discuss this again after the wandering cultivator gathering is over.”

The crowd had no choice but to swallow their arguments. Holy Maiden Qingxuan was elated. The senior sectmaster’s attitude had given her a little bit of hope.

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Meanwhile, Pillfire City had also received news about the wandering cultivator gathering.

Emperor Pillzenith had just returned from Veluriyam Capital, still dazed by what had happened. He'd been filled with ambition when he first set off, but had been forced to run away with his tail between his legs and was even played for a fool in the end by a nonexistent formation.

It was a smudge on his clean record. He grew more and more frustrated as his thoughts lingered on the incident. Why hadn't he thought clearly back then? A sky rank formation? How could the brat possibly set up a sky rank formation in advance? He clearly wasn't clairvoyant!

What frustrated him the most was the fact that his love rival, Emperor Peerless, had joined Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

"Shura, this is your mess. You better clean it up!" Emperor Pillzenith's pent up rage came bursting out when he set eyes Emperor Shura's face.

Failing to usurp the throne, Emperor Shura naturally had no choice but to defect to Emperor Pillzenith's side. The latter had gained a powerful pawn, but there was no lack of powerful beings in Pillfire City.

Emperor Pillzenith only valued Emperor Shura because of his strategic significance in Veluriyam Capital. Shura was a lot less useful if he wasn't in the capital. After all, Emperor Pillzenith's goal was to gain control over Veluriyam Capital through him. The former was extremely annoyed that this plan had been thwarted at the very last moment.

Emperor Shura was dejected. He grit his teeth. "Emperor Pillzenith, in my opinion, the dust in Veluriyam Capital hasn't completely settled yet. We can either give up, or we can double down and assert control through a show of force. Utilizing your fame, we can assemble a group of heroes and march to the capital to assert our dominance!"

Emperor Pillzenith snorted coldly. "You make it sound so easy! How am I supposed to justify those actions?"

The entire human domain would be horrified if he ignored the vast distance between the two factions and led an army there to interfere with Veluriyam Capital's internal affairs. There was simply no viable way to justify this open act of hostility.

If they were allowed to interfere with Veluriyam's politics, who was to say that they wouldn't interfere with another faction some other day? So while Emperor Shura's suggestion might seem perfect, it wasn't viable at all.

"Ji Lang, your nemesis young lord Zhen has achieved so much at such a young age. What's your opinion on this?" Emperor Pillzenith suddenly shifted his gaze. The person who hated Jiang Chen the most might not, in fact, be Emperor Shura. Pill King Ji Lang could very well claim the spot.

"Honored master, that brat is definitely an anomaly. Even someone as great as Emperor Shura was completely helpless against him. We mustn't view him as a young lord anymore. Instead, we should judge him with the same criteria as great emperors like Emperor Peafowl."

Pill King Ji Lang was a genius at retaining face. He'd lost to Jiang Chen twice and hated the young lord to the bone, but he had no qualms with putting the young lord on a pedestal just so that his defeats wouldn't seem too humiliating.

"Pill King Ji Lang is right. That brat is a monster. Emperor Pillzenith, we must eliminate him before he matures. Otherwise, he'll surely threaten your position and maybe even our city's position one day," one of Emperor Pillzenith's most trusted aides advised. He was similar in rank to Cloudsoar Monarch and also a peak level emperor. His name was Baili Shengzhi, Emperor Pillzenith's most trusted strategist.

"Baili, what's your recommended course of action?" Emperor Pillzenith valued his strategist's opinions greatly.

The latter hummed deeply as he pondered. "We can't engage in open hostility against Veluriyam Capital unless we can justify the mobility of our troops. The capital has a good reputation and young lord Zhen is growing more famous with each passing day. We'd be denounced as invaders if we march there. We can't afford to make this mistake."

Emperor Pillzenith nodded. Baili Shengzhi's words were in line with his worries. There were other dominant factions in the Upper Eight Regions as well. If Pillfire City caused a public outcry, these factions might retaliate in kind. The city was mighty, but not even the mightiest could withstand an all out attack from the entire Upper Eight Regions. The strong often had enemies operating within the shadows. They'd lie prone, waiting for an opportune moment to pounce.

"We can't attack in the open, but we can try some things from the shadow."

"Oh?" Emperor Pillzenith's eyes lightened up. "Do go on."

"Young lord Zhen's recent success must've inflated his ego. Why else would he host a wandering cultivator gathering? After tasting the sweet nectar, he must think that every wandering cultivator is as easy to recruit as Emperor Peerless."

"Mo Wushuang that idiot! First he acts all high and mighty, and then he willingly joins Sacred Peafowl Mountain to be their loyal dog. What a disgrace!" Emperor Pillzenith scolded mercilessly.

"Your Majesty, young lord Zhen will definitely become a laughing stock if he truly believes that wandering cultivators are so easy to recruit. This subordinate thinks that we can launch a two pronged attack."

"How do you propose we do that?"

"We can host a similar event and invite the titans of the wandering cultivator world. We'll offer great incentives to sweeten the deal, but we'll also have to be firm like an iron fist in a velvet glove. We'll let them taste the sweet nectar and then show them our might. Our target will be the wandering cultivators that are active around the northern region of the Upper Eight Regions. We need to emphasize that we'll become enemies if they show up at Veluriyam Capital."

Emperor Pillzenith frowned. "Surely such candid statements will not be well-received?"

