

Three Realms 1251

Chapter 1251: The Six Titans Of The Wandering World

At this point, Veluriyam Capital had walked out from the shadow cast by the Vassal Meeting. Normal order and peace had been restored. There was still no news of Emperor Peafowl's whereabouts, but young lord Zhen's governance exceeded many people's expectations, despite the chaos and skepticism in the beginning.

With the passage of time, everyone gradually grew accustomed to having young lord Zhen at the helm. What everyone failed to predict was that the capital would actually be even more prosperous and thriving than in Emperor Peafowl's era.

Even though many remained skeptical about young lord Zhen's plans, they mostly agreed that the young lord was a progressive ruler. He was always busy at work and by no means was just putting on a show. The precise location for the academy had been set. Various preparation efforts were under way and a majority of the funds had already arrived.

The information released for the Tiger and Dragon Meet swept the entire human domain up in a storm. Lately, discussions related to the capital had run hot and fierce, and for the first time in a thousand years, it exceeded Pillfire City in popularity.

Though everyone knew that a short term phenomenon didn't mean much, it was still a good start. The entire capital had always seen Pillfire City as a mountain to conquer. It was a peak that the capital had to scale to become the undisputed champion of the Upper Eight Regions.

Naturally, a large majority of the citizens saw Pillfire City as the enemy. That was why they'd celebrated so fiercely when Jiang Chen defeated Pill King Ji Lang during the duel over the Longevity Pill. Their desire to win over Pillfire was simply too strong. His victory was a much needed boost to the capital's morale.

Even though the capital lost Emperor Shura and Emperor Vastsea after the incident, it didn't sink into chaos. Quite the contrary in fact. The incident actually brought even more unity and internal cohesion.

Emperor Petalpluck and Emperor Mountaincrush, both neutral parties during the incident, publicly declared their support for young lord Zhen. They wanted Sacred Peafowl Mountain to continue its rule over Veluriyam Capital. Even Emperor Skysplitter, once siding with Emperor Shura, declared his support for Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Thus, it wasn't an exaggeration to say that the capital was at its most united in a long while.

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Emperor Peerless was all smiles in the young lord manor. "Young lord, good news! Many secluded titans of the wandering cultivator world have been asking me about the Tiger and Dragon Meet. From the looks of it, our event seems to be getting more attention than Pillfire City's Pill-Martial Summit!"

"Old Brother Mo, you've come at the right time. I still lack some understanding of the wandering world. I'm not worried about a lack of attendees, but rather that we'll have too many. Perhaps you can help me a little in this matter?" Jiang Chen flashed a grin.

Emperor Peerless nodded. "Precisely what I'm here for. The wandering world is full of hidden dragons and crouching dragons that avoid showing themselves in public. However, that doesn't mean there's a lack of experts. Disregarding the ancient hermits, there are six active leaders in the wandering world. They are often called the Six Titans.

"These six are domineering characters who are highly revered in the wandering world." Emperor Peerless explained patiently.

"Let me guess, you're one of the great titans?" Jiang Chen laughed.

"Heh. That's correct. However, I'm actually ranked anywhere between fourth to sixth amongst these six greats." Emperor Peerless admitted without any hesitation.

"Oh? There are people stronger than you?" Jiang Chen was slightly taken aback.

"Mm. Let me tell you in detail. it's widely acknowledged that the top three titans are Emperor Everviolet, Emperor Wellspring, and also Emperor Sabledeep.

"Emperor Everviolet cultivates the Everviolet eye technique and is a master of various eye technique arts. Emperor Wellspring's original name is Jingzhong Hui. He cultivates the Onestrike Wellspring sword technique. His cultivation is deep beyond comprehension. I once exchanged a few moves with him. Even though there was no clear winner, it was obvious that I'd lose if we fought until the very end. Emperor Wellspring is definitely strong enough to go up against Emperor Pillzenith."

"What?" Jiang Chen was taken aback. Emperor Pillzenith and Emperor Peafowl were widely recognized as one of the strongest in the Upper Eight Regions! And Emperor Wellspring could take on cultivators of this caliber? Wasn't he terrifyingly strong then? Did the wandering cultivator world really hide that amount of perverse strength?

"That's right. There's no need to be surprised." Emperor Peerless was calm beyond measure. "The reality is, the Upper Eight Regions is full of supreme cultivators of this caliber. Just because Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City are the strongest factions doesn't mean that the strongest cultivator must come from these two factions. The lifespan of powerful experts is simply too long. Some who haven't surfaced for a while are forgotten by the world at large."

Jiang Chen was dumbfounded. He wasn't actually certain that Emperor Peafowl was the strongest in Veluriyam Capital. He'd never thought about or questioned this before. He just naturally assumed that Emperor Peafowl was the strongest.

"Alright, let's continue with Emperor Sabledeep then." Jiang Chen didn't want to dwell on matters for too long and decided to change the subject.

"Emperor Sabledeep is the most scholarly amongst the six titans. He's a powerful expert who indulges in books and scrolls. He has a group of loyal followers due to his scholarly disposition. Emperor Wellspring once said that he had little confidence in his ability to take down Emperor Sabledeep, even with his most powerful techniques."

"Hmm... The wandering cultivator world is truly filled with enigmatic heroes." Jiang Chen sighed.

“Mm. Those three are strongest among the six titans.” Emperor Peerless was a proud and accomplished person, but even he had to agree with this fact.

“What about the other two?” Jiang Chen quickly added.

“As for the other two, we’re roughly equals in strength. Emperor Reliance, whose original name is Li Ningyi, is the only female among us. Emperor Inferno is slightly younger than all of us, but his cultivation is by no means weaker than mine. Many say that he’ll one day catch up to the top three. All six titans hold great influence in the wandering world.”

“The great titans of the wandering world...” Jiang Chen muttered. “Can you also tell me about their personalities?”

“Personalities?” Emperor Peerless didn’t rush to answer. “Well, powerful experts of the wandering world are often less sociable and prefer solidarity. Emperor Everviolet is very enigmatic and cold. He isn’t particularly fond of other wandering cultivators either. Emperor Wellspring is completely devoted to sword dao. He lives by the sword and dies by the sword, and is completely disinterested in matters unrelated to martial dao. Emperor Sabledeep pursues the knowledge and intricacies of life and death itself. The common folk will find it very difficult to hold a conversation with him. Emperor Inferno is very brash and unapologetic. He lives and dies by his own heart, and prefers not to be tied down by anything in life. Emperor Reliance is a kind and wise woman. However, never judge her by appearance alone. Those who do so come to regret it.”

Emperor Peerless had given his impression of these emperors and gave Jiang Chen a rough understanding.

“Other than the six titans, there are many other powerful experts in the wandering world, right?”

“There are others who’ve broken through to great emperor, but none can compete with the six great titans. The others often challenge the six titans to gain fame, but none have ever succeeded. There’s an unsaid rule in the wandering world that one must defeat a great titan, or they’ll forever be seen as inferior.”

“Haha! That’s interesting! There’s only so many places with the six titans. Their lives would be much easier if it’d been the twelve or eighteen great titans.” Jiang Chen quipped.

“If it’d been the twelve or eighteen great titans, our legitimacy would’ve lessened.” Emperor Peerless said with a straight face.

Jiang Chen had gotten a rough understanding of the structure of the peak of the wandering world. There were other great emperors, but none could compare to the six great titans.

“Young lord, even though the public calls us the six great titans, it’s unlikely that we’re the strongest in the wandering cultivator world. As I’ve mentioned, it’s likely that there are hidden ancient masters that are stronger than all of us.”

Jiang Chen nodded. “We shan’t bother with the hidden masters. It’s more productive to take the active emperors into account. By the way Old Brother Mo, did any of the six titans inquire about the Tiger and Dragon Meet?”

“Yes. Emperor Springwell asked me about it.” Emperor Peerless answered bluntly.

“What about the others?” Jiang Chen was a little disappointed.

“Young lord, the titans of the wandering world are proud and lofty. They might not show it even if they’re interested. The Pinecrane Pill might not pique their interest, but I can guarantee that they’ll be extremely curious about the mysterious expert from Myriad Abyss Island. By my estimations, at least two or three titans will be attending the event.

“Emperor Wellspring will definitely come, as will Emperor Inferno. If nothing goes awry, Emperor Reliance might come as well. However, I can’t give any guarantees for Emperor Everviolet or Emperor Sabledeep.”

Counting Emperor Peerless, a total of four titans would be present if three more came. The Tiger and Dragon Meet would absolutely be a success if that was the case.

Chapter 1252: The Eight First Rank Sects

Every tavern and inn in Veluriyam Capital surged in occupancy. The streets bustled with activity and business boomed. A few hundred thousand wandering cultivator experts made their ways into the city over the course of only a few days, making urban life a lot more lively. That number was only a fraction of the expected turnout. Estimates predicted that one to two million total would be present for the start of the festivities.

The world teemed with wandering cultivators of every stripe. One to two million was only a small portion of the greater whole. Most wandering cultivators wouldn't think of attending this kind of event. And yes, on a certain level, they didn't qualify.

Firstly, there was no point or possibility for lower level wandering cultivators to come. What would they even do once they were here? Anyone below sage realm would be too embarrassed to come to the Tiger and Dragon Meet.

Veluriyam Capital would be unwilling to admit anyone thick-skinned enough to show up, anyways. If they allowed it, over ten million would rush in as a conservative estimate.

The number of wandering cultivators residing in the environment around the city and the Upper Eight Regions was awfully large. For the most part, this simple preventative measure kept the situation in the city under control.

Time passed. Only three days remained until the Tiger and Dragon Meet was officially slated to begin.

"Congratulations, young lord. We've welcomed over twenty great emperor realm cultivators into our city. As for regular emperors, a preliminary count puts the number at a few thousand. They've come from all over the human domain. There are even a few from the far north."

The far north was Pillfire-controlled territory. If people were willing to come from that far, that meant the Tiger and Dragon Meet was a success.

"How many of the Upper Eight Regions' sects have come?" Jiang Chen inquired.

"After our last announcement, many factions and sects in the human domain have expressed their willingness to send teams of observers. Representatives from these five first rank sects have arrived: the Great Yu Skysword Sect, Celestial Cicada Court, Ninesuns Sky Sect, Heavenly Dragon Sect, and the Sublime Chord Temple. Groups from the remaining three have not yet reached our gates."

The Upper Eight Regions had eight first rank sects. The ones previously mentioned made up five. The remaining three were the Empyrean River Palace, the Eternal Celestial Palace, and the Moon God Sect.

In terms of martial strength, the Great Yu Skysword Sect, Ninesuns Sky Sect, and Heavenly Dragon Sect ranked the highest. Below them were Eternal Celestial Capital and the Sublime Chord Temple. The Celestial Cicada Court, Empyrean River Palace, and Moon God Sect were at the bottom.

But the difference between each sect wasn't pronounced enough to be notable. If one of the top three was forced to duke it out with one of the bottom three, any victory it won would be at a terrible loss. There was no overwhelming advantage to be had. Any disparity between first rank sects wasn't large enough to be crucial or consequential. That's why they could call each other equals.

Jiang Chen had invited every faction of the human domain to spectate his Tiger and Dragon Meet. This was a natural position he needed to adopt. His final goal was to unite the human domain, placing Veluriyam Capital at the helm.

He wasn't doing so out of personal ambition, but rather an imitation of history. If there hadn't been strong leadership during the great war in ancient times, the human race would've fallen without question. The efforts of said leaders at key moments had single-handedly saved humans from becoming slaves beneath the demon race's iron boots.

The human domain of today was a pile of loose sand. Factional warfare and conflict was everywhere and no one yielded to justice or authority. If the demonic invasion were to occur right now, there would be no resistance to it whatsoever. The human domain would be rapidly conquered and utterly crushed.

Jiang Chen wanted to tackle the arduous task of bringing the human race together. Human hearts were the most difficult things in the world to accurately gauge. Similarly, selfishness was the most dominant in human behavior.

Several conditions had to be in place before consolidation was possible.

One, a powerful, authoritative character had to appear. This person had to be able to overcome each and every rival and challenger that arose.

Two, the people needed to know what kind of trouble the human domain was about to face. There was no solution without exposing the crux of the matter. If mankind didn't have a sense of impending dread driving it forward, what else could compel a widespread suppression of selfishness?

Three, the person had to possess immense personal charisma. Strength alone could stamp out opposition for a time, but it would not inspire faith and trust. A leader that was both strong and charismatic was far more useful and decisive than a brutal despot.

This meeting for wandering cultivators was only Jiang Chen's first step. His long-term goal had to remain hidden and he could only get there step by careful step. Presently, his main objective was to gradually increase his influence. He didn't yet have enough to command obeisance from the world at large.

The Upper Eight Regions formed the core of the human domain. Here was the key to uniting the human race. As long as he could rally all eight of the regions under his banner, the middle and lower regions should be no problem whatsoever.

The Upper Eight Regions were currently controlled by several large factions, plus the eight first rank sects. Jiang Chen and Eternal Celestial Capital knew each other well. Given the enmity between them, it was unlikely that the sect would send a team of delegates.

The Ninesuns Sky Sect was Jiang Chen's number one enemy in the past, though it had eventually been replaced by Eternal Celestial Capital. Would it send some people? It was hard to say.

The Great Yu Skysword Sect and the Celestial Cicada Court were Veluriyam Capital's newfound allies. Their representatives hadn't actually left after attending the Vassal Meeting prior. The Han brothers and Su Huanzhen were still within the city.

The Empyrean River Palace, Heavenly Dragon Sect, and Sublime Chord Temple typically refrained from taking a stand between Pillfire City and Veluriyam Capital. The Empyrean River Palace was actually a little closer to Pillfire City. However, that wouldn't stop them from sending representatives here. The sect head was unlikely to appear, but that was perfectly fine.

The Heavenly Dragon Sect was a sect with an ancient heritage. Supposedly, it possessed the bloodline of ancient sky dragons. Among the first rank sects, its bloodline was the strongest.

They were probably the strongest among the eight in terms of raw strength. Even the Great Yu Skysword Sect and the Ninesuns Sky Sect paled a little compared to them.

The Sublime Chord Temple was a Buddhist sect, rarely inserting themselves into worldly conflicts. This didn't mean that they were free from desire; how could a first rank sect maintain its status if that were the case? It simply had divergent ideas and methods about cultivation.

The only sect Jiang Chen had no inkling about was the Moon God Sect. It displeased him that they hadn't yet received anyone from the sect. The young man frowned a little. There was no way the Moon God Sect didn't know he was Sir Shao from earlier. Was it going to excuse itself despite his favor of saving their Precious Tree?

Because the Moon God Sect neighbored Pillfire City, they couldn't openly support Veluriyam Capital. Still, an arbitrary representative would have sufficed to show their gratitude.

"Eternal Celestial Capital won't come, young lord. They've pretty much broken off with us entirely after the Longevity Pill fiasco. Its leader's departure from the Vassal Meeting signifies that they'd wanted to accomplish something by attending our event. I don't think they will have the face to come."

"Maybe not," Jiang Chen shook his head. "A first rank sect has no problem suffering a hit to superficial things. Even if they do not come, it won't be for that reason."

The only reason Eternal Celestial Capital wouldn't come would be its old enmity with Regal Pill Palace. There was a paper-thin layer of peace between all-out war. To a certain extent, the same was true for the Ninesuns Sky Sect. As they spoke, Xue Tong hurriedly rushed over. "Young lord, the Ninesuns Sky Sect has sent an emissary. He's waiting outside the young lord residence for an audience."

“The Ninesuns Sky Sect?” Jiang Chen was stunned. “They... sent someone?”

There was talk just now that the Ninesuns Sky Sect hadn't sent anyone. They certainly had great timing, but the Meet hadn't started yet. What did its emissary want?

Jiang Chen didn't quite understand. There was no need to be impolite about it, though. “Send him in.”

The Ninesuns Sky Sect's representative was a high-ranking official of the sect, a twelfth-ranked inspector. It was the highest rank an inspector could have, an honor given only to those just below the sect head and the elders.

“Your name sounds constantly in our ears like thunder, young lord Zhen. I feel great joy that I am able to see you in person today. My name is Shangguan Yanqing, a rank twelve inspector from the Ninesuns Sky Sect. I'm very honored to meet your acquaintance.” The inspector's words were quite humble. He showed no arrogance before Jiang Chen's face, instead opting to salute very respectfully to Veluriyam's young lord.

“A rank twelve inspector is both important and powerful. You count amongst the top five within the Ninesuns Sky Sect. It's I who is lacking in respect.” Jiang Chen returned a sentence that contained an equal amount of pointless pleasantries.

Chapter 1253: The Ninesuns Sky Sect Requests Peace

Shangguan Yanqing was a perceptive man. He surveyed his surroundings, then glanced thoughtfully at the nearby Cloudsoar Monarch before smiling. “Young lord Zhen, may I speak to you privately?”

Objectively speaking, his request was rather impolite. After all, he was standing within Sacred Peafowl Mountain, face-to-face with its very own young lord. What unspeakable motive did he have for a private audience?

Jiang Chen glanced nonchalantly at the inspector. His face was emotionless. “Cloudsoar, please give us a few minutes alone.”

Cloudsoar Monarch blinked in surprise, but obeyed the command. After he departed the room, only Jiang Chen and Shangguan Yanqing remained. Their eyes met. The latter suddenly began to laugh.

“Young lord Zhen, it is often said that hearing of someone is far inferior to meeting them in person. I came today for two reasons. Part of it was because I wanted to see exactly how amazing the legendary young lord Zhen was for myself. That aside, I do have something important I'd like to discuss with you.”

“What?” Jiang Chen's tone was flat. He knew very well that the Ninesuns Sky Sect likely knew of his real identity. After all, he was borrowing Shi Zhen's Pill King Medallion. The pseudonym 'Zhen Shi' only made things more obvious.

Since they already knew each other's thoughts, there was no need for any more unnecessary niceties. A man in Jiang Chen's current position didn't need to be scared of Eternal Celestial Capital, much less the Ninesuns Sky Sect. Rather, the reverse should be true.

Shangguan Yanqing smiled. “There's no one else here, so I won't beat around the bush. Others may not know of young lord Zhen's identity, but we surely do.”

Not a hint of emotion flickered through Jiang Chen's face. "What, did you come all the way here just to say this to me?"

"Of course not," Shangguan Yanqing smiled back. "I am here on the sect head's behalf to parley with you."

"Parley? What's there to discuss between us?" Jiang Chen frowned.

"Let me speak more plainly, young lord Zhen. Many years ago, our ambitions brought us to Myriad Domain. We acknowledge our offenses and duly apologize for them. However, we weren't the mastermind behind the domain's destruction. In fact, that has nothing to do with us at all. The Eternal Celestial Capital has swindled us both. When two dogs strive for a bone, the third runs away with it. Our sect head has always regretted what's happened since then between us... especially now that your fame is spreading far and wide, I'm sure you understand."

Jiang Chen maintained a half-sneer, coldly gazing at Ninesuns' emissary. He wasn't in a hurry to respond just yet.

"You wasted many of your days in the sixteen kingdom alliance and the Precious Tree Sect, but we were the ridiculous ones in the end. Our inspectors only slaved over the minor details without discovering you in the rough. It's our blindness that's at fault, truly."

Shangguan Yanqing's words were a little exaggerated, but they sounded plausible to a certain extent. Jiang Chen found no real reason to trust these half-truths the man was spouting. He didn't care much about praise from them given his current position.

"The Purple Sun Sect's total defeat at the Precious Tree Sect is entirely because of you. After that, our plans in the Myriad Domain went entirely awry. The Tristar Sect's destruction and various other misfortunes led to our schemes being completely crushed, and the Purple Sun Sect being bankrupted in the region. We were furious at the time, but I can see now that the results were a foregone conclusion."

The smile on Shangguan Yanqing's face didn't recede a bit. "Look at how Emperor Shura is doing these days. Look at Pillfire City. They've both experienced defeat at your hands, young lord Zhen. How does the bit of trouble we had in the past match up against that? Not at all, I say, not at all! I'm thankful that there's no bitter vendetta between us, no mortal enmity. Truly."

The inspector paused a moment, his eyes looking fervently toward the young lord. "This is what I came to say, young lord Zhen. Our sect head wishes to make peace with you. Let our past animosity be settled. Yes, we did commit some unbecoming acts towards you at the time. You've also killed two of our best disciples, along with a few other young geniuses. But even so, I don't think there's any need for us to fight to the death. What do you think?" After a long-winded talk, Shangguan Yanqing had finally arrived his main purpose.

The Ninesuns Sky Sect was looking for a reconciliation? This defied Jiang Chen's initial expectations. As one of the strongest among the Upper Eight Regions' first rank sects, they had a habit of acting recklessly and with impunity. But apparently, they now sought an armistice from the young lord of Veluriyam Capital! He considered the proposition thoughtfully, assessing the truthfulness in the man's proposition.

Shangguan Yanqing's eyes were sincere and plain. "We at the Ninesuns Sky Sect value pragmatism. If young lord Zhen hadn't grown up to be such a character, we would never have offered our invitation. But since your meteoric rise can't be stopped, it's unwise for us to hold onto old disputes. That's right, Cao Jin and Xiao Paohui were two true disciples. But such disciples cannot sway the path of an entire sect. You have a vicious fight against Pillfire City in your own future, young lord Zhen. Surely you don't wish to make an additional enemy?"

The Ninesuns Sky Sect's attempt at reaching out for peace was honest, but Shangguan Yanqing wasn't exactly going to grovel. That was an unrealistic expectation. They were a first rank sect, after all. While Ninesuns was unwilling to have Veluriyam as its opponent, it was unlikely to toss away its own dignity in the process.