Baili Shengzhi laughed. "There's no doubt. But we can always use someone else to say them! We'll hire a few wandering cultivators that are trustworthy and let them disseminate the news. Nobody can intervene as long as we don't admit to these statements."

Emperor Pillzenith pondered for a moment. “Hmm. It’s worth a try. Upstaging Veluriyam Capital with a similar event seems like a good plan. However, you mentioned a two pronged attack. What else must we do?”

“We can also employ some schemes. We’ll hire a few henchmen to stir up trouble in Veluriyam Capital and get them to cause some destruction at the event. It’ll be a huge loss of face for both the capital and young lord Zhen.” Baili Shengzhi had formulated a closely reasoned and well-argued plan. Emperor Pillzenith’s pulse quickened with excitement.

“Excellent! Baili, I’m very pleased with your plans!” The great emperor burst into a hearty laughter. “Now, let’s come up with a way to upstage Veluriyam Capital!”

Baili Shengzhi smiled. “Our city has always been more attractive than Veluriyam Capital. Even though we’re one step behind at the moment, our city’s heritage and your reputation should give us an edge in attracting these titans of the wandering cultivator world.”

Veluriyam Capital had only just released the initial announcement without mentioning Jiang Chen’s three benefits. Thus, Pillfire was unaware of Veluriyam’s determination to host this event. Emperor Pillzenith would’ve been fraught with anxiety if he’d known otherwise.

Jiang Chen had chosen not to release all information in one go simply because he wanted to “Baili, I’ll put you in charge of this. You have to make this event as sensational and unique as you possibly can. We need to take the limelight away from Veluriyam Capital!” Emperor Pillzenith was going all out

“This subordinate understands.” Baili Shengzhi bowed to accept his orders.

“Ji Lang, assist Baili in this matter. Also, you’d best reflect on why young lord Zhen was able to defeat you and eclipse you in every single discipline. I’ll be very disappointed in you if you’ve learned nothing from all of your failures.

This was an enormous blow to Pill King Ji Lang. After losing so many times in a row, Emperor Pillzenith had begun to doubt the pill king’s abilities. He’d been fond of Pill King Ji Lang in the beginning because the pill king had seemed to possess even more talent in pill dao than the great emperor when he was young. His talent in martial dao was also comparable as well. A young genius like him was definitely a suitable candidate to inherit his legacy if nurtured well.

However, Pill King Ji Lang’s two consecutive losses against young lord Zhen had caused a sliver of doubt to grow within Emperor Pillzenith’s heart.

Pill King Ji Lang cursed inwardly while remaining respectful on the surface. “Honored master, your disciple will definitely learn from the humiliation.”

Emperor Shura stepped forward. “My liege, this subordinate has yet to prove himself to your faction. Is there a way for us to contribute?”

“My liege, please give us an order. Brother Shura and I wish to prove our loyalty.” Emperor Vastsea quickly piped in.

“Hmph! If you wish to prove your loyalty then get rid of young lord Zhen! That’s the best way to prove your loyalty!” Emperor Pillzenith hectored angrily.

Chapter 1247: Tit For Tat Provocation

The Upper Eight Regions was quite a bustling place these days. First, Veluriyam Capital announced the Tiger and Dragon Meet and invited all wandering cultivators in the world to attend. Not long after, Pillfire City announced that they were hosting a Pill-Martial Summit. All wandering cultivators were likewise invited to attend.

Pillfire City also boldly declared that their summit would feature every single one of the city's emperors as lecturers. Pillzenith included, they would be available to discuss pill and martial dao with the wandering cultivators of the world.

News of this caused a shockwave to ripple through the entire human domain. The contents itself were shocking enough. Though Pillfire City hosted events frequently—almost on a daily basis in fact, the grandness of this particular event marked a once-in-a-millennium experience. If every Pillfire emperor really was going to make an appearance, the experience would be unprecedentedly amazing.

It was tremendously joyous news for wandering cultivators all over the world. The overwhelming nature of the news aside, there was a more important signal being broadcast. Pillfire City's gesture was clearly aimed at Veluriyam Capital.

Veluriyam's Tiger and Dragon Meet was already on the horizon. Pillfire City jumping out now was intentional opposition. They were both core factions within the Upper Eight Regions. One dominated the south, one prevailed over the north. Their authorities combined could steer the direction of the entire human domain.

Though there had always been clandestine conflict between them, their geographical distance meant that all-out warfare hadn't really occurred before. This was definitely the first time they'd gone head to head like this.

A collision between two giants was sure to spark incredible heat. The usually peaceful Upper Eight Regions was feeling the initial stages of the tremendous ripples. Were the two great factions really going head-to-head?

The atmosphere in all eight regions became odd and another rumor began circulating feverishly.

Pillfire City was holding its event was because of its intense displeasure with Veluriyam Capital. Wandering cultivators everywhere were to refrain from attending the Tiger and Dragon Meet. The wandering cultivators that did would be blacklisted, forever banned from entering Pillfire City. They wouldn't be able to do any business with Pillfire.

There was no official verification from Pillfire, but the rumors had too much substance to ignore.

"Have you heard? The scale of Pillfire City's Pill-Martial Summit is unprecedented. Apparently they'll auction off a number of sky rank pills. The pills will be rarities that one usually wouldn't be able to buy with money, and Pillfire is offering such a valuable opportunity to wandering cultivators everywhere! This is a benefit that group's never seen before. Pillfire City's generosity is overwhelming."