Any request for peace had to be tempered with reasonable respect.

"I'm beginning to believe that the Ninesuns Sky Sect is genuinely seeking reconciliation. That's right, I killed Cao Jin because he threatened my life. As for Xiao Paohui, I guessed that he belonged to your sect when I fought him."

"If we're looking to resolve our conflict, the past shouldn't matter so much," smiled Shangguan Yanqing. "The dead can't be revived. Not to mention that we gave great offense back in the day. Why don't we call it even? We don't wish to be enemies with young lord Zhen, and I'm sure you would rather have one less enemy?"

After some thought, Jiang Chen realized that his dislike of the Ninesuns Sky Sect was far outweighed by the deep acrimony he had of the Eternal Celestial Capital. In fact, Ninesuns probably hated him more than he did them.

"I can accept your request, Inspector Shangguan. However, I must take some time to observe the trustworthiness of your sect's actions."

"Naturally." Shangguan Yanqing chuckled. "Though I will say that our sect head always makes good on his promises. If he's decided to stop fighting with young lord Zhen, why would he change his mind?"

Jiang Chen knew that the Eternal Celestial Capital was the real mastermind behind Myriad Domain's destruction. The Great Scarlet Mid Region was also a faction directly under its control.

The Ninesuns Sky Sect had participated a fair amount in earlier days, but it wasn't responsible for a majority of the damage. They had nothing whatsoever to do with the fall of Regal Pill Palace. As for their pursuit of him much later, the men they'd sent had all been slain at the Valley of Infant Shriek.

The crux of the matter was that the Ninesuns Sky Sect had suffered much more at his hand than the reverse. If they were willing to take the loss, Jiang Chen was willing to reciprocate by allowing them to step back.

"Our sect head is coming in a few days to visit you himself, young lord Zhen," continued the inspector. "If you don't believe me, he'll swear an oath with you then. I hope that will be expression enough of our sincerity."

"Hmm, if the Ninesuns Sky Sect is indeed so forthright, then I am obliged to respond in kind. I maintain my position from earlier. But if this is a lie covering up disruption, I have plenty of ways to respond. If

that happens, the sect will forever be classified alongside the Eternal Celestial Capital as a faction I must destroy." His tone hardened as he uttered the threat.

"Bold words, young lord Zhen." Hearing those words upset Shangguan Yanqing somewhat, but he had enough self-control to say nothing. Successful mediation was at hand. There was no need to jeopardize it through idle squabbling.

"Alright, I'm sure you're tired from your trip. Come, take our guest to his rooms. Make sure he rests well in preparation for the Tiger and Dragon Meet." Jiang Chen dismissed his guest.

After Shangguan Yanqing's departure, he mulled the matter over a little while longer. The Ninesuns Sky Sect's olive branch was likely authentic.

The situation was clear. As Veluriyam Capital's young lord, he occupied a position that the Ninesuns Sky Sect couldn't challenge. Because of this, there was no reason for them to renew hostilities with him. It was better to put their problems in the open and resolve them.

Shortly after, another subordinate reported in. "Young lord, representatives from the Moon God Sect and Eternal Celestial Capital have entered the capital."

"What? Did they come together, or separately?"

"Together, sir."

The young lord furrowed his brow. What was the meaning behind this gesture? The Moon God Sect was definitely unaware of his difficult history with Eternal Celestial Capital, so they didn't necessarily mean anything by it. But Eternal Celestial Capital definitely had ulterior motives for the action.

His mind alert, Jiang Chen asked, "Who's come from the Moon God Sect?"

"Its third sectmaster, young lord, and two holy maidens. And their entourage, of course."

"Which two holy maidens?"

Chapter 1254: Get Out Of Here, Now!

Jiang Chen was highly perturbed that the Eternal Celestial Capital had arrived together with the Moon God Sect and immediately asked for clarification.

"The two holy maidens are Holy Maiden Xu Shan, the senior sectmaster's newest disciple, as well as Holy Maiden Zi Qiong, the third sectmaster's direct disciple."

"Holy Maiden Qingxuan didn't come?" Jiang Chen couldn't resist asking.

"The calling card states that only Holy Maiden Xu Shan and Holy Maiden Zi Qiong are here."

Jiang Chen took the calling card and nodded after a short glance. The second sectmaster was eccentric and overprotective of her most beloved disciple. A stubborn old woman like her would never allow Holy Maiden Qingxuan to come to Veluriyam Capital. She was already suspicious even though Jiang Chen had only spent a brief moment alone with Xu Qingxuan during the Moon God Precious Tree incident.

Jiang Chen didn't have a good impression of the second sectmaster. Setting aside the fact that she'd separated his parents, she was shackling Xu Qingxuan with unreasonable rules.

He was rather fond of his sister even though they'd only met once. Her playful yet straightforward personality was very refreshing. Because of their shared blood, he felt an indescribable sense of kinship with her. Naturally, he didn't want his sister to be restrained by such an unreasonable antique.

He was most worried that the second sectmaster's incessant brainwashing of Xu Qingxuan would turn her into an ingrate who would betray her parents. It'd be awful if she was turned into a puppet whose sole purpose was to cultivate, abandoning everything else that made her human.

Fortunately, Xu Qingxuan was rather resilient to the second sectmaster's brainwashing. Jiang Chen was quite consoled. Even though he was a little disappointed that his little sister hadn't come, he was equally relieved. Without her, he could be more straightforward in his dealings with the Moon God Sect.

If the sect had truly joined forces with the Eternal Celestial Capital, he had no qualms taking them down a notch through a show of force. Of course, that wouldn't be the case if the sect was being manipulated by the Eternal Celestial Capital instead.

"The Moon God Sect, where are they staying?" the young lord asked.

"Young lord, lodgings for the representatives of the eight first ranked sects have been arranged at the Coiling Dragon Clan's old manor."

The Coiling Dragon Clan Manor was one of the most prominent manors in Veluriyam Capital. It had been left empty after Emperor Coiling Dragon had achieved a breakthrough and established his own faction.

The emperor generously offered to let his manor be used in the event. Once the largest and most prominent clan in Veluriyam Capital, its manor was fittingly spacious and magnificent. It was perfectly capable of housing eighty factions, let alone just the representatives of the eight great sects.

"Invite Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Peerless for a visit right now." Jiang Chen ordered.

Both arrived in no time at all. "Gentlemen, do you mind accompanying me to the Coiling Dragon Manor?" Jiang Chen asked with a smile.

"Oh? Only the representatives of first ranked sects are there right now. Young lord, who do you seek?" Emperor Coiling Dragon smiled faintly.

"The representatives of the Moon God Sect," Jiang Chen answered bluntly.

"Oh? Have they arrived as well?" Emperor Coiling Dragon had yet to receive news of their arrival.

"Not just them. The Ninesuns Sky Sect and the Eternal Celestial Capital have arrived as well. The eight great sects have all convened." Jiang Chen laughed.

"Tsk tsk, all of the great sects are here. Young lord, your influence knows no bounds." Emperor Coiling Dragon sighed.

Emperor Peerless laughed. "These factions are each more and more shrewd than the other. With so many attractive rewards, it was only a given that they'd come."

A messenger arrived during their conversation. "Young lord, the representatives of the Moon God Sect and the Eternal Celestial Capital request an audience."

Jiang Chen was stunned. Emperor Coiling Dragon cracked a joke. "It seems our young lord has saved himself a trip. Your influence is so great that they show up at the door themselves! The entire Upper Eight Regions must be itching to exchange moves with you!"

Everyone laughed.

"Show in the Moon God Sect representatives first. The men from Eternal Celestial Capital can wait in the side hall." Jiang Chen would rather not receive both of these factions at the same time.

The third sectmaster, Holy Maiden Xu Shan, and Holy Maiden Zi Qiong were soon shown in.

"Third Sectmaster, it's a pleasure to have you here. I apologize for not greeting you sooner. Older sister Xu Shan, it's been a long time! You've grown much stronger since we last met! This is a cause worthy of celebration!" Jiang Chen was openly admitting that he was young lord Shao Yuan.

Xu Shan turned as red as a tomato when Jiang Chen called out her name. "Should this older sister call you young lord Zhen or Sir Shao?"

"You may call me anything you like." Jiang Chen answered with a grin.

A chill ran down the third sectmaster's spine when she saw how casual Jiang Chen was behaving. Xu Shan's blush extended to her ears and her eyes glittered with joy. This wasn't a good sign for a holy maiden. Love was clearly blossoming in her heart.

The senior sectmaster had entrusted Xu Shan to the third sectmaster and implored her not to let Xu Shan fall under young lord Zhen's spell. Thus, the sectmaster panicked and walked forwards to interrupt them. "Young lord Zhen, we have yet to repay you for the incident related to our sacred tree. I've come with a gift of thanks. We hope that you'll accept it."

The third sectmaster wanted to hand over a storage ring, but Jiang Chen stopped her with a sweeping gesture.

"We should leave matters of the past behind. I would've asked for a reward back then had I wanted one. Truly, it was nothing. If the third sectmaster insists on giving me a gift, I'll take it as an insult to me and my capital."

The third sectmaster froze. She couldn't push the gift onto the young lord after all that. The sect had planned on making a statement with the gift that help would be returned with kindness, but he had to leave their holy maidens alone.

Unfortunately, the young lord had refused their gift. Can it be...

The third sectmaster was depressed. Did young lord Zhen really covet the holy maidens? It'd be a huge headache if that really was the case. His fame, talent in pill dao, and countless legendary stories were an extremely lethal combination for these young maidens.

Xu Shan idolized him and viewed him as a savior. Even Xu Qingxuan was showing too much concern about the young lord's matters. It was unfortunate that Holy Maiden Xiyuan hadn't shown any interest

in the young lord as she was the most likely candidate to be married off. She lacked wisdom and was more tinged with mundane impulses.

Jiang Chen didn't realize that the third sectmaster was besieged by thoughts. He smiled warmly. "I heard that the Moon God Sect and the Eternal Celestial Capital arrived together. Are your factions close?" he asked probingly.

The third sectmaster thought nothing of the question. "We met by coincidence on the way here and thus travelled together. Our sect consists of mostly women, so we don't have much contact with the other sects. Sadly, the Eternal Celestial Capital was simply too enthusiastic, making it difficult to turn them down. Young lord Zhen, in a way we must thank you for getting them off our backs," she responded nonchalantly.

Holy Maiden Xu Shan and Zi Qiong nodded in agreement. They were clearly annoyed by the Eternal Celestial Capital's harassment as well.

Jiang Chen had expected as much. The Eternal Celestial Capital was putting on a show to fool the world into thinking that the two were about to form an alliance.

"That's good to hear." Jiang Chen flashed a warm smile.

"Good to hear?" The third sectmaster was flabbergasted. Why?

"Third Sectmaster, you might not know this, but I'm rather fond of the Moon God Sect. However, I can't say the same about the Eternal Celestial Capital. Their nature is awful and it reflects in their reputation. Since you two aren't close, I won't have to give them face. This is why I said that this is good to hear."