"Given their rich history with pill dao, they're sure to have many excellent pills. The Pill-Martial Summit is something to look forward to."

“Too bad for Veluriyam Capital. They’ve made the announcement about their Meet already. I’m not sure how things will pan out for them now. They’ll have a hard time trying to win a popularity contest with Pillfire City.”

“That’s right. Emperor Peafowl isn’t around at the moment, so there’s already a measurable gap between the two factions. Ah, I’d heard Veluriyam Capital’s young lord Zhen to be a capable character. I was hoping to go meet him. But Pillfire’s event shouldn’t be missed.”

“I think so, too. The Tiger and Dragon Meet will be botched, I’m sure. Maybe twenty percent will choose to attend their event over Pillfire City’s. And even those would be doing so due to Emperor Peerless’ reputation!”

“Young lord Zhen is too young. He hasn’t thought many things through as much as he should have. The name ‘Tiger and Dragon Meet’ sounds quite impressive, but there’s nothing particularly amazing about it. His exploits in recent years aside, the young lord’s name alone isn’t enough to compete with the whole of Pillfire City.”

“Heh, Pillfire City’s answering move is pretty vicious. The rug is being pulled out from Veluriyam Capital’s feet. It’s going to fall and die from that height.”

“Maturity has its benefits. Emperor Pillzenith is pushing young lord Zhen off the edge of a cliff. The pitiful amount of fame he’s accumulated is going to disappear into nothingness. He’ll be the joke of the Upper Eight Regions.” The sects, nobles, and various other factions were all discussing the same topic. Coincidentally, so were the wandering cultivators.

There was intense comparison between Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City. The majority felt that Pillfire City’s counterattack was perfectly executed. They’d cut off any means of retreat for Veluriyam. Falling from a much greater height than initially was very painful.

After careful consideration, most wandering cultivators tended to concur. They thought that Pillfire City’s Pill-Martial Summit would feature more desirables.

“I didn’t think that Veluriyam Capital would lose its cool so quickly after Emperor Peafowl’s fall. This would’ve never happened in the wise emperor’s time.”

“I agree. Emperor Peafowl was sophisticated and conservative. He knew of the huge gap between Pillfire City and Veluriyam Capital in terms of pill dao, so he avoided direct conflict. Young lord Zhen is too hot-headed and brash. He let the blood rush to his head and made this decision far too lightly. That’s why Pillfire City was able to find his weakness so easily and win with a decisive stroke.”

“Don’t say that. Young lord Zhen’s actions are always measured and strategic. Just think about everything he’s done over the years. He’s always had the last laugh in the end. Are you so sure that young lord Zhen doesn’t have a follow-up plan? Are you sure that he’ll just lie down and give up?”

Veluriyam Capital had its fair share of loyalists among wandering cultivators too. Young lord Zhen’s name was well known among some circles. Because many wandering cultivators hated the stronger party by nature, they preferred to stand beside Veluriyam, the underdog.

The wandering cultivator world never lacked for contrarians. They had their own thoughts and harbored principles of justice in their hearts. The more Pillfire City attempted to use its clout and authority to

edge out competitors, the more they were despised for it. Thus, this group unconsciously veered towards Veluriyam Capital, supporting and arguing on young lord Zhen and the city's behalf.

However, the lion's share of wandering cultivators was still biased toward Pillfire City. Most thought logically that Veluriyam Capital simply did not possess the capital to oppose it on even ground.

The support for the Pill-Martial Summit was overwhelming. The ratio of Veluriyam to Pillfire supporters was almost twenty-to-eighty. Less than twenty percent of wandering cultivators believed that Veluriyam Capital would ultimately prevail.

On the other hand, eighty percent confidently said that Pillfire City would crush its opponent thoroughly. This portion didn't actually like Pillfire City all that much. Rather, they'd made their judgment through rationality alone.

The two viewpoints between the wandering cultivators continued to ferment and collide. Unfortunately, the opinion that Veluriyam Capital would win was completely drowned out.

However, another piece of news a few days later crushed that sentiment.

At the Tiger and Dragon Meet, Veluriyam Capital would auction its own collection of rare and top-quality pills. The Pinecrane Pill would be included among said collection!

What was the Pinecrane Pill?

Veluriyam Capital gave the explanation that it was a pill that extended the lifespan an emperor realm cultivator or even great emperor for eight hundred to a thousand years. A true miracle drug, the pinnacle of sky rank pills! It was a pill that surpassed its fellows.

If news of the Pinecrane Pill had been rather limited before to private circles, this announcement verified what had been wild speculation. This legendary turn of events caused the wind to shift once more.

The Pinecrane Pill! It could lengthen the natural lifespans of emperors and great emperors? The mythical nature of the pill took the entire human domain by storm.

The news shocked both the wandering cultivator world and the world of cultivation at large. Without the presence of the Longevity Pill, the Pinecrane Pill would be branded a joke. But the Longevity Pill was excellent precedent and added to the truthiness to this claim. If something as wondrous as the Longevity Pill existed, why not the Pinecrane Pill, too?

More importantly, the Pinecrane Pill was backed by a giant of the wandering cultivator world. Almost every wandering cultivator knew that Emperor Peerless' cultivation partner, Madame Yun, had once been grievously injured. But she was perfectly fine now; not a trace remained of her life-threatening wounds. The main reason for her recovery was the Pinecrane Pill.