The third sectmaster finally put two and two together. Veluriyam Capital and the Eternal Celestial Capital had a great falling out because of the Longevity Pill. During the Vassal Meeting, they were the only faction that supported Emperor Shura other than Pillfire City. It was natural that Sacred Peafowl Mountain would be on bad terms with them.

"Young lord Zhen, please don't misunderstand. Due to our sect rules, we have always kept a distance with other sects. We aren't affiliated with the Eternal Celestial Capital whatsoever," the third sectmaster immediately clarified.

"It's true. Young lord Zhen, our factions only met by coincidence along the way." Xu Shan explained with a blush.

"Mm. Of that I have no doubt." Jiang Chen said while smiling. "I must say, I'm very grateful that the Moon God Sect would travel all the way here to participate our event."

The third sectmaster smiled. "Rumors of the Tiger and Dragon Meet's rewards have spread far and wide. Are the ones related to the Pinecrane Pill and Myriad Abyss Island true?"

"What do you think?" Jiang Chen smiled enigmatically.

"We naturally know what you're capable of. If it hadn't been for your help, our Precious Tree might no longer be alive. Thus, we remain quite impressed by you, young lord."

Jiang Chen sent them off politely after another round of pleasantries.

By now, the representatives of the Eternal Celestial Capital had waited for over four hours. They were furious when they learned that they'd be seen only after the Moon God Sect left.

"Young lord Zhen, our factions arrived at the same time, yet you're only showing them preferential treatment. This is extremely subpar treatment. Your neglect has been most unpleasant." The saint holy king immediately raised a torrent of complaints after laying eyes on Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen smiled coldly at the Saint Holy King. "I never imagined that the Eternal Celestial Capital would actually be brave enough to come."

"Young lord Zhen, what are you trying to say?" The saint holy king feigned ignorance.

"All first ranked sects in the Upper Eight Regions are welcome in my capital except yours. I won't be killing you today. Hurry on home and praise your holy emperor for escaping so quickly with his tail between his legs back then. He won't be so lucky next time. And now, scram!" Jiang Chen didn't give the Eternal Celestial Capital any face or leave any grounds for negotiation.

Chapter 1255: Undefined Enmity

The Ninesuns Sky Sect had sought reconciliation due to the shallowness of its grudge. Meanwhile, Eternal Celestial Capital was the entire reason behind Myriad Domain's fall and current ruined state. It was the culprit behind the demise of Regal Pill Palace.

Aside from the small group that Jiang Chen managed to rescue, most had perished. There were also many still lost and missing. The palace head and Ling Bi'er were very good examples. Though Jiang Chen had stayed only a short while at the palace, he'd still formed emotional ties to his peers and former home.

In all honesty, if the Regal Pill Palace hadn't gone against majority opinion in allying themselves with the Precious Tree Sect, Jiang Chen's path of martial dao would have been much rougher. Being brought to the palace was a crucial part of his experiences.

The days that he'd spent there convinced him of the palace's unique spirit. In spite of its rather average fourth rank status, it managed to thrive in surprising ways. He had a nostalgic affection for the sect and almost everything that had been associated with it.

So naturally he wouldn't spare any pleasantries for the main cause of its destruction. The Eternal Celestial Capital's head had also recently participated in Shura's rebellion, a fact that Jiang Chen was unlikely to forget any time soon. Their history of enmity meant that Eternal Celestial Capital was his most-hated first rank sect.

The saint holy king was here to test the waters of Jiang Chen's attitude. Remote as the possibility might seem, he wanted to confirm that reconciliation was indeed impossible. Jiang Chen's rebuke had popped the bubbles of the sect's improbably desire.

Still, he had every right to be angry. "I can understand youthful recklessness," he shot back coolly, "but you're wrong to think that the Eternal Celestial Capital will fear you!"

Surprisingly, the young lord wasn't angered at all by the retort. A faint smile hung on his face. "When you know the meaning of fear, it'll already be too late."

The young lord swept his sleeves dismissively. "Now get out!"

The saint holy king was incensed, but he wasn't quite bold enough to test his luck on Sacred Peafowl Mountain land. Suppressing his fury, he walked back outside.

"Have Emperors Peerless and Coiling Dragon drive out Eternal Celestial Capital's entourage from the capital. Don't let them cause trouble." Jiang Chen could dispense with civility entirely; his identity wouldn't be hidden much longer. Since he was doing so, he couldn't afford to keep anyone from the enemy sect around. They were sure to incite misbehavior and cause general chaos otherwise.

The Dragon and Tiger Meet was very important. He wouldn't allow anything to go amiss. The first step of his overarching plan hinged on the Meet's success.

Reproaching the saint holy king had no effect whatsoever on Jiang Chen's mental state. He was going to turn on them sooner or later. To Veluriyam Capital's young lord, Eternal Celestial Capital was no longer an insurmountable peak.

Sure, it was unrealistic to destroy the sect at present. His grudge with Eternal Celestial Capital was rooted in his former status as a member of Regal Pill Palace. He didn't want to use Veluriyam's clout as a club against his opponent, regardless of what Emperor Peafowl had said. In any case, the present was a troubled time.

His thoughts were interrupted by a surge of energy underfoot. The Goldbiter Rat King popped out from beneath.

"Young lord, there's a situation."

After many years of breeding and Jiang Chen's painstaking care, the Goldbiter Rats had dramatically grown in both size and number. The beasts were now a powerful underground task force. As the primary beneficiary, the Goldbiter Rat King was unquestionably loyal to his young master.

This time, the rats were responsible for running a subterranean patrol all around Veluriyam Capital's surrounding lands. Tens of millions acted as Jiang Chen's eyes and ears, monitoring every cultivator that came into the city.

The influx of cultivators into Veluriyam Capital was quite sizable, but the sheer abundance of the rats dwarfed the cultivators' number. Therefore, Jiang Chen actually had a very good grasp of the seemingly chaotic circumstances in the city.

"Ole Gold, you've worked hard the past few days," Jiang Chen praised generously. "Have you discovered anything new?"

"I've personally been patrolling Sacred Peafowl Mountain's premises these last two days. Several energy signatures are hovering nearby. They're definitely malicious."

"Oh?" Jiang Chen raised an eyebrow. "What else?"

"If my senses are correct, they're great emperor realm cultivators for sure. However, they seem to be suppressing their cultivation for some reason."

The Peafowl Guard protected Sacred Peafowl Mountain around the clock. Anyone who dared to plot against the faction despite the security were enemies without a doubt. They couldn't exactly be here for tea!

"Roughly how many are there in total?" Jiang Chen asked.

"Three to five." The Rat King gave his judgment.

Jiang Chen's brow became even more furrowed. Three to five great emperors lying in ambush near Sacred Peafowl Mountain indicated a clear and singular purpose. They were here for the life of its young lord.

"Keep an eye on them, Ole Gold. If there's any substantial change, come and tell me. Make sure you remember to keep your own safety a priority."

The Rat King smirked. "Don't worry, young lord. Even a great emperor wouldn't be able to do much to me underground. Plus, there's the Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation protecting the entire mountain. I can flee to within its line of defense in seconds."

Having said this, the beast dove into the ground once more, disappearing with a burst of wind. It had broken through to emperor realm as well; its cultivation was growing at an even faster pace than Jiang Chen's. Still, the Rat King couldn't shake free the timidity that was natural for one of its kind.

Jiang Chen wasn't at all worried about his furry friend. Goldbiter Rats were too overcautious for that.

"Three to five great emperors..." The young man fell into contemplation. He was unafraid of a direct assault even from that many when within Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

The Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation had a defensive prowess that even a couple of great emperors couldn't easily break. But they clearly didn't intend on mounting a frontal assault. They were hiding in the shadows in order to waylay him.

It was much easier to dodge a spear from the front than arrows from the shadows. He had no desire to see them maintaining their wraith-like hovering. Being constantly scoped out for an attack wasn't enjoyable at all. A sudden burst of anger emboldened him. Can I kill them all?

The thought flickered across his mind in a frenzied flash. He had the tools on hand to do so, but an uproar would occur if he were to use them. After all, he was living in the middle of Veluriyam Capital. It was a densely populated place. If he were to bring forth the residence of the ancient empyrean expert, Guo Ran, and use the restriction inside, it would be beyond sensational.

"Can I lead them away from the city into the wilderness? It'll be a better place to take care of trouble," Jiang Chen mused. But the Dragon and Tiger Meet was about to begin. A departure now would be odd and eyebrow-raising. It would attract his ambushers' suspicions.

Unfortunately, nothing better came to mind.

As he mulled things over, the two emperors he'd delegated made their return to the young lord residence. Emperor Peerless blinked at the sight of the pensive youth. "Is there anything wrong, young lord?"

Jiang Chen waved a hand, signaling for both of them to be seated.

“Old Brother Mo, how many of the wandering cultivator world’s six titans have arrived? Can you contact them?”

“Other than a brief rendezvous with Emperor Wellspring, I haven’t met any of the others. I know that Emperors Reliance and Inferno are here already, and there’s no news yet from Everviolet and Sabledeep. Perhaps the latter two are here as well, but haven’t yet made themselves known.”

Jiang Chen nodded. “Emperor Coiling Dragon, how many sect-affiliated great emperors have arrived so far?”

“Each of the first rank sects has sent a few experts. Moral support, if nothing else.”

The youth looked thoughtful upon hearing that.

“Why do you ask, young lord?” Emperor Coiling Dragon inquired.

The young lord answered with a question of his own. “If I recall correctly, Old Brother Mo, aren’t there twenty to thirty great emperors in attendance here in Veluriyam Capital besides the six giants?”

“Yes, just about.”

“How many of them do you know? How many do you trust? How many are unrelated to Pillfire City?”

“How many do I know? Most of them, at least as passing acquaintances. I don’t particularly trust any though, no. Wandering cultivators rarely have much to do with the sects and factions. Despite Pillfire City’s prominence, it’s not well-regarded in the wandering cultivator world. The only reason they go there in droves is because it has what they need, not because it attracts them on an emotional level. Desires and actions can’t be correlated.”

“Hmm. Well, I have something that I must trouble Old Brother Mo with.”

“What is it, young lord?”

“I’d like you to gather up the great emperor wandering cultivators so that I can make a deal with them,” smiled the young man.

“A deal?” Emperor Peerless looked perplexed.

“Yes, a deal. Do you think they’ll come?” Jiang Chen’s smile widened.

“They will attend the banquet without a second thought, young lord. Your stature and fame guarantees it. A deal, on the other hand... that will depend on what you offer. The wandering cultivator world has its own rules. They won’t be moved without sufficient profit.” Mo Wushuang was very forthright.

“Naturally. I just need them to be gathered up.”

“Where to? The young lord residence?”

“The young lord residence is fine,” Jiang Chen nodded. “You can inform them that I’m interested in listening to their opinion on the proceedings. I’d like to know what they want from the Dragon and Tiger Meet.”