Emperor Coiling Dragon was another example of the pill in action. When he was still the lord of the Coiling Dragon Clan, his mortal life had almost reached its natural end. His death sentence was exonerated by the Pinecrane Pill, granting him renewed vigor that allowed him to break through to great emperor.

There was plenty of substantiated evidence around the Pinecrane Pill, both circumstantial and anecdotal. Those who had their own channels of information independently verified that the Pinecrane Pill did indeed exist.

News of this pill spread across the wandering cultivator world like wildfire. Verified news had significantly more force than idle gossip. It took only a few days for astonishing accounts of the pill's marvels to spread to every corner of the world.

"First the Longevity Pill, now the Pinecrane Pill. This is simply too amazing! Veluriyam Capital has managed some truly unbelievable things. Everyone's underestimated young lord Zhen after all. And that's just what I thought! Young lord Zhen isn't someone to stand around and be slaughtered. Pillfire City has done something ignoble with their gathering. If Veluriyam wants to hold a wandering cultivators' meeting, why hold a Pill-Martial Summit in retaliatory response? It's an open provocation!"

"That's right. Pillfire City has lost all honor. Any reprisal from Veluriyam Capital is completely understandable. Still, young lord Zhen's counterattack is certainly sharp. I think the tides are turning once more."

Chapter 1248: I Can Do Everything You Can Do

Ordinarily, Emperor Pillzenith was a competent and restrained man. But the Pinecrane Pill had become an object of obsession to him. He desperately wanted one. He knew better than anyone else what the pill meant.

"Your Majesty, how real is the Pinecrane Pill?" Baili found it difficult to believe the pill was real.

"I haven't held it in my own hands, so I can't say for sure," the emperor sighed softly. "Pill King Hui, you had a chance that day, correct?"

"Your Majesty, the pill I was given was truly extraordinary. It had an aura unlike any other pill I've seen. I highly suspect it was the Pinecrane Pill."

"Your Majesty, Sacred Peafowl Mountain will attract a great deal of people with that pill of theirs. Our Pill-Martial Summit will have a lot of popularity stolen away from it." Baili Shengzhi's voice was dark. Veluriyam Capital's windmill counterattack put him rather suddenly onto the back foot.

Wandering cultivators were a pragmatic bunch. Threats and intimidation had little effect. Most of them were hard-headed and hot-tempered individuals with peculiar personalities. Violence wouldn't restrict their actions. In order to draw them to Pillfire City, one needed to dangle a carrot in front of them.

Pillfire City had invested a great deal as bait in this regard. They'd done so on a scale unseen for a thousand years. But the words 'Pinecrane Pill' rendered all their efforts largely ineffective in one fell swoop.

What pill was more desirable than one that could extend one's life?

Neither the Tiger and Dragon Meet nor the Pill-Martial Summit could actually attract every single wandering cultivator under the heavens. That was an unrealistic expectation, and neither city could host so many at once.

The idea instead, was to gather up the elite among them, the cream of the crop. Members of that echelon tended to have cultivation levels that were at least respectable. Emperors and great emperors alike found the Pinecrane Pill's allure to be irresistible. Who wouldn't be tempted by the promise of longer life?

Absolutely no one. Even sect experts would jump at such an opportunity. They would put in everything they had to attain that goal.

Pill King Ji Lang was disgruntled. "Hmph, Veluriyam Capital has never been known for its prowess in pills. They're probably overstating the Pinecrane Pill's effects. Plus, even if the pill is real, how can it compare to the plethora we have at Pillfire City? What can we possibly be scared of?"

Emperor Pillzenith was pleased to hear these words from his favorite disciple.

"Ji Lang has a point. Are they trying to take on the entire Pillfire City with just one type of pill?" sneered the great emperor. "So what if the Pinecrane Pill is real? I don't think mass production will be possible like the Longevity Pill. It must've been refined from extremely rare natural treasures. There's nothing special about that."

Baili Shengzhi nodded in agreement. "I doubt that Sacred Peafowl Mountain would refrain from announcing mass production if they could actually do it. I think it's more likely that they extracted the essence of some valuable specimen with the ability to lengthen lifespans. The name 'Pinecrane Pill' is just a ruse. How many more of those pills can he have? Your Majesty, I think we can attack them on this front. We can spread rumors that there's not that many of these pills. Only one or two lucky wandering cultivators will benefit if they go to Veluriyam."

Baili Shengzhi was a clever man. He quickly grasped the key to turning the tables.

"You're right. Do as you suggested, Baili," Emperor Pillzenith commanded.

Pillfire City's long history of business dealings meant that it had a social network of its own. The plan was executed on the spot, spreading rapidly throughout its tendrils. Almost overnight, there was a different voice in the wandering cultivator world.

"Perhaps the Pinecrane Pill exists, but rumor has it that the pill is refined from a rare natural treasure. These treasures are difficult to find. Moreover, Sacred Peafowl Mountain probably only has one or two pills. There won't be enough to go around. Only the giants of the wandering cultivator world has a chance at the pills. There's no point for everyone else to attend. Pillfire City is different, naturally. Its history with pills is robust, and it has pills of every variety. It is far more beneficial to visit the city with a good record than some upstart."

"I agree. The Pinecrane Pill is pretty incredible, but we're too insignificant to do much more than watch the show. At Pillfire City, we might be able to participate in buying other pills for ourselves."

"The Pinecrane Pill is probably just a publicity stunt. At the end of the day, it's better to visit an established place. Pillfire City has far more of an advantage in this regard."

The wind shifted once more. The Pinecrane Pill was accepted, but suspicions were raised regarding Veluriyam Capital's pill-refining proficiency.

The pill's appearance guaranteed that a group of the best wandering cultivators would choose Veluriyam Capital. A larger group of lookers-on naturally followed. However, more rational wandering cultivators would make the choice to go to Pillfire City instead. Pillfire City's storied past and reliable resourcefulness meant that there would be more opportunities for laymen.

Pillfire City's retort had been swift and sharp. A bucket of cold water was dumped upon the heat that the Pinecrane Pill had managed to generate. There was an improvement from last time, though. The peanut gallery refrained from one-sided commentary.

They'd been burned by wrong predictions before. Who knew what other tricks Veluriyam Capital had up its sleeve? There was one thing that everyone could agree on. As long as young lord Zhen was there, nothing was entirely impossible for Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Underestimation of the faction and its youthful leader would only result in embarrassment.

There wasn't very much waiting before the next piece of explosive news arose. At the Tiger and Dragon Meet, Veluriyam Capital was slated to announce the foundation of a new pill dao academy. It would set aside some enrollment slots to wandering cultivators. The city's new academy would fully introduce their pill dao capacity to everyone.

There was something else, too: the Pinecrane Pill was definitely not refined from some priceless plant or beast. It used relatively precious materials, but certainly nothing that couldn't be found with a little effort. Furthermore, the materials themselves had no anti-aging effects whatsoever. The recipe of the pill was the magical portion.

Furthermore, young lord Zhen declared that Sacred Peafowl Mountain was capable of refining any pill belonging to any other faction.

Anyone who didn't believe this was welcome to challenge him personally at the Tiger and Dragon Meet. Once more, the Upper Eight Regions was in uproar. Sacred Peafowl Mountain could refine pills belonging to any other faction? Since when were they this confident?

But clever individuals quickly realized the true meaning behind those words.

"They're trying to say that young lord Zhen's pill skill is incomparable. The Upper Eight Regions has no pill that he can't refine. He's trying to pound every other pill expert into the ground."

"Is young lord Zhen really this cocky?"

"Tch, what're you talking about? They have more than enough skill to back it up. Can the man behind the Longevity and Pinecrane Pills be any less than extraordinary?"

"I suppose you're right. The claim is reckless, but he has the capital to match it. I'd be even bolder were I in his shoes!"

"That's right. Even Pillfire City doesn't have pills this amazing. Their mess of disorganized tactics means they're losing their cool. In other words, they're scared. What's the point of targeting Veluriyam Capital like this otherwise?"

"Still, it is not good for a tree to stand much taller than the rest of the forest. I think Pillfire City will continue their efforts to swat down young lord Zhen from his lofty perch. Ah the follies of youth!"

“Swat down? Do you think a true genius could be swatted down so easily like that? Every great man in history has experienced adversity in his youth. And what were the results? The pressure only accelerates the young geniuses’ growth. In the end, the strain becomes another stepping stone on the path to success. I think Pillfire City is doomed to become one, actually.”

“That makes sense. See, young lord Zhen’s fame has spread far and wide recently. That’s partially to do with his own strength and contributions, but Pillfire’s repeated attempts to quash him also indirectly fueled his rise to stardom. Many who wouldn’t have paid attention otherwise felt sympathy for him out of shared defiance against frenzied suppression.”

“Sympathy for the underdog, I’d think.”

“Nonsense. Young lord Zhen is no underdog. Pillfire City is all appearance and no substance. Their fear is so obvious from their gimmicky actions.”

There was one thing that could not be denied. Repeated conflicts with Pillfire City had only served to heighten young lord Zhen’s fame, and the Tiger and Dragon Meet was attracting attention from an ever widening selection of people. Many wandering cultivators made the difficult decision of choosing Veluriyam Capital over Pillfire City.

When someone found favor in the eyes of the crowd, anything he did would be praised. Jiang Chen’s comments about being able to refine any other faction’s pills were extremely impudent and would usually draw the unnecessary ire of many. But his popularity in the wandering cultivator world exploded because of it. More and more wandering cultivators came forward to support him.

Of course, none of this was without reason. Without the battle over the Longevity Pill, the Moon God Precious Tree incident, and now the Pinecrane Pill, people would only think that he was some frivolous child. These things formed his foundation of credibility, transforming doubt into faith.

Chapter 1249: The Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill

Pillfire City had thought it would easily be able to snuff out the Tiger and Dragon Meet in the cradle. Instead, it found itself dangled over a fire pit. The Pill-Martial Summit had been announced solely to destroy their rival. Given Pillfire City’s prestige and brand, most had been absolutely certain that over eighty percent of wandering cultivators would be drawn away from Veluriyam Capital.

But the heavyweight news from Veluriyam Capital smashed Pillfire City’s popularity to pieces. The winds were blowing from south to north. The Pinecrane Pill itself was astounding enough, but the news that Veluriyam Capital was founding a pill dao academy was even more incredible. And enrollment slots set aside for wandering cultivators!