Chapter 1256: Gathering of the Titans

Since it was a great meeting of wandering cultivators, it made sense that the titans' opinions were sought. Even the sect heavyweights wouldn't find this to be a reason for jealousy. They were just here for the show, the wandering cultivators were the true stars. Thus, when they heard that the young lord residence of Sacred Peafowl Mountain was hosting a banquet for the wandering cultivator titans, the sect representatives were slightly envious but didn't raise a fuss.

They were more worried about the young lord recruiting all of this wandering great emperors to his banner. Veluriyam Capital would truly be able to dominate the Upper Eight Regions then.

But after some careful thought, they all realized that this was impossible. Subduing all of the wandering cultivators in the world had been the longstanding ambitions and goals of many sect experts, but no one had ever realized it.

When the wandering great emperors heard that young lord Zhen wanted to throw a banquet in their honor, they decided not to put on airs and attend, even though some were suspicious or outright wary.

Jiang Chen had always sought efficiency on everything he did. The banquet was ready that evening. Twenty-three wandering great emperors arrived, including Emperors Wellspring, Inferno, and Reliance. Of them, Emperor Wellspring was without a doubt the strongest and highest placed of them all.

These great emperors had seen much of the world in their many years of wandering. They could sense the strong presence of the Ninesparks Petalstorm Formation as soon as they set foot into Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

The mountain had strong foundations alright! Just a singular formation was enough to awe them. Even the most unbridled amongst them had to admit that this formation wasn't anything that they could break through.

After being taken down a peg by the formation, the sense of belittlement in their hearts reined in somewhat. They understood that Sacred Peafowl Mountain's reputation of first in the capital was well deserved.

"Haha, the arrival of so many great emperor seniors brings glory to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. On behalf of the mountain, I'd like to thank you all for coming." Jiang Chen wasn't shy at all and walked up with a booming laugh.

His appearance instantly drew everyone's gaze. Their thoughts were all the same at the moment. Does this famous newcomer really have three heads and six arms?

Jiang Chen's expression didn't flicker at all, despite the convergence of 23 pairs of intent eyes on him. He smiled genteelly. "Everyone, this way please. Old Brother Mo, these are all titans of the great wandering world and some of them are your old friends as well. You'll have to make sure for me that they're treated well."

"Crouching tigers and hidden dragons abound in the wandering cultivator world." Mo Wushuang grinned. "I only know the general majority of the fellow daoists here today. However, to meet once is to become friends the second time around. Everyone, this way please."

Emperor Wellspring chuckled. "Ole younger brother Mo, I must congratulate you first that your wife's injuries have finally been healed and your heart sickness dispelled. Let's go! We need to drink to this!"

Emperors Wellspring and Peerless had a good relationship. They'd sparred against each other before and exchanged moves, so they were rather admiring of each other. Although Emperor Wellspring had been a hair stronger than the other back in the day, he still felt that Emperor Peerless was a friend worth making.

"Old brother Hui, thank you for your thoughts."

Emperor Wellspring was named Jingzhong Hui. Most of the wandering cultivators called him Senior Hui or Senior Jingzhong. Even Emperor Peerless, the same generation as the great emperor, called him old brother Hui.

Since all of his guests were great emperors, everything had to be of a certain exquisite level. Jiang Chen invited them to take their seats after a carefully thought out routine.

"Everyone, I've invited you here today to speak your minds and see what kind of suggestions you might have for the Dragon and Tiger Meet."

Emperor Inferno was in a robe festooned with blazes and projected a very strong personality, like a personified ball of flame.

"Young lord Zhen, this gathering is being held by your Capital. I thought you'd already set the agenda. Why are you asking us instead?" This great emperor was a straight shooter and his words equally so.

"As one of the six titans in the wandering cultivator world, I have long been acquainted with your name." Jiang Chen smiled. "You indeed live up to your serious reputation. We do have an agenda for the meet, but since this is being held for everyone, we want you all to be satisfied and feel that this trip was worth it. Only then will this gathering be hailed a success!"

"In order for it to be a success, we need to know what's on everyone's mind and what you'd like. Only then will this gathering have not been held in vain."

Emperor Peerless smiled off to the side. "Old brother Hui, why don't you start?"

Emperor Wellspring chuckled again. "I came partially for you, and partially for young lord Zhen's reputation. And also... well... I'd like to know if the rumors about the Pinecrane Pill are true."

The most compelling rumors couldn't be believed unless verified by one's eyes and ears. This summed up the thoughts of mostly everyone present.

"Please, take a look." Jiang Chen had anticipated this and decided to respond with action. When he next opened his hand, there was a pill resting on it. It was the Pillcrane Pill.

The translucent jade pill seemed to have just simply popped into being, formed by nature, giving one an infinitely strong visual impact. A high rank, unique pearl had its own allure. This was even more apparent with something like the Pinecrane Pill. It instantly attracted everyone's attention, making pulses quicken.

Emperor Peerless smiled. "I can swear on my internal demons that the Pinecrane Pill does exist. My dao partner received a new lease on life because of it."

The truth couldn't be refuted. No matter how wild the rumors were, nothing was as real as the pill in front of them.

Even Emperor Wellspring looked at the pill for a long moment, a light dancing in his eyes, before sighing softly. "A greater talent always appears in the world. I bow to you, young lord."

"Young lord Zhen, can this pill be mass produced?" Emperor Reliance suddenly asked tenderly.

Jiang Chen shook his head. "It wouldn't be a sky ranked pill if it could be mass produced. Its ingredients are very difficult to gather and the refining process is quite arduous as well. Even the strongest pill king won't be able to refine this pill. Only pill emperors can give it a try, but their chances of success aren't too high either.

And that was the truth. Jiang Chen could refine the pill not because he was already at a pill emperor level, but because his foundations from his previous life were too strong. Although the Pinecrane Pill was a highly sophisticated pill, it was still just a mundane creation when placed in front of Jiang Chen. It could just barely reach the level of the empyrean planes.

But for the pill masters of Divine Abyss Continent, the difficulty of this pill was akin to scaling the skies. It came down to the differences in foundation in the end.

Emperor Reliance seemed like an ordinary person, but her every word and smile was filled with friendliness. Her voice was so soft that it melted the heart.

"Young lord Zhen, how much will this Pinecrane Pill go for?"

It was the question on everyone's minds. Although they were all great emperors, that didn't mean they were immortal. Their lifespans were still limited at the end of the day. Since the ancient times, there had been precious few great emperors who'd lived past ten thousand years. Even empyrean cultivators didn't live forever. Therefore, no one could withstand the temptation posed by the Pinecrane Pill. Who would ever feel that their lives were too long?

Being able to live another eight hundred to a thousand years was an utmost temptation for these cultivators. It was likely the great attraction apart from breaking through to empyrean realm. They all started fixedly at Jiang Chen, ardently wishing to know a concrete answer.

"Everyone, I've actually never calculated the value of this pill in terms of spirit stones. I'm truly stumped by this question." Jiang Chen laughed.

This pill was too precious, after all. He didn't feel that its worth could be measured in spirit stones at all. If the Pinecrane Pill could be purchased, then he felt that all cultivators in the world would bankrupt themselves to buy a single pill.

"Young lord Zhen, did you invite us here today to sound out how much the pill can be sold for? To test what's the anticipated market reaction to the pill?" One of the wandering great cultivators suddenly asked coldly.

Emperor Peerless' expression instantly sank when he heard this. "Friend, such speculation is uncharitable and rather narrow-minded."

Young lord Zhen however, smiled. "I would indeed like to see how everyone will react to the pill. As for seeing how much it can be sold for... that's not necessarily the case."

Emperor Wellspring asked, "Young lord Zhen, how many of these pills do you have?"

This was the critical question, and Jiang Chen met it head-on. "Very few of them, and not enough for everyone here. I'm only offering one for the auction this time, and maybe one or two more for a transaction."

"Oh? A transaction? For what?" This piqued Emperor Wellspring's interest.

"Something that everyone can offer." Jiang Chen smiled.

This made the great emperors blink blankly. Some faces immediately darkened and they looked towards Emperor Peerless.

"Heh, well isn't that nice, young lord Zhen? Do you think that a mere Pinecrane Pill will be enough to make us swear fealty to you like Emperor Peerless?" An unkind tone shot out from one of them.

Chapter 1257: Luring Fish to the Bait

It was definitely tougher to converse with wandering cultivators, in no small part due to their sensitivity. An offhand comment had been perceived as outright solicitation for their allegiance. These great emperors were like hedgehogs, spikes instantly popping up in resistance.

Jiang Chen couldn't help but laugh at the reaction. "Do you live inside my head? How do you know I want you to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain?"

"Isn't that the case?" The man's voice was cold.

"Of course not. You may think me stupid, but I can't possibly be ignorant enough to invite all of you together rather than talking to you individually if I wanted to recruit you." The young man grinned.

"That would work a lot better, wouldn't it? Plus, there's more than two dozen great emperors here. Even if Veluriyam Capital had the ambition, we're not prepared to deal with accepting so many into our fold. We must act according to our abilities. I'm not that foolish, I assure you."

His speech assuaged the hostile attitudes somewhat. Young lord Zhen was right. If he wanted to persuade the wandering cultivators to join, a more private and personalized approach would have been much more effective. What need was there to make a semi-public announcement?

When something like that was put into the open, a single voice of opposition would evoke a chorus of defiance. It was completely counterproductive. Had they misunderstood the young man after all? Did he have something else in mind?

The great emperor in question couldn't back down verbally though, regardless of what he now thought. "What bargaining chip are you talking about then?"

What was something that everyone could offer? They were all great emperors, but there was disparity in both strength and wealth. The only other thing that came to mind was spirit stones. Was it truly possible to buy the Pinecrane Pill with spirit stones alone?

Jiang Chen cast a sidelong glance at the defiant emperor, but refrained from replying. Instead, he turned a thoughtful gaze upon Emperor Wellspring. "Senior Hui, my Pinecrane Pill needs neither spirit stones nor complicated strings. The only thing I would like is a single instance of your help."

"Helping just once?" Emperor Wellspring's eyes were impenetrable. "How?"

"Simple. I would like your help in an hour of need," explained the young lord.

"Who's your opponent?" The emperor's heart thumped with anticipation.

"That's not important right now. Would you agree to something like that?" Jiang Chen beamed.

"Are you planning to declare war on Pillfire City, young lord Zhen?" Emperor Wellspring pondered. "If so, it's hard for us to agree to that. The wandering cultivator world has never participated in inter-faction conflict, and we have no intention of disturbing that balance. If I may put it more plainly, Veluriyam won't win in the end even if we vanquish Pillfire together. Doing so is painting a target on your back."

The emperor wasn't exaggerating in the slightest. Spurring wandering cultivators onto participating in the destruction of a faction was one of the greatest taboos in the cultivation world. It would unquestionably cause backlash from all factions, possibly even panic. The other factions would gather together in a coalition for self-preservation, the tip of their spear firmly pointed toward Veluriyam.