Most incredulous was that young lord Zhen had boldly declared that Sacred Peafowl Mountain was able to refine any pill that anyone else could. Even if he was larger than life, his confidence won the hearts of many wandering cultivators. Going to Veluriyam Capital was a snap choice for them. They wanted to see for themselves whether the legendary young lord Zhen really was as remarkable as the stories described.

Pillfire City made several attempts to salvage the situation. They put multiple other benefits onto their own table. Emperor Pillzenith personally wrote to a number of secluded hermits in the wandering cultivator world. He wanted to borrow their popularity for the Summit.

In the past, he hadn't cared at all about them. He was making a special exception for this occasion. Unfortunately for him, no one was interested in his makeshift olive branch. His invitations received a few replies, but most couldn't be bothered to respond.

The top wandering cultivators generally lived carefree lifestyles. Emperor Pillzenith's usual lack of respect towards them meant that they weren't going to immediately respond with much passion. What expert didn't have a resolute heart and a distinct temper?

Pillfire's actions were effective to a degree, but it was impossible for them to manipulate the situation back to the one-sided affair they'd first predicted. Quite a few giants of the wandering cultivator world let it slip that they were planning on attending the Tiger and Dragon Meet. Most however, were still watching and waiting. There was still time before the two events. They wanted to see if either side was willing to offer a few more perks.

Because they were best in class, most of them tended to weigh up their decision until everything was clear. There was no need to be hasty and unnecessary rashness often led to a less than ideal result down the line. Their attitude spoke volumes about their eagerness.

The situation in the Upper Eight Regions became quite strange. Wandering cultivators, typically a group that had barely any bargaining power or influence, were thrust into the spotlight. They could suddenly sway the actions of both Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City.

Pillfire City was between a rock and a hard place. If they hadn't responded to the Tiger and Dragon Meet by setting up the Pill-Martial Summit, perhaps they wouldn't have put themselves in so much trouble. As it was, they found it troubling to either proceed or back off. They'd wanted to make Veluriyam Capital lose face, but they were tossing their own aside first to do so.

"Your Majesty, those old-fox wandering cultivators are too wily. They're waiting for us to up the ante." Baili Shengzhi wasn't having a good month. He'd found out rather belatedly that his responsibility wasn't a pleasant one.

"We can't afford to lose this face, Baili. We have more than enough wealth to take them on. We'll splurge a little this time. We're sure to recoup several times our investment eventually." Emperor Pillzenith gnashed his teeth.

He knew that Pillfire couldn't afford to retreat now. It could only put more and more weights onto the scales to try to tip them. Otherwise, it would quickly become the laughingstock of the Upper Eight Regions. Worse, it would sustain a direct loss in a contest with Veluriyam. That was something Pillfire could not accept.

"Your Majesty, our problem right now is that we can't satisfy those old bastards' appetites with normal rewards." Baili Shengzhi was despondent. "Veluriyam Capital has raised the stakes sky-high. It's very difficult for us to match them."

At the end of the day, he was only an executor of Emperor Pillzenith's wishes. He didn't have the carte blanche right to make whatever promises he wanted.

"Baili, announce that I'm willing to auction off a Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill!"

"What?" Baili Shengzhi's entire body shook. Pill King Ji Lang and the emperor's other subordinate experts reacted with similar surprise.

"Your Majesty, the Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill? Are you... are you sure?" Baili Shengzhi asked with bated breath, desire flashing in his eyes.

"Then it's settled." Emperor Pillzenith looked pained, as if someone was cutting his flesh off.

"Alright, alright." Baili Shengzhi's tone sounded a bit odd, but he refrained from commenting further. He signified his acceptance of the order with a cupped fist salute.

"Don't despair, Baili. I haven't given a Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill to you yet because I'm hoping you'll break through to great emperor yourself. Sure, the pill can give you a twenty to thirty percent higher chance of breaking through, but why rely on a pill if there's no necessity?"

The Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill was one of the three most precious pills that Pillfire City possessed. It was extremely difficult to refine and its materials were incredibly rare. Over his four thousand years of being a great emperor, Emperor Pillzenith had only managed to refine a single cauldron of them, having procured the materials by pure chance. That cauldron had only contained four pills total.

Baili Shengzhi was his top follower and confidant. Though the strategist had reached the peak of emperor realm a long time ago, he hadn't broken through to great emperor yet. It was the strategist's deepest desire to get his hands on a single Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill.

Alas, Emperor Pillzenith had never given one to him. He didn't really know whether Emperor Pillzenith wanted him to break through using his own strength, but hearing the name of the pill made his heart race nevertheless. If he had the increased certainty offered by the pill, it would be the perfect opportunity to ascend to great emperor!

The loss of spirit in Emperor Pillzenith's top follower did not go unnoticed. Worried that his favorite lieutenant would lose faith in him, the emperor quickly added a few words of encouragement. "There's no need to despair, Baili. If you really can't break through with your own strength, do you think I won't be able to spare a single Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill?"

Baili Shengzhi's eyes lit up. Blood pounded through his veins. "Thank you, Your Majesty. I will carry out your commands at once!"

The Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill was only one of the city's three most valuable pills. Pillfire City's sheer resourcefulness was no joke.

The news of Emperor Pillzenith's addition to the Summit made waves in the wandering cultivator world yet again.

"Haha, Pillfire is finally paying up now. Not bad, not bad. The Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill isn't as attractive as the Pinecrane Pill, but it should still draw in a good crowd."

“Emperor Pillzenith isn’t usually the most friendly towards the world of wandering cultivators. I’m sure he finds it painful being forced to make such a big investment.”

“Heh heh, he doesn’t just want to attract wandering cultivators. He’s trying to one-up Veluriyam Capital. Didn’t Veluriyam say that Sacred Peafowl Mountain can refine any pill that anyone else has? Does young lord Zhen know how to refine the Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill? It’s a slap to the face, that’s what it is!”

“We’ll see how that young lord responds. He’s young and full of energy. I bet you he won’t take it lying down.”

“Young lord Zhen always surprises, so let’s see what he does this time. There’s not much time left, hmm? Pillfire is being quite frank with offering the Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill. If he doesn’t respond, it’ll be hard for him to convincingly demolish Pillfire in the end.”

“It wouldn’t be young lord Zhen if he didn’t respond, eh?”

After Veluriyam Capital’s incredible performance time and again, expectations for young lord Zhen were extremely high. Everyone craved to see what new amazement he had up his sleeve. The atmosphere grew tenser and conflicts grew more intense by the day.

On the third day after Pillfire’s announcement for the Hoarcrown Supreme Mystery Pill, Veluriyam Capital proclaimed yet another piece of stunning news. It shook the foundations of not only the wandering cultivator world, but the entire human domain.

Young lord Zhen had promised that a mysterious sage from Myriad Abyss Island would lecture about pill and martial dao at the Tiger and Dragon Meet. Furthermore, Veluriyam’s gathering welcomed not only wandering cultivators, but the other factions as well. Anyone that was interested could delegate a small team of representatives to attend.

Of course, reception limitations meant that one faction could only bring ten at most. Any more than that would be barred entry. Aside from this, young lord Zhen had also declared that since Pillfire was decided on confronting Veluriyam at every step, it was welcome to send any number of pill dao representatives to challenge Veluriyam’s pill dao prowess. The Sacred Peafowl Mountain was ready to receive them at any time!

Clearly, Veluriyam Capital was done with passive tolerance. Their displeasure was plain and they were going to duel openly.

The human domain reacted with absolute chaos.

Chapter 1250: Frenzied Offering of Ideas

The tug-of-war between the cities was finally concluded with this last bit of news. No matter how much it struggled, Pillfire discovered sadly that Veluriyam’s tide could not be stopped.

Myriad Abyss Island? Most in the human domain didn’t know about the place. Only a few experts of the highest caliber were privy to bits and pieces about it. Whether the place existed at all was a long-running mystery.

But today, Veluriyam Capital brought an end to the debate. A mysterious expert from the island would lecture on pill and martial dao for everyone to attend. Regardless of whether the rumor itself seemed true on the surface, young lord Zhen had already taken on a mantle of credibility in everyone's minds. The youth's rise to fame was studded with fulfilled promises. Never once before had he taken back his words.

Myriad Abyss Island was a mythical place. A holy land in the dreams of countless martial cultivators. The three words alone held countless magic and mysticism in them. They were an irresistible power that could not be ignored.

The moment that name was brought out, the invisible competition between Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City concluded. The two parties no longer competed on the same level. Pillfire City was forced to back off. It had the will to carry on, but not the strength. Furthermore, there was nothing they could do that could remotely overwhelm Veluriyam Capital's three offerings.

"Your Majesty, any further efforts on our part will be in vain. I think Veluriyam Capital has gone crazy. They dare bring out Myriad Abyss Island? Does that Zhen kid really know some mysterious expert from there?" Baili Shengzhi looked unconvinced. He only half-believed the stories surrounding the ancient isle. Moreover, he instinctively refused to believe the possibility that young lord Zhen was able to invite a mysterious expert from there.

"Shura, you've been at Veluriyam Capital for three thousand years. How much do you know about Sacred Peafowl Mountain? What's with that young lord Zhen?" Emperor Pillzenith couldn't make neither heads nor tails of the situation.

Emperor Shura was as displeased as any of the Pillfire natives. His one consolation was that they had as much difficulty in dealing with young lord Zhen as he did. If an entire Pillfire City couldn't put down that brat, his own loss seemed much more reasonable in comparison. But Emperor Pillzenith's question was one he could not ignore.

"Emperor Peafowl enjoyed making friends in the outside world. He rarely told me what he did. Sacred Peafowl Mountain didn't originally have this young lord Zhen. There was a certain young lord Fan who was a martial dao genius, but unskilled with pill dao. But young lord Fan died under mysterious circumstances one day. I thought Emperor Peafowl would leave the city to me then, but he managed to find that kid out of nowhere."

"So you're saying that even you don't know where he's from?" Emperor Pillzenith was very dissatisfied.

"Sacred Peafowl Mountain's version is that young lord Zhen has always been its true young lord. Young lord Fan was only ever a candidate. But I think that they're full of it. Young lord Zhen isn't someone that Emperor Peafowl could have taught." Emperor Shura spoke of his former superior with unbridled resentment.

"Does Sacred Peafowl Mountain have relations with anyone from Myriad Abyss Island?" This was the point that Emperor Pillzenith was most concerned about. The mere possibility of it was enough to strike fear into his heart. Like everyone else, the great emperor harbored an indescribable wariness for that uncharted place.

If Sacred Peafowl Mountain had a connection to Myriad Abyss Island and Pillfire City did not, the latter would be in a horrendous place. The more he considered things, the more panicked he became.