Jiang Chen wasn't about to engage in such an ill-advised scheme.

"Do you think I lack a brain, Senior Hui?" The young lord chuckled. "If I'm declaring war on Pillfire City, then I'll do it with honesty and frankness. I won't do so by the hand of wandering cultivators. There's no glory and every shame in using an underhanded tactic like that."

"Then what do you propose?" Emperor Wellspring couldn't understand it.

"The help I want isn't to attack some faction. In fact, I'll only need your help within Veluriyam's own territory."

Within Veluriyam's own territory?

The proposition instantly sounded a lot more attractive. That geographic limitation made many things much easier. Even if they had to fight denizens from Pillfire, it mattered very little in the grand scheme of things.

Assisting in an attack on Pillfire City was one thing, but defending Veluriyam Capital was quite another. The former was invasion, and the latter was justified self-defence. The nature of the two were night and day.

"Is it really that easy?" The emperor looked back at the youth in disbelief.

In response, Jiang Chen tossed the Pinecrane Pill in his hand at Emperor Wellspring. The emperor felt his mind go blank, but instinctively caught the pill.

“What do you mean by this, young lord Zhen?” The emperor was stupefied by the gesture.

“Old Brother Mo has mentioned you many times to me, Senior Hui. He says that you’re one of the rare peers that he admires. His admiration alone is worth that pill. I think it should be rightfully yours. Consider it my respect to you. We can talk about a deal later on, yes?”

The senior emperor was a little embarrassed by the courtesy. Many in the wandering cultivator world were like this. If he was displeased by something or someone, then nothing would convince him to change his mind. But if he was showered with kindness, favors, and praise, he would find it much harder to refuse a future invitation.

Emperor Wellspring was that kind of person. He found the Pinecrane Pill in his hand to be strangely hot.

“Don’t worry, Senior Hui. If you at any point think my demand too much, you’re free to back out whenever you like. I won’t say a word about you returning the pill.” Jiang Chen made a ready declaration.

There was no more reason for any hesitation. The emperor nodded. “Alright. I’ve heard a lot of praise about you, young lord Zhen. There are some that sing them every day. Today, I’ve witnessed at least part of the reason why.”

Still smiling, Jiang Chen glanced towards the others. “I’ll be upfront about this, everyone. I don’t have nearly enough Pinecrane Pills to satisfy all of you. However, if you agree to the deal, I’ll get one to each and all of you sooner or later. Of course, that requires your willingness to deal with and trust me. Senior Hui has received payment ahead of time, but you might need to provide your services first before you get paid. Moreover, I’m be sure when you’ll get your pill.”

He kept his voice even and composed.

The great emperors were largely hesitant. Some envied Emperor Wellspring’s special treatment.

However, Emperor Wellspring was in the top tier of the six giants. Even Emperors Peerless and Inferno were slightly inferior. It was understandable that he would receive preferential conduct.

“It’s fine if you pay us later, young lord Zhen, but how can we trust you? If you can’t even give us a date, what guarantee do we have?”

“You have nothing to lose and everything to gain,” Jiang Chen shrugged. “Why not take a bet? The only reason I cannot give you a date is because of uncertainty about when I’ll get the materials again. Refinement itself isn’t exactly difficult for me.”

“If I may ask, young lord Zhen, what does the Pinecrane Pill require in materials? Perhaps we can supply you with them?”

“Yes, please do let us know. We’ve traveled all over the world, and we’re no strangers to treasures. If we can’t bring you the materials, I don’t expect anyone can, aside from maybe the richest of sects.”

Eagerness flared in the cultivators' eyes. Their yearning for the Pinecrane Pill lured them unwittingly into Jiang Chen's trap.

The Pinecrane Pill's main materials were Invisible Chameleon Cloudpine acorns and Goldencrown Cloudcrane hearts. Jiang Chen had the former, but the latter was moderately rare.

"I'd like to hear your individual decisions, first," Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

Mo Wushuang stayed silent. He couldn't guess at Jiang Chen's purpose, but he knew there had to be a reason behind the young man's actions.

"Ah, fine. If it's just once within Veluriyam Capital's territory, without directly attacking another faction... what harm is there? At worst, I'll have helped for free. No skin off my back. Even a chance at the Pinecrane Pill is something I can't ignore."

A burly great emperor was the first to pipe up, a mane of black hair trailing behind him.

The man's name was Ye Jianlei. He was a powerful and tenacious expert among the wandering cultivators, said to be very close in strength to Emperor Peerless himself.

"Excellent. You are a candid man, Senior Ye." Jiang Chen clapped cheerfully, turning his smiling eyes upon the others. He had no intent of rushing them into the decision. Something like this required personal willingness.

"Sacred Peafowl Mountain has honored its word for thousands of years. Your personal fame is far-reaching as well, young lord Zhen. I think it's worth the risk. Count me in."

"Me as well."

"Don't forget me!"

"Me too."

After the first steps forward, more tend to follow. Seven or eight great emperors made their willingness known.

Emperor Reliance suddenly broke into a bewitching smile. "I shall participate as well, young lord Zhen. As a woman though, we tend to seek the feeling of security... do you mind giving me priority on the Pinecrane Pills?"

The others had no room to criticize the sole woman among the wandering cultivator six titans.

Seeing this, Emperor Inferno sighed softly. "Young lord Zhen, I prefer making myself clear ahead of time. The two of us are not making a bet, but rather a transaction. If I act on your behalf, then I must receive a Pinecrane Pill sooner or later. If I find out you're trying to freeload off us... Veluriyam Capital will have an enemy for life!"

"I appreciate your candor," Jiang Chen smoothed back his smile somewhat. "If you want to say something, put it in the open. But since we're on that topic, I'd like to note something as well. If you agree to help me, then you must remember this: I won't accept a half-hearted effort. If you do not give this your all, I have the right to renege."

“It’s hard to distinguish, no?” someone interjected.

“I’ll make it easy. Anyone who wants to participate can swear an oath on their inner demons. Any assistance on their part has to be wholehearted and without reservation.” Jiang Chen took the initiative.

He was absolutely certain of the attraction the Pinecrane Pill held. No mortal cultivator could ignore it before they broke through to empyrean realm. Experts on the doorstep to doing so were the sole exception. Anyone else would surely relish the extra chunk of time the pill offered.

Chapter 1258: Shifting Allegiances on the Frontlines?

Ten out of twenty three great emperors ended up agreeing to the deal. The rest remained skeptical and decided not to participate. Emperor Wellspring, a top expert, was amongst the ten, as was Emperor Inferno and Emperor Reliance, whose strength matched Emperor Peerless. This lineup was more than adequate.

“Young lord Zhen, since we’ve already finalized the deal, when do you want us to take action?” Emperor Inferno asked impatiently.

“Now.” Jiang Chen flashed a faint, but sincere smile.

“Now?” Emperor Inferno frowned. “Against who? Surely you’re not going to have us kill each other?”

“Of course not.” Jiang Chen laughed. “There are a few pesky little pests wandering around Sacred Peafowl Mountain, wanting to cause harm. They’re causing me a headache and I won’t take this lying down. Since all of you have graced my capital, I wish to borrow your muscles to get rid of the unscrupulous scum.”

The young lord paused for a moment before he continued. “As I’ve mentioned before, feel free to renege on your promise if you find this request inappropriate. I won’t fault you.”

The great emperors exchanged glances without saying a word. They were mulling over the pros and cons. It felt like they’d walked into young lord Zhen’s trap, but they quickly came to terms with the fact that it wasn’t inappropriate at all.

A Pinecrane Pill in exchange for a minor task? Clearly the deal of a century! Moreover, if they reneged on their promise, who knew for sure that the young lord wouldn’t blacklist them?

They weren’t afraid of being blacklisted by Veluriyam Capital. However, the Pinecrane Pill was something that they truly yearned for. They’d never be given an opportunity like this again if they were blacklisted. They didn’t want that to happen. Even though they felt used by the young lord, they harbored no anger towards him, nor did they intend to renege upon their promise.

Emperor Wellspring chuckled. “Young lord Zhen, do you know their backgrounds and cultivation levels?”

“To be honest, I’m not sure. They could be old acquaintances of ours, hidden enemies plotting against us, or forces from an enemy faction. Their identity really doesn’t matter. What matters is the fact that they’re trespassing and we have the right to defend our territory. This isn’t against the rules of jianghu. No?”

Jiang Chen had actually guessed that it was Emperor Shura and a few other men from Pillfire City. He couldn't verify his theory right now, but that was likely the case.

Emperor Springwell laughed. "Everyone, since we've already agreed on a deal, it's better that we do this sooner rather than later. Since we're doing this on Sacred Peafowl Mountain territory, our actions are perfectly justifiable. What do you think?"

Emperor Inferno nodded. "It's settled then."

Emperor Reliance smiled. "I agree."

"Young lord Zhen, do we really have enough men to handle them?" one of the great emperors suddenly asked.

Jiang Chen smiled. "If we include Old Brother Mo, our lineup is so powerful that we could flatten any faction in the Upper Eight Regions. Surely our numbers aren't a cause for concern?"

"That may be the case if you only want to defeat the enemy. If they're hellbent on escaping though, there's no guarantee that we'll be able to stop them. What happens to our deal then?"

That was everyone's biggest concern.

Jiang Chen smiled. "As long as everyone gives it their best effort, I won't blame you if a fish or two manages to slip past. However, I do hope that you'll be able to get all of them in one go."

Emperor Springwell nodded. "Everyone put your best foot forward. Don't be complacent."

"Don't worry, I'll definitely honor my end of deal. My capital stands to gain nothing by offending so many reputable seniors of the wandering world. Moreover, I'll also come up with a plan. As long as you follow it, we will absolutely net them all in one fell swoop." Jiang Chen spoke with complete and utter confidence.

The wandering cultivators were taken aback. The young lord was very young, but definitely no a pushover. He was fearless and unflinching in front of so many great emperors. He would most certainly go on to become one of the greatest leaders of the human domain one day!

The wandering cultivators had quickly realized that the young lord wasn't to be trifled with. Making enemies with this young genius would be a grave mistake. It was better to offend a wealthy old man than a poor, flourishing youth.

The great emperors who'd opted not to partake in the deal were filled with regret when they heard how simple the condition was. Why hadn't they agreed?? It was such a simple request!

Unfortunately, the deal was already struck and there was no possibility of a renegotiation. They were beside themselves with frustration that they'd thrown such a great opportunity away.

Somewhere in a hidden corner around Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Emperors Shura and Vastsea had disguised themselves as wandering cultivators and were lying in wait.

"This brat is more slippery than a frog! It's been days! Why hasn't he shown up yet!" Emperor had set up an ambush in the vicinity, but to no avail. Jiang Chen simply hadn't showed up.

Emperor Vastsea didn't have much faith in the plan. "Brother Shura, must we take the risk? That brat must have at least a few great emperors accompanying him now. Although we have five great emperors, who's to say that we can kill him in one strike? Even if we do succeed, can we really escape Veluriyam Capital in one piece?"

Emperor Vastsea's faith had wavered greatly in recent days. Regret was constantly looming in the back of his mind.

Emperor Shura answered coldly. "Vastsea, this is our only chance to turn the situation around! After killing that brat, the capital will surely fall into chaos! Why should we leave? We can saunter back in! Don't forget, we have roots in the capital too!"

"But... the other great emperors might gang up on us immediately after we appear!"

Emperor Shura snorted coldly. "Impossible! Petalpluck and Mountaincrush are both spineless fence-sitters! Emperor Skysplitter's foundation hasn't solidified yet, so he's another one. Void, Coiling Dragon, and Peerless might put up some resistance, but we're five! This is basic math! Five against three, it's obvious which side will win! After that brat is dead, do you really think that Petalpluck and Mountaincrush will continue to side with the three like some loyal hound? Don't they know how to assess the situation and act accordingly?"

Emperor Vastsea sighed. "But what if we slip up? We'll be trapped and surrounded by all sides then. Everyone will be after us like we're a rat crossing the street!"

"We mustn't make any mistakes then." Murderous intent exploded from Emperor Shura. "How can there be accidents when we've planned this so meticulously? We're in the shadow while he's in the light. We have the element of surprise. Without any formations to protect him, how can an initial emperor realm cultivator possibly withstand my ultimate attack?"

Emperor Vastsea sighed and said nothing else. He agreed that Emperor Shura's plan was almost flawless, but for some reason, he had a feeling it wouldn't work. After so many frustrating defeats, he'd begun to feel that young lord Zhen's fortune was simply insurmountable. Even though the plan seemed flawless now, things could still go awry when it was put into action.

After all, Emperor Shura's previous plans had also seemed just as flawless at the beginning, but young lord Zhen was always the one with the last laugh.

Would this time be an exception?

Emperor Vastsea didn't think so. He'd always been Emperor Shura's firmest believer. But the seedling of doubt had grown too big to be ignored this time. It felt like he was walking on a path of no return with Emperor Shura. They'd be goners with one misstep.

No... don't! Emperor Vastsea's inner voice constantly droned on the back of his head.

"Vastsea, keep a lookout from this position while I check on the others. Remain vigilant. We can't afford any slip-ups!" Emperor Shura never would've imagined that his most loyal ally was faltering.

“Mm. Go.” Emperor Vastsea nodded and pretended that nothing was out of the ordinary. He was consumed by a state of panic after Emperor Shura left. Moments later, he grit his teeth with an idea. He retrieved a message glyph, imbued some of his consciousness into it, and sent it soaring.

The glyph arrived at the young lord manor in a blink of an eye. It fell into the possession of the Geng brothers who were patrolling the gate. They immediately took it to Jiang Chen, who smirked mischievously when opening the unexpected message.

Emperor Vastsea? Jiang Chen was slightly taken aback. Isn't he Emperor Shura's diehard follower? Is he planning to turn his sword against his friend?

Jiang Chen had always looked down on Emperor Vastsea. To him, Vastsea was merely Emperor Shura's obedient hound. If someone like him was switching sides, it could only mean that Emperor Shura was in a terrible situation and that there wasn't much of a future by being on his side.

Jiang Chen pondered every other possibility. Could this be a scheme from Emperor Shura and Vastsea? He concluded soon after that there was little reason for them to hatch such a plot in Sacred Peafowl Mountain territory. Perhaps Emperor Vastsea was really betraying Emperor Shura?

Should I or should I not accept his offer? Jiang Chen didn't think very highly of Emperor Vastsea's offer.

Chapter 1259: Jiang Chens Attitude

After some consideration, Jiang Chen decided not to completely cut off Emperor Vastsea. The betrayal of Emperor Shura's closest confidant was very useful. Firstly it would intimidate Shura's remaining supporters. The message would be very clear: there was no hope for the disgraced emperor to succeed. Even his most loyal lieutenant was abandoning him!

Secondly, Emperor Shura definitely had something to do with Emperor Peafowl's disappearance. Given Emperor Vastsea's intimacy with Shura, he was sure to know a few details. And, it was a safe guess that Emperor Vastsea had not been a direct participant. He'd remained within Veluriyam Capital's walls when Emperor Peafowl was absent, unlike Emperor Shura. Moreover, he only had the courage to defect to Jiang Chen's side because of his relative innocence regarding Emperor Peafowl's disappearance. If that wasn't the case, he wouldn't dare surrender.

Thirdly, it wasn't easy to completely exterminate their marks without internal assistance. After all, both sides had a good number of great emperors. With Emperor Vastsea's assistance at a crucial moment, things would go a lot more smoothly.

Finally, Jiang Chen's acceptance of Emperor Vastsea's surrender showed the entire capital his generosity. That he was willing to forgive someone's wrongs would surely draw the people's hearts closer to him.

Most importantly, the great emperors close to him currently—Emperors Coiling Dragon, Void, Peerless—were all generally righteous people. That meant he lacked a subordinate who would obey his every command and do certain dirty jobs unsuitable for the others.

It was better to recycle Emperor Vastsea and put him to much better use as a gatekeeping dog. He would fill a slightly unsavory, but nevertheless much-needed role. Such things had to be done

eventually. Jiang Chen couldn't exactly assign them to Emperors Coiling Dragon, Void, or Peerless. In his own way, Emperor Vastsea was the best man for this particular kind of job.

Jiang Chen was willing to give Emperor Vastsea a chance. Of course, he had to prepare for the possibility that the surrender was only a pretense as well.

"Please excuse me for a moment, everyone," Jiang Chen departed the hall with a cupped fist salute. Moving to a more secluded corner, he summoned the Goldbiter rat king.

"Ole Gold, Emperor Vastsea has issued me a message glyph containing his surrender. Please reach out to him and see if he's really interested. If so, come back immediately. I'll have a new plan then," the young man commanded.

The rat king chuckled. "Alright! Emperor Shura's a bastard alright. He's walking right into his own demise this time."

Vastsea's location wasn't far. The rat king reached his position in only a few moments. Being the cautious beast he was, he probed upward only after sensing that the emperor was by himself.

Emperor Vastsea's great emperor-level senses immediately alerted him to the rat king's presence upon the spirit creature's approach. Sensing latent hostility from the emperor, the rat king decided to just burrow out and reveal himself.

"Are you Emperor Vastsea?" After breaking through to emperor realm, the rat king had the ability to take on human form. Naturally, he had also learned human language.

The large golden rat surprised Emperor Vastsea. "Who... are you?"

"After hearing your intentions to defect, my young lord sent me to scope things out. He says that he's willing to give you a chance if you're sincere."

"Oh?" Emperor Vastsea hadn't had high hopes for his message.

"My young lord has only one question for you. Did you participate in Emperor Peafowl's disappearance?" The rat king pressed sternly.

"Not at all. I knew about it, but I definitely didn't participate in it!" The emperor's denial was lightning-fast.

"Are you able to swear to that?" The rat king was always exceedingly prudent.

"I swear on my inner demons that I did not. I was at Veluriyam Capital for the entire thing, so it would've been impossible anyway." Emperor Vastsea frantically defended himself. He knew that this was the only chance he had at redemption. He was done for if he couldn't firmly grasp it. In any case, young lord Zhen already seemed to know that they were hidden nearby.

The rat king smirked. "I commend you for your wise decision, Emperor Vastsea. You would've met an untimely death otherwise."

"Hmm?" Emperor Vastsea started.

“You people think you’re so clever. I’m sure you have no idea that the young lord knows your every move.” The rat king took a sledgehammer to the emperor’s psychological defenses. “Need I say more?”

“What?” The emperor blanched at the revelation.

“So, how do you convince the young lord of your trustworthiness? You can inform me of how many great emperors you brought, as a start.” The rat king felt very good indeed. He was pleased to throw his weight around before a human great emperor. His typically timid heart was tremendously satisfied.

Emperor Vastsea felt his own anxiety pushing at him. “Aside from me and Shura, three other great emperors under Emperor Pillzenith’s orders are present. They’re about as strong as I am. Please inform young lord Zhen that I’m willing to vouch an honest defection with my inner demons. If I lying, then let my inner demons consume me and let my descendants be enslaved in perpetuity.”

The rat king grinned at the vicious affirmation. “Good, good. Discretion is the better part of valor! You were quite an idiot before, but it looks like you’re not entirely hopeless after all. My young lord is charitable enough to offer you a lifeline. Wait here a moment.”

Saying this, the beast disappeared into thin air.

Emperor Vastsea’s back was slick with sweat. His recent distress and exhaustion was unprecedented; he hadn’t experienced such emotions since the day he’d first become a great emperor in Veluriyam Capital. A junior’s attitude was influencing his state of mind! Why was he happy to receive the forgiveness of someone so much younger than him?

Ah, Vastsea, you’re really moving down in the world now. Never mind that. I was the foolish one all along for following the wrong person. If young lord Zhen is willing to give me a chance, then he must have a use for me. I’ll bear however much shame and derision I need in order to survive.

Emperor Vastsea was a smart man. He was resolute in his decision to abandon his former ally, and acutely knew the derision that would come from the Emperors Void and Coiling Dragon. Emperor Void would probably be fine, but Emperor Coiling Dragon was famous for his acerbic tongue. Emperor Vastsea was prepared to receive verbal abuse from him.

The Goldbiter Rat King returned with news of Emperor Vastsea. After verifying that the message was true, Jiang Chen had his own idea on how to approach the subject.

He gave the rat king further instructions. “Ole Gold, go back and tell Emperor Vastsea that I’m willing to accept his defection. However, he must provide more substantial proof of his sincerity. When the time is right, he needs to attack Emperor Shura from behind. He doesn’t need to land a lethal blow. Just a wound is sufficient. There will be others to finish the job!”

With information on Emperor Shura’s men and an agent on the inside working for him, Jiang Chen firmly believed that the coming battle would be flawless.

The Goldbiter Rat went back to Emperor Vastsea with the young lord’s missive.

After hearing the entire plan from the rat king, Emperor Vastsea pondered a few moments before nodding. “He’s not suspicious of me right now. An attack from the back is fine. What I am worried about though, is the possibility of his escape even after receiving a serious wound.”

“That’s not something you should worry about. The young lord has his ways of dealing with him. You only need to do your part to be considered genuine.”

“Alright. Please tell young lord Zhen that I will carry his word out to the letter.” Emperor Vastsea was unwavering.

The rat king departed once more. Emperor Vastsea took back to the shadows, experiencing a fleeting moment of apologetic regret. He shook off the sentiment very quickly.

Don’t blame me, Shura. If you’d stayed at Pillfire City, I would never have abandoned you regardless of embarrassment. But you just had to toss yourself forward into mortal peril. Dragging me along without my permission too... this is all your fault.