Without this unexpected factor coming into play, Emperor Pillzenith wouldn't have cared too much about the Pinecrane Pill. Pillfire was entrenched and well-established. Veluriyam Capital had a long way to go before it could truly challenge its rival in pill-related matters. But Myriad Abyss Island introduced uncertainty into the mix.

Emperor Pillzenith thought it quite likely that young lord Zhen had a Myriad Abyss Island-related background. Where did his blind confidence come from otherwise? He wouldn't have dared to challenge Pillfire City directly if he didn't have something he could rely on.

What faction in the human domain was brave enough to contest pill dao with Pillfire City? Young lord Zhen was the first in several millennia with the courage to do so!

Unfortunately, Pillfire City was in a difficult position to respond. Should they respond? They were more than willing to issue a counterpoint, but who would they make their representative?

Pill King Ji Lang? He'd lost twice to young lord Zhen already. He didn't have the spirit to face the youth any more.

There were others in the city with superior pill dao skills, of course. Pillfire City's history meant that there were always a couple of pill emperors in the older generation, however troublesome it was to spur them into action. There was a bigger problem, though. Old-time pill emperors embodied the peak of Pillfire City's pill dao prowess. They were obliged to win any contest they participated in. Any public loss would have far-reaching consequences.

Repeated failures had made Emperor Pillzenith afraid. He was uncertain how expansive young lord Zhen's pill dao knowledge was. Could the older generation defeat the kid convincingly?

The emperor was confident enough that he felt he had a good chance at defeating the young lord. However, it was condescending for a ruler of a major faction to participate in a contest. Furthermore, he risked even more by losing than those old-timers. His loss would mean Pillfire City's total defeat at Veluriyam Capital's hands. Therefore, Pillfire's final response to young lord Zhen's provocation was to ignore it completely.

Emperor Shura was a little ashamed. He knew very little about any of the three or four questions that Emperor Pillzenith had asked. He had discovered far too late that he knew extremely little about his supposed rival. No wonder his usurpation hadn't succeeded. Did young lord Zhen have relations with Myriad Abyss Island? He had no idea at all.

Emperor Pillzenith was quite irritated at Shura's silence. Working with Emperor Shura was completely unproductive. In some aspects, the exiled emperor was no better than a good-for-nothing.

Emperor Shura felt a wave of guilt wash over him when he saw Emperor Pillzenith's frigid eyes. The other emperor's evaluation of him had probably already fallen a mile. If he didn't assert himself now, Emperor Pillzenith's impression of him would worsen even more.

"Your Majesty Pillzenith. There's not much point in investigating the relationship between the Zhen brat and Myriad Abyss Island. We can't use conventional tactics in dealing with our current predicament," Emperor Shura ventured.

"Do you have something you want to say?" Emperor Pillzenith asked coolly.

"The only reason Veluriyam Capital is able to do all of this is because of young lord Zhen. If young lord Zhen is out of the picture, so is the entire capital," Emperor Shura spat viciously.

"What do you mean?" Emperor Pillzenith asked coldly.

"Isn't he hosting the Tiger and Dragon Meet? We can take advantage of this by sending a few experts to infiltrate Veluriyam Capital and assassinate its young lord. I know the city very well. If we find the right window of opportunity, there's no reason we shouldn't succeed."

Emperor Pillzenith found this suggestion stupendously attractive. He hadn't thought about such a simple solution because of his prior desire for the Pinecrane Pill. But young lord Zhen had become a real threat to his own faction. If the kid was allowed to grow, Pillfire City would lose its dominant position sooner or later. He absolutely did not want that to happen.

The answering pensiveness prompted Shura to put himself forward. "Your Majesty Pillzenith, if you give me three great emperor realm cultivators alongside Brother Vastsea and myself, I'll have a seventy to eighty percent of cutting young lord Zhen down."

"Are you sure?" Emperor Pillzenith inquired somberly.

Pillfire City had plenty of great emperor realm cultivators, though the emperor wasn't necessarily willing to delegate any them out. He had many other channels through which he could hire great emperors. They were definitely scarce, but not so much so to be impossible to find, especially for someone like him. Given the emperor's own level of cultivation, most he associated with were great emperors also.

Emperor Shura was resolute. "I am sure. I, Vastsea, and three more great emperors. We'll get the job done."

Emperor Vastsea's heart pounded at those words. He wanted to urge Emperor Shura not to speak so hastily or make such bold promises, but the madness on the other man's face told him that he would only make an enemy of his erstwhile friend. There was an inexplicable sadness in his heart. He felt a hint of regret. Why had he been so obsessed with following Emperor Shura's lead?

What was wrong with a carefree lifestyle in Veluriyam Capital as one of its titled emperors? His choices had only turned him into a homeless dog. Moreover, Emperor Shura was proving to be far more reckless than he had signed up for. Putting his own life on the line without asking first upset him quite a bit.

Shura wasn't entirely wrong, but a shadow crept into Vastsea's heart whenever he thought of young lord Zhen. Jiang Chen was a lingering nightmare for him. The kid's sheer monstrosity and invincibility intimidated him. Regardless of how well-planned things seemed initially, the results were always less than satisfactory. It was very possible that this was yet another easily-foiled plot.

Once that happened, they would be utterly disgraced as criminals. Emperor Vastsea had no desire to become a sewer rat in the Upper Eight Regions.