Emperor Vastsea managed to convince himself of the value and necessity of his actions. His reason was decent enough. Personally, Emperor Vastsea hadn’t wanted to return to Veluriyam Capital at all. He had developed a natural fear of young lord Zhen and no longer wanted to be enemies with him.

But Emperor Shura had forcibly shoved him along upon this path. Emperor Vastsea desperately wanted a way out from the disaster he was in.

Emperor Shura returned after fifteen minutes.

“Any leads, fellow daoist?” Emperor Vastsea asked impassively.

The anxiety and irritation was plain on the emperor’s visage. He was fueled by a desire for revenge. The light of hatred brimmed in his eyes.

“That kid is just too devious. I’ll wager he’s not showing himself until the Dragon and Tiger Meet begins. He’s just invited a group of wandering great emperors to a banquet,” Emperor Shura spat out through grit teeth. “That animal is inviting a brood of vipers into his own home! Does he want to destroy Veluriyam Capital by inviting so many wandering cultivators in?”

Emperor Vastsea was utterly disgusted by his companion’s faux-virtuous tone. Before, he would’ve concurred. But he could see plainly now that Emperor Shura was simply jealous.

Shura was jealous of the young lord’s ability and fame despite his youth. The young lord had been able to invite the unruly great emperor experts from the wandering cultivator community at such a young age. Even Emperor Vastsea himself had to admit that the young lord was rather competent. “Fellow daoist, does he perhaps want to hire these experts as his bodyguards?” He managed to squeeze out.

“Hard to say. If that’s the case, we’d have a hard time getting in there.” Emperor Shura sounded deeply reluctant. “However, wandering cultivator experts are generally selfish. What’s so special about that brat? I don’t believe that he’d be able to convince them. Not one bit!” He was loath to give up on mowing down his obstacle.

Emperor Vastsea nodded. “I think he’s just trying to get on their good side. Maybe get their opinions about the Dragon and Tiger Meet. I feel the same way as you do. Can he really get them to put their lives on the line the first time he meets them? Even Emperor Peafowl didn’t have the reputation to pull that off.”

Emperor Vastsea hadn't wanted to come with Emperor Shura back in Pillfire. Now, he was worried about Emperor Shura abandoning the operation. If that happened, wasn't his own plan of defection done?

Chapter 1260: General Betrayal

Emperor Vastsea's worry was extraneous. Emperor Shura's hate-filled eyes signaled a fundamental unwillingness to give up attacking. The fires of vengeance burned ever brighter. He had zero intentions of abandoning the plan.

"Vastsea, this is when we make it or break it! Either we kill that brat and take back Veluriyam Capital, or we're cut off from it forever!" Emperor Shura didn't quite declare the absolute alternative of 'death' outright. He was still retaining some consideration for Emperor Vastsea's feelings.

"We'll have the chance for sure, fellow daoist," said Vastsea.

Suddenly, Emperor Shura's consciousness detected something. A look of deranged glee appeared on his face. "Good! What a stroke of fortune, Vastsea! That brat is finally showing himself. He's escorting the wandering great emperors out right now and they're on their way down Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He only has Mo Wushuang beside him. Void and Coiling Dragon are absent!"

Emperor Vastsea's heart trembled. His eyes radiated glee. "Truly?"

The emperor was a very good actor. Behind his cheerful expression was detached indifference. What a fool. He's at the brink of a precipice, but doesn't know he's being intentionally baited in. How could I have been so blind to follow such a brainless and incompetent man for so many years?

"Come, Vastsea. Let's go to them. The others have locked on to the kid. We're in charge of cutting off his escape. We simply need to prevent him from returning to his residence. He won't get away even if he sprouts wings!" Emperor Shura gnashed his teeth.

"Yes, let's go!" concurred Emperor Vastsea.

Emperor Shura didn't detect anything out of the ordinary with his compatriot. His excitement had gone to his head. In his mind, victory was already assured.

The two emperors hid themselves near Sacred Peafowl Mountain's entrance, along the return path.

Emperor Shura gazed intently into the distance. "He's just sent off the wandering cultivators," he muttered. "The brat will be back very shortly. The hour of reckoning will soon be upon us. You'll be in charge of stalling Mo Wushuang. I'll lead the attack, and the other three will back me up. Use our domains to block the kid's escape!"

"Alright. Congratulations, fellow daoist. Surely nothing will go wrong this time," nodded Emperor Vastsea.

"Heh heh heh," Emperor Shura cackled ominously. He focused his eyes upon the road further down, not blinking even for a second. He would spring into action the second any hint of Jiang Chen appeared in the periphery.

Time passed moment by moment. It didn't take long for two hazy figures to appear in the distance. Another second was enough for Emperor Shura to differentiate their identities. "It's him! It's the brat!" The desperate emperor felt a surge of happiness. "He thinks he's so good, Vastsea. He thinks he's right outside his home. He only brought one person with him! It is fate that decrees his death!"

Emperor Vastsea echoed hollow laughter. "If the heavens wants someone to die, they will first drive him to madness."

Emperor Shura completely missed the undertones to those words. His only reaction was a vicious nod. He awaited Jiang Chen to reach his domain's zone of control before he would launch his attack.

Jiang Chen was very cheerful with a spring in his step. He was laughing and chatting with Mo Wushuang, not having the slightest inclination of sensing any impending danger.

Emperor Shura was pleased by the sight. The kid was so full of himself that he'd tossed all caution to the wind. Excellent news for what he was about to do. The more relaxed the kid was, the better of a chance he had on the offense. An alert target would only hamper his plan.

So very close!

Rubbing his fingers together, the emperor conjured a powerful talisman into his hand. Upon activation, it turned into an expanse of yellow radiance, rippling outward in a series of circular waves.

Thunder rumbled through the air. It was a very potent sealing talisman.

These talismans were designed to counter escape talismans. It locked down the general area so that would-be escapees couldn't slip through dimensional cracks. Emperor Shura had done so in order to block off every passage of escape. He wanted to trap Jiang Chen and torture him at leisure.

This talisman in particular was especially strong, and was one of Emperor Shura's most valuable possessions. He was willing to spend a pretty penny on the excursion.

Space in a ten-mile radius was thus closed off.

"Hahaha!" The talisman's success made Emperor Shura cackle in triumph. Now that the surrounding space was sealed off, neither Jiang Chen nor Mo Wushuang could flee.

There was no more reason for him to hide. He had three allies nearby that would arrive at any moment. Five great emperors against one, plus a mere emperor realm genius, was beyond superb odds! How could the emperor not feel vindicated?

Emperor Vastsea followed his companion's materialization from thin air, standing close by the other emperor.

Mo Wushuang's expression froze at the spatial enclosure. "Young lord," he called out to Jiang Chen, "this is a powerful sealing talisman. We can only exit on foot."

Jiang Chen nodded, but his expression was quite composed. He looked coolly onto Emperor Shura. The great emperor was halfway up the mountain, blocking the way.

Emperor Shura particularly despised the young man's intractable pride. The brat's death was nigh, but he was still putting on a noble, detached air. The emperor was particularly incensed by this kind of reaction.

"Brat Zhen, heaven has delivered justice this day by giving you to me! I'd like to hear any last words you might have, hahahaha..." The desperate emperor was exultant for a change. He even had the energy to utter a mocking comment.

Young lord Zhen was a mouse caught in a trap. No matter which way he looked at it, the young man should be descending into severe panic any moment now. Emperor Shura was quite unhappy that it hadn't happened yet.

"Shura, eh? Your actions are only bringing yourself to ruin. Homeless dogs should lick their wounds from the shadows, not run to their demise. You would've been fine if you hadn't come running to your destruction."

Emperor Shura barked a laugh out of extreme anger. "Do you really have time left to waste on idle bickering? In a way, I'm impressed. Do you think you have any chance left of turning the tables today?"

"What, you think you've won already?" Jiang Chen looked at his opponent through a half-smile.

"Hmph, enough talk. The airspace for miles around has been sealed off by my talisman. You won't be able to escape. Do you think that Mo Wushuang alone can guard you? Don't try to bluster. I've done my research already and know that the other emperors aren't at Sacred Peafowl Mountain!"

Emperor Shura spoke like a petty, argumentative brat. He seemed to be scared of losing a verbal debate to Jiang Chen and constantly emphasized his advantage. He wanted to overwhelm the youth on an emotional level.

However, his tirade seemed to have had the opposite effect. Rather than wiping away the smile on the young man's face, it seemed to have introduced a hint of ridicule instead. There was a very small bit of sympathy as well; the charitable kind that one might throw to a fool. For the second time that day, the youth's reaction deeply hurt the emperor.

"Vastsea, back me up. I'm going to take that kid's head right off. Let's see if he can keep running his mouth then," Emperor Shura instructed.

Emperor Vastsea maintained a blank expression. "Alright."

Shura cast his gaze into the distance. "Good. The three others are coming up now. A flanking maneuver will hasten that brat's death."

"As you wish," replied Vastsea woodenly.

With a bark of hideous laughter, Emperor Shura began to brew up the momentum needed to strike a lethal blow.

Suddenly, a flash of uneasy precognition flickered through his consciousness. He wanted to investigate exactly what was wrong, but a tremendous force was already rushing at him from the rear.

He responded with lightning speed, but the sheer abruptness of the attack allowed it to sneak in anyway. A nasty punch hit him in the small of his back. The punch dealt a heavy, hammering blow, almost sending his heart flying through the front of his chest.

Thump!

Emperor Shura felt a warm sensation in his oral cavity. He spat out a mouthful of blood.

Pfft! Still, the desperate emperor was no slouch at combat. He reflexively scythed backward with his demonic saber in a fluid motion. If the assailant behind him delayed half a moment, he would've been cut cleanly in half.

Unfortunately, the attack landed on empty air. The assailant was already gone like a light breeze. A terrifying thought drifted into Emperor Shura's mind. Though he didn't turn his head, he could still who had attacked him from behind.

There was only one possible culprit: Emperor Vastsea!

My once loyal underling has betrayed me! Shura turned his head in indignation, but Emperor Vastsea had already drifted a few hundred meters out. The once follower ignored the murderous wrath of his former master.

"Vastsea, you... you dare betray me!?" Emperor Shura's rage couldn't be contained. He had never thought he would be backstabbed by the man he had trusted the most, and at the eleventh hour!

Emperor Vastsea was expressionless. "I am not the one that has betrayed you, Shura. You're trying to drag me into the abyss with you. I don't want to die, so I have to do something."

"Bullshit!" The desperate emperor let out a savage roar. "I'm on the verge of killing this kid. Are you blind? Don't you see we're on the cusp of winning?"

Emperor Vastsea shook his head. "No, I don't. I see you a witless clown dancing around. Shura, I followed you before because I thought you could inherit the throne. You proved me wrong through your ineptitude, and drove the point home in the face of adversity. You aren't worth my loyalty any longer."

Emperor Shura trembled like a leaf. Emperor Vastsea's attack had wounded him physically, but the man's words were crueler than his fist. He was on the verge of suffocation.